2019 | Anuac. Vol. 8, n° 2, Dicembre 2019: 167-188

# An expert in peripheries

## Working at, with and through the margins of European anthropology

**Francisco Martínez**
University of Leicester

**Abstract:** This research explores the relationship between knowledge production and place by studying different notions of disciplinary and personal peripherality. In an auto-ethnographic manner, the author discusses some of the power relations at work and the politics of representation of an anthropology being done at the margins of European scholarship. By analysing his own professional trajectory, the author surmises that the question of centre or periphery highly depends on the perspective applied (i.e., methods, labour conditions, institutional support, funding, the scale, access to jobs...) Also, he argues that there is a distinct form of reflexivity at the margins, as well as a distinct temporal regime – characterised by discontinuity. To contrast and complement his personal insights, the author invited fifteen scholars working in Estonia to share their experience of researching "at the margins". Based on their responses, the author concludes by admitting that being at the periphery is relevant, yet circumstantial – something to be aware of, yet not definitive or a determinant. The article contributes to the discussion on the need to differentiate, contextualise and problematise the question of the academic marginality, making this issue more nuanced by putting the ethnographic focus on the conditions of possibility among practitioners and the state of being peripheral.

**Keywords:** European anthropology, Margins of academia, Power relations, Hierarchies of knowledge, Ex-centric studies.


*An expert in peripheries: Working at, with and through the margins of European anthropology*
2019 | Anuac. Vol. 8, n° 2, Dicembre 2019: 167-188.
ISSN: 2239-625X - DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-3626

## *The periphery as a problem-space*

This article shifts the argument from geography and hierarchies of knowledge, to the question about the conjuncture of the objective conditions of knowledge production and the subjective perception of working in the country located on the margins of Europe[1]. By considering a particular periphery in its ordinary specificity, the article sets up a reckoning of what it means to be "peripheral" within European anthropology – do we talk about relevance, training, kind of collaborations, freedom from disciplinary constrictions, relation of dependence, mechanisms of in/visibility, scientific reputation or funding? To a great extent, it all depends on the question asked and the individual profile of the person; indeed, my informants, having different career trajectories, see their academic experience in Estonia, their being and acting on the periphery, as an asset or shortcoming, chance or obstacle. Likewise, I wish to argue that traditional geographical and epistemic margins are constituting new centres of inquiry themselves, which might lead us to reconsider the potential for ex-centric studies to inform theorising and draw new lines of comparison. In this sense, it is relevant to wonder if the concept of centre itself might have become anachronic and we should rather talk of clusters of knowledge production (overcoming the centre-periphery relation of dependence), or if rather, it is the very anti-structural character of the periphery that participates in the creation of a sense of canon and centre (Turner 1969).

To understand this, we might start by considering places such as Estonia as global peripheries of knowledge production, instead of simply Eastern European ones. Global peripheries are coming into contact with each other through novel forms of connection. These places can be simultaneously central because they can function as regional hubs, once the practitioners gain capacity to make "theory from the South" (Comaroff, Comaroff 2011; Simone 2010; Roy 2011); or, in turn, if they manage to re-invent their role in the production of knowledge, realising that many exciting works in contemporary anthropology are not coming from any disciplinary core, but from its borders (Marcus 2008). We might also want to think in terms of semiperiphery, which – as described by Marina Blagojević (2009) in her analysis of gender issues in the former Yugoslavia – is a space positioned between the centre and the periphery, functioning as a social hybrid that contains characteristics of both.

1. The title is inspired by Franz Krause's statement. I want to express my gratitude to all the participants in the enquiry and the reviewers; Also, to Patrick Laviolette, Siobhan Kattago, Alessandro Testa, Tomás Sánchez Criado and Damián Omar Martínez for their feedback on earlier versions of this paper. Also, to the *Anuac* anonymous reviewers.

For five years, I was affiliated to Tallinn University and practicing an anthropology at, with and through the disciplinary borderlands. This experience allows me to reconsider the ways in which my professional trajectory has been conditioned by: 1. Researching a field of study that is seen as "marginal" in Estonia; 2. A country which is also considered as peripheral within the European geopolitical, economic and academic system; 3. And establishing relations in the field across disciplinary borders, as for instance finding collaborative alliances with people who have no background in anthropology. The periphery is thus transformed into a site of engagement and a problem-space itself, here taken as "fertile staging grounds" –experimenting, intervening and doing things that are not possible elsewhere (Comaroff, Comaroff 2012).

A look from peripheries might produce different lines of vision and understanding, allowing us to see what is not readily apparent when viewed from the centre – for instance, how globalisation is inter-twined with regional, national and local clusters (Nash 2001; Shore, Trnka 2015). Peripheries are often linked with distance, remoteness, and some kind of alterity as well as exploitation. It explicitly evokes asymmetrical relations and a sense of unequal location, as well as a misinterpretation by or invisibility from the centre (Green 2005). The paradox of peripheries is that they are unable to completely evade the centre's influence, and simultaneously the centre itself needs the periphery to solidify and supplement its always incomplete project of centrality. This has been traditionally done, for instance, by constantly encoding and indexing the periphery and its way of being modern (Pratt 2012). Imbued with this sense of ambiguity, peripheries, on the one hand, refer to a centre and attempt to build an attachment to it; on the other, they show proudness of their diverse ways of doing, presenting themselves as subversive and challenging established hierarchies. Hence, centre and periphery are not just categorical or geographical distinctions, but also refer to a diversity of ways of seeing and knowing, according to which the former might be understood as more regimented and normative, and the later as more perspectival, simultaneously outward and introspective (Cohen 2000; Marcus 2008).

