

CHAPTER 1

The Changing Story of Ethnography

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Ethnography is a practice and an expression with a capacious historical past that necessarily includes philosophical, political, spiritual, and aesthetic elements. These elements have at times defined cultures, named people, and told them who they are and what they might become. In short, ethnography grew out of a master discourse of colonization. Today, scholars question the legitimacy of that discourse (Ellis and Bochner, 1996; Burawoy, et al., 1991; Clair, 1998; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Denzin, 1997; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Van Maanen, 1995; Wolf, 1992). These challenges have come at a time that may mean the demise of ethnography. At the very least and without a doubt, the days of naive ethnography are over; if indeed, they ever truly existed. However, it may be somewhat premature to pronounce a requiem for ethnography, as alternative forms of writing culture continue to surface. A review of the history of ethnography should help to place ethnography in its political terrain, set the stage for discussions of alternative perspectives, and provide a backdrop for the essays included in this collection.

The First Wave of Colonialism

Ethnography, the writing of culture, traces its origins to ancient Greece. Herodotus, who is also known as the father of history, traveled from one culture to another to document the traditions and sociopolitical practices among people of the ancient world during the third century B.C.

Herodotus wrote a nine volume tome, entitled *History*, which is the Greek word for *inquiry*. It focuses on two main themes: (1) expressing the culture, and (2) writing its political history. Specifically, Herodotus explored the Middle East

as the center of the world which he believed was being torn asunder by the tensions between two distinct civilizations: Eastern and Western; Persian and Greek. This division, among others, is revisited currently by postcolonial scholars (see Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1995; Castle, 2001) as well as postmodern scholars (see Clifford and Marcus, 1986) or both (see Denzin, 1997).

The *History* is also considered a creative work, because Herodotus chose prose to express his discoveries. "Critics have paid tribute to its grandeur of design and to its frank, lucid, and delightfully anecdotal style" (Bram and Dickey, 1986, p. 83). Herodotus traveled the ancient world in order to collect the artifacts that expressed the uniqueness of cultures. To view ethnography as travel (Neumann, 1992) or as a means of collecting not just the stories of other cultures, but of collecting ourselves, in a sense, in order to define who we are (Neumann, 1996), speaks to the heart of ethnography: the interest in self, others, and the world. However, that interest is not always pure; sometimes, it is unjustifiably self-righteous.

Ethnographers have been known to create or construct the Other as primitive. Certain Western scholars evidenced arrogance through their judgmental interpretations of Others.¹

The Second Wave of Colonialism

The second wave of colonization spawned renewed interest in ethnography, mostly as a means of *saving* cultures that were being virtually annihilated. It began during the mercantilist period in Europe and continued through the 1800s. Exploration and trade increased as did the lust for land and the greed for gold. European conquistadors ravaged what came to be known as North and South America, Latin America, and Africa. Slavery, which had all but died out during the Middle Ages, resurfaced with a vengeance.

Spain and Portugal took the lead in colonizing what came to be known as the "Americas" (North, South, and Central). The French and British followed close behind. Historians, poets, explorers and missionaries kept careful diaries that detailed the conquests of these *strange* cultures. And, indeed, the New World cultures were strange to the Europeans. These cultures evidenced such curious customs that Europeans were forced to question what could be deemed *natural* to humankind and what was culturally specific. For example,

Bernard Romans, traveling in the Southeast [United States] in the late eighteenth century, informed his European readers that "a savage man discharges his urine in a sitting posture, and a savage woman standing. . . . I need not tell you how opposite this is to our common practice" (White, 1993, p. 248)

Ethnographers and historians working from the late fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries lived during tumultuous times and provided accounts of cultural annihilation, slavery, and torture. Friar Bartolome de Las Casas, who wrote the *History of the Indies* in 1552, reported the following account:

[The Spaniards] made bets as to who would slit a man in two, or cut off his head at one blow; or they opened up his bowels. They tore the babies from their mother's breast by their feet, and dashed their heads against the rocks. . . . They spitted the bodies of other babes, . . . on their swords. . . . [They hanged Indians] by thirteens, in honor and reverence for our Redeemer and the twelve Apostles, . . . All this did my own eyes witness. (Las Casas as cited in Josephy Jr. 1994, p. 114)

Historical accounts speak volumes not only of the conquered culture, in this case, *Native Americans* of the *West Indies*, but also of the European conquerors, as well. Revisionist history is a part of the contemporary postcolonial concern about the representation of culture. Postcolonial scholars ask that alternative views be written into textbooks. For example, the general notion that Christopher Columbus was a hero to be emulated takes a different turn with respect to the following accounts:

Columbus, who . . . began shipping Indians in chains to the slave markets . . . stopped briefly at the island now known as St. Croix, where without provocation members of his expedition attacked four Indian men and two women in a canoe, cutting off the head of one of the men with an ax and taking the other Indians aboard ship as captives. (Josephy Jr., 1994, p. 123)

All of this he did to people whom he described as:

generous with what they have, to such a degree as no one would believe but he who had seen it. (Columbus' diaries, see Josephy Jr., 1994, p. 115)

