

Market vs Society? Human principles and economic rationale in changing times

CUA Annual Conference

Corinth, Greece 27-19 May 2011

## **Ambivalent flexibilities: anthropological explorations and perspectives**

Sissie Theodosiou

Epirus Institute of Technology and Hellenic Open University \* University of Manchester

aspasia.theodosiou@manchester.ac.uk

### **Abstract**

This paper seeks to evaluate ideas about flexibility that emerge in the context of a social theory discussion about market economy from an anthropological perspective. It explores the key critiques of notions of flexibility, focusing particularly on feminist sociological critiques. Perhaps most crucially, these include the proposition that flexibility is hegemonic, and that it continually produces subjects who are unable to be flexible. In other words, the privileged status of flexibility, along with reflexivity, mobility, and individualisation, in so much of contemporary life, masks the ways in which these processes generate a series of exclusions.

This paper proposes that anthropology, and in particular ethnographic exploration, is well placed to reveal the varied ways in which different elements of hegemonic flexibility emerge in people's daily lives.

Through appropriating, and being appropriated by, particular locations and histories, ideas of flexibility work in articulation, and sometimes in competition, with each other. This paper will draw attention to the different values and contextual meanings ascribed to flexibility, thus making it possible for different modes of flexibility to be evoked in different contexts. The political effects of this ambivalence

will be explored, including a consideration of how these conditions allow flexibility to be positive and affirming, as well as exploitative and exclusionary.