The periphery constantly refers to but also deviates from the normative core and straight line. It is in this sense that a periphery can be also a space of creativity and production, situated at the margins of dominant paradigms, providing terrain to experiment and for self-initiative, catching opportunities on the wing. As peripheries are not fully defined and territorialised, there is enough openness for imagining and practicing anthropologies in the interstices or gaps, thinking-doing, change-oriented,

epistemologically eclectic (Brković 2018), yet engaged in a constant struggle against discontinuity (Pobłocki 2009; Rander 2019). Such quality allows us to work without a manual or to cooperate with unexpected travelling companions (as pointed out by Estalella and Sánchez Criado in this issue). Also, it points out that the periphery might be located elsewhere than on the borderline, being distinguished by its capacity of doings things that the centre cannot (Peeren, Hanneke, Van Weyenberg 2016). Accordingly, a periphery can be thought as an edge and not only as a space of withdrawal, stagnation or backwardness (Kyriakides 2014).

However, one should not ignore that power, resources and canonic knowledge lie at the centre, and that structural inequalities in academia might still hinder collaboration between European anthropologists (Gerholm, Hannerz 1982). Also, to forget how difficult is to make projects endure in the periphery, and the need to justify oneself every time one intends to reach the core. Even if we can engage in more experimental forms of doing anthropology that go beyond conventional ideas, at the end scholars need stability to do their work. "Other anthropologies" means also "other problems", surely more basic and precarious (Boškovic 2008). And, in spite of knowing all the complications and relapses that researching out of the core entails, I cannot avoid feeling sympathy for Costica Bradatan's article "In Defense of Margins" (2015), in which he argues that margins are more spontaneous, wild and disperse than the centre; and also that margins understand the centre better than vice-versa.

> Eventually the center structures itself and everything other than itself: it establishes dichotomies and hierarchies, classes and "rankings," according to how close or how far away things are in relation to it. As a result, life at the center becomes highly regulated: spontaneity is legislated, the primary impulses tamed, and the vital instincts channeled. Everything is thought out to the last consequences; nothing is left to chance … the margins remain mostly incomprehensible to the center. The center is certainly aware of their existence, and often makes it its duty to survey and map out the margins, with whole knowledge industries dedicated to them. But that's all the center can have: cartographic knowledge. It can never understand the margins (Bradatan 2015)

## *"There were two references to US scholars"*

In the nineteenth century, peripherality was mostly equated with cultural issues; throughout the twentieth century, it was linked primarily with ideas of geopolitics, and the current set of narratives depict it more in terms of issues of economy and knowledge (Browning, Lehti 2007). Nowadays,

relations of dependence are played out intensively at different scales through both institutional structures and personal networks. Peripherality is also being turned into a less geographical and more relative issue (niche-like) by global processes of communication and commodification. Here, I use the terms "core", "periphery" and "margin", but not necessarily with the same rigour as world systems theorists would perhaps prefer to. In political science, a periphery is often presented as a place where nobody is interested, dependent on the core, precarious and unstable, an area that might have an important stake in current matters but no real voice (Bechev 2012). For instance, in Immanuel Wallerstein's understanding (1974), peripheries suffer from geographical isolation, with poor access, distant from core spheres of activity, and dependent within the system of relationships. Nonetheless, Wallerstein claims for not reifying peripheries by attributing essential meanings to them. Further, a periphery can also be "a centre out there", which requires a dislocation and distancing that may be physical or mental (Turner 1973).

Peripheries have been also associated to a fantasy realm and zones of marginalia, authenticity, ex-centricity, and redemption (Stewart 1996; Scott 2000). However, these mythical projections towards peripheries are often dependent on their continued marginalisation (Selwyn 1996) and denial of coevalness (Fabian 1983). An example of this was an event organised in Tallinn (May 2015) by the research group *Stop-and-Go* (established in Vienna to discuss mobility within Central and Eastern Europe). The Austrian coordinators were enthusiastic and supportive to local researchers, yet as they acknowledged during the workshop: "we chose Bulgaria and Estonia because of geographical reasons and because they are at the margin of Europeanisation". Also, I was surprised when I read Theodoros Kyriakides blog entry "Anthropology at the Margins" (2014) commenting on the EASA conference of Tallinn; not only because he positioned the academic work done in Estonia as marginal, but especially because of his belief that after the visit of core anthropologists our university would be "put on the map": "Tallinn finds itself in a marginal position, not only in terms of European history and identity, but also in terms of anthropological relevance … Estonian anthropology was affirmed. This is important: whether it is Estonia or other anthropologically "marginal" parts of Europe, resources, labour and attention need to be supplied to turn them into centres". On the contrary, what happened is that the department was directly affected by a structural reform of Tallinn University and in the years following the EASA conference it lost three of the four full positions in anthropology, one of whom was later replaced with a lower ranking role.

In short, asymmetries in knowledge production exist still, within Europe and globally, as testified by the answer I received when submitting my manuscript *Remains of the Soviet Past in Estonia* (2018) to an American university press:

> The series is primarily oriented to American English readers with secondary readers in the UK. Most of our readers will know little or nothing of Estonia, or even where Estonia is without checking a map. (I googled Wikipedia, for example, to get a quick orientation to Estonia and its history). Your prospectus and the book manuscript emphasize the analysis of many abstract, and admittedly valid and important, concepts as primary to your presentation of materials on Estonia. And I find that the reader can follow your penetrating work only by holding drawing on prior knowledge of Estonia itself, its history and changing structural relationships through time. You indicate a very sophisticated readership, mostly in Europe (I think there were two references to US scholars). And by the information provided it is clear that they would bring with them the kind of sophistication on Estonia and the former Soviet Union that a careful reading and thorough understanding of your manuscript requires. But to repeat, the vast majority of our readers will not have such sophistication.

## *Locating the periphery*

So, how could we represent and understand our own peripherality? We could start by acknowledging that the link between our fieldwork sites as well as between the locations of our academic affiliations is often autobiographical. As Michał Buchowski remarks (2005), ethnographers observe different realities because they happen to live in different societies, being all individuals with their own life trajectories. This reflection brings to the fore how the relationship between places and times affects knowledge, in the sense of affecting what can be known. Madrid, Lisbon, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Helsinki, Berlin, Tallinn, Tartu, Tbilisi, Leicester – significant stations in my academic career where I have been for at least half a year.