Columbus gave one of these Arawak women to a colonist at St. Croix who without shame or remorse reports:

I took a most beautiful Carib woman, whom the lord Admiral [Columbus] made a gift of to me; and having her in my berth, with her being nude . . . the desire to enjoy myself with her came over me; and wishing to put my desire to work, she resisting, she scratched me with her fingernails to such a degree that I would not have wished then that I had

begun; but with that seen . . . I grabbed a leather strap and gave her a good chastisement of lashes, so that she hurled such unheard of shouts that you could not believe. Finally, we reached an agreement in such a manner that I can tell you that in fact she seemed to have been taught in the school of whores. (see Josephy, Jr., 1994, p. 123)

The atrocities were so extensive that “by 1552, the Indians of Hispaniola had become extinct” and the Spanish had to replace the Indian slave labor with captured Africans (Josephy Jr., 1994, p. 129).

Disruption of African cultures created a diasporic condition. Slaves taken to America lost most of the knowledge of their cultural heritage as their language and customs were stolen from them. Treated as brutally as the Indians, captured Africans died at a rate of seven out of every ten brought to America. Although the impact upon their cultures was devastating, ethnographic studies of African cultures would not surface for several decades. Instead, American anthropologists focused their *salvage* efforts on painting cultural portraits of the decimated Native American cultures.

Henry Lewis Morgan, the founding father of American anthropology, has been praised for his insights and severely critiqued for his bias. Morgan studied the Ho-de'-no-sau-nee or Iroquois during the mid-1800s. Influenced by Darwin's theories of evolution, Morgan developed a framework for studying disparate cultures. He believed that cultures evidenced different stages of development moving from savage to barbaric to civilized. He believed four factors influenced the level of sophistication that a culture attained. These include: (1) material invention and scientific discoveries, (2) establishment of government, (3) kinship system, and (4) economic or material practices related to property (see Moore, 1997).

Supported by the Smithsonian Institution, Morgan conducted extensive cross-cultural studies using over three hundred societies (Cohen and Eames, 1982). Yet, his own cultural background led him to draw erroneous conclusions about different cultures. For example, in many Native American societies, both the mother and her sister are called “mother” by the children. Morgan determined that the people were promiscuous and uncivilized, because the children did not seem to know who was their rightful biological mother. To the contrary, in the Native American society, the children simply demonstrated respect for the women who raised them. Furthermore, it could be argued that Euro-American culture encourages distance and separation rather than closeness among relatives. Euro-Americans dissect relationships (e.g., half-brother, step-mother), delineate relationships (great-great-grandmother instead of grandmother, second cousin or cousin once-removed instead of cousin as in the Native American tradition.)

Although Morgan's discussion of kinship systems were influential, his “materialist basis of cultural evolution has been considered his principal legacy

by subsequent evolutionists like Marx, Engels, [and others]” (Moore, 1997, p. 36). Scholars today might take notice of the continuing assumption that technology is progress, private property inevitable, bureaucratic government denotes organization, and a patriarchal family superior to a matriarchal family—all of which invites cultural analyses of the biases of Euro-American cultures.

Although Morgan was influential, his British counterpart, Edward Tyler, had a stronger effect on American anthropologists. Tyler’s most enduring contribution to the field of anthropology was his definition of culture:

Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [sic] as a member of society (Tyler, 1871/1958, as cited in Moore, 1997, p. 17)

Tyler’s intellectual travel guides of Mexican culture were supported by anthropological and archeological studies. Like Morgan, he also conducted comparative ethnography by sifting “through missionaries’ accounts, explorers’ journals, ancient texts, and ethnological reports to search for similarities in human cultures” (Moore, 1997, p. 19). Tyler believed that the ethnographer played a key role in classifying cultural creations. However, his classifications included the theme of progress and like Morgan fell into the trap of self-aggrandizement. Tyler arranged cultures in order (e.g., Australian [aborigine], Tahitian, Aztec, Chinese, Italian) with Europeans situated at the zenith of civilization (Moore, 1997).

One of the most influential American anthropologists was German born, Franz Boas (Cohen and Eames, 1982). Boas challenged the evolutionary approach to the study of culture arguing that it might be the case that “fire must precede pottery making . . . but there is no ethnographic evidence indicating that matrilineal kin systems preceded patrilineal kin systems or that religions based on animism developed before polytheistic religions” (Moore, 1997, p. 49). Thus, he fervently attacked academic anthropological racism.

Boas is probably most famous for expanding the study of anthropology to place emphasis on linguistics, archeology, sociocultural considerations and physical anthropology. His studies of the Kwakiutl people of northwestern America are highly praised for attention to linguistics, the vigilant collection of artifacts, photographic documentation, and a more holistic approach to understanding individual cultures. His career took him from university teaching to museum directing and back again. He probably influenced more American anthropologists than either Tyler or Morgan and contributed to the development of anthropological societies, magazines, and university curriculum. Some of his student protégées include Alfred Kroeber, Ruth Benedict, Edward Sapir, and Margaret Mead, to name a few. “Boas’ personal contacts with his students extended his intellectual influence and shaped the institutions of American anthropology” (Moore, 1997, p. 42).

