
- Analyzing myth of exploring, adventuring, and understanding across cultures

**Background**
- 1987: University of Chicago; Professor
- Chair of Cultural Anthropology in Amsterdam
- Focuses on history of Anthropology

**Book**
- Outlines the elements taken into consideration in explorers’ accounts of their travels in Africa
- Explorers were engaged in scientific investigation based on subjective measures of time – they were biased and unscientific in methodology and analysis
- Issues with hygiene could have affected their methods: fever, dysentery, melancholia seriously affected explorers.
  - Issues of hygiene not just limited to issues of physical cleanliness. Hygiene also considered a set of practices of body and mind, represents cultural values
- The realities of travel made exchange of food, other goods a part of the process of making science
- Explorers had issues with nostalgia/melancholia that strongly influenced how they interpreted their surroundings
- They also had superiority complexes that gave them preconceived notions and affected their methodology in interacting with ‘natives’
- Science values putting forth a method to study phenomena objectively, but Fabian is arguing that what the explorers did did not follow true science
- Explorers had assumption that Europeans only have civilization
- Exploration was chaotic, did not allow systematic methodology or careful observation, and the explorers may have lost control of their own rationality

- Notion of **ecstasy**: how to move across cultural boundaries
- Africans were sexualized in the accounts of the explorers
  - Could be a reflection of what they actually saw, or reflects the explorers’ own preconceptions or evaluations based on their own cultural standards
- Explorers were not able to understand a different context
  - Ex. Moods and Feelings: explorers were condescending about humor and what makes something humorous. Did not understand true original context
- Questions of methodology:
  - Trying to absorb things that may not even have a category in Western society
  - Creates cognitive dissonance as they attempt to rationalize and ‘create’ new categories
o When environment, psychological comfort zone is taken away, things can be confusing
  • Symbolic interaction as tool of power. Europeans thinking that Africans consider certain things to be fetishes served as a method to maintain power and status quo, by categorizing Africans as incapable of rationality, hence inferior
  • European collecting curios as they traveled could also be described as fetishistic in their own way

  • Fabian’s book describes period just before Belgian colonization, or the “Race for Africa”
  • African exploration done in a period when European countries were seeking new territories
  • Colonization was expressed as a matter of state and nation building
  • Anthropological work done in this time implicitly reflected these issues

Power of Medicine:
  • Power becomes invisible, not overt (Foucault)
  • Science and western medicine, exerted through the practice of medicine is something that is done to physical forms, but shapes perceptions, bodies, practices
  • All part of Foucault’s biopolitical process as control over a population

  • Science is a process in which replicable steps are taken to create reliable knowledge
  • Victorian era: valued order, propriety, chasteness in women – these were parts of cultural identity in Europe, which were reflected in the ways the explorers described Africans, particularly women
  • All these are inextricably linked to issues of market.

Time and Other
  • Fabian is diagnosing the politics involved in the construction of knowledge about the Africans
  • Describing their methodological approach as ways in which Europeans are establishing superiority
  • Anxieties about identity, self, bodies all reflect the Victorian sensibility of the explorers
  • Page 3 – explorers are as “out of their minds” as they perceived the Africans to be
  • Page 4 – what was created as forms of knowledge hides other projects that were simultaneously affecting how knowledge was created
  • Revision of history as it is currently known
  • Epistemological leap to know
  • Can people transcend culture/social barriers?

Modes of Perception
  • Europeans have visual tradition – sight and visual elements are given primacy
  • There is a sensory hierarchy, with vision at the top
Nancy Scheper-Hughes: slums in Brazil and policies on maternal neglect reflect implied moral judgments.

Do you think ecstasis is a valid way to produce knowledge? Is it a realistic goal? Ecstasis is a physical, emotional method of research.

Is this a valid methodological approach? Personal experience vs. professional methodology
  - Motive of ethnography is self-reflexivity, or understanding how self shapes data and knowledge that is created
  - The explorers were protoanthropologists who wrote about their experiences and attempted to analyze. However, they were not necessarily trying to understand culture or practices

1st half of book: what are the stereotypes present about Africans

2nd half of book: describes experience of explorers in Africa. Explores question: most texts were written by outsiders – is this a valid way to collect knowledge of an ‘Other’?
  - All throughout explores forms of control, controlling properties, resistance