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INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Theory and Method

During my fieldwork in Ghana, West Africa, I conducted in-depth interviews with Ghanaian human rights activists on their interventions upon a cultural practice, they called *Trokosi*. These local activists deemed the Trokosi practice abusive and life threatening to Ghanaian women. The Trokosi practice was an ancient religious tradition that took place in a specific region of the country. During my fieldwork, there were many Ghanaians who never heard of the practice and were completely unaware that such a cultural tradition existed. While I was conducting fieldwork, activists believed the Trokosi practice to be enslavement where young women and girls were sent to a shrine to serve as “wives” for the shrine priests in reparation or atonement for a crime committed by a family member or member of the community to which she belongs. At that time, the tradition taught that if a female was not sent to the shrine then tragedy will befall her family and community. Many of the activists were from the region and asserted the practice placed young women in bondage and servitude where they were denied an education, condemned to hard labor, and commanded to engage in sexual relations with the priest. However, there were traditionalists from the region who refuted the claim the practice was abusive and harmful. They argued the young girls and women were adopted by the shrine to protect them from a family or community who committed a crime or cultural transgression. They also denied that priests were forced upon them, instead they claimed the girls are honored and revered. The traditionalists defended the practice and asserted the proper name was Troxovi¹ where the young women were free to go to school as they were also educated in the shrines to the history and ways of the tradition. The debate between the activists who worked to stop the practice as maltreatment and enslavement against the traditionalists who defended the practice as honoring and protecting young women and their freedom was an intensely complicated and deeply impassioned debate. The focus of my fieldwork was on indigenous human rights activism and how local activists transformed, with great courage and wisdom, their own culture and society against the harmful forces of both local and global forces. The focus also examined how Trokosi/Troxovi was practiced differently relative to freedom on one hand and bondage on the other depending on the level of poverty and the economic factors of mobility, literacy, food, water, labor, and health as well as forms of leisure, play, poetics, habits, narration, and aesthetics. Over time, it was clear to me that the Trokosi/Troxovi villages throughout the region were not all the same in their treatment of girls and women

because they were variously contingent on the dynamics of these economic, social, and cultural factors.

It was my second year of living in Ghana when one of the activists, who became my friend and where a mutual trust had formed, asked if I would go with him on this particular day to one of the Trokosi villages. He said a journalist from California had come to Ghana to write a story on the Trokosi practice, and he thought I could provide an added perspective as well as share insights from my research for her article. I agreed. When I arrived to meet her, she became very upset: "This is a very delicate situation, and you should NOT be here! I have come all this way, and I do not want you to disrupt or intrude! This is my story!" It seemed as though she was about to implode. I could see that my friend was stunned by her words and not sure how to respond to her outrage. I immediately said, "Do not worry, I will not come with you. Have a safe journey home." My friend was about to speak. I took his hand and with an assuring look told him it was best for me not to go. I thought to myself it was better for her to write the story without the chance of her becoming more angry or resentful of my presence; anyway, she refused to allow me into the car. At that point, I did not want to risk explaining myself and the tension rising even more. However, when they drove off I thought, "I should have explained to her who I was and that I am a serious researcher, a university professor! I have been living in Ghana for two years! I know more about the Trokosi practice than she will ever know in an afternoon! I am not parachuting into the country to get a newspaper scoop! I am here for the long haul! I am committed to this work! Why did I not say these things to her and speak up for myself? Why did I prevent my friend from speaking and clarifying who I was and why I was there? Why did I feel so foolish at that moment as I saw them drive away?" This incident happened over 15 years ago, and this is the first time I have written about it or shared it in public. I share it now because I believe there are some important lessons to be learned and because I think it will be helpful to you. Lesson One: Fieldwork is full of unwanted surprises, and despite your preparation, dedication, knowledge, and expertise, there will be moments when you will be misunderstood, embarrassed, dismissed, and even disrespected. But I learned in those moments to take a breath; to harness my ego so I won't topple over into a reactive and regretful mess; to invite calm to enter for the sake of balance, confidence, and clear thinking; to determine who or what must be served, preserved, or evaluated in this moment; to choose what new thing, insight, or feeling can be used for good purposes and taken away; to know that the wise reflections of tomorrow will come and one day this moment could be a story. Lesson Two: Fieldwork is full of unexpected opportunities for generosity. You will meet people you don't like, people you adore, others you will never want to forget, and a few you wish you could. Fieldwork, above all, is relational. Your work is inextricable to your relationships in the field: Without relationships there is no ethnography. Generosity comes from the Latin word *generositas* or *generosus* meaning to be "magnanimous." I have learned that to be magnanimous requires action and choice that takes the form of generous acts that can flow naturally with ease and great

pleasure, but at other times is impossibly difficult, foolish, and simply unproductive. Fieldwork has taught me that generosity is both necessary and strategic and that it takes on forms that are both obvious and disguised. Generosity in action is not only choosing to give, from your own material resources, when you determine a genuine need, a more fulfilling use, or a matter of survival, but generosity is to listen genuinely with an open heart and deep attention, even when feeling unease and disapproval of the words spoken. I have learned that it is this act of generous listening that will change you, unlock wisdom, and deepen curiosity, or, by contrast, it will embolden a confidence, awareness, and strategy of when, where, and how to interrupt, intervene, and effectively contest what was said and its consequences. Lesson Three: I learned from the journalist incident that you do not always need to defend or prove yourself, or your “authority,” in the field. Sometimes it is not about you or your feelings, but it is about the mission, the purpose of the work, or the “greater good.” If something goes unsaid that you feel should be said or an incorrect assumption that, for the sake of truthfulness, needs to be corrected, you can always set the record straight through your writing, teaching, performances, or activism. Vindication feels less important than the self-fulfillment of sharing the story and communicating the importance of your purpose or the greater mission.

