
Book Review

Decentering (Western) Europe: Rethinking Global Entanglements from the Eastern Semi-Periphery

Adam, Jens et al. (eds) (2019) *Europa dezentrieren: Globale Verflechtungen neu denken*. Frankfurt and New York: Campus. 341 pages.

The timely volume proposes a new theoretical framework for ethnographic Europeanization research informed by postcolonial theory, from the vantage point of German anthropology. The reviewer argues that this innovative program of ‘decentering Europe’ can and should be productively extended to ethnographic research in the ECE region, in dialogue with critical ECE social sciences perspectives.¹

Following Dipesh Chakrabarty’s call to provincialize Europe (Chakrabarty, 2000), the anthology edited by a team of scholars currently or formerly affiliated to the Institute for European Ethnology of Humboldt University, Berlin, proposes ‘a fresh view on the fragile presence of the European project in time of multiple crises, from the perspective of its currently less considered global entanglements and dependencies, linking (German) social and cultural scientific Europeanization research with postcolonial perspectives for the first time’ (cover text).

The volume introduces the project of Critical Europeanization Studies (CES), as a ‘program and perspectives of an Anthropology of reflexive Europeanization,’ ‘decentering the perspective on Europe from the perspective of its margins, its global entanglements and internal omissions. This focus expands the temporal and spatial scope of the investigation far beyond the current political project of European integration: towards a long-term, relational embedding of the continent in the production of “World,” as a general context of unequal and shifting trans-regional relations’ (p. 8).

It is the volume’s declared objective to encourage and expedite such a linking of postcolonial and anthropological approaches to the investigation of current processes of Europeanization and the production of Europe in the context of global conditions.

The editing team’s co-authored introduction ‘Decentering Europe: Program and Perspectives of an Anthropology of Reflexive Europeanization,’ (pp. 7–33) presents CES as a theoretical concept and proposes analytical perspectives for

¹ The reviewer is a PhD candidate at the Institute of European Ethnology at Humboldt University Berlin. One of the editors/authors of the reviewed book, Prof. Regina Römhild, is her German PhD supervisor. Her Hungarian second supervisor is the editor-in-chief of this journal, Prof. Margit Feischmidt. This review was independent work, in terms of both the decision to write it and the content.

ethnographic research, illustrated by selected articles from various disciplines, perspectives, and geographic locations.

As the authors state, the Eurocentric power structure that is shifting towards a multipolar world requires a re-measurement of Europe's global position, as well as a critical focus on topographies of inequality within Europe, which can be observed in various regional and local contexts across the continent. For such a project of provincializing and decentering Europe, a postcolonial perspective is necessary, but with a more decisive focus and recalibration on the continent's globally entangled present than before. Global interdependences and entanglements need to be studied not only in terms of their effects on the 'Global South' or the 'non-Western World,' but also in their retroactive effect on the space of 'Europe.' Globally distributed regional anthropological expertises need to be brought together to open up the view of the movements and relations between the regions of research as elements of 'process geographies' (Appadurai, 2001), reaching beyond a 'static map of ethnographic Area Studies as seemingly fixed geopolitical units' (p. 9). From this vantage point, Europe's position appears not defined by borders, but by its dynamic spaces of transnational relations, mobilities, and migrations in the world. This way, formerly hidden everyday practices of 'other Europes' can be ethnographically unearthed and brought into view.

Due to the specific history of the discipline, German anthropology is institutionally divided into two branches that have developed from a split into 'native' anthropology/ethnography, German folklore studies (*Volkskunde*) and non-European Ethnology (*Völkerkunde*). The volume's project of CES is proposed from within the 'native' branch of German anthropology as a cultural/social sciences discipline. The postcolonial perspective the authors propose is based on theoretical and analytical concepts by postcolonial scholars mostly from India (Dipesh Chakrabarty, Shalini Randeria, Arjun Appadurai, Gayatri C. Spivak), and Western anthropologists working on non-Western/European contexts (Laura Ann Stoler, Marilyn Strathern, and Michael Herzfeld).

A central concept here is 'worlding,' adapted from Gayatri C. Spivak, as complex relational forms of colonial World-making, and being made through the World. Informed by Marilyn Strathern's concept of 'auto-anthropology' (Strathern, 1987), the project of 'decentering Europe' is understood here as a reflexive analytical movement of 'Re-Worlding' (p. 27).

