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Not All Roads Lead to Rome, 18 years Later

“Not all roads lead to Rome”. Besides being the negative form of a common saying, it was the title Christian Giordano gave to the first article published by *Eastern European Countryside* in its 1993 so-called ‘zero’ edition. That article dealt with transition in Eastern Europe. As he ironically wrote ten years later, “Transition has come to an end, because it never started” (*Die Transition ist vorbei, weil sie nie angefangen hat*¹). We can see from those two examples how the mere titles of his articles give us a scent of his wit and acute critique against the *lieux communs* that are spreading in the social sciences. The places he chose to do his fieldwork are off the track of classical anthropology and do not lead to its canonical centre.

Christian Giordano is a man of contrasts. His choices and personal history have pulled him back and forth between different identities and changing loyalties. Both a Sociologist and an Anthropologist, an Italian born in Switzerland, he does not let himself get locked into one sole identity. On the contrary, he enjoys making links between elements which, though not opposed, are at a first glance unrelated. He likes to reconcile the irreconcilable. He is solitary yet outgoing, hardworking yet appreciative of the good things in life. His personality confirms the breadth of his multi-faceted intellectual pursuits. Nevertheless, Giordano remains predictable in his schedule and his habits, practising some of his ancestors’ beneficial siesta-tradition and spending his summers as a world-traveller.

Since 1983, roads have led Christian Giordano to numerous places other than Rome, and to many subjects other than the transition in Eastern Europe. Although he remains faithful to Political Anthropology, Christian Giordano has taken an interest in many other subjects, as can be seen in his many articles featured in prestigious publications.

¹ In: *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 50 (2003), 3: 404-412.

He has never confined his academic career to one single discipline, one single theme or one single field. On the contrary, he has always been interested in all the fields of the Humanities and different geographical regions. He feels at ease in both Paraguay and Malaysia, studying rural populations or multiculturalism. In his anthropological works, he has never given into trends, be they theories (such as structuralism, utilitarianism, neo-culturalism or postmodernism) or the ideologies that underlie those theories. He always looks for functional (in the wide sense of the term) explanations and more importantly, for historical interpretations of social facts, aligning himself with the British school of thought, whose master thinkers he has always admired, and whose empirical and pragmatic vision he shares. This hasn't stopped him, however, from staying close to his German mentors, or from often referring to French and Central European historians. He is well-versed in sociological, anthropological, historical, philosophical and political traditions both Western and Eastern European, and he is gifted with a prodigious memory – which he acquired and practises through the game of chess. The scope of his approach never ceases to impress those around him.

Giordano is the President of the Interdisciplinary Institute of Central and Eastern Europe, Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Timișoara, and founder and member of many learned societies. He is an intellectual whose insatiable curiosity has led him to such diverse paths as museology and the Anthropology of Law and Justice. His lectures have influenced numerous generations of students. As the first Anthropology professor at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, to be neither priest nor missionary, he has greatly contributed to the development of the Ethnology Institute (later renamed the Institute of Social Anthropology). In 1989, he was made head of the Institute, created in 1942 for the famous Father Wilhelm Schmidt (cofounder of the Vienna School), and later headed by the Divine Word missionaries, the last of which was the Africanist Father Huber.

Giordano is in a league of professors that is quickly disappearing: he is the learned professor able to charm his audience with the breadth of his knowledge and livening up his lectures with all sorts of anecdotes. This type of personality is becoming increasingly rare in universities, because of the need for administrative efficiency that ends up taking over academic qualities. Beneath his distracted professor persona, he is a subtle politician and has been able to strengthen the place of Anthropology at the University of Fribourg, giving the latter quite some notoriety in the field of Eastern European Studies that has spread well beyond Swiss borders.

For his 65th anniversary, following the academic tradition, we wanted to offer him a book tracing his intellectual journey. We thus asked some of his colleagues and friends to contribute with articles that would take us to the places Giordano has explored, studied and loved, from Palermo to Penang, from Switzerland to Bulgaria, Poland or Romania, each contribution illustrating in its own way, a facet of his work. The reader is transported to some of Christian Giordano's preferred destinations – the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, South-East Asia – and is offered to visit his favourite research themes – citizenship, multiculturalism, ethnicity, rural studies in a post-communist context, corruption and trust, honour and post-colonial studies. The book also contains witnesses of close friends, mentors and former students. It ends with a series of critical papers paying tribute to his own critique: the 'smuggling' and instrumentalising of anthropology, and a critique of *bonism*.

Unsurprisingly we entitled the book "From Palermo to Penang. A Journey into Political Anthropology". It was published in 2010 by Lit Verlag in the series that C. Giordano created *Freiburg Studies in Social Anthropology*.

The official launching of the book took place in September 2010 in Fribourg at a reception organised in honour of C. Giordano. His former professor in Frankfurt, Prof. em. Dr. Ina-Maria Greverus, pronounced a brilliant laudation illustrated with "historical" pictures of Giordano doing his fieldwork. It was followed by a two-day conference organised in Christian Giordano's honour. The conference gathered some of his colleagues and friends whose research and interests were related to Eastern European studies.

Our aim was not to organise just another celebration after 20 years since the fall of the Berlin wall, but to propose open debates and discussions among recognised scholars and younger ones, about a couple of selected issues pertaining to post-socialism. The conference sought to assess the relevance of Social Anthropology to the study of post-socialism. Participants from both the "inside" (Eastern and Central Europe) and the "outside" (Western Europe and North America) were invited to evaluate the achievements of post-communism anthropology. The relevance of area studies such as Eastern Europe studies, or Eurasian studies, and the future of conceptual tools and theories that have been developed during these years in the context of what is called "post-communism" were scrutinised.

The title of the conference was in itself provocative: "Does East Go West? The Future of Anthropology of Post-socialist Societies".

The programme allowed a fruitful exchange not only concerning the respective research but also on the methods and approaches, as well as

exciting debates. Three sessions were developed around a dialogue between two voices: that of a “Western” anthropologist having researched in Eastern Europe and that of his/her “Eastern” counterpart, a local partner or a local “opponent-Anthropologist”, respectively from Romania, Ukraine and the Czech Republic.

Another four meetings offered opportunities to ask more specific questions through the presentation of ongoing research on political aspects of post-communism transformations of the public sphere, religious affiliations and identities, minorities such as the Roma people, and the state of the art of Eastern European Anthropology.

In a final round table participants were able to exchange on what are the next steps to be taken in the study of post-socialism. There were discussions about the dominance of American oriented research in Eastern Europe. Some participants pledged for a broader insight, taking into account other perspectives, particularly the views of scholars publishing in languages other than English and those of Eastern European scholars. This doesn't mean however the promotion of a “native” or national anthropology, but rather a regional exchange of researchers. The round table also gave us the opportunity to conceptualise the *Anthropology of Post-socialism* as rather an *Anthropology on Post-socialism*. Finally, participants discussed whether the *Anthropology of Eastern Europe* should not be considered as part of the *Anthropology of Europe*.

The richness of debates convinced us to ask the participants to submit their contribution with the view of publishing a volume dedicated to the anthropology of post-socialism. We expect the book to be published by the end of 2011.