We should not choose between critical theory and ethnography. Instead, we see that researchers are cutting new paths to reinscribing critique in ethnography.

—George Noblit, Susana Y. Flores, and Enrique G. Murillo, Jr.

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.

—Zora Neale Hurston

DEFINING TERMS: WHAT IS THE CRITICAL IN CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY?

Critical ethnography adheres to a cross sections of methods. Ethnography is generally defined by its aim to engage, interpret, and record the social meanings, values, structures, and embodiments within a particular domain, setting, or field of human interaction. Because the central approach of the researcher or ethnographer is to spend time in the field, to participate in daily life, and to develop trust and close communication with members and interlocutors of a social world, it follows that the *critical* ethnographer is particularly concerned with how human actions and experiences are generated by these social worlds and, in turn, how these social worlds are generated by them. The question becomes: Must the researcher spend time in the field in order for the work to be considered ethnography? For some, ethnography is equivalent to qualitative research, not necessarily fieldwork. The disposition here is that if you are a qualitative

researcher—conducting in-depth interviews and conversational meetings with interlocutors—your work is ethnographic. You are not spending sustained amounts of time in a specific location or environment to observe and participate in what others do across that designated space. For others, ethnography is a form of qualitative research that is constituted by field research—to *do* ethnography one must *do* fieldwork. In this instance, ethnographers are field researchers who enter and spend time within the groundwork of day-to-day, embodied actions, of a field site. The researcher is a participant observer or a performative witness within a sustained, body to body, environment. Whether you are taking up one or both, ethnography as *qualitative research* and/or ethnography as *field research*, there are fundamental principles they both share: First, methods are multidisciplinary yet distinctive, open-ended yet precise, contingent yet resilient. Second, methods are deeply grounded in the substance of critical theory, the wide-ranging standpoints of philosophical argument, and the complexity of intersectional experience. Third, this means that ethnography becomes more than just a set of procedural rules for collecting data. The point is that data collection is not aligned with surveys, statistics, prescribed categories and a golden rule of objectivity. Qualitative researchers and field researchers understand their work is more than a method of data collection, because the inter-animating symbols, actions, values, embodiments, meanings, power hierarchies, spontaneous moments of life in the field, and so forth, exceed categories.

What Is Distinctive About Critical Ethnography?

What is distinctive about critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain. By “ethical responsibility,” I mean a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on principles of human freedom and well-being and, hence, a compassion for the suffering of living beings. The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they *could* be for specific interlocutors; as a result, the researcher feels an ethical obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity. The critical ethnographer also takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control. Therefore, the critical ethnographer resists domestication and moves from “what is” to “what could be” (Carspecken, 1996; Denzin, 2001; Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004; Thomas, 1993). Because the critical ethnographer is committed to the art and craft of fieldwork, empirical methodologies become the foundation for inquiry, and it is here “on the ground” of Others that the researcher encounters social conditions that become the point of departure for research (Thomas, 1993). We now begin to probe other possibilities that will challenge institutions, regimes of knowledge, and social practices that limit choices, constrain meaning, and denigrate identities and communities.

KEY POINTS FROM MICHEL FOUCAULT ON THE ACT OF “CRITIQUE”

- Critique is to deconstruct and reinvent those epistemological certainties that foreclose alternative possibilities for ordering and reordering authoritative regimes of truth.
- Critique is to discern and unveil the relationship between mechanisms of coercion and what constitutes knowledge.
- Critique is to interrogate the politics of truth that pertain to those relations of power/knowledge that determine in advance what will and will not count as truth.
- Critique is the recognition that the will to be governed is also “the will not to be governed like this—in this way—by these people at this point. . . . It is not a refusal of governmentality or to claim anarchy,” but it is the will to reenvision new and alternative ways to be governed.
- Critique occurs when a subject gives itself the right to question truth as truth operates through power and to question power as it operates through truth.
- Critique is to expose and explicate the relational processes of governmentalization and subjugation to reveal the possibility of transgressing one’s limits and transforming oneself toward desubjugation, i.e., toward becoming a subject.
- Critique is to care for the self as a subject that is in formation and to excavate and deconstruct those limits and meanings that circumscribe your subjecthood in advance of your coming into being.
- Critique is the courage to break open “the limits of what I might become and the limits of what I might risk knowing.”
- Critique is to labor for an emergent liberation where the limits of what one can be are cracked open . . . when desubjugation of the subject confronts and deconstructs the politics of truth/knowledge regimes.

What does it mean for the critical ethnographer to “resist domestication”? It means that she will use the resources, skills, and privileges available to her to make accessible—to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of—the voices and experiences of interlocutors whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach. This means the critical ethnographer aims to contribute to life sustaining knowledges and discourses of restorative justice. The often-quoted phrase “knowledge is power” reflects how narrow perception, limited modes of understanding, and uncritical thinking diminish the capacity to envision alternative life possibilities.

While critical ethnography must take up the charge of life-sustaining knowledges and restorative justice, it must also take up the charge of positionality. The question becomes, “How do we begin to discuss our positionality as ethnographers and as those who represent Others?”