Translated into *decolonial* terms, CES could thus be described as an academic effort at Western intellectual self-decolonization in a specific German cultural sciences context, in a 'theoretical shakedown' (Moosavi, 2020: 2).

The first three articles, co-authored by the German editing team, introduce and discuss CES as concept. The introduction is followed by a conversation between Jens Adam and Regina Römhild with social anthropologist Shalini Randeria, whose concept of *entanglements* is central to CES, its inception in 1998, and its methodology (pp. 35–65). Römhild and Knecht then reflect on the theoretical implications of the institutional split within German anthropology ('double gap'), which they claim is leading to a 'regionalization of thought,' reproducing an 'imperial separation' of anthropological knowledge that represents

Europe as subject and the colonized world as object (p. 19). According to the authors, a postcolonially informed Ethnology of Europe needs to fight for other institutional conditions of knowledge production; they argue for a re-focusing of the discipline towards a process geography and anthropology of entangled spaces and mobilities, using the example of migration- and border regimes research (pp. 67–79).

The authors propose six analytical perspectives regarding how this theoretical program could be applied to empirical ethnographic research settings, to be pursued singularly or in a flexibly combined way, and adapted to a wide range of research contexts. At the same time, they define the volume's structural setup: The ten articles from social and cultural anthropology, sociology, political science, decolonial theory, and geography, both original contributions and translations,² are selected to illustrate each analytical perspective.

The proposed analytical perspectives are the following:

(1) 'Reconstructing global entangled histories, to highlight the constitution of Europe, the project of "European Modernity" and its political basic tenets as products of colonial and post-colonial relations, surpassing the perspectives of methodological nationalism and Eurocentrism' (p. 18).

Examples are the conversation with Randeria, and Römhild/Knecht's contribution on the institutional split of German anthropology into 'native' and non-European Ethnology.

(2) 'Rendering visible the internal "Others" and omissions/blind spots in the past and present of Europe, at the same time highlighting and decentering European Modernity's inner heterogeneities, established cultural hegemonies and asymmetries' (p. 19).

This point is illustrated by Nilüfer Göle (2012) on Islam as the excluded constitutive Other of Western modernity and European chronotopes; while in *Postcolonialism: Living with the Specter of Europe* (pp. 101–118), Vassos Argyrou reflects on Cyprus' ambivalent relation to Western modernity.

(3) 'An analytic perspective on Europe from its geopolitical, postcolonial and epistemological margins, from where its inner ruptures and ambivalences, racisms and demarcations in dealing with the world and its inhabitants can be brought into view' (p. 20).

In *Towards decolonial Futures: From Western Universalism to Decolonial Pluriversalisms*, Ramón Grosfoguel searches for an epistemic space on the margins of European-Western thought to further the project of decolonization (pp. 119–142); Henk Driessen is rethinking cosmopolitanism based on a study of Mediterranean port cities (cf. Driessen, 2005), and Tanıl Bora introduces *the debate of the White Turks as a class- and culture war* in Turkey (pp. 165–193).

(4) 'An analytic re-contextualization of different world regions in the course of a comparative research of (crypto-)colonial constellations in countries within and outside of Europe' (p. 22).

² Driessen (2005), Göle (2012) and Herzfeld (2016).

Michael Herzfeld develops his concept of 'Crypto-colonialism' (see Herzfeld, 2016, and more below) further for this volume.

5. 'A critical analysis of past and present politics of Europeanization as projects of power, deconstructing the teleological character of European integration and enabl[ing] a perspective on alternative developments of Europe.' (p. 23)

In *The Crisis of Europe in the Context of Cosmopolitization* (pp. 223–238), sociologist Ulrich Beck (1944–2015, original 2015 article) calls for a 'cosmopolitan turn' in social sciences: Europeans must 'deprovincialize' themselves by 'learning to see themselves sociologically-methodologically with the eyes of the Other.' Keith Hart addresses *The Euro Crisis: An Episode on the World History of Money*, also in an original article for the volume (pp. 239–273).³

6. 'A cosmopolitan, no longer exclusively anthropocentric perspective on global entanglements of Europe, including also non-human beings and heterogeneous networks and constellations of human and non-human actors' (p. 25).

