

## ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD AND WRITING FOR CHANGE ANTH 45390

Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:30-2:45  
Office Hours: Tues, Fri 1:00-3:00

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The time has come in the academy to change some of our academic standards, for the *better*. To improve what and how we know, as well as whom we know it *for*, and why we know it *at all*. To enable an intellectual evolution in our field away from sponsoring knowledge for its own sake, to sponsoring knowledge for the sake of humankind. To use what we write, and what we write about, to make differences - positive, productive differences - in the lives of people.

*from Writing the New Ethnography,*  
by H.L. Goodall (Altamira Press, 2000)

The notion that a written text can itself be a “site of resistance,” a location where political commitment and rigorous scholarship intersect, undergirds this course on ethnographic method. We study the construction and interpretation of field notes, subjectivity and objectivity in research, ethical issues in fieldwork, feminist and postcolonial critiques of ethnographic practice, “voice” and oral history, and aspects of ethnographic inquiry that impact on change processes. Students engage in field projects in the local community and produce experimental ethnographic text as a central part of coursework. We also examine the writing process, rhetorical style, the responsibilities of the author, and polyvocalism and inclusivity. Ethnography as a nexus of theory and practice, of scholarship and action, emerges from our work in the course.

For Anthropology majors, this course fulfills the department’s “methods” requirement in a particularly challenging way. You will learn the basics of ethnographic field skills like interviewing, note-taking, and research design, but within the context of recent theoretical challenges in anthropology that push us to new forms of literary expression and political responsibility. You will be working on finding your own style as an ethnographer and a writer. Yet more challenging, we ask ourselves how we can make our anthropology useful a tool for positive social change. You will critique the texts of others and consider the possibilities of writing one of your own.

Required Texts:

John van Mannen – *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*

Emerson, Fretz & Shaw – *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Cynthia Keppley Mahmood – *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants*

Readings packet – on e-reserves (you'll have your print quota upgraded to accommodate this)

Case Studies [each student will choose one from the list]:

Each student will choose an ethnography to read, analyze and report on in terms of the interpretive lenses we are studying this semester. The list below includes some recently published possibilities that would be appropriate. There are plenty of others! But clear them with me before proceeding.

Margaret Lock, *Twice Dead: Organ Transplants and the Reinvention of Death*

Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America*

Valery Tishkov, *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society*

Beatriz Manz, *Paradise in Ashes: A Guatemalan Journey of Courage, Terror, and Hope*

Lorna Rhodes, *Total Confinement: Madness and Reason in the Maximum Security Prison*

Donna M. Goldstein, *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*

Alexi Argenti-Pillen, *Masking Terror: How Women Contain Violence in Southern Sri Lanka*

Catherine Besteman, *Unraveling Somalia: Race, Class and the Legacy of Slavery*

Mary Moran, *Liberia: The Violence of Democracy*

Carolyn Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story*

Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps*

Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*

Antonius Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina*

Paul Stoller, *Stranger in the Village of the Sick*

Monique Skidmore, *Karaoke Fascism: Burma and the Politics of Fear*

Alexander Hinton, *Why Did They Kill? The Anthropology of Genocide in Cambodia*

Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping: Everyday Violence in Northeast Brazil*

Elizabeth Drexler, *Aceh, Indonesia: Securing the Insecure State*

Susan Slyomovics, *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco*

June Nash, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (classic not recent)

Carol Stack, *All Our Kin* (classic not recent)

James Freeman, *Untouchable: An Indian Life History* (classic not recent)

Recommended Texts:

H.L. Goodall – *Writing the New Ethnography* (especially recommended for anth majors)

Kate L. Turabian – *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*  
(especially recommended for those going on in academics)

Booth, Colomb, and Williams – *The Craft of Research* (especially recommended for graduate students)

John Paul Lederach – *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Peacebuilding* (especially recommended for peace studies students)

Lucy Popescu and Carole Seymour-Jones, eds. – *Writers Under Siege: Voices of Freedom From Around the World* (inspiring for everyone!)

Evaluation: We'll be doing a lot of experimenting with writing in this course. There are ten small assignments throughout the semester that add up to 40% of the course grade. An interpretive book review is worth a further 20%, an ethnography conducting over the course of the semester is worth 20%, and engagement in the class is worth 20%.

### Schedule:

#### UNIT 1: Theoretical background

January 14                    introduction: anthropology, responsibility, and change

January 19                    Chs. 1, 2 and 3 in *Tales of the Field* on “the realist tale” in ethnography. Come to class ready to discuss an example of a realist tale you’ve read in anthropology or a related field. What was informative about the text? Compelling? Engrossing? Off-putting? When you first read the text, had you considered another way of writing the piece?

