

THE 5th ERIC WOLF LECTURE



The Eric Wolf Lectures

Kooperationsveranstaltung
von IFK, dem Institut für
Kultur- und Sozialanthropo-
logie der Universität Wien
sowie dem Institut für
Sozialanthropologie
der Österreichischen
Akademie der Wissen-
schaften (Eintritt frei).

**Am Folgetag, dem 4. 11.,
besteht die Möglichkeit
zu einer Diskussion mit
Aihwa Ong.
16.00–18.00 Uhr,
IFK, Reichsratsstraße 17,
A-1010 Wien
(Eintritt frei)**



The international ERIC WOLF LECTURES have been held every two years in autumn since 2002. They are collaboratively organized by the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the International Research Center of Cultural Studies, Vienna and the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna. The researchers who are invited to speak have all made significant contributions to their respective fields. It is hoped that the Eric Wolf Lectures will serve Eric Wolf's legacy and advance the liberal and broad-minded development of a transnational cultural and social anthropology.

2002 The 1st Eric Wolf Lecture

Marshall Sahlins (Professor, University of Chicago)

“Anthropology, Culture, History”

Published in German as: “Das rastlose Verlangen nach Macht und noch mehr Macht: Klassisches Griechenland (15. Jh. v. Chr.) und klassisches Fidschi (19. Jh. n. Chr.)”, in A. Gingrich, T. Fillitz & L. Musner (Hg.), *Kulturen und Kriege: Transnationale Perspektiven der Anthropologie*. Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach Verlag, 2007.

2004 The 2nd Eric Wolf Lecture

Jane Schneider (Professor, City University of New York Graduate Center)

Peter Schneider (Professor, Fordham University College at Lincoln Center)

“Mafia, Antimafia, and the Plural Cultures of Sicily”

Published in *Current Anthropology* 46 (4), 2005: 501–520.

2006 The 3rd Eric Wolf Lecture

Judith Okely (emer. Professor, University of Hull, and International Gender Studies Centre, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford)

“Ethnographic knowledge has the power to transform: it may also be ignored, blocked or misappropriated”

2008 The 4th Eric Wolf Lecture

Thomas Hylland Eriksen (University of Oslo)

“Rebuilding the ship at sea: An anthropologist's attempt to make sense of contemporary world history”

**“What Marco Polo Forgot”:
Asian Projects Reconfigure the Global**

Aihwa Ong (Berkeley)

Tuesday, 3 November 2009, 18:00

Kleiner Festsaal der Universität Wien
A-1010 Vienna, Dr. Karl Lueger-Ring 1

Main Books

*Wolf, Eric R. (1999):
Envisioning Power:
Ideologies of Dominance
and Crisis, Berkeley.*

*Wolf, Eric R. (1982):
Europe and the People
Without History, Berkeley.*

*Wolf, Eric R. (1969):
Peasant Wars of the
Twentieth Century,
New York.*

*Wolf, Eric R. (1966):
Peasants, New York.*

*Wolf, Eric R. (1959): Sons
of the Shaking Earth,
Chicago.*

*Cole, John W./Eric R. Wolf
(1974): The Hidden
Frontier: Ecology and
Ethnicity in an Alpine
Valley, New York.*

Eric Robert Wolf was born in Vienna on 1 February 1923. Because of his Jewish family background he was forced to emigrate under the Nazi regime. He first went to England and then to the USA, where Eric Wolf was raised for the most part in New York. A soldier in the US army, he fought against Mussolini in Italy and Nazi Germany. After World War II he studied anthropology at Columbia University, and then taught at the University of Michigan, Lehman College and finally at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York. Eric Wolf died on March 6, 1999 in New York.

Eric Wolf did field research in Latin America and in Europe. His most important monograph was “Europe and the People Without History”, in which he showed that non-Europeans were not isolated, but involved in global processes of world history from at least the year 1400.

Eric Wolf was a McArthur Prize laureate, a member of the American Academy of Fine Arts and Sciences and held an honorary doctorate from the University of Vienna. He is considered one of the most important anthropologists of the 20th century, standing for cultural and social anthropology that is cosmopolitan and liberal-minded. His importance for anthropology lies in his focus on themes such as power, politics and colonialism, which he analysed from a comparative viewpoint. The goal of anthropology was, in his opinion, to explain the socio-cultural diversity of the world. This meant that societies were to be examined within their respective historical context and as part of a continuing process of exchange, not as isolated and closed entities. In many respects, Eric Wolf was a pioneer in the anthropology of a globalized era.

“What Marco Polo Forgot”: Asian Projects Reconfigure the Global

In 1995, an artist Cai Guo-Qiang set adrift a Chinese junk on the Grand Canal, Venice. The event was the 46th Venice Biennale. Marking the 700th anniversary of Marco Polo's return to Venice, Cai filled a junk with Chinese herbs and medicines that Marco Polo “forgot” on his departure in 1291 from China. Last year, in the midst of a global financial collapse, a historian warned that in the long haul, “New York could turn into Venice ...”. The paradoxical implications of these two historical moments open Aihwa Ong's talk on the role of Asian art in navigating the geography of global thinking and desires.

The future recedes because it is no longer forecast by historical horizon, cultural superiority, or moral certitude. Our accelerated and interconnected world has surpassed old geographies of East-West divisions, and the inevitable unfolding of prescribed futures. As Michel Foucault remarked, “We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed.” In this era of conjuncture and assemblage, anthropologists open up new ways to study “the global” by looking at cultural projects that re-envision and remake the world by bringing together alternative points of view.

Aihwa Ong explores how East Asian artists have become significant in shaping cross-cultural perceptions abroad, while also challenging entrenched political ideas at home. Instead of projecting world citizenship and giving up national affiliations, experimental Asian art interprets historical events – Marco Polo's return to Europe, the end of the Cold War, post-9/11 and the rise of China – to index shifts in global and national orders. Among the questions raised are, “What can China give the world besides hard-earned money? How do Asian projects change China from an object of Western knowledge, to a tool of global intervention? In what ways do contemporary Asian art and architecture crystallize conditions of cross-cultural understanding?”



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Introduction and Welcoming Address

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