Recognizing that colonization threatened cultures across the globe, anthropologists like Boas, began serious efforts to document endangered cultural practices (Cohen and Eames, 1982). The presence of a dominant culture that intended to exterminate, assimilate or control the subordinate culture placed cultural survival as an anthropological priority. Of course, anthropologists did not literally try to save cultures or people except in rare instances. Rather,

the main motif that ethnography as a science developed was that of salvaging cultural diversity. The ethnographer would capture in writing the authenticity of the changing cultures, so they could be entered into the record for the great comparative project of anthropology (Clifford and Marcus, 1986, p. 24).

Some of these scholars intended to have the cultural legends, myths, history, language and medicines safeguarded for future generations (e.g., James Mooney's, 1891, 1900/1992 work among the Tsaragi—Cherokee). Others, including Ruth Benedict (1934), and Margaret Mead (1928) took a more theoretical stance by asking questions about culture and humanity as they documented their cultural discoveries. Alfred Kroeber's studies of Arapaho; Ruth Benedict's studies of the Serrano, Zuni, Coachiti, O'totam, and the Apache; Edward Sapir's (see Moore, 1997) interest in Yana, Puite, Shashone, Nootka languages and combined work with Benjamin Whorf (1956) on the Hopi language and culture, all contributed to documenting cultures, salvaging them, perhaps, but saving them, I think not. Ironically, the winds have shifted dramatically. Currently, Native Americans are conducting ethnographic studies of archaeologists, if not anthropologists (see Peters, 2000).

The second wave of colonization contributed to the preponderance of studies of Native American cultures. The third wave of colonization brought with it a change in perspective concerning who constituted the *Other* and which cultures would or should be documented.

The Third Wave of Colonization

The third wave of colonization is characterized by a resolve on the part of dominating countries to tighten their colonial grip. Noting that the sun never sets on the British Empire, the English both extended their rule and enforced it with great vigor. The British were not alone in these colonizing efforts. France and Portugal continued their exploitation. The Dutch had taken the Muslim center of learning in Aceh, Indonesia. Italy attempted to take Ethiopia, but failed. Germany took small portions of Africa. Russia extended her boundaries. Japan entered the game of expansion, as well. And, the United States of America all but completed its

imperial expansion based on manifest destiny at home and extended its colonial grasp beyond its current domestic borders.

The early 1900s were a scramble for control that ended in jealous rivalries between European nations. But more lurked beneath the surface than simply land acquisition. No one recognized this better than W. E. B. DuBois (1914) who wrote:

The present war in Europe is one of the great disasters due to race and color prejudice and it but foreshadows greater disasters in the future. . . . It is not merely national jealousy, or the so called “race” rivalry. . . . It is rather a wild quest for Imperial expansion. . . . between Germany, England, and France primarily and Belgium, Italy, Russia, and Austria-Hungry to a lesser degree. (DuBois, 1914—as cited in Lester, 1971, p. 68)

For DuBois, colonization was intricately interwoven with race prejudice:

A theory of the inferiority of the darker peoples and a contempt for their rights and aspirations has become all but universal in the greatest centers of modern culture. . . . civilized nations are fighting like mad dogs over the right to own and exploit these darker peoples. (DuBois, 1914 as cited in Lester, 1971, p. 68)

DuBois’s ethnographic work, which revealed the “Souls of Black Folks” in America and his political activism at the both domestic and international levels, bravely attacked imperialism and its inherent prejudice against dark-skinned people.

DuBois was not alone as an activist and writer of the times who understood the ravages of imperialism. James Joyce, the novelist, produced two works prior to World War II—*The Dubliners* (1914) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) which provide auto-ethnographic accounts of economic, ideological, and personal struggles in British occupied Ireland. Joyce’s work is praised by contemporary postcolonial and postmodern writers as fundamental to the new movements in ethnography (Denzin, 1997; Wolcott, 1995)

This third wave of colonization triggered both World War I and World War II (DuBois, 1914/1971). During this time, ethnographers found themselves in precarious and unique situations that ranged from unexpected studies of the Other to atypical ethnographies of the colonizers. For example, Austrian born, Bronislaw Malinowski traveled to Australia with a British contingent in the early 1900s. He arrived as World War I began and was arrested as an enemy by Australian forces, but was allowed to conduct field work in New Guinea during his period of incarceration (Moore, 1997).