January 21                    Write a short realist description (3-5 pages) of any readily available ethnographic site. Remember that objectivity, value-neutrality, and reproducibility of results are the watchwords of realist writing. The unique character of the author should not come through at all; the focus is wholly on the subject.

(If you have a realist piece you’ve written in an class, you can bring that in along with a brief written critique pointing out features of the realist style according to van Mannen.)

January 26                    Read ch. 4 of van Mannen on “Confessionalist Tales.” Renato Rosaldo wrote a pioneering confessional tale in “Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage” (from *Culture and Truth*, on e-reserves). Also read “Death and Memory: From Santa Maria del Monte to Miami Beach” from Ruth Behar’s *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (also on e-reserves). How do we draw the line between focus on the author and focus on the subject? Then read my

recent "Anthropology from the Bones" (*Anthropology and Humanism*) which uses confession as a means to inspiration/instruction.

January 28 Write a short confessional tale (3-5 pages) that could be construed as somewhat ethnographically instructive. That is, we don't just learn about you, we learn about some other subject or person through learning about you. Or, we are inspired/instructed beyond your own experience to do something more.

February 2 Read van Manen to the end: Impressionist and other Tales (chs. 5 and 6). Let's read the classic Clifford Geertz piece, "Deep Play" on the Balinese Cockfight, often used as the first example of this kind of writing. Be ready to discuss why this was so different from writing that had gone before; bring a text or a few passages from a favorite ethnography (or your own writing!) to illustrate impressionist narrative.

February 4 What is the ethnographer, now, called upon to do? Geertz has commented fulsomely on this ambitious task in "Being Here" and "Being There" excerpted from *Works and Lives*. Read also James Clifford's piece "Partial Truths" (from *Writing Culture*) which deals with the ever-problematic question of objectivity in the new ethnography. Can anyone actually achieve what these authors call for?

February 9 But there is more. Consider the riposte from anthropology's postcolonial interlocutors, who no longer remain silent as the Western academy works out its methodological conundrums. Read the bold and incisive Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized" (*Critique of Anthropology*) and think about what his message means for a metropolitan anthropologist. Also check out Gyatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and

Ashis Nandy, "The Intimate Enemy." Some feel paralyzed to write at all.

February 11 Nancy Scheper Hughes believes that an anthropology that just stands by (as a spectator) is not living up to its humanist heritage. In "The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions Toward A Militant Anthropology" (*Current Anthropology*) she echoes C. Wright Mills long-ago call for a sociology that would have the vision to see the changes that needed to be made, develop the tools to implement them, and find a voice in the political forum. Read "On Politics," excerpted from Mills' *The Sociological Imagination*- a founding text for a discipline that often turned the other way.

February 16 Finally – someone came up with "Criteria for an Ethnography of the Late Twentieth Century" (George Marcus, from *Ethnography Thick and Thin*). These criteria are certainly very different from criteria that would have been proposed fifty years ago. Let's go through them one by one, and evaluate.

Handout: The American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics, with some ancillary reading on Institutional Review Boards and Human Subjects processes.

By now . . . choose the books that you'll be reading, independently, to review and critique as texts of engaged anthropology.

*We'll schedule a relevant film, "Miss Evers' Boys," about the history of human subjects protection.*

## UNIT 2: Experimenting with Methods

February 18                    The ethnographic confrontation: risk of the face to face. What does it mean to try to understand another's life? Read Marjorie Shostak's introduction to her classic *Nisa* and Karen McCarthy Brown's introduction to *Mama Lola*. The journalist Gita Sereny takes a more interlocutory tone with her subject in *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*.

Seek a person whose life story (or part of a life story) you can collect as an exercise for this class. For this first assignment, collect just a single episode, preferably one that is significant or telling in some way, and that perhaps others also participated in who could be consulted later. If the person is part of a locale, like a restaurant or yoga group or boat crew member, all the better. You'll be able to build these class exercises together if you choose well at the beginning.

February 23                    Some sharing of collected (mini) oral histories. We will consider the conundrum of truth and falsity in oral history accounts by looking at the Rigoberta Menchu case. Please read "The Menchu Effect: Strategic Lies and Approximate Truths in Texts of Witness" by Ana Douglass (from *Witness and Memory*), "Long-Term Memory of Extreme Events: From Autobiography to History" by Francesca Capelletto (*J. Royal Anthropological Institute*), and "After the Rigoberta Menchu Controversy: Lessons Learned About the Nature of Subalternity and the Specifics of the Indigenous Subject" by Arturo Arias (*Project Muse*). These illustrate the difficulties of using individual oral history as a window into the politics of the collective.

