The Color of the Fieldworkers

Racism, Discrimination and Diversity on the field

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Our contribution originates from questions and reflections which have emanated from racism and discrimination experimented by ethnographers and fieldworkers while carrying out research projects[1] in Brussels. These research projects included racism, discrimination and urban segregation. In the wake of these field experiences, our paper aims at thinking about the ways in which social sciences researchers should deal with racism when it arises at the heart of field relationships and what it reveals on ethno-racial relationships in the contexts of European Metropolis as Brussels characterized by highly diverse population.

The first part of our paper will explore anthropological and socio-ethnographical literature on fieldwork relationships and to the debates surrounding the ethno-racial and migratory background of fieldworkers (for example, from white ethnologists during the colonial period to community researchers). In the wake of interactionist sociologists of the second school of Chicago, the second part of our paper discusses methodological proposals which allow to study field experiences of racism and discrimination as a window to analyze ethno-racial relationships in the contexts of European Metropolis as Brussels. Amongst others, these proposals are the following ones: collective fieldwork with a diversity of fieldworkers and brainstorming seminars in which researchers are led to take some distance with the emotions aroused from the field and question their personal relation with the categories of class, race and gender.

In other words, our paper will contribute to debates surrounding field relationships at the time of diversity and on ethno-racial relationships in the contexts of European Metropolis as Brussels characterized by highly diverse population.

The strength of this paper is based on a co-authorship and on two different topics and especially on different sections of the social space so on very different combinations of the different social categories of race, gender and class.

[1] André G. and Alarcon-Henriquez A. (2017-2021), “Empower Youth” (ULB-VUB and UCL) Research Project funded by Innoviris and Giordano Ch. (MIRAGE