World War I shattered Émile Durkheim's school of sociology as many of his students, including his son, were killed on the battlefield (Moore, 1997). Only Marcel Mauss, Durkheim's nephew, was left to carry on the sociological ethnographic tradition, which he did with great vigor until World War II. Mauss' (1925/1967) greatest contribution is his cross-cultural comparison of *exchanges* as *total phenomenon* that reflect the prescribed nature of giving. His work entitled, *The Gift* exposed exchange as a phenomenon that stretched well beyond economics and pointed to interrelationships with other cultural institutions including religion. Mauss' work has been described as "economic ethnography" as well as "structural" ethnography as the type practiced by Claude Levi-Strauss (1963, see Moore, 1997, p. 124). Mauss also influenced the highly respected work of Mary Douglas (1966) who posed "dirt" as a total phenomenon of cultural and cross-cultural interest (see Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergesen, and Kurzweil, 1984 for a discussion of Douglas' contributions). Mauss was forced into retirement during the Nazi occupation of France (Moore, 1997).

Between World War I and World War II, George Orwell provided a moving account of his own experience with poverty through the novel, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933/1961). Described as autobiographical, this work may be considered an auto-ethnography or personal ethnography, as well. The novel extends beyond an autobiography by capturing the sordid conditions of poverty as a cultural phenomenon. Orwell's second book, *Burmese Days* (1934) is also autobiographical with cultural insights on imperialism.

World War II affected ethnography in other ways as well. For example, Ruth Benedict (1946) found herself conducting an ethnography via archival documents of Japanese culture for the American government during World War II. However, more common ethnographies of this time period included, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's (1942) study of the Balinese, and E. Evans-Pritchard's (1940) studies of the Nuer. Although classical or traditional ethnography continued to flourish, alternative forms surfaced in response to World War II.

During the Great Depression era and continuing through World War II and beyond, sociologists began to study the plight of the urban poor. Field work in the cities of London, Chicago, and Philadelphia eventually developed into schools of urban ethnography, specifically the Chicago School. Outstanding contributors to urban ethnography include Robert Park, W. E. B. DuBois, Sidney and Beatrice Potter Webb (see Van Maanen, 1988) and W. F. Whyte (1955). A more recent example of urban ethnography is Dwight Conquergood's (1994) study of the South Chicago street gangs. Contemporary urban ethnographers represent different fields of study including sociology, communication, and anthropology.

In addition, World War II gave rise to the ethnographic study of organizations. W. F. Whyte's (1948) studies of *Human Relations in the Restaurant Industry* were undertaken to address the cultural impact of World War II on industry. Whyte discovered that with work populations shifting cultural norms were being

challenged. Whyte's work in organizations initiated a new ethnographic contextual setting. Numerous scholars have undertaken organizational ethnographies and have done so using different perspectives as well as different styles of presentation (also see e.g., Goffman, 1956, 1959, 1963). For example, Donald Roy's (1959) study of factory workers does not use the same perspective as Michael Burawoy and colleagues' (1991) micro-macro critical ethnographies. Even when organizational ethnographers use the same line of work their approaches vary. For example, John Van Maanen's (1988) studies of police work are quite different from Nick O'Donnell-Trujillo and Michael Pacanowsky's (1983), and Nick Trujillo and George Dionisopoulos' (1987) studies of police work. Today, organizational ethnographies are broad based and proliferative.

Gregory Bateson (1972) introduced a third approach to ethnographic work following World War II. Focusing on patterns, interactions and communication, Bateson noted early on that communication is *framed*. For example, people have the ability to recognize the difference between real fighting and playful fighting because they have ways of framing or commenting upon the behavior. That is to say, people communicate about their communication—they meta-communicate. Further, Bateson promoted the idea that certain expressions were more salient than others in determining cultural distinction—what constitutes *the difference that makes a difference* is worthy of ethnographic exploration. He also took great pains to explore the connectedness of life. Bateson's work stimulated discussions in psychology, communication, sociology, and anthropology.

Mary Catherine Bateson, the daughter of Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, extended her parents' work and contributed to interpersonal ethnography. For example, her book, *Composing a Life*, (1990) allows the ethnographer to look at herself in relation to others as well as the wider cultural framework. Contemporary interpersonal ethnographers often highlight interpersonal relationships and personal struggles. That is, they explore subjectivity through reflexivity (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992). Ways of expressing these personal and interpersonal cultural experiences include dialogue, short story, and performance (Ellis and Bochner, 1996).

Fourth, during World War II, the Frankfurt School of critical scholars recognized that in addition to the economic orientation of previous Marxist-driven research, the cultural aspects of domination and exploitation needed to be discussed. Antonio Gramsci (1971), famous for the *Prison Notebooks*, wrote on the concepts of power, politics, and hegemony from his prison cell after the Fascists incarcerated him. Other critical theorists exiled from Germany, some of whom made their way to the United States, promoted cultural studies of power. Kenneth Burke who was influenced by Émile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx contributed significant philosophical insights that promoted understanding of identification, alienation, and symbolization. Out of these traditions, a new form of ethnography developed—critical ethnography. A contemporary and classic

example of critical ethnography has been provided by Paul E. Willis (1977) in his study of working-class lads in England.

Yet another stream of cultural studies surfaced during World War II. Like Joyce and Orwell, Simone de Beauvoir and other French existentialists felt the genre most conducive to expressing philosophical and cultural commentaries is the novel. For de Beauvoir, the novel provided an expressive means of conveying rich philosophical and political ideas. The threat of Nazi occupation of France exists at the shadowy edges of her classic existential novel, *She Came To Stay* (1954/1990).

