

# 6.2 Critique of Anthropology

Reading and Doing Ethnography  
Social Anthropology 314

# Critiques of anthropology

- » Restrepo and Escobar: "Other Anthropologies and Anthropologies Otherwise"
- » Berry, Argüelles, Cordis, Ihmoud, Estrada: "Fugitive Anthropology"

One approach is about global systems of knowledge, the other is an intersectional feminism.

# Berry et al: Critique of fieldwork

*The field in anthropology is the milieu for knowledge production. It is a physical place as well as an epistemological space of investigation shaped by histories of European and U.S. imperialism and colonialism. Fieldwork has been referred to as the “basic constituting experience, not only for anthropological knowledge but of anthropologists themselves.” The givenness of fieldwork as an individualistic rite of passage often obscures its constitutive and interlocking racial and gender hierarchies and inequities. (537)*

*Our experiences with racialized gender and sexual violence compelled us to question the pervasiveness of dominant logics within activist research in relationship to our own fieldwork in El Salvador, Cuba, Palestine, Mexico, and Guyana.<sup>1</sup> Collectively we imagine alternative pathways toward a decolonial research praxis that advances a critical feminist ethos. This ethos is defined by its flight from an intellectual garrison, in which the idealized radical subject within leftist struggles figures as a martyr for the movement. This self-sacrificing subject coincides with the institutionalized notion of fieldwork as a masculinist rite of passage or an exercise of one's endurance. We call for a praxis of what we term fugitive anthropology, a rethinking of the contours of the political in co-creating spaces of liberation and transformation. (539)*

*Our continued investment in the project of decolonizing anthropology suggests that justice, in some sense, exists. Our written words betray our screams, which are neither audible nor appropriate in the academy. Confronting violence not just as individual survivors, but as knowledge producers enhances our collective struggle. Yet at the same time, we realize that these provocations may damage our careers in the academy and our relationships to local struggles that we have worked to cultivate. How, then, can we imagine a way of doing activist research that does not reproduce violence against ourselves, as racialized, sexualized, women anthropologists speaking from places of intimate connection with those with whom we align our work? (560)*

# Restrepo and Escobar: Critique of geopolitics

*Dominant anthropologies', in other words, assume a single epistemic space within which anthropology functions as a real, albeit changing and contested, practice. 'Other anthropologies/anthropology otherwise', on the contrary, suggests that the space in which anthropology is practiced is fractured – perhaps even more so today than in the past, and despite increasing normalizing tendencies worldwide – making it into a plural space. In other words, rather than assuming that there is a privileged position from which a 'real anthropology' (in the singular) can be produced and in relation to which all other anthropologies would define themselves, 'world anthropologies' seeks to take seriously the multiple and contradictory historical, social, cultural and political locatedness of the different communities of anthropologists and their anthropologies. (100)*

Let's practice writing critiques

Describe a moment where  
someone did something  
inconsistent with their professed  
values.



Describe a moment where you felt  
powerless in the face of an  
institutional situation.

Describe the way that a critique  
was handled

# What is the basis for criticism?

- >> Unfair (justice)
- >> Illogical (consistency)
- >> Dysfunctional (pragmatic)
- >> Oppression (power)

# How are critiques handled?

- >> Ignored
- >> Accepted
- >> Disputed
- >> Stalled
- >> Tricked
- >> Acknowledged, but no more