Michelle Fine (1994) outlines three positions in qualitative research (p. 17):

1. The *ventriloquist* stance that merely “transmits” information in an effort toward neutrality and is absent of a political or rhetorical stance. The position of the ethnographer aims to be invisible, that is, the “self” strives to be nonexistent in the text.
2. The positionality of *voices* is where the interlocutors themselves are the focus, and their voices carry forward indigenous meanings and experiences that are in opposition to dominant discourses and practices. The position of the ethnographer is vaguely present but not addressed.
3. The *activism* stance in which the ethnographer takes a clear position in intervening on hegemonic practices and serves as an advocate in exposing the material effects of marginalized locations while offering alternatives.

Fine’s outline is similar to the three positions of social inquiry set forth by Jürgen Habermas (1971) when he discusses the (a) natural science model of empirical analysis, in which the social world can be measured, predicted, and tested as life phenomena in the natural sciences through the invisible reportage of the researcher; (b) historical and interpretive model, in which social phenomena are described and their meanings and functions further elaborated through the balanced commentary and philosophical descriptions of the researcher; and the (c) critical theory model, in which social life is represented and analyzed for the political purpose of overcoming social oppression, particularly forms that reflect advanced capitalism through the overt polemics of the researcher (see also Davis, 1999, p. 61).

In the examples just listed, various positions of social science and qualitative researchers are *described*; however, Noblit et al. (2004) take positionality a step further in what they refer to as *postcritical ethnography*. They not only describe positionality but also comprehensively critique it relative to traditional notions of critical ethnography. Noblit et al. state that much of critical ethnography has been criticized for its focus on social change but lack of focus on the researchers own *positionality*: “Critical ethnographers must explicitly consider how their own acts of studying and representing people and situations are acts of domination even as critical ethnographers reveal the same in what they study” (p. 3).

Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our interlocutors. A concern for positionality is sometimes understood as “reflexive ethnography”: It is a “turning back” on ourselves (Davis, 1999). When we turn back, we are accountable

for our own research paradigms, our own positions of authority, and our own moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation. We begin to ask ourselves, “What are we going to do with the research, and who ultimately will benefit? Who gives us the authority to make claims about where we have been? How will our work make a difference in people’s lives?” But we might also begin to ask another kind of question, “What difference *does* it make when the ethnographer himself comes from a history of colonization and disenfranchisement?” Enrique G. Murillo Jr. describes these identities in his revisioning of the term *mojado*:

Mojado ethnography is how I have chosen to describe one node along my journey. Mojado (wetback) refers to Mexicans and other Latinos who cross the nation-state territorial border into the United States, and are socially, politically, economically (as well as legally) constructed as “illegal entrants,” and “newcomers.” . . . Mojado symbolizes the distrust and dislike experienced in gringolandia, as la raza odiada, “those damn Mexicans,” extranjeros, which literally means “outsiders.” . . . My experience as an educational ethnographer, to date, can sometimes be described as traveling those blurred boundaries when Other becomes researcher, narrated becomes narrator, translated becomes translator, native becomes anthropologist, and how one emergent and intermittent identity continuously informs the other. (Noblitt et al., 2004, p. 166)

Murillo’s positionality moves against the objective, neutral observer. Fieldwork research has a very long and early history of scientific empiricism and concern with systematic analysis that is testable, verifiable, and objective without the distraction or impairment of subjectivity, ideology, or emotion. What many early researchers, particularly during the colonial and modern period, did not recognize was that their stalwart “objectivity” was already subjective in the value-laden classification, meanings, and worldviews they employed and superimposed upon peoples who were different from them. The current emphasis on reflexive ethnography or postcritical ethnography and its critique of objectivity are in sharp contrast to the philosophy of a value-neutral fieldwork methodology that favors the analytic evaluation of the natural science model. But critical ethnography—or what some have called the “new ethnography” (Goodall, 2000)—must not only critique the notion of objectivity, but must also critique the notion of subjectivity as well. More and more ethnographers are heralding the unavoidable and complex factor of subjective inquiry as they simultaneously examine its position. Moreover, the current thinking is not that ethnographers can simply say or do anything they think or feel and pass it off as fact, but rather that they make sure we do not say “is” when we mean “ought”—or as Thomas (1993) writes, “We are simply forbidden to submit value judgments in place of facts or to leap to ‘ought’ conclusions without a demonstrable cogent theoretical and empirical linkage” (p. 22).

In various dimensions, this was done under the traditional banner of objectivity, when cultures and people were reinvented and redefined to fit inside the biased classifications and philosophical systems of the objective researcher. However, we are now more and more critical of the subjective researcher and how that subjectivity reflects upon its own power position, choices, and effects. This “new” or postcritical ethnography is the move to contextualize our own positionality, thereby making it accessible, transparent, and vulnerable to judgment and evaluation. In this way, we take ethical responsibility for our own subjectivity and political perspective, resisting the trap of gratuitous self-centeredness or of presenting an interpretation as though it has no “self,” as though it is not accountable for its consequences and effects. Doing fieldwork is a personal experience. Our intuition, senses, and emotions—or what Wallace Bacon (1979) collectively refers to as “felt-sensing”—are powerfully woven into and inseparable from the process. We are inviting an ethics of accountability by taking the chance of being proven wrong (Thomas, 1993).