Travelling means losing countries, wrote Fernando Pessoa[2]. Looking back, I feel as if I have transitioned a series of different lives, reinventing myself in each of them, and not always leaping forward. These lives are shaped by emigration, by discontinuity, by multiple imaginaries; I ask myself what happened to the other lives? The old lived on, the pre-emigrations, which linger inaccessible to me, the émigré. I have a trans-career, working at the intersection of different scales, agendas and locations, going across, trans-mutating and transporting, being part of a global transmission of people,

2. "Viajar! Perder países!", 20-9-1933, http://arquivopessoa.net/textos/2195, accessed on 10/12/2019.

ideas, standards, and money. I was lucky enough to study and work in varied universities, yet in my case, I have taken an opposite trajectory to many "Eastern European" researchers, who preferred to move to the West to acquire a high education and later applied this theoretical tool-kit back into the societies where they come from.

And yet, despite accomplishing my doctorate in Estonia, could I say that I became myself an East European scholar? Am I doing Estonian or Spanish anthropology? Actually, what is "Estonian anthropology"? Is it due to language, research topics, traditions, methods, networks or economy of favours? Consequently, how can we define the work of *local* scholars researching Burma, the Urals or Rio de Janeiro? Still it strikes me when a local colleague told me "you can say this because you are not Estonian, so you are not afraid of making enemies here". However, I lived in Estonia for over eight years, being physically present within this community, socialising in different moments and circumstances, from discussing about the so-called "Russian minority" in Narva to talking about flags and parades while having breakfast with my mother-in-law, for whom I am the Spanish partner of her daughter and not an anthropologist. For me, these kind of relations, negotiations and micro-ethnographies are also part of my political location, referring to epistemological questions and situated knowledge (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). But could I say that I was doing fieldwork "at home"?

Recently, I had a curious episode in which I said that I felt that Tallinn was my home, and a close person to me replied that such a feeling was not appropriate, as I was not born in Tallinn and I do not speak Estonian. Yet how does one know when one is at home? By engaging with the question of the anthropologist's relation to his/her culture, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2003) argues that the native does not have to be natural to the place where we find them, neither does the anthropologist need be a stranger to the people about whom they discuss. The essential factor, in his view, is the kind of relationship established between the observer and the observed, and how it is translated into discourse or relation of knowledge. Also, Marilyn Strathern (1987) has tried to answer this question by discussing the different kinds of knowledge that people can be assumed to have and the impossibility of measuring degrees of familiarity. As she puts it, fieldwork at home involves processes of both familiarisation and defamiliarisation, and one has to be prepared to cast the findings in terms of ethnographic objectives and professional discourses. In a nutshell, to do anthropology at home refers to a process that concerns informants and local anthropological discourses too, producing knowledge that is directed to both the global anthropologist's audience and the studied people. Interestingly, I experienced that I was reaching them both while receiving the Early Career Award of the European

Association of Social Anthropologists (August 2018, Stockholm). Eeva Kesküla, an anthropologist currently based at Tallinn University, posted on the Estonian anthropology network a photograph of me receiving the prize and the caption: "Congratulations to the Estonian anthropologist Francisco Martínez…" So, the award finally gave me an anthropological nationality.

Being born in Spain, yet having studied and worked in different cities, has allowed me to experience how the reactions of my interlocutors in conferences has been different when stating my affiliation to Tallinn University than when presenting myself as a researcher at Humboldt or Helsinki, perceiving different expressions of interest or arrogance, often leading to the sense of not being invited to the party (DiGiacomo 1997). But what kind of party is that? Reflecting on the contradictions of my own liminal position –in terms of geographical location and the kind of anthropology that I practice, I feel myself as a kind of non-belonging *doppel* marginal, somehow accumulating different peripheries. Symptomatically, a local colleague observed once, "you cannot say you come from a periphery because you are from Spain, a big country". Yet, I am not just a tourist or visitor "from Spain", whose affiliation and obligation lies elsewhere, but a researcher working locally and for a long time affiliated to an Eastern European university. Also, Spain is a big country, and hundreds of millions of people speak Spanish, but the configuration of centre and periphery are based on factors such as the ability to write and speak academic English as well as to publish in "high impact" journals, rather than on geopolitics or imperial history (see, for instance, the case of Russian academia too).

Indeed, I presented an early version of this article at the first AIBR (Network of Iberoamerican Anthropologists) conference of Madrid (July 2015). During the discussion of my paper, and following a question about the supposedly shared mission of publishing in Spanish, I explained that my aim is to reach as many people as possible, gain access to funding, and participate in international debates, and nowadays that means writing in English. I added that I try to publish in the language of the country where I live, since for me it is important to make accessible research materials into the languages of the place where I have worked; but as a plus, since at the end of the day I am assessed mostly by my publications in English. Aware of possible *hostile* reactions, I left for the end of my reply the provocative observation that not everything published in English is good, but all that is good will soon or later be published in English; and that the claim for publishing in Spanish sadly disguises the lack of working knowledge of English within Spanish academia. Four hands were automatically up to passionately contradict my statement.

## *Tracing the ethnographer*

In a slim book published in 1986, Mary Douglas tried to seek meaning from institutions, asserting that institutions think, stabilise relations, and sustain what is social. She explained, in the preface, that this should have been the first book to write in her career. However, I engage with this topic in my early career. Currently, I work in the School of Museum Studies of the University of Leicester, having no dedicated department of anthropology – which may be perceived as being at the margins of this discipline, despite being central in the field of museum studies. Before I was a postdoc in Finland, a place, on the other side of the Baltic, which has been historically depicted as a borderland (Browning, Lehti 2007), yet where I felt as being part of a global academy with a wide cohort of inspiring international scholars and generous funding.

