
Carolina Alonso Bejarano, Lucia López Juárez, Mirian A. Mijangos García, Daniel M. Goldstein, *Decolonizing Ethnography: Undocumented Immigrants and New Directions in Social Science*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2019, 208 pp. Paper ISBN: 978-1-4780-0395-3, Cloth ISBN: 978-1-4780-0362-5.

The book *Decolonizing Ethnography* demonstrates what happens when ethnography meets social activism. The publication is coauthored by four people with different backgrounds, all of whom participated in the field research and activism. Both fields are perceived here as mutually inseparable. In August 2011 ethnographers Carolina Alonso Bejarano and Daniel M. Goldstein began, in their own words, a project in activist anthropology that aimed to join the work of ethnography to the struggle for undocumented workers' rights in New Jersey. Two undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala, Lucia López Juárez and Mirian A. Mijangos García, not previously qualified in the field of ethnography, joined them as field researchers and equal coauthors. The research was conducted mainly around the center for undocumented workers in New Jersey where all participants had met and where all four coauthors have been volunteering. In order to keep the identity of the migrants' secret, it has been necessary to change some data. For the same reason, the book is also accompanied by illustrations instead of using the migrants' photos which makes it quite outstanding in graphic terms. One of the main title objectives is to question the meaning and tools of anthropology nowadays and its possible changes. The book follows the idea of the anthropologist Faye Venetia Harrison¹ that anthropology needs to transform itself dramatically to overcome its colonial heritage, and that it needs to be decolonized by, for example., incorporating theories and scholars from the Global South and outside the mostly

white western academia. However, in *Decolonizing Ethnography*, the concept of decolonization is not only a theoretical subject but situated to specific anthropological practice. Regarding theory, the coauthors are asking an important question: Is it even possible to make a decisive break with anthropology's colonial past and eurocentrism? Colonial anthropology was distinguished by a division between those being studied and those doing the studying. This approach is still a frequent practice in the field, leading to power imbalances and asymmetric relationships between ethnographers and the people in the terrain up till now. In this book, the coauthors argue that a new kind of anthropology can emerge from taking a more collaborative perspective towards, and engagement with, decolonial theory and methodology. This approach can make common cause with the struggles of those with whom ethnographers work – in this case, undocumented migrants. According to the coauthors, that means not only questioning the hierarchical relations between ethnographers and their participants, but also questioning the hierarchy in universities as places of western dominance – i.e., the hegemony of western thought and theories. In order to change this system, the need to create a theory from below or a theory from the south is urged. What does it mean for ethnographic research? The coauthors suggest, to disturb the hierarchy and coloniality one can put the instruments of ethnographic research in the hands of local people so that they may produce knowledge about themselves, for themselves.

The publication comprises a preface, an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, notes, references, and an index; it is supplemented with seven illustrations. In the first chapter, the authors introduce basic theories, concepts and names of scholars connected with the subject of decolonial theories, while mainly discussing concepts of coloniality, eurocentrism in research and their understanding of colonial anthropology. Reconsidering the researcher/researched relationship, they call for not co-optative but collaborative anthropology instead. Anthropology, where, in their own words, the researched are not treated as objects and raw materials. By changing the research process, knowledge is shared between the

¹ Faye Venetia HARRISON (ed.), *Decolonizing Anthropology – Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*, Arlington: American Anthropological Association, 1991.

two parties, rather than extracted from the person being researched. Overall, I find the chapter useful as a summary of contemporary debates relating to coloniality, colonialism etc., and introducing scholars like Walter Mignolo² and Nelson Maldonado-Torres.³ The chapter thus comes in handy for everyone who is not exactly familiar with decolonial theories.

The second chapter aims to introduce all four coauthors, their backgrounds, stories, and position in the project. I consider this part to be highly important as it reveals the mutual relations and power structure and the asymmetry among the participants and points out either their various privileges or their inequalities i.e., race, gender, non/possession of US citizenship etc. I am convinced that reflecting the researcher's own positionality is the key point of any kind of research regarding the question of power and power relations. It is a necessary vehicle for research aiming to give new perspectives on ethnography using decolonial practice.

The third chapter describes all the details and history of the research project and gives us

an outline of how the fieldwork was conducted. The coauthors offer this account as an example of how they think anthropology beyond colonial(ity) should be practiced: anthropology conceived not as the ultimate manual but as an inspiration. I regard the effort of carefully describing decolonial practice as being highly useful for further anthropological projects and fieldwork. The chapter also presents the background of the undocumented migrants' community, their problems, and struggles. This enables readers to gain a better idea about the research setting.

