

Johannes Fabian: Out of Our Minds, 2000.

- 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 **ecstasis**: 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

- 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

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