Simone de Beauvoir (1961) also presented her ideas in scholarly format. French existentialists struggled with the issues of 'being' and 'otherness.' De Beauvoir (1961), developed feminist existentialism which gave rise to a sophisticated understanding of women as cultural beings defined as the Other in relation to men. Her work challenges biological and psychological explanations of gender difference and argues that patriarchal constructions of women and men have placed women in a position of existence that names them as the Other.

Following World War II, American feminists used ethnographic methods to further expose the patriarchal construction of the world. Specifically, feminist ethnographers combined feminist theory, critical theory and postcolonial theory to explore cultural issues. Eleanor Burke Leacock's (1954, as cited in Moore, 1997) work provides a leading example of this blending of perspectives.

Eleanor Burke Leacock, the daughter of Kenneth Burke, and "the leading Marxist feminist in American anthropology" (Moore, 1997, p. 201) successfully blended Marxist insights with Boas' position that argued against the evolutionary progression model for its inherent prejudice. In addition, she took a feminist perspective to advance these notions into a unique critique of past cultural theories. Her work on the fur trading industry suggests that prior to infusion of European colonization trade patterns among the Montagnais-Naskapi were dynamic and changing. Primitive societies are not stagnate, she argued. They did not depend on Europeans to advance. However, colonization did indeed have a monumental impact on their culture. Colonization, capitalism, and Christianity, especially that of the Jesuits, redefined the culture especially for women. Women's economic independence was curtailed, divorce was made illegal, promiscuity was called a sin, monogamy was instituted, and patriarchy enforced. Writing during the McCarthy era, Leacock's Marxist's insights would have been considered unpatriotic, at best. Furthermore, her feminist leanings would have been dismissed by a sexist society (see Moore, 1997).

Following World War II, Betty Friedan (1963) used ethnographic methods to interview women (mostly middle- to upper-middle-class white women) to paint a portrait of a despondent group whose depression could be traced to patriarchy. In so doing, Friedan offered a unique ethnographic form and a political commentary that set off a tinderbox of opinions about feminism and patriarchy.

At the same time, Gloria Steinem undertook a journalistic ethnography of a sexist institution—the Playboy Club—where she participated as a playboy bunny (Steinem, 1963/1983). Elizabeth Boyer, one of the founder's of National Organization for Women (NOW) and the leading founder of Women's Equity Action League (WEAL), used ethnographic and historical methods to uncover the story of one strong woman. Both a novel and scholarly books provide archival evidence of the life experiences of Demoiselle Marguerite (1975, 1983).

The economic, social, and political connection of most white women including the above mentioned feminists, to the imperializing white Euro-American male did not go unnoticed. African American women challenged the white middle-class bias of these studies (hooks, 1984) as well as the heterosexual focus (Lorde, 1984). During the 1980s and 1990s voices from the colonized began to (re)surface.² But before they did (at least in a manner loud enough to be heard by white academic audiences), ethnography took a turn toward the interpretive direction.

The Fourth Wave of Colonization

The fourth wave of colonization moved from capitalist development in *Third World* countries through extended globalization of capitalist engagement around the world, via policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and practices such as the employment of offshore (meaning off American and European shores) labor pools. Neocolonialism has been criticized as the Americanization of the world or capitalist globalization. This new form of colonization led to new forms of ethnography. Each of these new forms highlighted the linguistic and eventually the political aspect of culture. As colonized subjects pursued, explored, or recovered from Euro-American educational systems, their voices reached academic and popular audiences. The colonized began speaking for themselves, albeit with altered voices (Clair, 1997). And an era of postcolonialism emerged with an emphasis on the linguistic turn.

The Linguistic Turn in Ethnography

The linguistic turn refers to the emphasis on language to create culture as well as to understand culture, to guide inquiry, and to express discoveries. Several schools of thought exist as part of the linguistic turn. They include the interpretivist, the critical, particular feminist theories, the postmodernist, and the post-colonial perspectives. Each of these schools of thought has some unique aspects as well as similarities.

The Linguistic Interpretive Turn

Following World War II, ethnographers continued the colonial project in a new world order. Clifford Geertz, for example, working for the Ford Foundation, explored “Third World development, with the explicit goal of improving economic growth” (Moore, 1997, p. 239). Geertz (1973, 1977) ushered in a new era for ethnography. Geertz is most famous for viewing ethnography as a textual undertaking that requires *thick descriptions* and searches out *webs of significance*. His focus on symbols, text, and language gave birth to what is sometimes called “interpretive ethnography.”

Interpretive ethnography placed meaning at the center of its enterprise and encouraged scholars to conduct ethnographies of communication (Hymes, 1964). Politics and power were not completely dismissed, but signification and symbol systems were highlighted. Cultures were clearly labeled and the idea that the ethnographer could represent the Other still permeated much of the research. The idea that one specific truthful interpretation and representation could be garnered still acted as the basic assumption of ethnography.