In Mab Segrest’s important book, *Born to Belonging: Writings on Spirit and Justice* (2002), she describes how “we are all born to belonging.” This means that belonging precedes being (Bell, 1999; Probyn, 1996; Rowe, 2005; Segrest, 2002). The various relations and locations of where and how we belong with and to others define our being, i.e., how we think, feel, and see the world around us as well as the orientation of our bodies, gestures, and musculature. This is what the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu calls habitus, i.e., characterized by a set of acquired sensibilities, dispositions, schemata, and tastes that are not based on biological instinct but are culturally learned modes of being, thinking, valuing, and behaving that derive from deeply positioned home-place worlds that we inhabit with others. If it is true that none of us is purely an individual but a subject in continual formation with others, then “there is no subject prior to infinitely shifting and contingent relations of belonging” (Rowe, 2005, p.17). Our position as ethnographers is to understand that we bring our belongings into the field with us, not only the many others who constitute our being but how we belong to what we know, how our epistemologies are yet another site of our belonging with and for others. As Aimee Carrillo Rowe reminds us,

We are always inseparable from the theory we create. And the theory we create allows us to live in new and more just ways. Our homework is to examine these connections—between self and community, between community and theory, between theory and justice. (2005, p. 17)

She goes on to state that “doing our homework is about making the familiar strange, or revisiting home to unearth what is at stake in its making. My argument is that who we love is political” (2005, p. 17).

DIALOGUE: VIRTUES AND CHALLENGES

As we recognize the vital importance of illuminating the researcher's positionality, we also understand that critical ethnography requires a deep and abiding dialogue with others as never before. This means that our attention to ethnographic positionality still must remain grounded in the empirical world of others. In fact, it is this concern for others that demands we attend seriously to our position as researchers. Ethnographic positionality is not identical to subjectivity. Subjectivity is certainly within the domain of positionality, but positionality requires that we direct our attention beyond our individual or *subjective* selves. Instead, we attend to how our subjectivity *in relation to others* informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of others. We are not simply interlocutors, but we are interlocutors in dialogue with others. We understand that our subjectivity is an inherent part of research, but in critical ethnography it is not my *exclusive* experience—that is autobiography, travel writing, or memoir (or what some people call *autoethnography*). I contend that *critical* ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others, one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in others' worlds.

Dialogue and Dilemmas

In Gary Fine's (1993) essay, he lists the challenges ethnographers face in meeting three overarching ethical conventions of fieldwork. He describes them as "classic virtue," "technical skills," and "the ethnographic self." He provides counterexamples for each of these ideals that I will discuss in this section. For classic virtue, the notions of (a) "the kindly ethnographer," (b) "the friendly ethnographer," and (c) "the honest ethnographer" are tested by certain concrete situations. First, you strive to be *kind*, but your kindness is not always realized or appreciated. You may unintentionally insult those you meet or may end up being thought of as a "fink" or a traitor. Second, you are *friendly* and value friendliness as a virtue, but there are people you meet that you genuinely dislike. Third, you try to be *honest* as you propose your study and describe your intentions, but you do not always know with certainty or cannot say with complete honesty what the details or discoveries will be for your project until you are actually in the process of completing it. In each case, classic virtues are questioned; however, ethics demands that although you may not like some of the people that you meet, although your intentions may be questioned and misunderstood, and although you cannot always with complete honesty represent your project before it has begun, you must remind yourself that it is not a perfect world, and working with human interlocutors will always be a complicated and contradictory enterprise; therefore, you continue to strive for the ideals of kindness, friendship, and honesty while anticipating the challenges.

For technical skills, Fine (1993) argues that the aspirations of (a) “the precise ethnographer,” (b) “the observant ethnographer,” and (c) “the unobtrusive ethnographer” become difficult in the following situations. First, you understand that possessing technical skills as an ethnographer often suggests that one must be as *precise* as possible in interpreting the lives of others; however, precision falters when we realize that all of our interpretations are filtered by our own subjectivity and interpretive paradigms, as well as by our own idiosyncratic writing styles. Sometimes, ethnographers have more in common with playwrights than with scientists. Second, we understand that one of the cornerstones of ethnography is the ability to be a keen *observer*; however, we can never grasp or present the whole picture (Fine, 1993). There is always something that will be left out, and there will always be elements of observation that are vitally important to one ethnographer’s sensibilities and less important to another’s. Third, in most of the literature on qualitative research methods, one of the most important attributes is for the ethnographer to be as *unobtrusive* as possible in order not to disturb the natural surroundings of the site or to divert attention away from the innate actions within the field toward actions that are influenced by the “approval” or “disapproval” of the researcher. Try as we must, our presence does make a difference; sometimes, it can be of little importance, and at other times, it may drastically affect the fieldwork site.

Technical skills are a part of the methodological process, but they are also an ethical concern, because precision, observation, and ethnographic presence necessarily carry with them moral judgments, interpretive implications, and the responsibility of representation. As we aspire to fine-tune our technical skills, we will not perfect them, because we are not perfect beings, but we strive to do the very best we can.

The final category, the ethnographic self, focuses on the positionality of the ethnographer and when the aspirations to be (a) “the candid ethnographer,” (b) “the chaste ethnographer,” (c) “the fair ethnographer,” and (d) “the literary ethnographer” become shaken. First, you make every attempt to be forthright and *candid* about all that you see, hear, and experience in the field; however, you may need to decipher what must be stated from what need not be stated. There will be times when you make mistakes; when you feel foolish, fearful, or awkward; and when fieldwork encounters are threatening, embarrassing, or intimidating. Candor is desired, but it has limits. It is important to reflect upon the consequences of candor. With gratuitous candor that does not benefit anyone, and where there are no real lessons learned, frankness can read like crass indulgence or shallow sensationalism. You might ask yourself what purpose candor serves. Am I putting myself in jeopardy for the sake of a candor that rubs against personal and professional respect, intimacy, and vulnerability? How does my need for candor affect and represent Others?

