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The Inside of Outside : From Another Native' s Point of View

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The Inside of Outside: From Another Native's Point of View

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Vincent: But you know what the funniest thing about Europe is?

Jules: What?

Vincent: It's the little differences [...].

Jules: Examples?

Vincent: Alright, well you can walk into a movie theater in Amsterdam and buy a beer. And I don't mean just like in no paper cup; I'm talking about a glass of beer. And in Paris, you can buy a beer at McDonald's. And you know what they call a, uh, a Quarter Pounder with Cheese in Paris?

Jules: They don't call it a Quarter Pounder with Cheese?

Vincent: Nah, man, they got the metric system, they wouldn't know what [...] a Quarter Pounder is.

Jules: What do they call it?

Vincent: They call it a 'Royale with Cheese'.

Jules: 'Royale with Cheese'.

Vincent: That's right.

Jules: What do they call a Big Mac?

Vincent: A Big Mac's a Big Mac, but they call it 'Le Big Mac'.

Jules: 'Le Big Mac'. [laughs] What do they call a Whopper?

Vincent: I dunno, I didn't go into Burger King.

(from the movie *Pulp Fiction* by Quentin Tarantino, 1994)

As the famous dialogue from the movie *Pulp Fiction* reminds us, comparing American and European ways of life is not without its own social connotations. Being different is the only way of social survival—even in Europe. The authors of the present volume explore the old continent from a different angle, through the double lenses of Japan and anthropology. What is common between them and the two hitmen above though is their appreciation of those 'little differences'. Luckily enough, they leave the reader with a lot to think about.

The collection of these articles could be said to be about the anthropology of Europe, but most of them do not limit themselves to area studies or the discourse of regionalism that has recently been a popular topic in the social sciences. By contrast, the authors here situate themselves both outside and inside Europe by questioning one

important epistemological and political premise of it, which they call ‘the social’.

What is exciting about this take on sociality is that in these stories of immigrant families and local communities we begin to understand how both the conceptual and the regional are destabilized in everyday life on the peripheries of Europe. As Professor Mori points out in the introduction, the ‘concept of “social” [...] is found at the core of welfare work in the realm of state policy, and in grassroots movements by self-help groups. And, at a spontaneous personal level, it also refers somewhat to one’s lifestyle. By means of the concept of “social”, ties to others such as the aged, the poor, the suffering and migrant families are initiated. Moreover these ties are mobile, flexible, and vary in form’ (Mori, this volume p.9). This is a thought-provoking argument that leads to the recognition that the conceptual and geographical contexts of anthropology are implicated in and through each other making the work of ethnographers ever more complex and challenging at the same time.

Anthropologists used to take ‘society’ as one of their grand contexts. From Radcliffe-Brown’s classic *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1952) to more recent work on consumption or medicine (Appadurai 1986, Whyte et al. 2002) it has been the north star of ethnographic inquiry in the endless sea of human existence. Recently, however, anthropology has been increasingly concerned with the concept of ‘the social’ as both an object *and* subject of description (see e.g., Miura 2006; Strathern 2005). The point here is precisely to move away from the explanatory and toward an inventive approach by asserting that ‘theorizing about society is itself a social activity which takes its cue from a particular moment in history and intervenes in its course’ (Ingold 1996: 48). And where else to start such an exploration other than in Europe, the only place on earth where ‘the social’ is also local? Of course such a move requires much more than thinking of Europe as just another place for doing fieldwork. As we are reminded over and over again in this volume, when it comes to the anthropology of Europe, the problem of the social is deeply inherent *in the field*.

The articles here convey a recursive relation between the ways Europeans change the meaning of social life through their daily engagement with it and the ways anthropologists try to seize and expand its conceptual scope. Arguing both with and against Geertz’s well-known claim, then, one might say that if there is a distinctively anthropological mode of studying villages (or societies), it is to study them *in* villages (societies). In other words, as long as different ways of knowing and being are of interest to anthropologists, the question of *where* remains a critical concern.

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Many of the contributors to *The Anthropology of Europe and Its Extending Horizons* have taken up this challenge by turning the context of the social into an ethnographic question. It is a very timely undertaking, indeed, and therefore one can only welcome the publication of these articles together. As anyone who has read them could attest, they are very different texts. However, in my reading at least, they all more or less explicitly deal with the relations between outsider and insider identities in European localities. Along

the way, contexts shift and values clash so that the reader may wonder if there ever were any clear boundaries between European and other socialities at all.