Whilst doing my Ph.D. fieldwork in Estonia, I was often compelled to justify why I moved to that country (to both locals and foreign colleagues), explaining that this dislocation did not involve love or romantic relationships originally; rather I had found in this place the possibility to come back to academia and *recycle* myself from journalism. Accessing a doctoral programme and grant allowed me to develop my research project, in situ (at home), about the relevance of the Soviet legacy to understand current developments in the country. The dislocation is, however, not an issue if the direction had been from the periphery to the core, as it has happened while moving from Tallinn to Helsinki. Or, as a close local colleague bluntly told me, "why should anyone care to read about Estonia or what is produced in Estonia?"

The periphery is always a longer route, which in some cases might be a faster one, yet in some others one might get lost in side-roads. Indeed, being in Estonia had advantages and disadvantages. For instance, while a graduate student I enjoyed inspiring graduate schools and had access to funding for organising international seminars (e.g. Playgrounds and Battlefields), summer schools (e.g. Hopeless Youth!), or research visits (e.g. Berlin, Lisbon and Tbilisi…), mostly relying on European Funds. On the other hand, during the period of writing up my dissertation I discovered that I did not have the right to public health insurance, so I had to ask for a loan to pay my medical bill[3]. Also, I witnessed a radical downsizing episode in Tallinn University, presented as unavoidable due to financial reasons. It was especially surprising

3. See also: Mark Carrigan's *Accelerated Academy* (http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactof- social-sciences/2015/04/07/life-in-the-accelerated-academy-carrigan) and *Academia is Killing my Friends* (http://academiaiskillingmyfriends.tumblr.com), accessed on 10/12/2019.

to hear the financial rhetoric from the Head of the Institute of Humanities (a philosopher specialised in phenomenology). Paradoxically, he reproduced corporate ideas of "international excellence" and "accountability", while submitting academic standards to parochial needs, based on "the need to defend the use of Estonian language in academia"[4]. Furthermost, this example shows not only the relevance of language politics in reverse (against English), but also how the outcomes of neoliberal processes and the introduction of audit cultures to academia have been rather heterogeneous and contingent, despite many parallels and convergences across cases (Strathern 2006; Green 2016).

Not only centre and periphery, but locality itself is perceived as increasingly ambivalent for contemporary scholars, who experience "two competing logics – that of mobility and internationalisation on the one hand, and that of privileging the locality and those who belong to it on the other" (Simoni 2016: 360). Between the far away and the home, new forms of "crosslocations" are appearing[5], as Sarah Green puts it, in tune with global processes that intensify dynamics of relative positioning and changes in relations between places and people, forming hybrid scholarly identities, since people like me feel themselves as part of different scales of evaluation, belonging and collaboration. Likewise, polyglotism and the simultaneous attachment to multiple places is becoming a professional requirement and not simply an autobiographic accident, producing a multiplicity of rootedness. More and more people find it necessary to move far away from friends and family, working in institutions and projects at the peripheries of the academic world, creating new circuits of exchange yet appearing personally painful, disorienting and time-consuming (di Puppo 2016). In short, mobility is not a guarantee for escaping from peripherality (Jansen 2016). Also, the periphery is not a site where to escape the pressures of globalisation and academic capitalism. You might exist outside the focus, but not outside the power relations at work. Further on, location still matters, affecting our temporality, mobilities, networks, conversations, access to funding and also while applying to jobs. We can even talk of anthropology being done at different speeds within Europe based on our actual geographical position as well as on our location within the EU solar system of research infrastructures.

4. Stated during a meeting with the international staff on the 20th of May 2015.

5. See the Crosslocations project, funded by the European Research Council Advanced Grant.

## *Peripheralised in the middle*

We can explain many of the actual epistemic asymmetries as a result from the commodification of academia, thereby relocating these hierarchies within the global knowledge market (Pobłocki 2009). Postsocialist changes altered not only the living conditions in the societies under research, but also the very conditions of possibility for research, producing a constant underfunding in academia and establishing new trajectories of circulation of ideas and with them, new modes of action. We can say that, over three decades, these changes brought a new oscillating geography of centrality and marginality, embedded in historic and cultural factors, yet also depending on how new global networks are being locally negotiated. Hence, neither a "big bang" happened in 1991, starting everything from scratch (Verdery 1996), nor knights of Western know-how with a centrifugal civilisational mission conquered the new territories with the "true faith" (Verdery 2007). In this light, Chris Hann describes the original enthusiasm of anthropologists after the break-up of the Soviet regime as: "exaggerated claims that investigations of postsocialism might open up a new phase in the discipline, analogous to the focus on colonial African societies and on Melanesia by past generations" (2005: 547).

On this matter, Katherine Verdery (a scholar working on Romania but based in the USA) observed that, since there was no equivalent to social anthropology in Eastern Europe and most of the work of local scholars was preoccupied with national peasant traditions, various Western scholars acted to introduce the discipline and displace the older ethnological practice. For that they hoped to receive "assistance" from local scholars, presenting the process in terms of upward mobility aspirations and Western style anthropology as a symbol of "democratisation" (Verdery 2007: 48-50). However, despite attempts to establish the "proper" version of anthropology in the region, the described efforts did not succeed due to the realities of the post-socialist environment that Western scholars often ignored (Červinková 2005). Also, Michael Burawoy wondered about what shape a more decentralised postsocialist theory would take, and Verdery speculated about who the Frantz Fanon of Eastern Europe would be. Then, more radically, Michał Buchowski chose to openly denounce "the subaltern status of scholars living in post-socialist countries" which eventually "leads to an intellectual domination of the West, the perpetuation of hierarchies of knowledge, and creates a one-way street in the flow of ideas" (2004: 12).

After a decade living in Eastern Europe, I have also met several cases in which local colleagues understood as "normal" that Western scholars were in charge of bringing concepts and theories, whilst their role was limited to

providing "material". Nonetheless, I find Buchowski's positioning too agonistic. Hierarchies between Eastern ethnologists and Western anthropologists might exist still, yet the East-West line of division is just one amongst the many divisions that crisscross knowledge production in Europe and its importance seems to be decreasing. Likewise, in my recent visits to London, I was surprised to learn about the difficult working conditions of some colleagues there, who feel themselves as peripheralised in the middle (see Berglund 2008).