*We'll schedule time to see the film "Capote" about Truman Capote's relationship with the protagonist of the story In Cold Blood – quite reminiscent of the push-and-pull of the*

*ethnographer with his or her interlocutor.*

February 25                    Getting too close . . . The current AAA Code of Ethics allows for “covenantal” relationships, but how close is too close? Read “The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mis-en-Scene Of Anthropological Fieldwork” (George Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*), “Turning Out Good Ethnography, Or Talking Out of Turn?” (Jayne Howell, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*), “The Politics of Truth and And Emotion Among Victims and Perpetrators of Violence” (Antonius Robben, *Fieldwork Under Fire*) “Excessive Witnessing: The Ethical as Temptation” (Joseba Zulaika, *Witness and Memory*).

March 2                         Sharing more of our life histories, or oral histories of those who participated in the life of the protagonist. Pay attention to your own role as the research dynamic evolves. In political circumstances, this can turn out to be a life or death matter.

March 4                         The ethnographic landscape. In your eventual article or book, the reader will want to get a sense of what the place looks like, feels like, smells like, sounds like. Read “Sociological Landscapes” from Robert Nisbet’s classic *Sociology as an Art Form*, and read my humble attempt at evoking a sense of place in “The Tile-Maker” (*Anthropology and Humanism*). On landscape and politics read “Style Matters: Ethnography as Method and Genre” by Russell Leigh Sharman (*Anthropology and Humanism*)

Write a brief narrative sketching out the landscape in which your ethnography takes place. Take chances here! Make the reader know that you are there (the old claim to ethnographic authority) but also bring the reader right in as well. Advice: be as concrete as possible.

- NOTRE DAME SPRING BREAK -

March 16                         We’ll share some of the landscape writings, then begin discussing “the ABC’s of ethnography” – fieldnotes. Read Emerson, Fretz and Shaw chs. 1 & 2. Begin visiting your field site and taking notes.

March 18                         Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw chs. 3 and 4. Continue with your note-taking, remember the different levels of notation recommended. Experiment with various styles to find what suits you best. (If a note-taking session turns into an interview, go with the flow – seizing opportunities is the hallmark of a great anthropologist.)

Remember to write up your notes FIRST after the research session – before you tell your stories to anyone else. The immediacy of turning to your notebook first really makes a difference, as Emerson, Fretz and Shaw suggest.

March 23

We'll discuss how the note-taking is going as we move on to Emerson, Fretz and Shaw chs. 5-8. Start to think about how your notes and bits of oral history could be grouped into sections, and what other sections could be if you were to turn this into a broader research project. What further questions could be asked? How could maps, photos, etc. complement what you already have? How could the wider anth literature be brought in? Are there any relevant social change or political issues, and if so, how could your work contribute?

March 25

Let's share where we are with our practice ethnography. As Each student presents informally, we'll talk about potential ethical and methodological issues that could arise, and brainstorm about where the projects could go if time (and finances) actually allowed. Also please read George Marcus on ethnography beyond the primary site: "The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," from *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*.

March 30

Continued sharing of practice ethnographies. You should keep working on these mini-ethnographies so that they ready to hand in at the end of the semester. Each "finished" product must contain at least one oral history, at least one map, drawing or photo, and at least five pages of text analyzing and interpreting what you have done. This is

obviously not a formal ethnography; it's a learning experience. So feel free to include the "I" voice in what you write. Use proper academic citation when you bring up sources from our readings or elsewhere, however. Continue working on these ethnographies as the semester progresses; also be reading your selected ethnographies for the final book review project.

April 1

How about trying ethnographic fiction? Read Margery Wolf's traditional ("The Woman Who Didn't Become a Shaman") and fictional ("The Hot Spell") account of her fieldwork in Taiwan (both from *A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Post Modernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility*). Also read the 2007 Anthropology and Humanism Fiction Contest Winner, "Mashti" by Roxanne Varzi, and the runner-up poem "The Great Market" by Roberta Feins. Finally, read the prescient words of Ken Saro-Wiwa of Nigeria, who describes his own death in "On the Death of Ken Saro-Wiwa" (*Writers Under Siege: Voices of Freedom From Around the World*)

Please write either a short story or a poem (or it could be a play) set at your site. The characters should not be identifiable as real people, but they should be plausible as people who *could* be found there. This will be due after Easter Break (Apr 15). You'll also be asked to compare this genre to the more standard ethnographic genre you've been practicing.