Although most of the authors are looking at Europe from the outside (from Japan, from social theory, from the academia), they do so in an ethnographic mode with the implicit promise of an insider's view. Many of the people they describe, however, are themselves outsiders, or at least, from the periphery of Europe either in the geographic or social sense. The diversity of human worlds, anthropologists are so fond of, appears here neither as a structural consequence of globalization, nor as a transparent voice of the people who talk to the anthropologist, but as the very practicalities of their daily lives. The virtue of the articles collected in this volume is that they show how such multiplicity is more than an anthropological cliché, and indeed is the very condition of living on the margins of European societies today.

Tax policies in the North become part and parcel of the changing social landscape of a Maltese town in Boissevain's paper. Wages in Morocco, according to Nakagawa, fold into the internal disputes of French farmers. Emotions of old individuals and the ideology of the welfare state feed off each other in some kind of mutually parasitic bundle in Takahashi's case study. Such plural perspectives include each other not simply in a sociological or anthropological sense, but in the form of organic vegetables, colored tiles, handicraft and knitting. We learn, for example, that tiles do not only translate the culture of Naxxar's inhabitants to the outsiders, but they also happen to enable the creation of new wealth on the island with its cultural consequences as well (Boissevain, this volume). The Court Barn Museum in Chipping Campden does not simply represent a kind of Campdonian cultural heritage, but is also the driving force in the redefinition of the local community (Shioji, this volume). So, outsiders and insiders hang together here not in equilibrium, but in a permanent state of conflicting ideas and facts.

Judging by these beautiful accounts of distant European places and peoples some readers may get the impression that *change* is something that arrives from the outside. Sometimes it is brought in by tourists who revitalize religious festivals, or by newcomers from the city who prefer old buildings to trucks that carry dairy products to the city in front of those buildings. Other times, yet again from an apparently external political-economic space, change comes in the form of globalized capital or the welfare state. I know this quite well from my native Hungarian countryside where transformation arises in many forms; ranging from socialist cooperatives inspired by the Soviet model to German retirees, to GMO seeds from France, what have you. Remarkably, such external imperatives of socio-economic transformations tend to be thoroughly infected by the *identity* of those inside: the locals, the natives, and all those sorts of people who then become the objects of ethnographic writing.

The descriptions of lonely old people in Finland, desperate narratives in Ireland, or locals sticking to their history in Spain and Turkey are admittedly one-sided and at certain points even passionate, however I would be the last to urge for more 'background' that explains them (or rather not). As Nakagawa implies in his contribution, it is precisely the perplexity of these shifting contexts that keeps ethnography on the move. The three axes of conflict that he describes (farmers/shippers, farmers/farmers, farmers/agricultural

laborers) interact in quite surprising ways that somehow shift the focus from the farmers themselves to the interaction of different realities. Speaking of the changing meanings of social justice, for example, he writes:

Criticism against the exploitation of agricultural labourers, especially seasonal labourers, is increasing. It emphasizes the need to protect labourers' rights, by, for example, ensuring decent living conditions and wages determined by the law. The farmers do not readily accept this kind of human rights discourse. On the contrary, they often oppose it because, according to their views on social justice, they themselves are victims of globalization, and thus for them illegal practices are sometimes morally justifiable (Nakagawa, this volume p.103).

It is, in other words, the farmers themselves who turn Nakagawa's description into a critique of globalization, which at the same time provides and transforms the social context of his research. What I want to stress then is that the passionate voices in these articles and the constraining frames of the outside world, including the social sciences, are not independent from each other but, in very important ways, they are *partially connected*. Let me highlight this further with a short childhood story.

* * *

One of my first memories of 'Europe' is a blue passport from 1986. As part of a family trip to the Netherlands, my parents needed to apply for a passport at the local police station, which I could use later for entering Western-European countries. The red one that we kept at home was only valid for 'socialist countries'. I remember my father explaining to me in the evening—with both documents in my hand—how those people living 'on the other side' had only *one* passport because they did not divide Europe into Eastern and Western blocks (contrary to my teachers at school who did), and that I would see it with my own eyes in a couple of days how friendly they were. For someone having been raised on war movies, in which heroes of the Red Army fought against evil Nazi soldiers, such parental circumspection was indeed necessary.