John Van Maanen (1988) describes interpretive ethnography as a rhetorical practice that represents the “social reality of others through the analysis of one’s own experience in the world of these others” (p. ix). He sees ethnography as “hauntingly personal” (p. ix) and yet at the same time a “portrait of diversity” (p. xiii). Although always evocative and self-transformative, ethnography can take different forms of presentation including a realist form, a confessional form, or an impressionistic form (Van Maanen, 1988). These three forms are detailed through examples of his and other ethnographer’s work. Sometimes these three forms of presentation may overlap within one work (see Van Maanen, 1988, or Hayano, 1982). No matter what style of representation is chosen, the focal point for the interpretive ethnographer is understanding the *meaning* of certain phenomenon. For example, Nick O’Donnell-Trujillo and Michael Pacanowsky’s (1983) search for the meaning of *tough talk* among police officers was grounded in Clifford Geertz’ (1973) interpretive notions, which were based on Max Weber’s insights, that webs of significance exist in the symbolism, in this case, in the everyday talk of the members. When Nick Trujillo and George Dionisopoulos (1987) are faced with the odd and seemingly unexplainable act of a police officer shooting a pigeon, they are able to interpret this act based on Victor Turner’s (1981) social drama theory. In this case, the social drama serves the purpose of alleviating the routine boredom of police work in a small town. In short, interpretive ethnographers are looking for the meaning of cultural practices—what is the meaning of tough talk; what is the meaning of shooting pigeons?

Critical and Radical Feminist's Linguistic Turn

Although numerous political differences exist between critical scholars and radical, socialist, or Marxist feminist scholars, their views on communication are somewhat similar. Communication and language are never neutral. Communication can be oppressive and act as a means of silencing different groups of people. However, communication also carries with it the possibilities for emancipation.

Earlier, I suggested that Paul E. Willis' (1977) ethnography of working-class lads is an excellent example of critical ethnography. However, Angela McRobbie (1981) also clearly points out that Willis' ethnography marginalizes women. Nevertheless, both radical feminist ethnography and critical ethnography seek to uncover oppressive practices (see Burawoy et al., 1991 for other examples).

A unique example of uncovering sexist language and oppressive practices is found in the work of Mary Daly (1973). Using ethnographic methods (reviewing historical documents and hermeneutics), Daly exposes the patriarchal construction of Christian cultural institutions (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church), especially through myths (e.g., stories of Adam and Eve, the Virgin Mary). Furthermore, Daly deconstructs and plays with language in order to offer a new liberated set of meanings for old terminology (e.g., crones and hags as positive). Thus, Daly critiques culture, exposes oppression, highlights the political nature of language, and offers forms of resistance. In short, she provides a unique ethnographic expression.

The Postmodern Linguistic Turn

Postmodernists diverged from these three schools of thought (i.e., interpretive, critical, and radical feminist) in several ways. They criticized interpretivists for not being political enough; they rarely mentioned contributions by critical scholars (for an exception see Marcus, 1986); and, they blatantly ignored feminist contributions (see Clifford, 1986). Separating themselves from these schools of thought went beyond neglecting or criticizing others. Postmodernists also set their own agenda. First, postmodern ethnographers positioned language, discourse, text, or symbol systems in a privileged position beyond that of previous schools of ethnography. Discourse is not only a means to understand culture but is culture itself. Second, they argued that past ethnographies were couched in colonial constructions thus presenting Westernized views of the Other. Third, they suggested that more than one truth could be garnered from an ethnography and that a single interpretation taken to be Truth merely contributed to the hegemonic order. Thus, the political nature of ethnography, according to post-

modernists, resurfaced with a new vengeance and new perspective. Marcus for instance, writes: “ethnographers of an interpretive bent—more interested in problems of cultural meaning than in social action—have not generally represented the ways in which closely observed cultural worlds are embedded in larger, more impersonal systems” (pp. 165–166). However, this can be debated.

Jerry Moore (1997) argues that politics was always embedded in ethnographies and that Boas for one recognized and argued openly these implications. In short, the postmodern claim to exposing the political nature of ethnography is not new. Claims to new ethnographic genres may also be stretching the truth/Truth a bit since all of the varied forms existed prior to postmodernism. They quite simply had not been labeled under a coherent rubric.

In spite of these oversights, postmodernists can be credited with offering a new and valuable conceptualization of culture:

If “culture” is not an object to be described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitively interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal, and emergent. Representation and explanation—both by insiders and outsiders—is implicated in this emergence. (Clifford, 1986, p. 19)

James Clifford and George Marcus (1986) provide a notable series of essays that pointedly criticize the tenets of modernist ethnography including the interpretivist mode. Clifford Geertz’ work is challenged for establishing an artificial authority and a representation that tells no lies, but does not tell the whole truth (Crapanzano, 1986). Additional criticism includes Clifford’s meta-communicative critique of ethnography. In his critique, Clifford (1986) uses Victor Turner’s notion of social drama to explain modernist ethnography, and although it is interesting, one is hard pressed to understand how postmodern ethnography will not be yet another chapter in the social dramas of ethnography. Stephan A. Tyler’s (1986) eloquent essay moves beyond critique of the modernist enterprise and attempts to define postmodern ethnography:

A postmodern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of common sense reality, and thus provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect. (p. 125)

The therapeutic effect is reminiscent of interpersonal ethnography as suggested by Gregory Bateson and at a more macro-level links with feminist and critical calls for consciousness raising. But extends beyond either of these schools of thought by arguing that realities are constructed of fragments and the ethnographer is complicit in writing the culture into what it is, so to speak.