Second, chastity is another virtue in the field; although there have been particular accounts where the researcher reports moments of intimacy, they are rare and often denounced. Intimacy, desire, and sexual encounters in the field do happen, but, again, one must consider the consequences in terms of power relations, cultural insensitivity, safety, and the potential for emotional harm. You must be ever so self-reflexive and

contemplate your intentions and the possible effects of making public those private encounters and personal moments in the field. Sometimes the personal and the private are profoundly important and provide the greatest impact for the reader in understanding larger, more universal realities and implications. The question becomes, Why should we care about private matters? Where do they lead us?

Third, if we can attribute certain rules to ethnography, the attribute of *fairness* would be one of them. We are reminded as qualitative researchers again and again of the importance of being fair. Fine (1993) states,

What does it mean to be fair? Is fairness possible? The label “fair” can consist of two alternative meanings: that of objectivity or that of balance. Each is problematic, and each is far from universal in qualitative research narratives. Some suggest that there should not even be goals. Qualitative researchers need not be warned about the difficulty, if not impossibility, of pretending objectivity. Objectivity is an illusion—an illusion snuggled in the comforting blanket of positivism—that the world is ultimately knowable and secure. Alas, the world is always known from the perspective, even though we might agree that often perspectives do not vary dramatically. . . . Few ethnographers accept a single objective reality. (p. 286)

Fourth, the ethnographic self is conventionally known and presented through writing; therefore, all of us who present our work in the form of writing become the literary ethnographer. Writing is a domain in qualitative research and ethnography that has become a topic of much deliberation about the descriptions it offers (e.g., poetic, impressionist, performative, interpretive). The challenges and demands of writing will be taken up in more detail in the next section; however, Fine’s (1993) comments are worth mentioning as an initial consideration of how some ethnographers may be more preoccupied with the writing craft; that is, they are conscious of writing styles and devices to the point that the encounters and actualities of the ethnography become overshadowed by language use, metaphors, and poetic devices. Fine suggests that “the writing can hide lack of evidence. . . . The writing carries too much meaning, and inevitably meaning gets shuffled and is imprecise” (pp. 288–289).

The ethical implications related to the ethnographic self in terms of candor, chastity, fairness, and writing are based upon the fact that it is the ethnographer who becomes both the transmitter and the interlocutor for a world that is largely shaped by his or her positionality. Our candor, chastity, fairness, and writing are always contingent on the unique situation; however, these elements must always be aligned with basic codes of ethics that are part of self-reflexive and conscious deliberations.

Conceptual Errors

Adding to the challenges offered by Gary Alan Fine, the feminist critic Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich (1986) outlines four overriding perceptions or conceptual errors

that have dominated Western epistemology relative to its erasure of difference and the Other. Minnich's analysis will assist the critical ethnographer in unveiling and recognizing certain taken-for-granted practices, particularly in the academy, that cut against the grain of an ethics of ethnography as it relates to notions of Otherness. For the purpose of parity and justice, Minnich's work brings us to a deeper recognition of the relationship between knowledge, power, dominance, and the Other.

The first conceptual error that Minnich (1986) describes is *faulty generalization*. This is where differences and distinctions become ignored and discounted. In faulty generalization, one type or category of human being represents all others. According to Minnich, faulty generalizations take for granted or naturalize one kind of human being as the universal human while claiming that this singular category represents everyone else.

A common example of faulty generalization is the meaning and use of *man* and *mankind* as a universal signifier for everyone. In many forms of usage, these terms literally and intentionally refer to males at the exclusion of all other human beings (i.e., women and children). This is obviously a faulty generalization in reasoning, intent, and usage. However, these terms, when *intended* to include *all* human beings, remain an inherited faulty generalization that fails to critically disrupt the historical reasoning and intent of its own traditional exclusion.

The second conceptual error is *circularity*. This is where value judgments and ideas of rationality are derived from one particular tradition and then used to prove why other traditions or other concepts of rationality are unreasonable or unworthy. Circularity does not account for the fact that value and reasoning from any one individual, cultural tradition, or intellectual perspective is partial, idiosyncratic, and constructed. Minnich (1986) describes it this way: "In all fields, we find somewhere the intellectual equivalent of redheads defining red hair as a necessary possession of humans, and then using their definition to prove that it is true that only redheads are properly human" (p. 12).

An example of circularity is the proclamation by one religious doctrine that it in and of itself is the one and only doctrine that holds the absolute Truth. In other words, religions A, B, and C have different doctrines, and within each different doctrine they all claim to represent the absolute Truth while claiming the others false. This is circular thinking, because it is equivalent to making the claim that only C is a good religion because C makes the claim that it is the only good religion.

The third conceptual error is *peculiar theoretical constructs and inadequate paradigms*. This is where "ideal" models or illustrations suggest universal applicability without explicitly stating that they do. In other words, "metaphors, normative notions that make no claim to be generalizations from any real sample" are employed in such a manner that they stand in as a general truth (Minnich, 1986, p. 17). Minnich retells a classic example to make this point:

The story of the blind people and the elephant is a Jain story: the elephant that felt to one like a rope; to one like a tree trunk; to one like a barrel; to one

like a fan; to one like a tube is all of those things. Together, the blind people knew the elephant; one by one, they were partly right, and only wrong if they thought they were wholly right. (p. 17)

The fourth conceptual error is *falsification of the status of knowledge*. This is where scholars and teachers “confuse the subject matter as constituted by the particular history of their field with the subject matter itself” (Minnich, 1986, p. 23).