The last two articles focus on climate change: Silja Klepp and Johannes Herbeck: *Decentering Climate Change: Negotiations on Climate Change and Migration in Europe and Oceania* (pp. 275–314), and Kirsten Hastrup: *On the Way to a Global Social Imaginary? Climate Change and the End of an Era in Social Sciences* (pp. 315–338).

In their concluding outlook ('Re-Worlding Europe,' pp. 27–30) the authors see concepts like 'shared histories,' 'interpenetration,' 'crypto-colony,' 'trans-modernity,' and 'global imaginaries' as valuable contributions to the project of an anthropology of reflexive Europeanization, to be pursued beyond this volume. Furthermore, they include 'the Imperial' as a powerful category of Worlding, applying Ann Stoler's concepts of 'imperial formations' and 'imperial debris' (Stoler, 2013), considering that Europe, also from a decentering perspective, presents as an intersection of different imperial projects: Not only have Western-European colonial undertakings, but also those of the Ottoman Empire and the 'state-socialist Soviet Empire' left their traces in concrete local contexts as well as geopolitical orders, and Europe's relations to the world. And also, the EU is producing manifold imperial effects in its Member States, 'even more obviously so in its southern or eastern neighboring states, its membership aspirants, [and] in the countries of the Global South' (p. 28).

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In terms of geographic scope, the European border zones along the Mediterranean are covered in the volume; while mentioning 'postbloc' perspectives (p. 1), ECE

³ English version: *The euro crisis: an episode in the global history of money*. Available at https://www.academia.edu/25142305/The_euro_crisis_An_episode_in_the_global_history_of_money. Accessed: 05-10-2020.

does not feature. No authors from the region are included, and ECE scholarship is practically absent in the references related to the editors' contributions.⁴

In terms of its position in the geopolitics of knowledge production (see Buden, 2015, Demeter and Goyanes, 2020), and relevant for the vantage point of ECE social sciences, this debate within German anthropology produces knowledge about Europe and the World from the context of a democratic, post-migrant Western-European society as a cultural sciences discipline, with a theoretical agenda of criticism of Eurocentric Western cultural hegemony. Within German anthropology, CES's objective thus can be seen as twofold: Questioning, negotiating, and opening up the 'native' branch of German anthropology's theoretical and methodological approach to 'Europe' and the non-European world; and proposing an updated, non-eurocentric, merged German anthropology from the postcolonially informed 'native' (Volkskunde) tradition; engaging with the marginalized non-European Other within German Western post-migrant society, as well as proposing a relational model for a reflexive, non-eurocentric engagement with other European and non-European contexts, especially in migration- and border studies.

The central idea of CES is clearly overcoming the Eurocentric 'West-rest' binary with the concept of entanglements. But what to do conceptually with the South Eastern European – here represented by Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey – and Eastern European border zones that were not subjected to Western colonialism, but to continental empires and Western cultural hegemony (see Böröcz, 2001: 21–22)? These regions developed *ambivalent* relations to Western modernity as part of their structural position on the semi-periphery, described in numerous publications by scholars of World System Analysis (Wallerstein, Amin, Arrighi). The editors' solution here is to apply Herzfeld's concept of crypto-colonialism – developed for Greece, but, as he shows, applicable to structurally similar configurations in global contexts. Puzzling from the vantage point of ECE social sciences might be how CES's critical agenda of challenging Western cultural hegemony is being translated here: As a response to the thus stated 'crypto-colonial cultural self-subjugation to simplified knowledge of Western modernity in the region' pursued by 'local elites,' the editors' answer is a call for 'an internal revision of such forms of cultural self-subjugation' (p. 23).⁵ On which levels and pursued by what sort of actors the authors envision such projects of 'internal revision' to take place in the region is left unclear (intellectual elites?

⁴ Paweł Lewicki (Department of Comparative Studies of Central Europe, Frankfurt/Oder) co-authored the introduction. In the introduction's references, Michał Buchowski's (Department of Comparative Studies of Central Europe, Frankfurt/Oder) *Specter of Orientalism* (2006) is the only reference by a ECE-author. Römhild and Knecht refer to a 2007 article by sociologist Manuela Boatcă (2007), which was included in the 2013 German anthology *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus (Beyond Eurocentrism)* (Conrad, Römhild and Randeira, eds. 2013: 322–344).