### UNIT 3: Critically Reading a Text-for-Change

April 6            Now we'll start reading my own ethnographic text, *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants*, which we will critique together on the basis of all the methods and stylistic advice we've learned about so far. I will be honest about how I made my authorial choices and all of you have to be completely honest and blunt about your questions and criticisms. This is not only an ethnography but also a political critique – one that I hoped would spark change. So perhaps we can profitably deconstruct how that all worked out.

For today read chs. 1 and 2. Is ch. 1 an effective introduction to the topic? How would you have written it? Chapter 2 is actually used all over the diaspora to introduce Sikh youth to their religion, as parents find my interpretation "bridges" Sikh philosophy to Western culture appropriately. How does starting with religion affect the rest of the book?

April 8            Ch. 3 is the first long interview ("A Saint-Soldier") and Ch. 4 narrates the founding trauma of the Khalistan movement, the Indian army's attack on the Golden Temple. Be ready with your questions and criticisms of how I handled these, and perhaps alternate ideas of how it could have been done. What remains unsaid that should have been included?

- EASTER BREAK -

April 15           Chs. 5 and 6 go into the history of the movement, integrating some oral histories of fighters who describe how and why they chose to fight. In ch. 7, "Three Fighters," I decided to present lengthier sections of life stories of three Sikh militants, to give a real flavor of the individuals comprising the Khalistan movement. How do you feel about the eclecticism of this book? i.e. combining straight-out history in ch. 5 with conversational interviews in ch. 6 and then life histories in ch. 7? How do you feel about my own voice as author here?

We will see some power point slides, and plan a trip to a Sikh temple nearby for those who are interested. Many in the congregation are refugees who fled the conflict in Punjab described in *Fighting for Faith and Nation*.

- April 20 Ch. 8, "Playing the Game of Love," is the most interpretive part of the book. In article form, it was discussed among the top Khalistanis in great detail. (I would have liked to have been a fly on that wall!) Ch. 9, on gender relations, was the most problematic for my editors, who found the idea of female killers hard to swallow. Both call upon "the anthropological imagination" – that's why I put these topics toward the end rather than at the beginning of the book. Is the reader drawn into the Khalistani world enough at that point to conceive of terrorist missions undertaken out of love? Of a sweet young girl who is also a cold-hearted assassin?
- April 22 Chs. 10 and 11 are the most theoretical of the book. "Culture, Resistance, and Dialogue" focuses on the responsibilities of the scholar in a complex political world, and "Looking Into Dragons" (after Geertz) explores what an anthropologist studying violence might contribute to our world. What do you think might be the ultimate effect of a book like this? Does an author have a continuing responsibility beyond the date of publication?
- April 27 Praxis. I will talk about my actual experiences as I've become morally, politically, and practically involved in the world of the Sikhs.
- Practice "advocacy" writing by composing an op-ed piece (letter to the editor) for a major newspaper on the topic of Sikh human rights. Your piece should make an argument using substantive information, and bring out the role that your expertise as an anthropologist plays in your opinion.
- April 29 We'll share a few of the op-eds, but mostly we'll talk about writing. How to stay inspired, how to keep writing in spite of risk and against the odds of making a difference?
- Some successful authors have advice. Read "Notes on Failure" by Joyce Carol Oates (from *The Faith of a Writer*), "Required Reading and Other Dangerous Subjects" and "Five Writing Tips" by Amy Tan (from *The Opposite of Fate*), excerpts from *The Right to Write* by Julia Cameron, and *The Freedom to Write Memorial Lecture* by Orhan Pamuk.

Why the Obama Administration Needs Anthropologists! During the scheduled finals time, we'll meet so that each of you can give a brief presentation to convince the new administration of the value of anthropology in policy-making. Consider the audience (assembled students plus myself) to be a

commission on expert consultation. You may choose any area to focus on, e.g. health care, education, international relations, security – or speak more generally. You have 5-10 minutes to explain (passionately or coolly, as you choose) why anthropologists should be hired as expert consultants. Back up what you say with facts, as you actually would in such a situation. Likewise, dress for the occasion insofar as you are able.

Book Review: Write an *approximately* five to seven page book review of your chosen volume, focusing particularly on the potential impact it may have on world events. It might be useful to compare it with *Fighting for Faith and Nation*, or other books you have read, or to bring in materials we've read for the class. Remember to use formal academic citation style for sourcing. Do not spend more than a paragraph summarizing the book; the point is interpretation and analysis, not writing a "book report." This is your chance to demonstrate your understanding of writing-anthropology-for-change, through the mechanism of a book review. The paper is due Thursday, May 7, at 5:00 in my office, in hard copy.