One example of falsification of the status of knowledge is when European and Euro American artists are the only artists included for a course in the study of art history. One may surmise from this that Europeans and Euro Americans are the only people that have a history of art. When only one kind of people is represented in a course of study, that representation is often mistakenly understood as the field of study itself. Another example occurs when the *construction* and *interpretation* of knowledge, rather than knowledge itself, is taught as reality. Minnich (1986) explains it this way:

When historians confuse the past as it has been recorded, interpreted, and studied by historians with the past itself, [an] error has been committed. By that view, until recently indeed women and most men had very little if no history—and hence, no past. (p. 24)

These conceptual errors as articulated by Elizabeth Minnich describe the manner in which dominant regimes of knowledge marginalize, ignore, and devalue other ways of knowing and being that are outside that prevailing regime or culture. When applied to an ethics of ethnography, they direct us at several levels toward the following ethical contemplations. As ethnographers, we should strive for the following:

- To be more self-reflexive and self-critical of our own value-laden perspectives and not take our own perspectives for granted; to question ourselves and to think honestly about the attitude and disposition we hold for the interlocutors of our study before we enter the field. Interlocutors demand that we articulate and make known our own subjectivity, partiality, and biases as we interpret and represent Others.
- To be more mindful of where our theories and paradigms come from and to ask ourselves what voices, representations, and experiences are being excluded on one hand and too quickly universalized on the other.
- To be more precise concerning both our theoretical and methodological choices. Do we need to explore other frames of analysis that may be more applicable to the uniqueness of a particular context? We must ask ourselves if the analytical and methodological frameworks are relevant and appropriate. Interpretive analysis is not a one-size-fits-all proposition.

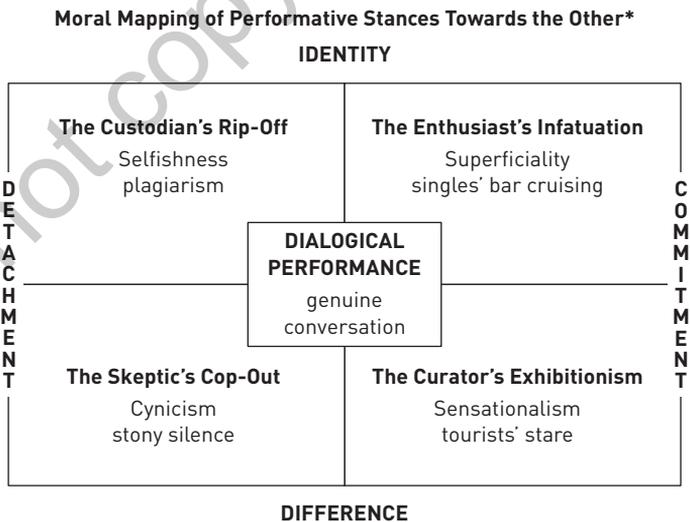
Minnich (1986) concludes by assuring us that “the errors are not necessary, not by nature, not by requirement of rationality, not by anything” (p. 29). She then introduces a call to action of sorts by stating that these errors, in the past, “were committed by a particular people in particular times, and they can be undone by a kind of critical thinking that is directly related to action” (p. 29).

Dialogical Performance

We will turn to the action of ethnography in the work of performance scholar, ethnographer, and activist Dwight Conquergood. In his popular essay “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance” (1982b), Conquergood presents five stances relative to ethics, four of which are fundamental problems or offenses to ethical fieldwork in varying degrees and circumstances. However, the fifth stance of *dialogical performance* contributes to an ethics of ethnography that provides a methodological approach that resists conceptual errors based on exclusivity and repressive paradigms of knowledge.

The first ethical offense is what Conquergood (1982b) calls *the custodian’s rip-off*. This is where fieldworkers enter the field for the single purpose of “getting good material” to further their own self-interest and ambition. Human beings are used as raw material that must be acquired or collected to successfully get the job done. In the custodian’s rip-off, researchers are only concerned with getting what they want for themselves and for their projects, with little or no consideration of how their presence affects the dignity, safety, traditions, order, economy, and health of the people they meet.

FIGURE 1.1



The custodian's rip-off occurs when the researcher enters the field without respectful regard for interlocutors, but measures the time and trust given to him or her by the success and effectiveness of the research project. In her very fine study of domestic workers, Judith Rollins (1985) describes a researcher who asked for a family recipe that her interviewer, an elderly domestic worker, cherished deeply. The recipe had been in the elder woman's family for generations and was a symbol of the history of love and caring the women in her family enacted through the art of cooking and domesticity. It was a special recipe that was created by the lineage of her mothers with their writing and imprints on the original copy. The recipe was one of her most valued possessions, a remembrance of her youth, the women who loved her, and early years of protection and joy. The researcher pressured the older woman to please let her borrow the recipe as an artifact to interpret for her research. Although the elder was very reluctant, she wanted to help the young woman who insisted that she understood the value of the recipe and vowed she would return it. Wanting to help, and believing the researcher's promise that she would take great care of the valued recipe and return it, the elderly woman let the researcher borrow it. The researcher took the recipe to analyze for her project and forgot to return it to the woman. The elderly woman never saw her recipe again. She expressed to Rollins the sense of loss, pain, and deep regret over the broken promise.