The fourth chapter presents the results of the fieldwork and a theory which emerged from it. Focusing mainly on Mirian and Lucy's experience in the role of ethnographers, it sums up their research methods and the problems they had in approaching immigrants. It further pursues their efforts to combine fieldwork, the organization of workers, advocacy, and having workers know their rights. Involving locals into conducting anthropological research is not an unusual step. What makes it unique is the roles played by Mirian and Lucy as coauthors and equal researchers. Following the research, they came up with their own research-based *theory of undocumentedation*. The theory explains what it means to be undocumented in the U.S. and wherein lie the principal sources of the problems faced by undocumented people. The coauthors call it emic or native understanding of the topic, an *undocumented activist theory* as developed by undocumented activists themselves. As the coauthors stress, the theory stands in contrast to the theories of Carolina and Daniel, who emphasize the structural explanations they represent – Mirian and Lucy are aware of them but emphasize also other factors, i.e., lack of unity on the part of the immigrant community, resulting in people's failure to know their rights and to demand them collectively. I consider the way of developing an emic theory, which means a theory using research participants' knowledge gained through the research process, as being extensively inspirational for decolonial ethnography practice and appreciate the demonstration of how a theory can be created from below.

The field research was interwoven with activism including various directly organized actions, legal advocacy, and consultancy. According to the coauthors, the research became an instrument of social resistance, transformation, and liberation.

² See e.g.: Walter D. MIGNOLO, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, & Colonization*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995; idem, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000; idem, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity – Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011; Walter D. MIGNOLO – Catherine E. WALSH, *On Decoloniality – Concept, Analytics, Praxis*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

³ See e.g.: Nelson MALDONADO-TORRES, "On the Coloniality of Being", *Cultural Studies* 21/2–3, 2017, pp. 240–270; idem, "Césaire's Gift and the Decolonial Turn", *Radical Philosophy Review* 9/2, 2006, pp. 111–137; idem, "Thinking through the Decolonial Turn – Post-Continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique: An Introduction", *Transmodernity* 1/2, 2011, pp. 1–15; idem, "The Decolonial Turn", in: POBLETE, Juan, *New Approaches to Latin American Studies – Culture and Power*, London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 111–127.

The theater of the oppressed,⁴ which uses the dramatic form as an instrument of public political engagement, is also pursuing these objectives and prodding audiences into being its active participants. In the fifth chapter we are confronted with the script of *Undocumented, Unafraid*, theater of the oppressed written by all the coauthors. Based on real stories of migrants, it translates some of our research findings about immigrant workers' rights into an intelligible message for ordinary people. Thus, the research can have a direct positive impact on the migrant community.

Despite the coauthors' slightly different opinions about whether and how ethnography can be decolonized, it is certain that the publication serves as a great example of the effort to do so. With its reflective method towards the positionality, privileges, and transformations they both experienced during the research, it offers a more conscious attitude towards the fieldwork setting from which new possibilities in the field can arise. First the book emphasizes the importance of turning to theorists outside the usual Western canon as a way of challenging the authority of colonial anthropology. Secondly, according to the coauthors, it appeals to researchers to think more consciously about what ethnographic research is, how it is conducted, and what its purposes are.

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Jonathan Rosa, *Looking Like a Language, Sounding Like a Race. Raciolinguistic Ideologies and the Learning of Latinidad*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, 286 pp. ISBN 978-01-9063-473-5.

In the last fifteen years or so, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in homicides and acts of violence against people of color in the United States. Although the main targets of this hate are predominantly African Americans, prejudice, hostility and even outright violence is also increasingly evident against Americans of Hispanic origin⁵, who are now one of the largest minorities in the United States and already make up the majority of the local population in many places, especially in the Southwest⁶, which is logically reflected in various disciplines such as social anthropology, sociology, psychology, demography, and linguistics, including linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. One such work is the recently published book by the young sociocultural and linguistic anthropologist Jonathan Rosa, showing how ethnic origin ("race"), education, and especially language competence, in particular among people of Latin American descent (Rosa uses the term "Latinx" by which he means a gender nonbinary alternative to Latina, Latino, and Latin@) to refer to US-based persons of Latin American descent) are stigmatized in American everyday life despite various efforts to use inclusive language.

The central thesis of Rosa's book is the strong claim that race and language, at least in the contemporary United States, are key factors in modern governance, by which Rosa means the legitimacy of racial capitalism and the colonial power relations out of which this form of governance evolved (pp. 4, 5, 213). Although Rosa makes several

⁴ The specific dramatic form called Theater of the oppressed (TO) was developed by a drama theorist Augusto Boal in the 1970s as a tool to liberate the oppressed people by themselves through participative theater experience. TO has become popular practice among social and political activist worldwide. See: Augusto BOAL, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 3rd. ed., London: Pluto press, 2008.

⁵ According to data from American investigative journalist Tonya Mosley published in an article *The 'Forgotten' History of Anti-Latino Violence in the U.S.* for Here & Now on 25 November 2019 and managed by Boston radio station WBUR, there were 485 hate crimes against citizens of Latin American descent in 2018.

⁶ According to U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanics made up about 20% of the U.S. population in 2020, i.e. about 65,000,000.