Postmodern ethnography has both strengths and weaknesses, like any other ethnographic model. The main weakness of postmodern ethnography is that its theoretical foundation is plagued with paradoxes. For example, although the postmodern school of thought encourages the elimination of bifurcations (see e.g., Derrida's work), they are firmly grounded in bifurcations. As J. D. Moore (1997) points out "one attempt to distinguish modernism and postmodernism was a schematic list of thirty-two paired opposites describing *modernism* and *post-modernism* respectively: purpose/play, design/chance, hierarchy/anarchy, selection/combination, and so on (Hassan, 1985 as cited in Moore, 1997, p. 261). A second paradox that confronts postmodernism and in turn postmodern ethnographies is the issue of truth/Truth. Although postmodernists argue against one *Truth* (Foucault, 1972, 1973, 1976/1990) their firm grounding as a school of thought has become legitimized as *The Answer* to modernist frailties. The only postmodernist to actually confront postmodernism with its own inflated sense of self-importance is Jean Baudrillard (1977/1987). Third, they cannot help but to create a limited picture of cultural phenomenon based upon their own sense of truth as they select out the fragments of discourse meant to represent, if not create, their version of the world. Thus, the ethnographer maintains cultural control. Fourth, the development of postmodern concerns with oppression, hegemony, and resistance rest primarily on the shoulders of European males (e.g., Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Baudrillard). Thus, their cultural analyses are still guided by European philosophy. Finally, a number of postmodern ethnographies are still very much couched in modernist views of who and what constitutes ethnographic inquisition. James Fernandez's work in Gabon, "a Francophone nation on the Atlantic coast of Africa," has been highly praised for capturing the discursive focus of postmodern ethnography (Moore, 1997, p. 263). He studies the tropes, especially metaphors, of the Fang culture. True to a postmodern stance he studies how metaphors create a way of being in the world. But one cannot help but note that his subjects are Africans who have relentlessly been viewed as "Other."

An example of postmodern feminist ethnography by Margery Wolf (1992) also uses the life story of the Other (in this case a woman from China). Wolf tells the woman's story through different tales including fiction, field notes, and scholarly commentary. Nevertheless, it is Wolf who is speaking on behalf of the woman. As such, Wolf notes that Edward Said (1978) pointed out that ethnography may be an act of colonial dominance. Yet, she suggests that Said was referring to ethnographies that were used blatantly to control the colonized and that she hopes her work addresses the more subtle forms of domination that all women have faced. Thus, postmodernists are not blind to these criticisms.

Additionally, the definition of the Other has taken a turn with the help of postmodernism. Postmodernists readily complicate the concept of other. They suggest that the Other is not simple and cannot be defined in opposition to one dominant group. Instead, the Other is seen as holding multiple subject positions which shift and slip into each Other (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Although post-

modernists are generally credited with refining the concept of multiple subject positions, its origin might be traced to the classic and eloquent speech, “Ain’t I A Woman” by Sojourner Truth, who points out that she is both a woman and a person of African descent who was once a slave. Gender, race, and class collide in a moment that evidences both discursive and materialist evidence of the plurality of subject positions for a colonized individual.

The Postcolonial Turn

With the advent of postmodernism another school of thought—post-colonialism—which had been lying dormant for some years, emerged with renewed strength. Postcolonialism, as a field of study, is not easily defined. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (1995) suggest the “field itself has become so heterogeneous that no collection of readings could encompass every theoretical position now giving itself the name *postcolonial/post-colonial*” (p. xv). Debates continue as to whether postcolonialism/postcolonialism should be understood as “an amorphous set of discursive practices, akin to postmodernism” or to a more “*historically* located set of strategies,” (p. xv). Nevertheless, we know that “postcolonial theory has existed for a long time before that particular name was given to it” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 1995, p. 1) and that it necessarily speaks of “migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and response to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 1995, p. 2).

Second, the conceptualization of postcolonial thinking is not limited to literature and literary criticism. There are a wide variety of issues and genres, respectively: issues of migration, identity, diaspora, representation, hegemony, resistance, and artificial decolonization; as well as genres such as the novel, revisionist history, poetry, dialogue, short story, cultural reclamation, and performance. Writing about the “effects,” the “responses,” or the “process” of colonization are all part of the postcolonial dialogue (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 1995, p. 3).