### *Being in the centre is not opposed to being peripheral*

To contrast my views and experience on peripherality, I invited some of my colleagues to speak about the position of Estonian universities in the global circulation of ideas and how the marginality of the country in the academic production of knowledge has influenced their work. These colleagues research different topics and are affiliated to three different universities in the country, and are here considered as natives. The criteria for selection was that they conduct research for a local institution in Estonia and have international experience. I simply asked them two questions: do you think research in Estonia is marginal within the global circulation of ideas and knowledge production? And what are the advantages and limitations of working at the margin? Answers were gathered by email in the summer of 2015. Most of the informants seemed to agree that academic knowledge is shaped by its conditions of production; pointing out, nonetheless, that considerations of "centres" and "peripheries" are contextual, depending on how we frame the discussion. The experience of "centrality" or "marginality" also appears circumstantial, dependent on the character and background of the researcher. Hence, we can argue that peripherality is something out there, as a condition that we are part of, and in here, in our minds and attitudes, instead of seeing peripherality as only a bind depriving oneself of power and capacity for manoeuvring.

In this light, researchers such as Hugo Reinert, Franz Krause, Elena Pavlova, Andrey Makarychev and Klemen Slabina perceived this question differently than native-born Estonian scholars. For example, Reinert associates marginality with autonomy and independence, and takes margins as "emancipatory". In his view, an "exotic" affiliation like Tallinn sparks interest and functions as a social asset. Krause observes that "Estonian academics make extremely good use of this marginality, for instance, by receiving sizable funding from the EU"; and presents a margin as a space "where to try out things and thoughts impossible at the centre". Pavlova notices that there is an increase in the number of good universities at the

periphery, while adding that there are different degrees and forms of peripheriality. On this matter, Liisa Kaljula suggests that things are better for the margins now, because of the Internet and cheap flights. And Maarja Kaaristo reckons that the very fact of being in the margins gives us "an alternative perspective, a different and sometimes wider vista".

For Slabina, "marginals always preserve the element of surprise and have it easier to obtain sympathy", and Makarychev notes that peripheries are sources of resistance to big narratives and offer a chance to see what might not be seen from more central locations. Raili Nugin moves the debate forward by pointing out that when publishing in international journals, one has "to relate the topic with wider research done in other countries". Likewise, Uku Lember notes how Estonian scholars need to balance between the topics of local and global academic interest, and also to engage in various forms of translation. Olga Razuvajeva and Tauri Tuvikene chose to surmise that marginality exists, but is neither good nor bad *per se*. Another important matter, pointed out by Roomet Jakapi, is that peripheries might have the disadvantage of academic incest and a stuffy atmosphere. Whilst Kristina Jõekalda and Karin Dean bring into discussion whether being at the margins is a matter of disadvantage, with regard to the resources available. Finally, Tarmo Jüristo reminds us that we also have to answer whether academic research itself might be marginal to the Estonian society in general, and not simply Estonia being peripheral to a world system.

To illustrate the discussion, I include some verbatim answers, firstly because they explain very well the respondents view, and secondly because I believe it is important that their voices are directly heard.

Karin Dean (native-born Estonian), senior researcher in Asian Studies at Tallinn University:

> Why is academic work in Estonia assumed marginal in the production of knowledge? I read the question posed as predetermining the "location" of researchers in Estonia as "marginal". How and why would location matter if we talk about production of knowledge, particularly in the information age? Is this marginality defined by Estonia's physical location or by its inability to produce top-class scientists? … As far as hierarchies of knowledge are concerned, I am more worried with Anglo-American centrism or Eurocentrism… this is topical when one works on Asia. In this production of knowledge, I am located at the "centre" as Estonia is situated in Europe and in the realm of Anglo-American influence … I do not see my academic work as marginal in Estonia, although I sometimes feel disadvantaged because the focus of my research is located in Southeast Asia and Singapore respectively, and I cannot travel there for research seminars or fieldwork as often as I would like to. This said, there are several "centres" of knowledge production on Southeast Asia also located elsewhere – to me these are places where good research is carried out…

Maarja Kaaristo (native-born Estonian), former researcher at the Department of Ethnology at the University of Tartu; currently a lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University:

> While one could say that Estonia is "marginal" by definition – both geographically and size-wise, the question of margin always depends on where's the "centre". For example, regarding ethnology/socio-cultural anthropology, historically the centre has never been fixed in one place: we have been looking towards Finland, Scandinavia, Russia and Germany. In the past 30 years or so, the centre has admittedly been the anglo-american (or "Franglus" including the French) anthropology. Therefore, when looking at it in the historical perspective, the academic "centre out there" has been a rather mobile and ephemeral entity, always changing, never fixed. Of course, one can say that looking from, say, the UK, the Estonian academy might sometimes seem far away and therefore rather marginal to some. But that says more about the "centre" than the "margin" and although we, the "marginal", might be somewhat gravitating towards the centres, the very fact of being in the margins gives us an alternative perspective, a different and sometimes wider vista... I am quite convinced that in inhabiting the borderlands of academia lies manifold possibilities: the margins are the places where "other anthropologies and anthropology otherwise" as formulated by Restrepo and Escobar can be practiced, challenging the perhaps dominating canons and pluralising the discipline in new and innovative ways.

