

GAVIN SMITH ELUSIVE RELATIONS: DISTANT, INTIMATE AND HOSTILE

The 10th Eric Wolf Lecture in Anthropology
Monday, 9th of November 2015, 18:00



PROGRAMME

Changes in the dominant form of capitalism have implicated the shape of the state and supra-state. As a result crucial economic and political relations have to be re-thought and methods found for that task. The lecture takes up this challenge for the reformulation of ethnography.

The 2008 economic crisis followed by people's disenchantment with governments exposed the extent of economic polarity and inequalities of power. Yet the complexities of the instruments of finance and the obscurity of the technologies of power provide a challenge to intellectuals wishing to contribute to public understanding and effective politics for ordinary people. This challenge has been met by a flourishing literature explaining the instruments for garnering value and the mechanisms for securing power. While these help us understand current realities, they say little about the relation between the instruments and mechanisms they explain, and the ordinary people affected by their operation. Relations between the dominant and the dominated as well as relations among the latter are neglected. Taking the work of the late Eric Wolf as exemplary, the lecture seeks to redress this imbalance, by revealing the often obscure complexities of class relations hidden along the 'pathways of power'.

GAVIN SMITH

is an Emeritus Professor of Anthropology, University of Toronto. Focusing on the interfaces of differently scaled social relations Gavin Smith's ethnographic work in South America and Western Europe has focused on the connection between the ways in which people make a livelihood and their forms of political expression. To this end his ethnographic work relies heavily on seeing the present as a moment in history and hence seeking to address that history as real, not simply constructed, a perspective captured in the term historical realism. He has worked on large and small-scale agriculture and urban informal economies in South America, as well as on recent forms of flexible labour organisation and regional economies in Europe. His works include *Livelihood and Resistance: Peasants and the Politics of Land in Peru* (1989); *Confronting the Present: Towards a Politically Engaged Anthropology* (1999); with Susana Narotzky, *Immediate Struggles: People, Power and Place in Rural Spain* (2006), and *Intellectuals and (Counter-) Politics: Essays in Historical Realism* (2014).

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**Sky Lounge,
Oskar-Morgenstern-Platz 1, top floor
1090 Wien**

Introduction and welcoming address:

Ayşe Çağlar

(Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology
at the University of Vienna)

Andre Gingrich

(Institute for Social Anthropology
at the Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Helmut Lethen

(IFK International Research Center for Cultural Studies
at the University of Art and Design Linz, in Vienna)

OPEN DISCUSSION
WITH GAVIN SMITH

Tuesday, 10 November, 17:15-19:00

IFK

Reichsratsstraße 17

1010 Wien

Free admission

Chair: Ayşe Çağlar

THE ERIC WOLF LECTURES

The international ERIC WOLF LECTURES have so far been held nine times since 2002. 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. Previous lecturers (chronologically): Marshall Sahlins, Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, Judith Okely, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Aihwa Ong, Jean und John L. Comaroff, Vyjayanthi Rao, Margaret Lock, Ulf Hannerz.

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. As 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 6 March 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 globalised era.