The second offense, *the ethnographer's infatuation*, is where the fieldworker succumbs to romantic infatuation and superficial identification with the people of the study. The ethnographer is enamored with others in a shallow reverie over "aren't we all the same." Conquergood (1982b) states, "Although not as transparently immoral as the custodian's rip-off, this performative stance is unethical because it trivializes the Other. The distinctiveness of the other is glossed over by a glaze of generalities" (p. 6). The Other becomes an object of the researcher's admiration without a will or voice of its own. The ethnographer, secure in his or her own "protective solipsism," obviates differences and negates the possibility that others can reverse positions and become judge, critic, and interpreter of the researcher or ethnographer.

The ethnographer's infatuation occurs when ethnographers go into the field imposing their own romantic lens over difficult realities. The ethnographer will overlook deep-seated contradictions, detailed symbolic meanings, and troubling questions in the field for glorifying appearances and shallow romanticism. For example, the researcher may encounter terror, poverty, human rights abuses, or social injustices but then overlook the details and consequences of their severity and replace them with palatable banalities and general clichés about a common humanity. For example, I equate infatuation in my own fieldwork with those researchers I have observed who elide the complexities of human rights abuses only to excuse certain practices, such as various types of servitude or female incision (what is pejoratively referred to as "female genital mutilation"), as characteristic of the culture's intriguing uniqueness. Some will take the radical relativist stance that every culture has the right to its own idiosyncratic practices—always fascinating and permissible—without criticism, particularly from outsiders.

The third offense is the *curator's exhibition*. Whereas the enthusiast is enthralled by a shallow identification and sameness, the curator is fascinated by exotic difference and distance. We move from the shallow to the sensational. Conquergood (1982b) states, "This is the 'Wild Kingdom' approach to performance that grows out of a fascination with the exotic, primitive, culturally remote. The performer wants to astonish rather than understand" (p. 6).

In the curator's exhibition, the researcher becomes so enamored with difference that subjectivity and meaning are erased. While I was living in Ghana, a mask carver told me a story of a researcher who was enthralled with the "exotic" artwork of West African carvings. He was so ready to mark difference that he misinterpreted the meanings of a particular genre of carved masks and wrongly defined them as fetish symbols used in ceremonial witchcraft to bring destruction upon one's enemies. The carver, who is Catholic and doesn't believe in witchcraft, said the masks are actually carved to represent contemporary life in Ghana, largely for the purpose of selling to tourists.

The fourth offense is the *skeptic's cop-out*. The skeptic remains detached and determined that he will not enter domains of Otherness. With cavalier certainty, he claims he cannot embody or engage an identity outside his own. This stance forecloses engagement. Conquergood (1982b) states, "The skeptic's cop-out is the most morally reprehensible corner of the map because it forecloses dialogue. The enthusiast, one can always hope, may move beyond infatuation to love. Relationships that begin superficially can sometime deepen and grow" (p. 8). Conquergood compellingly describes the skeptic as "detached and estranged, with no sense of the other, sits alone in an echo-chamber of his own making, with only the sound of his own scoffing laughter ringing in his ears" (p. 8). The skeptic's cop-out shuts down the potential for engagement with others; therefore, we are left with no evidence or example of their entry into domains outside their own.

It is the fifth stance, located in the center of the four offenses just outlined, that to Conquergood (1982b) now becomes the ethical alternative. Conquergood describes this stance as *dialogical performance*. The four extreme corners of the map, from *detachment* to *commitment* and from *identity* to *difference*, reside in tension outside the frame that centers and focuses upon dialogical performance. Dialogical performance and genuine conversation are at the center and superimposed over the single connecting point where the offenses each meet. Commenting on "the strength of the center" where dialogical performance is situated, Conquergood explains that this center of dialogue "pulls together mutually opposed energies that become destructive only when they are vented without the counterbalancing pull of their opposite" (p. 9). Dialogical performance becomes the centerpiece, representing the moral ground that keeps the counterbalancing pull in operation:

The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions. It is intensely committed to keeping the dialogue between performer and text open and ongoing. Dialogical

understanding does not end with empathy. There is always enough appreciation for difference so that the text can interrogate, rather than dissolve into, the performer. That is why I have charted this performative stance at the center of the moral map. More than a definite position, the dialogical stance is situated in the space between competing ideologies. It brings self and other together even while it holds them apart. It is more like a hyphen than a period. (p. 10)

Conquergood (1982b) provides for ethnographers clear modes of ethical considerations. Each mode is a further call for reflecting upon our own positionality as it relates to ethical methods. We may determine that it is the nature of our work to be dialogical; therefore, the other four stances outlined here are too extreme. Would any thoughtful ethnographer really commit any of these stances? The significance of this mapping, as Conquergood states, is for us to consider the quintessential offenses as well as the relative offenses that commonly occur along the frames of each. We may not always assume we are incapable of committing such offenses, but we must instead be humble enough and circumspect enough about the power and privilege that we hold as researchers and about our own positionality along the axis of the five stances.

Dialogue and Performance

Dialogue is framed as performance to emphasize the living communion of a felt-sensing, embodied interplay and engagement between human beings. For Conquergood, dialogue resists conclusions. It is intensely committed to keeping the meanings between and the conversations with the researcher and interlocutors open and ongoing. It is a reciprocal giving and receiving rather than a timeless resolve. The dialogical stance is situated in multiple expressions that transgress, collide, and embellish realms of meaning. Dialogue is both difference and unity, both agreement and disagreement, both a separation and a coming together. For Conquergood, ethnographic, performative dialogue is more like a hyphen than a period. Dialogue is therefore the quintessential encounter with others.