Franz Krause (foreigner), a former postdoctoral researcher in anthropology at Tallinn University; currently a senior researcher at the University of Cologne:

> I would definitely call Estonia a marginal place in relation to the global academic scene. This has tangible manifestations in (small) national research funding, (limited) library resources, (internationally negligible) potential for work communicated in the country's official language, and many other aspects of academic life. Working under these conditions can be rather frustrating at times. Nevertheless, I have found that Estonian academics make extremely good use of this marginality ... Estonia has been receiving sizable funding from the EU ... I have experienced how some of this money was spent to facilitate interdisciplinary networks within the country, invite interlocutors from abroad, and finance a series of extremely pleasant events for inclusive academic audiences and with exceptionally good catering – something that I had not known in other locations, like Germany or the UK.
>
> Another noticeable advantage of working at the margins is that many scholars are well aware of what happens in other academic traditions, and are able to engage with their discussions, not least through a good command of the respective language ... This conceptual and linguistic cosmopolitanism gives Estonian scholars a perspective that many of those at the "centres" of academic production, for instance in the USA or the UK, often lack, as the latter limit themselves to domestic debates and their mother tongue. I believe that new ideas are not only born in the centre, but can particularly come out of the periphery, where an outsider's perspective on multiple dominant discourses may provide a productive vantage point.

> As an anthropologist, I am fond of the margins. These are the places that anthropologists have traditionally studied in search for manifestations of the otherwise, and often in the conviction that those at the centre have something to learn from life at the margins. Where centres have classically been seen as static and monolithic, the margins have been conceived as more dynamic and heterogeneous. This is not to glorify marginality. Having to work multilingually and pluriconceptually is a challenge, especially if this work is salaried so low that many academics need additional jobs to maintain their families … But working at the margins nevertheless has the potential to try out things and thoughts impossible at the centre, to "capitalise" on marginality by invoking it in European funding schemes, and to develop new ideas by critically re-evaluating and re-combining multiple insights from various elsewheres.

Uku Lember (native-born Estonian), lecturer in Eastern European History at Tallinn University:

> Estonia is marginal for its linguistic isolation and its population size in relation to Western Europe and also to its former imperial centre(s) … This marginality towards both "East" and "West" could then be also described by a certain in-between status of the region. Being located on the margins of the Western academic establishment, Estonia actually offers quite easy access to academic positions and centres – when national representation or diversity is sought after, then it is easier to become a representative of Estonia than, for example, of Germany or Russia. At this point in my career, I have personally never felt marginalised … I have also enjoyed access to EU funding that has facilitated attendance in academic events abroad (and such funding is less available to many young scholars from Western Europe). However, an Estonian scholar of humanities or social sciences needs to balance between the topics of local and global academic interest and to engage in various forms of translation, which, however enriching, often has to happen in "free time". Such burden of translation is certainly more foreign to Anglophone scholars and I have experienced this linguistic privilege as often taken for granted.

Raili Nugin (native-born Estonian), senior researcher in Youth Studies at Tallinn University:

> I would first of all challenge the approach of "margin", as this seems to presuppose the binary opposition of margin and centre … Estonia is in several senses inbetween: neither on the margin nor at the centre. It is part of the Western world, which produces hegemonic discourses about many academic issues … At the same time, for example in social sciences, Estonia is hardly in any sense a leader of discussions or debates in the field… On the other hand, Estonia offers a fruitful lab for applying several theories of social change, as it is an interesting country in which changes have been abrupt and visible in virtually all spheres. Therefore, it offers interesting material for researching several questions that cannot be researched in rather stable contexts.

> Another point in terms of Estonian academic life is that it is shaped by size. The number of academics is inevitably scarce and thus, the topics to research are not always covered. This, from its part, means that it is relatively easy to find an under-researched topic and become an expert on it in your own country. At the same time, if you find such a topic you can be an equal partner to those researching the same topics in other, so-called "centre" countries, where the competition is much higher. There are disadvantages... The resources are scarce, and also understandably, the academic world is not interested in Estonia as such... so when you publish in an international journal, you have to relate the topic with wider research done in other countries. When you publish research data about UK, you normally do not have to do that.

Hugo Reinert (foreigner), former researcher in anthropology at Tallinn University. Currently, a postdoc at the University of Oslo:

> The advantages of marginality are complex, and depend on how you frame the concept ... I am also myself predisposed to certain kinds of marginality, almost as a constitutional factor: on a personal level I associate marginality with autonomy, independence and the freedom to pursue my own interests. In fact, this positive notion of marginality has been an important organising principle for my academic career to date: moving to Estonia was a deliberate move away from the key recognised "centres" for my discipline (both geographically and in disciplinary terms), precisely because their "centrality" (with what this entailed) did not suit me.
>
> In geographical and historical terms, of course, the complex position of Estonia at the "edge" of Europe renders it a particularly interesting base for social science and humanities coming from "outside" – offering a wealth of material, and exposure to intellectual traditions that might not be visible from the "centre". Academic knowledge is shaped – in ways both subtle and obvious – by its conditions of production, and knowledge "from the margin" often speaks in different ways to different issues, other than the knowledge produced "in the centre".
>
> In disciplinary terms, I would say that I have experienced the "marginality" of Estonia as liberating, even emancipatory. Margins may function as frontiers, and it seems to me that it has been far easier for me to explore unconventional interests and perspectives here – at the "margin" – than it has been for many of my peers in more densely populated (and policed) areas of the "centre". There is also to my mind a sense of something like freedom to working on the Estonian "margin" which I find difficult to describe well: a sense perhaps that things can happen, or that they have yet to happen...
>
> ...To my mind, the disadvantages of the margin depend primarily on your own constitution as a researcher: if the margin is a frontier, frontiers are not for everyone. There are material issues to do with resources, support, remuneration – but again, in my experience these can be overcome, and addressed, in ad-hoc ways. Supposedly there is also the matter of prestige, of stigmatisation relative to more prestigious knowledge institutions of the centre

> – but for myself I must say that in my field I have never experienced such effects. Rather, an "exotic" affiliation like Tallinn sparks interest, curiosity and engagement – functioning, if anything, as a social asset. Generally speaking, for me the so-called margin functions as a highly productive space, open to spaces (both literal and figurative) that are not necessarily accessible from the "centre". Increasingly, rapid technological and social change is also rendering obsolete the spatial paradigm that underpins the conventional mappings of "centre" and "periphery". In my own discipline, the traditional "centres" are largely associated with dying imperial projects, and there is an ongoing flourishing on the periphery…