Completed Ethnography: May 8, the last day of finals, turn in your ethnography at my office by 5:00. There is no required or preferred length. As stated above, however, it should include at least one photo, map or drawing and at least five pages of interpretation or analysis. There should be some consideration of methods and Ethics. The ethnography need not have an advocacy component, but it may have one. There should be some reflection on how you found the process of doing ethnography and whether you would plan differently were you to start over. Remember to use formal academic citation style where other texts are referred to.

## PROJECTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

<u>due date</u>	<u>project</u>	<u>grade</u>
Jan 21	Realist writing or critique	x 4
Jan 28	Confessional writing	x 4
Feb 23	Oral history	x 4
Mar 4	Ethnographic landscape	x 4
Mar 18	Field notes	x 4
Mar 23	Developed field notes	x 4
Mar 30	Further ethnography	x 4
Apr 15	Ethnographic fiction or poem	x 4
Apr 29	Advocacy writing	x 4
finals time	Advocacy speech	x 4 _____ 40%
May 7	Book Review	x20
May 8	Completed Ethnography	x20
	Engagement in Class	x20 _____ 60%

## ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD AND WRITING FOR CHANGE

### Reading List (e-reserves)

Renato Rosaldo, "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage" from *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*.

Ruth Behar, "Death and Memory: From Santa Maria del Monte to Miami Beach," from *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*.

Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, "Anthropology From the Bones: A Memoir of Fieldwork, Survival, and Commitment," *Anthropology and Humanism*.

Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play"

Clifford Geertz, "Being Here" and "Being There" from *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*.

James Clifford, "Partial Truths," from *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*.

Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized," *Critique of Anthropology*.

Gyatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*.

Ashis Nandy, excerpts from *The Intimate Enemy*.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "The Primacy of the Ethical: Towards a Militant Anthropology," *Current Anthropology*.

C. Wright Mills, "On Politics" from *The Sociological Imagination*.

George Marcus, "Criteria for an Ethnography of the Late Twentieth Century," from *Ethnography Thick and Thin*.

Marjorie Shostak, excerpt from *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*.

Karen McCarthy Brown, excerpt from *Mama Lola: Voodoo Priestess in Brooklyn*.

Gita Sereny, excerpt from *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*.

Ana Douglass, "The Menchu Effect: Strategic Lies and Approximate Truths in Texts of Witness," from *Witness and Memory*.

Franscesca Capelletto, "Long-term Memory of Extreme Events: From Autobiography to History," *J. of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.

Arturo Arias, "After the Rigoberta Menchu Controversy: Lessons Learned About the Nature of Subalternity and the Specifics of the Indigenous Subject," *Project Muse*.

George Marcus, "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mis-en-Scene of Anthropological Fieldwork," from *Ethnography Thick and Thin*.

Jayne Howell, "Turning Out Good Ethnography, or Talking Out of Turn?," *J. of Contemporary Ethnography*.

Antonius Robben, "The Politics of Truth and Emotion Among Victims and Perpetrators of Violence," from *Fieldwork Under Fire*.

Joseba Zulaika, "Excessive Witnessing: The Ethical as Temptation," from *Witness and Memory*.

Robert Nisbet, "Sociological Landscapes," from *Sociology as an Art Form*.

Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, "The Tile-Maker," *Anthropology and Humanism*.

Russell Leigh Sharman, "Style Matters: Ethnography as Method and Genre," *Anthropology and Humanism*.

George Marcus, "The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," in *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*.

Margery Wolf, "The Woman Who Didn't Become a Shaman" and "The Hot Spell" from *A Thrice-Told Tale: Feminism, Post-Modernism, and Ethnographic Responsibility*.

Roxanne Varzi, "Mashti," *Anthropology and Humanism*.

Roberta Feins, "The Great Market," *Anthropology and Humanism*.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, "On the Death of Ken Saro-Wiwa," from *Writers Under Siege: Voices of Freedom From Around the World*.

Joyce Carol Oates, "Notes on Failure," from *The Faith of a Writer*.

Amy Tan, "Five Writing Tips" and "Required Reading and Other Dangerous Subjects" from *The Opposite of Fate*.

Julia Cameron, excerpts from *The Right to Write*.

Orhan Pamuk, "The Freedom to Write Memorial Lecture," *Writers Under Siege: Voices of Freedom From Around the World*.