⁵ One is in fact reminded of 'the potential temptation of European scholars to take the lead and to "dewesternize" and "decolonialize." If that happens (and it may happen), it would be indeed rewesternization disguised as dewesternization or decoloniality... European actors and institutions will now take the lead in decolonization because people in the rest of the world are not capable of decolonizing themselves!' (Mignolo, 2014, cf. Moosavi, 2020: 14).

Cultural/social sciences? Cultural policy? Civil society and activism?). Without any grounding in the history of nationalisms in the region, such a call can – not necessarily, but potentially – derail into the hegemonic Western enlightened mode of criticism CES set out decenter: Critical German scholars calling for Eastern self-emancipation from self-imposed immaturity (after all, the region wasn't colonized, 'real' oppression occurring elsewhere), – reproducing the classic Western orientalist tradition in relation to the West-East-axis (quasi in a German version of 'the East–West slope interpreted as a liberal utopia,' Melegh, 2006: 30). The empirical complication that it is mostly nationalist/far-right culturalist projects in the region acting in a 'decolonial' manner against Western cultural hegemony is (briefly) mentioned in the volume with the example of Hungary, discussed as a case of misappropriation of Latin American decolonial concepts of indigeneity (pp. 49–53).

'Crypto-colonialism,' if deployed as a generic analytical shortcut for non-colonized, non-Western regions of Europe, won't address the complex and ambivalent *patterns of entanglement* specific to this region; it clearly needs to be grounded in regional expertise.⁶ A range of compatible, postcolonially informed concepts and approaches have been developed in the region since the 1990s to address these very questions (like the *self-colonizing metaphor*, cf. Kiossev, 1995; 2000; 2010; 2018, *Nesting Orientalisms*, cf. Bakić-Hayden, 1995, or *East–West Slope*, cf. Melegh, 2006), while recently, a vibrant field of post-/and decolonially informed ECE scholarship with quite compatible critical approaches has emerged.⁷

But the Europe being decentered here with postcolonial concepts is clearly Western Europe, applying postcolonial concepts from a Western vantage point to non-western European regions. Unless addressed and contextualized, the same approach developed as a self-reflexive critical dialogue on the global North-South-axis is likely to methodologically remain a German monologue on the West-East-axis, producing analytical distortions due to context-blindness.

Structural East-West-asymmetries and the marginalization of ECE scholarship in Western academia is a well-researched topic in ECE, and has also been addressed in *Intersections* (Bartha and Eröss, 2015). In German academia, there is a division of labor in knowledge production; the ECE region being outsourced to specialist institutions for Eastern European Studies and Eastern European History. And the regional ECE expertise *within* the 'native' branch – for historical reasons institutionally situated mostly in the German Southwest – which is currently discovering postcolonial approaches for their local-regional research contexts (Eisch-Angus, Scholl-Schneider and Spiritova, 2019), is currently not in

⁶ Otherwise, it might produce effects such as Böröcz' critique of applying West-centric sociology classics to Hungary in 1997: "Eastern Europe" is one and indivisible. Its societies are quite simple little societies. They know of no other source of social inequality and conflict, logic of stratification and class formation, than totalitarian oppression (in the past) and gender inequality (today). In the latter, they are world champions. [...] Hence it is utterly unimaginable for things to be one way in one "Eastern European" country and another way in another' (Böröcz, 1997: 123).

⁷ For first impressions see the Facebook Group *Decolonizing Eastern Europe*, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/257972308642861>

active dialogue with CES. Due to this institutional and regional division – de facto producing a structurally similar ‘double gap’ effect for CES in respect to ECE like the global one described by Römhild and Knecht –, from the CES vantage point (arguing from the meta-space of process geographies, re-worldings and European border zones, critical of Eurocentrism and nationalism, not grounded in ECE regional expertise), ECE social sciences can sometimes be misperceived as ‘Area Studies’ in the postcolonial critical sense (a ‘static map of ethnographic Area Studies as seemingly fixed geopolitical units’; see above).