## *Conclusion: Working out the peripheral muscle*

In this article, I have reviewed how anthropological research is embedded in particular locations and the kind of entanglements developed to practice ethnography at the margins. By considering my own geo-disciplinary position, I have described how relations between core and periphery are not just relations of struggle, but are negotiations as well that evolve over time (Marcus 1995). As a result, margins might change, relocate themselves or acquire new meanings. In this light, we can say that academic peripheries are not what they used to be. One can find a great deal of diversity within the European anthropological practice, including projects that expressly cooperate at the margins and challenge traditional relations of alterity within the continent. In this sense, the power and knowledge asymmetry within European anthropology might be decreasingly based on an East/West divide, and more connected to ongoing global phenomena such as neoliberal policies, social acceleration and the commodification of knowledge. Looked at from Estonia, European anthropology appears as increasingly transnational, multiscalar and para-ethnographic (Holmes, Marcus 2005), with different intersections and niches, orientated through problems and themes (e.g., dozens of institutional networks as housed in EASA or SIEF or the Wenner-Gren Foundation). European anthropology is also aware of its own internal peripheries and multi-centred character (Green, Laviolette 2015a; 2015b; Martínez 2016), reinvigorating channels of communication between its peripheries (i.e. South-South, East-East), despite the actual context of globalisation and the neoliberalisation of academia, which are shrinking the positions on the edge, transforming along our notions of home, scale, risk, temporality, labour and value.

In 1982, Ulf Hannerz and Tomas Gerholm noted how anthropologists of different countries on the periphery take little note of each other's work, at least unless it is brought to their attention through central anthropologies. And, in 1997, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson observed how anthropologists

working at the "centre" learned quickly that they can ignore what is done at peripheral sites at little or no professional cost. Nowadays, however, the multiplication of niches of knowledge production and multi-scalar cross-located networks make more difficult to ignore the work done in the peripheries. To reflect further about how processes of location and knowledge production inform our research, I have also gathered the opinions of fifteen colleagues in Estonia. Based on them, we can conclude that the ethnographer's encounter with the peripheral is located as much in our methods and notions of epistemic validity as in the place where anthropology is done. For instance, as noted by Reinert, anthropology at, with, and through the margins is an adventurous practice, for which some people are more prepared than others[6]. To be at the margins is a circumstantial condition that requires particular *muscles,* such as openness to risks and collaborations with unexpected epistemic partners, and also ability to resist or adapt to rapid changes and ruptures.

We can add three further conclusions: The negative one is that the precarity and vulnerability of peripheries (regarding the conditions of possibility) seem to have come to places that were traditionally considered as central. The positive ones are that anthropology constantly renews itself from the margins, centripetally. And also, that the use of the peripheral condition depends on the researcher's background, interest and aptitudes to a great extent. Indeed, one of the things that make a difference is the person's state of mind and capacity for having an impact beyond academia (adding the nuance of getting to know the tricks that help to mobilise resources and overcome discontinuities). In short, more than ever before, believe in the periphery. Writing this article helped me reconcile my own peripherality, as well as assume that maybe my own character and work might better fit the ambiguous edge. There are delights and values in not occupying the core – there is freedom, there is excitement, there is vulnerability, and lots of learning. The peripheral refers to epistemological margins and invisibilities, whereby we can immerse ourselves in conceptual and methodological explorations, practice unconventional forms of doing research and elicit new kinds of relationships.

6. The very same person might will or reject to embrace edgy explorative risks depending on matters such as career stage or current personal situation (e.g. having children).

## REFERENCES

Bechev, Dimitar, 2012, The periphery of the periphery: The Western Balkans and the Euro crisis, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 60: 1-16.

Berglund, Eeva, 2008, I wanted to be an academic, not "a creative": Notes on universities and the new capitalism, *Ephemera*, 8, 3: 322-330.

Blagojević, Marina, 2009, *Knowledge Production at the Semi-Periphery: A Gender Perspective*, Beograd, SZR Zuhra Simić.

Bošković, Aleksandar, ed, 2008*, Other People's Anthropologies: Ethnographic Practice on the Margins*, Oxford, Berghahn.

Bradatan, Costica, 2015, In defense of margins, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 9th May.

Brković, Čarna, 2018, Epistemological eclecticism: Difference and the "Other" in the Balkans and beyond, *Anthropological Theory*, 18, 1: 106-128.

Browning, Christopher, Marko Lehti, 2007, Beyond East-West: Marginality and national dignity in Finnish identity construction, *Nationalities Papers*, 35, 4: 691-716.

Buchowski, Michał, 2004, Hierarchies of knowledge in Central-Eastern European anthropology, *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 22, 2: 5-14.

Buchowski, Michał, 2005, Correspondencce: Reply to Chris Hann, *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 23, 1: 198-200.

Burawoy, Michael, 1999, Afterword, in *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Post-socialist World*, Michael Burawoy, Katherine Verdery, eds, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield: 301-311.

Cervinkova, Hana, 2012, Postcolonialism, postsocialism and the anthropology of east-central Europe, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 48, 2: 155-163.

Clifford, James, 1997, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Cohen, Anthony P., ed, 2000, *Signifying Identities,* London, Routledge.

Comaroff, Jean, John L. Comaroff, 2012, Theory from the south: Or, how Euro-America is evolving toward Africa, *Anthropological Forum*, 22, 2: 113-131.

Di Puppo, Lili, 2016, Reflecting on knowledge production in contemporary academia, Rethinking Euro-anthropology: part three. *Social Anthropology*, 24, 3: 366-367.

DiGiacomo, Susan M., 1997, The new internal colonialism, *Critique of Anthropology*, 17, 1: 91-97.

Douglas, Mary, 1986, *How Institutions Think,* Syracuse, Syracuse University Press.

Fabian, Johannes, 1983, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object,* New York, Columbia University Press.

Gerholm, Tomas, Ulf Hannerz, 1982, Introduction: The shaping of national anthropologies, *Ethnos*, 47, 1-2: 5-35.