Third, postcolonialism is political. It challenges the master discourses of European imperialism. Postcolonial writings span diverse cultures, races, and gender; yet, sustain a connection through a shared sense of history and contemporary struggle to expose the ravages of colonization as they existed in the past and continue today. Challenging master discourses means to uncover the artificial bifurcations of the world, the presumed inferiority of the Other, the violently assumed privileged position of European culture and the continuing discursive practices that sustain the world order in an unquestioned way (Said, 1993). Ethnography is founded on one such master discourse. It is the study of the Other.

Subsequently, one might give pause to consider whether the concept *postcolonial ethnography* should be considered an oxymoron. Postcolonial theory, challenges the very existence of ethnography as an imperial endeavor. Yet, some postcolonialists have found a way to write ethnography in such a way as to *unveil* the complexities of colonization (Vivian, 1999) or to rewrite ethnographic practices to suit the cultural ways of the colonized (see González, 2000) or portray self in a self-reflective manner that captures the complexities of both the colonized culture and the practices of imperialism (Hall, 1985, 1995/2001; Lamming, 1960/1995, 1991/2001; Uchendu, 1973; also for edited collections see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 1995; Castle, 2001). Ethnography is taking a turn from expressing a one-sided view of the Other to expressing its own possibilities as a language of resistance and emancipation.

However, postcolonial studies, like postmodern studies, are entrenched in what may be inescapable ironies. For the most part, postcolonial writers are colonized people who have been well-trained in the educational system of the colonizer. As I have written elsewhere, colonization has produced *altered natives* or *alter-natives* by intermarriage, rape, colonial education, and/or other forms of assimilation (see Clair, 1997). The alter-natives may not be able to speak for anyone other than themselves. On the other hand, I have suggested that these alter-natives might provide *alternatives* to previous discourses about the Other. Nevertheless, being an alter-native presents paradoxes for the postcolonial scholar. As George Lamming (1960/1995, 1991/2001) pointed out, he sought acceptance as a novelist among the European, and especially English critics; thus, still buying into British elitism. Or they may be directing much of their discourse to an elite academic audience (as in the writings of Hall, 1996; Spivack, 1988/1995—see e.g., criticisms by Parry, 1987/1995).

Postcolonial ethnographers must grapple with the idea that novel forms of expression may be required to portray the past, the present, and the future of culture. From James Joyce to George Lamme, the artists' voice may be the most freeing from the academically based paradoxes. Hear the voice of Bob Marley and then ask, what is the role of academic intervention?

Freeing one's aesthetic sensibilities may help ethnographers to create "untold, unheard, unseen, and heretofore unimagined possibilities" (Clair, 1998, p. 186). In order to do this, I have suggested that we seek out aesthetic ways of being and give up restraints intended to limit ethnography; and instead, recognize and relish its complexities, subtleties, and ironies. After all, ethnography is not simply the methodological expression of anthropological field trips; it is the expression of history, politics, culture, and the essence of being. Ethnography necessarily implicates the ethnographer in the creation of an expression of who and what a culture is all about (Clair, 1998). It concomitantly describes the ethnographer as s/he describes the Other. Contemporary aesthetic ethnographers highlight these points (e.g., Clair, 1998).

Many traditional anthropologists seemed unaware of their own assumptions and biases. Contemporary scholars are attempting to unveil not only the biases of the past, but also add reflexive interpretations that speak to their own cultural assumptions and prejudices. Today, several forms of alternative ethnography exist. The following chapters, found in part one of this book, detail a variety of ethnographic perspectives. They include feminist, critical, interpretive, postmodern, postcolonial, and aesthetic perspectives. In part two, these perspectives, are elaborated further through philosophical discussion and exemplars from different schools of thought.³

Notes

1. It is important to note that:

I set off the word “western” in quotes because it is another example of linguistic limitations that have been driven by political, imperialist and patriarchal agendas. This language functions to split the world in half—eastern from western. It then labels western as white European so that every time someone invokes western traditions as a description, it further erases Native Americans. (Clair, 1998, p. 216)

And these are not the only cultures that are affected by this artificial bifurcation. For example, this discourse marginalizes African Americans because, they have a distinct cultural heritage that is neither eastern nor western per se and yet contains elements of both. It leaves the cultural contribution of South American cultures in question. Spanish, Hispanic, Latino, Mexican identities are placed in a precarious position. There is no clear place for the Irish who have suffered the throes of colonization for generations. Geopoliticizing under the term “western” further erases marginalized groups like people who are bi-homo or a-sexuals as British rule mandated sexual laws. Furthermore, American feminists trace their oppression to colonial rule. Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued that the *civil death* of American women in the mid-1800s was “a throwback to British Colonial days” (Banner, 1986, p. 91). Thus, it would seem that even women of “western” origin have been constrained by colonization. Finally, I do not intend to imply that the second wave of colonization was any more turbulent than the first wave of colonization. Slavery, torture, diaspora, paterarchy and a host of other ills existed during the first wave of colonization also, but it is simply beyond the scope of this chapter to detail that history.

2. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life a Slave Girl* (1861; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press), is one example of the writings of the colonized appearing in print long before the acceptance of the term postcolonial.

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