

Chun, Allen 2019. *On the Geopragmatics of Anthropological Identification*. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books. 174 pp. Hb.: \$120.00. ISBN: 9781789202038

In this book, Taiwanese anthropologist Allen Chun deals with the discursive spaces of anthropologists' speaking position. Chun, whose professional career has moved between social anthropology and cultural studies, both analyses and criticises interdisciplinary boundaries that in his view have hardened over time.

The book's chapters are based on articles previously published in journals, which confers a certain air of thematic dispersion, but present a set of core theoretical problems for modern anthropology. Each chapter dissects different perspectives around a concept, being that in some chapters the theoretical abstractions are illustrated with ethnographic brushstrokes from Taiwan, Hong Kong or Singapore, his geographic specialisation.

The book contains three parts with two chapters each. The first part deals with concepts of identity and diaspora. Chun, besides showing different perspectives around these concepts, favours a Bourdieusian approach stressing relational processes and social practices. Instead of thinking in terms of semantics, where meaning is objectively defined by scholars, he proposes analysing subjective pragmatics of identification within specific sociopolitical contexts.

Although a critical reflection on disciplinary boundaries pervades throughout the book, it is in its second part where this issue is more developed. Chun asks why anthropologists have viewed the postmodern critique of its authorial subjectivity as theoretically relevant, while other social science disciplines appear to be largely immune to this debate. The suggested answer is that sociology or cultural studies typically study more familiar societies, while anthropology is still largely thought of as the 'study of other cultures', with the permanent danger of 'Orientalising' them.

Additionally, Chun notes that some theoretical problems and concepts have crossed into many disciplines, but certain disciplines appropriate particular theories in specific and sometimes incommensurable ways. Even if a more constructive framework for interdisciplinary approaches is possible, his conclusion is pessimistic: 'institutional spaces represent repressive or counterproductive forces that impede change' (p. 101).

The third part focuses on postcolonial theory. In my opinion this is the most interesting section not only because of Chun's original exposition but also because he presents clearly his own perspective on this topic. Postcolonial critique, that could be summarised as a criticism of Eurocentric rationale, has evolved into a variety of theoretical approaches sometimes producing 'mutually incompatible discourses'. Chun distinguishes between two broad fields of postcolonial theory: on one hand, an earlier critique socially rooted in the postcolonies, that he terms 'postcolonialism₁', such as Fanonism or subaltern studies, and on the other hand, a more recent postcolonial theory ('postcolonialism₂'), especially in the form of literary criticism and cultural focus that became prevalent in the 1990s. Postcolonialism₂, in contrast to an earlier generation of anticolonial critique, emphasises the relationship between discourse and power, as well as cultural dimensions of colonial domination.

Chun echoes some criticisms of postcolonialism₂ advocated by diasporic intellectuals such as Saïd, Spivak and Bhabha, situated in the metropole rather than in the postcolonies. 'Postcolonial theory, which was supposed to have given authority to native voices and nativist scholarship, became most deeply felt, ironically, in English or Western literature departments, which also, not surprisingly, happened to be the point of diffusion for Western theory overall' (p. 113). Chun asks to what extent can a postcolonial₁ critique grounded in peripheral sites become the basis for generalizing critical theory. He notes how subaltern studies, posed at first as Indian exceptionalism,

in contrast to Europe's universalizing Marxist epistemology, extended later to Latin America or the Far East, concluding that 'its influence has not been really nativist-qualist but broadly politically critical by nature' (p. 118).

However, Chun does not neglect postcolonialism², whose relevance goes beyond postcolonial relationships. In his view, there is little difference between culturalising regimes that have defined and driven colonial rule on the one hand and those that have engendered other historically modern political institutions such as capitalism, the nation or the state. In this sense, he points out that viewing culture as an autonomous system is in the final analysis an obstacle to understanding the disciplinary, morally regulative nature of the modern state.

According to Chung, while the influence of postcolonial epistemology in sociology is negligible, postcolonialism² has tended to be most influential in literature and cultural studies, whereas postcolonialism¹ has been prevalent in history. Social anthropology would be halfway between the two, but a more detailed discussion of how anthropology is touched by these two branches of postcolonial critique is missing.

In the end, the reader will find in this book by Allen Chun an informed and updated presentation of core theoretical debates of current social anthropology and related social sciences.

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