Green, Sarah, 2005, *Notes from the Balkans: Locating Marginality and Ambiguity on the Greek-Albanian Border*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Green, Sarah, 2016, The universities of Manchester and Helsinki: Different paths, in *Anthropologists in/of the Neoliberal Academy*, Tracey Heatherington, Filippo M. Zerilli, eds, Forum, *Anuac*, 5, 1: 55-58.

Green, Sarah, Patrick Laviolette, 2015a, Forum Rethinking Euro-anthropology, *Social* Anthropology, 23, 3: 4-40.

Green, Sarah, Patrick Laviolette, 2015b, Forum Rethinking Euro-anthropology part two, *Social Anthropology*, 23, 4: 492-509.

Gupta, Akhil, James Ferguson, 1997, Discipline and practice: "The field" as site, method, and location in anthropology, in *Anthropological Locations*, Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson, eds, Berkeley, University of California Press: 1-46.

Hann, Chris M., 2005, Correspondence: Reply to Michał Buchowski, *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 23, 1: 194-197.

Holmes, Douglas R., George E. Marcus, 2005, Cultures of expertise and the management of globalization: toward the re- functioning of ethnography, in *Global assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Social Problems*, Aihwa Ong, Stephen Collier, eds, London, Routledge: 235-251.

Jansen, Ena, 2016, The South African backyard as a very local peripheral space, in *Peripheral Visions in the Globalizing Present. Space, Mobility, Aesthetics*, Esther Peeren, Hanneke Stuit, Astrid Van Weyenberg, eds, Leiden, Brill: 126-139.

Kyriakides, Theodoros, 2014, Anthropology at the margins: A report of EASA 2014, *Savage Minds,* https://savageminds.org/2014/08/15/anthropology-at-the-margins-a-report-of-easa-2014/, accessed on 10/12/2019.

Marcus George E., 2008, The end(s) of ethnography: Social/cultural anthropology's signature form of producing knowledge in transition, *Cultural Anthropology*, 23, 1: 1-14.

Martínez, Francisco, ed, 2016, Forum Rethinking Euro-anthropology: part three, *Social Anthropology*, 24, 3: 353-379.

Martínez, Francisco, 2018, *Remains of the Soviet Past in Estonia*, London, UCL Press.

Nash, June, 2001, Globalization and the cultivation of peripheral vision. *Anthropology Today*, 17, 4: 15-22.

Peeren, Esther, Hanneke Stuit and Astrid Van Weyenberg 2016. Introduction: Peripheral visions in the globalizing present, in *Peripheral Visions in the Globalizing Present. Space, Mobility, Aesthetics*, Esther Peeren, Hanneke Stuit, Astrid Van Weyenberg, eds, Leiden, Brill: 1-29.

Pobłocki, Kacper, 2009, Whither anthropology without the nation-state? Interdisciplinarity, world anthropologies and commoditization of knowledge, *Critique of Anthropology*, 29, 2: 225-252.

Pratt, Mary Louise, 2012, Modernity and periphery: Toward a global and relational analysis, in *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization*, Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, ed, Albany, SUNY Press: 21-47.

Rander, Tanel, 2019. Wind of change. Separating heads and bodies in Eastern Europe, *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 28, 1: 78-84.

Roy, Ananya, 2011, Slumdog cities: Rethinking subaltern urbanism, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35, 2: 223-238.

Scott, Julie, 2000, Peripheries, artificial peripheries and centres, in *Tourism in Peripheral Regions*, Frances Brown, Derek Hall, eds, Clevedon, Channel View Publications: 58-73.

Selwyn, Tom, ed, 1996, *The Tourist Image*, Chichester, Wiley.

Shore, Cris, Susanna Trnka, 2015, Peripheral vision as anthropological critique. How perspectives from the margins can illuminate the exploits of twenty-first-century global capitalism, *Focaal*, 71: 29-39.

Simone, AbdouMaliq, 2010, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads*, New York, Routledge.

Simoni, Valerio, 2016, Mobility, locality and precarious academic paths, Rethinking Euro-anthropology: part three, *Social Anthropology*, 24, 3: 359-460.

Strathern, Marilyn, 1987, The limits of auto-anthropology, in *Anthropology at Home*, Anthony Jackson, ed, London, Tavistock: 59-67.

Strathern, Marilyn, 2006, A community of critics? Thoughts on new knowledge, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 12, 1: 191-209.

Turner, Victor, 1969, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Chicago, Aldine.

Turner, Victor, 1973, The centre out there: Pilgrims' goal, *History of Religions*, 12, 3: 191-230.

Verdery, Katherine, 1996, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?,* Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Verdery, Katherine, 2007, "Franglus" anthropology and East European ethnography: The prospects for synthesis, in *Anthropology's Multiple Temporalities and its Future in Central and Eastern Europe: A debate,* Chris Hann, ed, Max Planck Working Papers 90: 48-51.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo, 2003, And, *Manchester Papers in Social Anthropology* https://sites.google.com/a/abaetenet.net/nansi/abaetextos/anthropology-and-science- e-viveiros-de-castro, accessed on 10/12/2019.

Wallerstein, Emmanuel, 1974, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century,* New York, Academic Press.

Francisco MARTÍNEZ is a Lecturer in the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester. In 2018, he was awarded with the Early Career Prize of the European Association of Social Anthropologists. Francisco has been a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki and Aalto University. Currently, he is the co-editor of the Berghahn book series "Politics of Repair" and member of the editorial board of the *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*. Francisco has edited several books – including *Repair, Brokenness, Breakthrough: Ethnographic Responses* (Berghahn, 2019) and is the author of *Remains of the Soviet Past in Estonia* (UCL Press, 2018).
fm211@leicester.ac.uk


*An expert in peripheries: Working at, with and through the margins of European anthropology*
2019 | ANUAC. VOL. 8, N° 2, DICEMBRE 2019: 167-188.
ISSN: 2239-625X - DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-3626