

Projections of Europe

After stamping my passport, the border guard at customs in Tbilisi handed me a half bottle of red wine made from Saperavi, an indigenous grape variety. 'Welcome to Georgia', she said. Dangling from the neck of the bottle was a small folding card with the words 'Did you know?' printed in bold. Below that were encouragements for economic investment, such as: 'Georgia is part of the European Market', 'Georgia enjoys Free Trade with half of the world, including the EU' and 'Exporting from Georgia is tax free'. On the bottle itself, also in English, was printed a bulleted list that alerted tourists of the centrality of wine to Georgia's traditions, and promoted wine as the central symbol in this checkpoint nation-branding (Manning 2010, 2012). It said, for example: 'Georgia is known as the "Cradle of Wine"', 'Georgia has an unbroken history of 8000 consecutive vintages of wine' and 'Georgia's traditional "Qvevri" winemaking method (fermenting wine in a clay vessel buried underground) dates back to the 6th century BC.' A symbol of national pride was literally thrust into my hand on arrival – unrefusable Georgian hospitality had made it all the way to customs. An arsenal of wine boxes was stacked behind the security booths.

That evening in June 2015 a flood caused the River Vere to burst its banks, destroying the surrounding area. Tbilisi Zoo, ill-positioned on the banks of the river, was flooded. Many animals were killed, and the rising waters carried others away. A white tiger terrified locals and a hippo made global headlines. Youth volunteers banded together to clear the debris. Politicians, reporters and regular citizens celebrated the younger generation's generosity and selfless labour in rebuilding Tbilisi. In the aftermath of the flood, many found solace in the collective action of youth. Against this backdrop, I researched how eco-urban activists invoked the category of 'Europe' when staging unorthodox protests against an increasingly congested traffic and parking culture. In previous visits, I had noticed that 'Europe' was often manifest in discourse as an imagined elsewhere to which social actors attributed forms of orderliness and cosmopolitanism.

The unopened bottle remained on my small kitchen table over the next month as I worked on fieldwork projects unified by a common question: What frames of reference do Tbilisi residents invoke to make sense of the material and social conditions of life? In Georgian discourse, 'Europe' remains a powerful yet ambiguous signifier, often appearing as an aspirational economic, political or social landscape of cosmopolitan modernity (Sherouse 2015). Yet 'Europe' is but one of many contrasts through which 'Georgian-ness' is made. The opposite of Europe is not simply 'Asia' – the singular thirdness of Georgian experience is also set in opposition to the thirdness of Russia, a non-Europe-non-Asia looming northward with a combination of menacing political power and enduring social and economic influence. Making sense of the multiple frames of international reference against which social actors differentiate 'Georgia-ness' means taking stock of the non-European others (Iran, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, to name a few) that historically and contemporarily run along the geographic and cultural peripheries of Europe. The predicament that the Greeks face is analogous in this regard: they hold themselves to the evaluative standards of the 'West' and in doing so acknowledge themselves as ancestors of 'Europe' but not its benefactors, and also must disavow the influences of adjacent powers that are 'non-Western' (Herzfeld 2003: 293–4). Projections of 'Europe', therefore, involve a matrix of 'non-Europes' against which social actors adduce cultural, political and economic alignments and contrasts.

In the first two instalments of the Rethinking Euro-anthropology Forum, scholars tacitly and explicitly grappled with the boundaries and contrasts that the designations 'Europe' and 'anthropology' rely on and generate. For instance, 'America' appears as a contrastive disciplinary other to British and European anthropological approaches (Eriksen; Foblets; de Pina-Cabral; Ingold; Wulff). I was reminded of similar debates about terms such as 'Eurasia', 'post-Soviet' or 'post-socialist', all of which can be both limiting and geographically expansive. What contrasts does 'Europe' invoke, and to whom? No matter what form of anthropology one practices, it is beneficial to find points of connection rather than new forms of insularity. What holds the 'diversity' of Euro-anthropology together is a commitment to weigh multiple and various accounts against one another, to restlessly probe the frames of reference that we and our interlocutors bring to bear on the interpretations of social life.

Perry Sherouse
Department of Anthropology
Princeton University
Princeton, USA
sherouse@princeton.edu

References

- Herzfeld, M. 2003. 'Localism and the logic of nationalistic folklore: Cretan reflections', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45: 281–310.
- Manning, P. 2010. 'The semiotics of brand', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39: 33–49.
- Manning, P. 2012. *The semiotics of drinks and drinking*. New York: Continuum.
- Sherouse, P. 2015. 'Russian presence in Georgian film dubbing: scales of inferiority', *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 25: 215–29.

Young scholars of an ageing discipline in the old continent

The task(s)

I think that the editors of *SA/AS* have set themselves an audacious and challenging yet necessary task: to stimulate a collegial reflection on what it means to practise anthropology of and/or in Europe today. This reflection has taken the form of a collection of dense and thought-provoking contributions that can truly constitute the base for a pivotal shift in the way we think and practise the discipline. And I am glad that the editors also gave the representatives of the newer generation an opportunity to make their voices heard.

Different focuses and approaches emerged in the earlier Forum parts, some of which seem to me particularly significant and inspiring for younger readers of *SA/AS*: the reaffirmation of the necessity to focus on specific, well-defined spheres of social life (religion: Meyer; economy: Siniscalchi; language and power: Nic Craith), the need to explore further new or old themes (like ethnicity: Eriksen) and the important call – not surprisingly coming from 'post-socialist' voices – for further attention in the articulations of academic and (therefore) political cultural geographies (Cervinkova,