



The Futures of Culture

University of Stellenbosch | South Africa | 3-6 September 2011

Anthropology Southern Africa Conference

During apartheid, anthropology taught at Afrikaans universities, *volkekunde*, supported a racist polity through teaching essentialist, biological and evolutionist notions of culture. Such social evolutionist notions of human difference were what anthropologist Franz Boas wrote against when he referred to habituated knowledge and tradition in his notion of the culture concept. In South African liberation struggle discourse, racial and cultural classifications were understood to be socially and politically constituted. Now, here in southern Africa as well as elsewhere in the world, ‘culture’ is often again used to mean innate, unconscious drives – so it is sometimes used as an alibi for misogyny, sometimes as an alibi for race-hatred. Contributing to a popular tendency to redefine both race and culture as biological, genetic scientists tell us that culture can be found in human DNA. Where do we, who study humans past and present, stand in relation to the tradition of a culture concept? Do we write against a notion of culture, presenting our work in terms of ‘community’, income-group, language-group, race, class, citizenship? What are the futures of ‘culture’ as a category to think with? How does a focus on questions of class, materialities and political economy influence or challenge the ways in which we engage with the culture concept? And we wonder what the future of anthropology, and other disciplines in which sociality is considered (such as the social sciences more generally, English Literature, Film and Media studies, Race, Gender and Queer Studies, Disability Studies, African Studies, Cultural Studies, Heritage Studies, Archaeology and History) would look like without a notion of culture.

If we accept the term ‘culture’ as having some kind of empirical and conceptual value for us, what are the futures of cultures in southern Africa? Can the process of becoming a nation allow for the kind of cultural difference that apartheid held was essential? Is rainbow multiculturalism inevitably contaminated by its resonance with discourses of apartheid-style separate development? How do cultural practices intersect with political economy? Are cultures invested in as commodity forms? We also ask for consideration of the kinds of futures that different groups of people consider possible or likely, that they hope for or dread, apocalypses and utopias or simply the dull quotidian. In this we would like to pay attention to stories about being human in the future.

We would also consider ‘culture’ in Matthew Arnold’s sense of the word: those creative texts in various media that are touchstones for us of what human existence is – texts that relieve us of the harsh reality of neoliberal economic conditions, or texts that tell us of the human experience of such conditions, that represent human conditions.

It is in the spirit of enquiry into the above concerns that we ground the 2011 Anthropology Southern Africa meeting in the particular history of the Stellenbosch University campus, where *volkekunde* sustained an apartheid epistemology, where slaves worked the winelands, and where communities were forcibly removed to create the beautiful campus. As well as considering the past, we would also like to celebrate burgeoning Afrikaner cultural expressions – from stand-up comedy to hip-hop to cooperative wine-farming – as a case-study of the extent to which this word ‘culture’ is and is not still useful to us.

You may like to submit abstracts for papers in the areas listed below.

We will consider all topics, and all combination of topics.

- Work and Development;
- Culture, Race & Racism;
- Nation & Culture (including work on citizenship);
- Embodiment of Culture (including work on disability);
- Knowledge Production (including work on *Volkekunde* & on university administration);
- Social Movements; and
- Media and Popular Cultures.

We encourage submissions that concern conceptual frameworks as well as those that present fieldwork analysis.

Invited Keynote speakers

Prof. Akhil Gupta studied Engineering and Economic Systems, before his studies in anthropology. He teaches anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles. His most recent book is *The Indian State After Liberalization* (2010). His work focuses on the state and development, the environment and food, as well as postcolonialism in India and South Asia.

Prof. Achille Mbembe was born in Cameroon, obtained his Ph.D in History at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1989 and a D.E.A. in Political Science at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Paris). He is the author of *On the Postcolony* (2001). He has joined the Stellenbosch Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology in 2011.

Prof. Charles Piot teaches African & African American Studies and Women's Studies at Duke University. His research interests include contemporary culture and politics, as well as histories of slavery and colonialism, in Francophone West Africa. His latest book, *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa After the Cold War* (2010), explores the way in which human rights discourse, democratization, NGOs, and charismatic Christianity are remaking political culture in West Africa.

Pan African Anthropological Association (PAAA)

Dr. Robert Akoko, the new president of the PAAA, has accepted an invitation to participate in the conference and to strengthen links with ASnA and the anthropology departments in the Western Cape. He has done research on pentacostalism, politics and social life in Cameroon. He teaches anthropology at the University of Buea, Cameroon.

Panels and abstracts

Proposals for panels (about 200 words) can still be sent to asna@sun.ac.za. Please contact the panel organisers to participate in specific panels - see updates on panel themes and contact details of panel organizers at <http://sun025.sun.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Arts/Departments/sociology/Tab6>

Abstracts for papers (about 200 words) should be submitted to asna@sun.ac.za up to 15 July 2011.

Conference Fee

The fee excludes accommodation, transport, conference dinner and excursion.

Full conference attendance, registration before 1 June 2011

1. Members from institutions in the global South R1500/\$210
2. Non-members from institutions in the global South R2500/ \$350
3. Participants from institutions in the global North R2500/\$350
4. Students R600/ \$85.

Full conference attendance, registration after 1 June 2011 (preferably before 1 August 2011)

1. Members from institutions in the global South R2500/ \$350
2. Non-members from institutions in the global South R3300/ \$470
3. Participants from institutions in the global North R3300/ \$470
4. Students R800/ \$110.

Day rate

1. Members from institutions in the global South R450/ \$60
2. Non-members from institutions in the global South R900/ \$125
3. Participants from institutions in the global North R900/ \$125
4. Students R200/ \$30.

Contact and Other Details

E-mail: asna@sun.ac.za

Telephone: +27-(0)21-8082202.

Registration

See attached Registration Form, Accommodation information, Info Sheet, List of Panels and ASnA Membership form.

Organizers

Thomas Blaser, Kathleen McDougall, Tinashe Pfigu, Steven Robins, Eleanor Swartz, Kees van der Waal, Handri Walters and Tazneem Wentzel.