So, we were up for a '*Bildung* trip' to Europe to learn about our own European identity. What being European meant for me then was something both outside and inside the world of 'socialist countries,' which marked the territory where I could use my red passport. Not that it caused the slightest confusion for a 12-year-old boy. Being an outsider and insider, all at once, seemed to be the most ordinary thing in the world. If anything, I was anxiously looking forward to my first breakfast in a McDonald's and to seeing the streets of Paris, which had filled my childhood readings. Traveling seemed to be the only plausible way to be a part of this Europe my parents kept talking about.

After all these years, I still I think of myself as European, although working as an anthropologist in and of Japan has considerably shrunk the space for that naïve child in me who could be two sides in one. It is probably for this very reason that I read the contributions to this volume with much joy and a little hope in our discipline to

reanimate this sort of liminality in us, which, I believe, is the driving force of any anthropological inquiry.

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The multiple voices of these insiders speak, without a doubt, to the anthropologist, and probably even to the European in me—but less to the *gaijin*, the foreigner in Japanese academia. My own ethnographic work with diabetes patients, physicians and scientists both in Japan and Hungary make me cautious about the ways differences between Westerners and Others are taken for granted in anthropology. Such identities not only take different forms in patients' homes and in epidemiological databases, but they are also articulated differently at the Annual Meeting of the Japanese Anthropology Association and in international journals of Japanese studies. And what is more, these different articulations are related to and embedded in each other through a series of frictions (Tsing 2005), local misunderstandings and 'encounters through difference', that are constitutive of social realities both in Europe and Japan, or anywhere, indeed. This challenge of putting difference to practice goes to the heart of how we do anthropology in and of the contemporary world.

Take medicines, for example. Some years ago patients at the local self-help group I was visiting once a month in Shitamachi, Tokyo, asked me to tell them about the newest diabetes pills available in European clinics. On one of my annual family visits back to Hungary, I asked my physician friends about the most common new medications in their practice. One of them—assuming that I, an anthropologist, was more interested in Japanese things than in Hungarian doctors—directed me to a regional clinic where they were testing a drug that had been developed by a pharmaceutical company based in the Kansai area. When I was introduced to one of the researchers there, he asked me, if I was willing to participate in a trial study that was comparing the differences between healthy Caucasian and Japanese adult men's reaction to this new blood sugar-lowering compound (Mohácsi 2012). Eventually, I refused to do so for various reasons, but just for the sake of anthropological curiosity, let me play with the idea of what would have happened if I had accepted his invitation. Volunteering for this Phase 1 clinical trial would have allowed me an insider's view to contemporary medical science and the potentialities of human difference in the discovery of new drugs. I could have argued that the clinic is, after all, not so different from a Pacific island or a tribe somewhere in Central Africa. That science is, yes, social.

All this has been done already, long ago, in laboratory studies and medical anthropology. It's easy to see, however, that such an intervention would have been different from traditional participant observation. Not necessarily because of being closer to home (in Europe), but because close and far are constituted in the very act of comparing each other (Europe and Japan). I could have become a part (or, to be precise, the target) of my informants' comparative study of Caucasian and Japanese metabolisms, just like they had been a part of my comparative experiment between Euro-American and Japanese practices of health and disease. Both of us try to compare Europe and Japan in

our own different ways, and along the way we change the meanings of both. If we do not, it is just bad science.

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The lesson which I draw from these case studies, somewhat freely, is the following: that the different perspectives of outsiders and insiders are neither primordially given (as, for instance, ‘urban’ vs. ‘rural’, or ‘French’ vs. ‘global’), nor socially constructed (or imagined or performed). Instead, they co-constitute each other providing partial perspectives of one another that the anthropologist may (or may not) interpret as the contemporary conditions of European social life. And although I would argue that such a postplural condition (Gad, et al. 2010) is not necessarily a European matter, I am quite ready to subscribe to the idea that the Old World is a case in point with all its external and internal immigration, the daily clash of ideologies, values and identities in market places, political forums, and grassroots activism—a rather different condition than the American melting pot or the idea of ethnic homogeneity in Japan.

Therefore, it would be interesting to further question how such everyday conflicts between different realities of outsiders and insiders are, almost paradoxically, the driving force behind the extending horizons of *European* cultural values, such as English charity, Mediterranean festivity, French collectivism and Nordic welfare. How, in other words, are these grand notions articulated in the local conflicts of multiple perspectives? Such questions of scale require methodological innovation that may well form the basis of another volume.

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