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**Rethinking Euro-anthropology: part three.
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The third world has come home

Ana Gutierrez

Doing anthropology in Europe is hardly new in the discipline. It is no longer the case that anthropologists have to leave their countries, their region, to go to the Global South in order to encounter the exotic ‘other’. The third world with its particular ‘otherness’ has come home. The so-called ‘other’ who was relentlessly imagined and created within Europe has arrived. These ‘others’ cross borders every day, every hour; they are desperate to get into the first world, into the land of opportunities. The more people move across those borders, the more the periphery and the center flux, get entangled, acquire new meanings and produce new forms of social relations. Those of us who made the choice to study the amalgamed diversity that populates Europe found that our fieldsites are postcolonial zones shaped and reshaped by painful legacies that are in continuous expansion. These zones produce and reproduce further inequalities due to on-going global economic forces and states’ increasingly rigid immigration policies, that in turn play on and reproduce ‘native’ racisms. The gap between the rich and the poor is no longer characterised by national geographic locations, it is here, and it widens within our fieldsites. In order to understand the so-called migrant phenomenon –now turned into the “migration crisis” – we, as anthropologists, focus on the effects of capitalism, the impact of neoliberalism and the global systems of domination that consistently “push and pull” migrants. Then through the detailed ethnographic observation of their everyday lives, we analyse its poignant manifestations and consequences.

By doing this, by studying those ‘others’ within Europe, we revive the old divide between the West and the Rest. We observe this divide during fieldwork by witnessing the inevitable outbreak of various cultural worlds. This amalgamation of cultures within Europe has radically transformed “Western” society. Despite the so-called transformation and blurring of the boundaries between Western and non-Western societies, our findings tell us otherwise. My own experience while doing fieldwork in London with women migrants confirms that the divide exists on an everyday basis. It is alive. It shapes migrants’ livelihoods and subjectivities. It influences migrants’ legal realities and social locations and dislocations. The divide is an intrinsic part of the lives of those ‘others’ that we study as part of our anthropological projects. As a result we are challenged by the alterity within and by the categories in which such alterity has been placed.

How do we make sense of this long standing divide? Do we ask the right questions to understand the alterity within? Who is the new subject that we observe, dissect, and shape by the production of anthropological knowledge? What is our ethical commitment towards the study of the alterity within? I fear that global discourses of difference subsumed under depoliticised categories like ‘multicultural’, ‘superdiverse’ and/or ‘transnational’ have influenced the way in which we approach this alterity. We are falling into the trap of “writing culture” along lengthy discussions about racial difference that appeared to be taken for granted and seemed to be silenced in our anthropological reflection. We must make explicit the alterity as racialised in order to recognise its connections to the development of citizen/migrant subjectivities and their material realities. After all, we are, as De Genova states, doing anthropology in Europe, but not anthropology of Europe. He explains that if we really want to engage with a critical anthropology of Europe, then we must posit ‘Europe’ itself as a problem and not only the ‘other’, the alterity on the spotlight. Based on my own experience, as an anthropologist in Europe, I see the need to go back and reassess those questions that post-colonialism, as well as feminism, once asked up front. Let’s go beyond the politics of cultural difference and bring race – and its various theoretical and scientific bearings – back into place in order to interrogate the workings of this new global socio-economic order. We need to bring race to the center of the analysis – in the way it is in everyday life – as a political imperative, particularly given Europe’s role in the creation of racial science and racist colonial practices and logics.

If we want to engage critically with an anthropology of Europe, we must acknowledge and face the uncomfortable but unequivocal role that race – with its concomitant dominant white identifications white supremacy – has played in shaping the postcolonial condition of contemporary Europe and its cultural identity. It is precisely from this powerful postcolonial whiteness that a nondescript, ‘superdiversity’ is fashioned, essentialising masses of migrants who come from a race-neutral alterity known as the “third world”.

Let’s take alterity seriously and reject the naturalisation of cultural identity that obscures the complex racial relations of power that keep the ‘other’ trapped in neutral zones of exclusion. It is not about reifying ‘otherness’ or simplifying race as a category of difference, but about working against the invisibilisation of race. Only then, by scrutinising the racial colonial underpinnings of the category of the other – along with its intersections with gender, sexuality, citizenship as well as religious identities – we will be able to develop a critical and holistic depiction of migrants’ social locations and dislocations as racialised ‘others’ existing in the different postcolonial national landscapes of Europe.

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