While the need for a meta-space to synthesize scattered regional expertise indeed makes sense within the German discipline, ECE social sciences, focusing on national or regional contexts ‘only,’ are sometimes perceived as being conspicuously imbued with methodological nationalism, ‘still’ operating in fixed national containers, and being ‘materialist’ rather than ‘critical.’⁸ In fact, the ECE regional expertise within the German ‘native’ branch reports of similar misperceptions of their work from the mainstream of the discipline, critical of a West-centrist ‘colonizing gaze’ on different methodological and theoretical approaches (Scholl-Schneider, Schuchardt and Spiritova, 2019: 25).

In the interest of a more productive dialogue, *the conceptual and methodological differences in researching global entanglements from variously located Western and Non-Western European contexts* need to be addressed.

CES as postcolonially informed debate within the ‘native’ branch of German anthropology – the mainstream of which is currently not sufficiently responsive to ECE scholarship in general (Scholl-Schneider, Schuchardt and Spiritova, 2019: 22) – currently rather relies on individual scholars’ research interests in the region (Adam, Boatcă, Buchowski).

Extending the epistemic space of German anthropology’s ‘native’ branch via postcolonial approaches into a ‘Re-Worlding’ – an operational discursive epistemic counter strategy against the Eurocentric hegemonic mainstream in the context of German post-migrant society, as Western intellectual self-decolonization from within – effectively turns the Eastern semi-periphery into an epistemic flyover zone, at least at this point.

German scholars with no regional ECE expertise are mostly genuinely surprised to hear that theorizing from within a postcolonially reformed critical version of Western modernity, outside of the German/Western epistemic space, can be translated into another Western claim to universalism, albeit in the postcolonial genre – especially when applying postcolonially informed Western criticism to ECE as a zone of methodological backwardness, ‘still’ invested in obsolete ‘national’ framings. In the German/core relation to its Eastern hinterland, this can translate into the classical case of the Western civilizing mission of its ‘not-yet European Other’ in the Orientalist tradition that authors from the region have now been writing about for over three decades, mostly unacknowledged by German academia. This epistemic divide, when unacknowledged, can produce

⁸ On East–West differences in discourses of ‘critical thinking,’ see Dzenovska (2018: 116–119).

miscommunication on many levels, especially in the power asymmetries of international research and conference settings funded by German institutions.

To ECE audiences, the need for global abstract meta-spaces and re-worldings in an empirical German discipline requires some explanation, which I'll try to sketch in an admittedly brief and cursory way. Historically, postcolonial theory traveled (Said) to West-German cultural sciences informed by Critical Theory (as a combination of ideology critique, a critique of the status quo, and pursuing emancipation). In the process of coming to terms with the German past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), critical self-reflection developed as a thought style and intellectual practice of West-German post-NS generations eager to exorcize Nazi thinking, building an epistemic place of critique from where to speak truth to power, at a time when the Nazi generation was still dominating German institutions. But in this work of the critical reflexive German subject in a post-genocidal nation, the Other was conceptually absent. Up to the 1990s, then in unified Germany, leftist (West)German intellectuals, working on critical discourse as part of Germany's historical responsibility, were able to refine ideology criticism of Othering / Anti-semitism for decades without any need of input from a living, present Other. During the 1990s, German cultural and social sciences adapted to the realities of an increasingly diverse German society, acknowledging that the Non-Western-European migrant and post-migrant Other had not only been here for centuries (e.g. Black Germans), but was here to stay, and adapted concepts of multiculturalism and social anthropology from the anglophone space.⁹

This is the leftist intellectual context postcolonial theory arrived at within European Ethnology, as the by then transnationally extended 'native' branch, during the last two decades. The German postcolonial critique of Othering, the mode of self-reflexivity and support for the emancipation of the marginalized/postcolonial subject in the 'native' branch of German anthropology is grafted onto this older intellectual tradition. The self-reflexive, postcolonially reformed critical German subject (not meant in an essentializing way but as a critical thought style or academic habitus), conscious of Germany's historical past and responsibility, in tune with the realities of a contemporary Western post-migrant society in a globalized world, in solidarity with the struggles of the marginalized, performs itself through hyper-self-reflexivity¹⁰ and voicing critique to power. And leftist-liberal academia, speaking truth to power from places of institutional power, in the case of European Ethnology is a small discipline pitted against the Goliath of German state institutions dominated by the non-European branch in the current debates and activist struggles about colonial legacies.¹¹

Critical Theory's ethical imperative being 'always concerned not merely with how things were but how they might be and should be' (Bronner, 2017: 1–2, see also Knauff, 2013), this can produce unfortunate side effects when translated to

⁹ In the 1990s adapting i.e. Stuart Hall/British Cultural Studies; groundbreaking also the 2002 volume of Conrad and Randeria (eds.) (2002).

