



ANR XenAfPol Conference Lecture

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A Global Conjuncture of Belonging? Autochthony and Its Different Trajectories since the Post-Cold War Moment

Monday 16 December 2013, 5.30pm

Room G24, Faculty of Law, University of Cambridge

The recent revival of the notion of autochthony - elusive, shifting and yet powerful - offers strategic insights into what I came to call (after Tania Murray Li) 'the global conjuncture of belonging' that seems to be characteristic for 'the post-Cold War moment' (Charles Piot). The idea of such a conjuncture - apparently different trends that all converge in making belonging an overriding concern - may help to understand present day's uneasy articulation of increasing mobility and xenophobia. In this context autochthony serves as a buzzword since it expresses a kind of primordial form of belonging. Yet it follows highly different trajectories in different parts of the world, assuming shifting connotations. Despite such shifts the notion seems to have great mobilizing power in variable contexts. Striking is especially the paradox between its promise of basic security - how could you belong more if you can claim to come from the soil? - and the haunting uncertainty it expresses in practice. Stephen Jackson rightly speaks of 'nervous languages.' Most autochthony discourses, despite all differences, seem to be haunted by the fear of traitors hiding inside - the flipside of which is the constant risk of being unmasked as a 'fake autochthon.' A comparison of the different trajectories of the notion in Africa, but also in Europe and elsewhere in the world, may help to understand its different potentialities. It can also address the question as to why the preoccupation with belonging and exclusion has become so central now, in a world that thinks it is globalizing.

A programme for the whole conference can be obtained at

www.african.cam.ac.uk/events/conference

If you wish to attend the conference please register by emailing

centre@african.cam.ac.uk

Please note that places for the conference are limited