¹⁰ Certain aspects of German 'Critical Whiteness Studies' being another example, see Bee (2013).

¹¹ See the contributions on Germany in von Oswald and Tinius (eds.) (2020).

other contexts – when German scholars, based on the unique German experience, critically focus on hegemony and power relations *elsewhere*,¹² with a patronizing attitude of moral and epistemic superiority (see also Krasztev and Holmes, 2018: 120–121; 2019). In the structural asymmetries of European core-semi-periphery relations, this can translate to – and in the ECE region is often perceived as – unreflected German West-centrism.¹³

How can CES, this German project of decentering Europe, be productive for the study of the ECE region? What comes into view when this postcolonial project of epistemic re-worlding is extended from a global North-South axis (*detached empires*, Böröcz and Sarkar, 2012) to an angle that also includes the European/Eurasian East-West-axis (*contiguous empires*, *ibid.*)? ECE scholars working on border zones and migration or decolonizing Eastern Europe in an anglophone academic environment clearly don't depend on German concepts that currently don't acknowledge and include their area of expertise.

As has been noted by Katharina Eisch-Angus – a scholar of the German 'native' branch, working on the multilingual Czech-Polish-German border region –, exploring the potential of theories developed in different contexts of colonialism and imperialism can be productive for ethnographic work on the region when not trying to project postcolonial approaches onto it, but rather, knowing about the historical differences, and translating them into concrete areas of study (Eisch-Angus, 2019: 46). How to bring regional micro-levels together with meta-concepts such as 'Re-Worldings' remains a topic for future debate within the German discipline. As for research in the ECE region, CES can be very productive for critically re-measuring European *center-semi-periphery-relations* – with the necessary conceptual adaptations and grounding in regional expertise and archives, drawing on the innovation potential of the semi-periphery (Ost, 2018). Especially, transnational, *bilingual or multilingual* collaborative research of the genealogies of the region's present, studying the long-term imperial legacies of the ECE region's entanglement with *Imperial Germany* (*contiguous empire*, Böröcz and Sarkar 2012) could be very productive¹⁴ – considering imperial, post-imperial interwar, and NS-Germany's role as the region's crypto-colonizer in Herzfeld's sense, in the areas of culture and academic knowledge production, and also

¹² When German scholars criticize scholars from other national backgrounds for not critically reflecting their own past, or nationalism, as Germans did and continue to do; for a Latvian example see Dzenovska (2018: 123).

¹³ On the 'growing West-centrism' of the German 'native' mainstream discipline from an ECE regional research perspective see Scholl-Schneider, Schuchardt and Spiritova (2019: 23, 25) and Eisch-Angus (2019: 51).

¹⁴ Just as Austrian historians have been adapting Randeria's concept of entanglements for the Habsburg empire (Feichtinger et al., 2003), and German ECE historians have been working with compatible concepts for some time (like the *GWZO Leipzig Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe's* research focus on 'Entanglements and Globalization' <https://www.leibniz-gwzo.de/de/forschung/verflechtung-und-globalisierung>, or the DFG Priority Programme *Transottomanica: Eastern European-Ottoman-Persian Mobility Dynamics*, <https://www.transottomanica.de/research/toproposal>).

considering Germany's current political and economic role in the region. And finally, CES's analytical perspectives can be adapted to this *historically entangled post-imperial, contiguous, continental European space* in its entangled global relations, mapping out intersections of the North-South- and East-West-axis in complex continental European/Eurasian settings.

Creating discursive spaces for such theoretical and methodological East-West-conversations, both timely and necessary, should be an exciting and rewarding project for the future.

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