Moreover, it is through dialogue and meeting with others that I am most fully myself. The wonderful paradox in the ethnographic moment of dialogue and otherness is that communion with another brings the self more fully into being and, in doing so, opens you to know others more fully. Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) writes,

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a thou). Separation, dissociation, enclosure within the self is the main reason for the loss of one's self. The very being of man is the deepest communion. . . . To be means to be for another, through the other, for oneself. (p. 287)

It is the dialogic relationship with interlocutors, this ongoing liveliness and resistance to finality that resists the connotation of timelessness commonly described as “the ethnographic present,” that has adversely haunted traditional ethnography. The ethnographic present refers to the representation of a timeless account of the culture or people being studied. Charlotte Aull Davis (1999) states,

The ethnographer moves on. [But] temporally, spatially and developmentally, the people he or she studied are presented as if suspended in an unchanging and virtually timeless state, as if the ethnographer’s description provides all that it is important, or possible, to know about their past and future. (p. 156)

The “Other” inscribed as a static, unchanging, and enduring imprint in the ethnographic present is dislodged by a dialogic, critical ethnography. Dialogue moves from ethnographic *present* to ethnographic *presence* by opening the passageways for readers and audiences to experience and grasp the partial presence of a temporal conversation constituted by others’ voices, bodies, histories, and yearnings. This conversation with the others, brought forth through dialogue, reveals itself as a lively, changing being through time and no longer an artifact captured in the ethnographer’s monologue, immobile and forever stagnant.

This is particularly relevant for critical ethnographers, because it means truth claims, i.e., notions of a *universal truth*, are reevaluated based on questions relating to tradition and the exception, ideology and the indescribable, power and change. Can a universal truth claim sustain the divergence and breadth of unanticipated questions? Without demanding that truth does not exist (within the nature of a social world), how do we enter the relevance of truth? In keeping with the contributions of post-modern thinking and the performance turn that questioned traditional criteria for evaluation, validity, reliability, and generalizability, we are left with a crises of legitimation. This “crisis of legitimation” destabilized the stance that researchers are (and must strive to be) neutral and impartial in their representations and claims relative to the ethnographic record. It was argued that ethnographic descriptions are partial because they are interpreted through so-called data collection layered by contingency, paradox, subjectivity, and surprise. Yet, all this withstanding, ethnographic writing must still reckon with the existential truths and realities of social worlds. This brings us to the belief that representation matters and is consequential therefore striving for an accurate and honest representation of reality and truth must be recognized and expressed as a *reflexive* endeavor. *This means the researcher is reflexive and therefore writes reflexively about truth and reality, not negating their existence, but reflecting upon the data as a partial account of specific and context bound truths and realities.* This is to recognize *critical realism* as a reflexive methodology where material structures and ecological systems in fact and in truth exist.

NOTE: BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

The field of ethnography in the United States is primarily influenced by two traditions: the British anthropologist from the 19th century and the Chicago School from the 1960s.

Anthropology and British Functionalism

Anthropology was established as an academic discipline during the middle of the nineteenth century. In the beginning, the questionnaire was the main method the missionaries, traders, sailors, explorers, and colonial administrators used to obtain data from the population that inhabited their local outposts or stations. The questionnaires were then sent back to the colonial metropolis for the “armchair” ethnologists to interpret (Davis, 1999, p. 60). The most noted work of this period is James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1900).

Toward the end of the century, more ethnologists financed their own expeditions to “far off lands” for the purpose of conducting surveys. These surveys were generally based upon predetermined questions for the interests and benefit of the colonial empire (Davis, 1999, p. 68). The limitations, distortions, and superficiality of these accounts created a growing unrest and demand for more detail. As a result, in the early years of the twentieth century there was a turn toward longer engagements in these locations. This was the foundation for long-term participant observation fieldwork and is associated with the work of Bronislaw Malinowski (1926, 1945) in Britain and Franz Boas (1928, 1931) in America and their students. As Davis (1999) writes about Malinowski and Boas,

Both had come to recognize the complexity of the so-called primitive and to link this with both an attack on cultural evolutionism and a deep and genuine (if sometime naïve and unreflexive) opposition to ethnocentrism. . . . Both were concerned to recognize and include in their analysis the interconnectedness of each individual society’s cultural forms and social structures; in British social anthropology, this came to be expressed theoretically by Radcliffe-Brown’s structural functionalism; in American anthropology, its fullest expression took the form of an interest in culture complexes. (p. 69)

Structural Functionalism

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown’s (1958) development of structural functionalism is concerned with defining and determining social structures and the interconnectedness within their own system of structures. It excludes any consideration of external influences; the focus was on the mechanisms that sustain the structure, thereby

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deeming human behavior as a function of the structures that guide and determine their culture and conduct.

The Chicago School

The Chicago School of ethnography developed in the 1920s in the Department of Social Science and Anthropology at the University of Chicago. Key contributors to the school were Robert Park (1864–1944), who turned the focus of fieldwork to the urban landscape; G. H. Mead (1865–1931) and John Dewey (1859–1932), who emphasized pragmatism; and Herbert Bloomer (1900–1987), proponent of symbolic interactionism. The Chicago School is credited for laying the foundation for “a vibrant and increasingly methodologically sophisticated program of interpretive ethnography” (Thomas, 1993, p. 11).

Positivism

Positivism is based on the idea that empiricism must reach the goal of positive knowledge—that is, prediction, laws of succession, and variability. Positivists believe genuine knowledge is founded by direct experience and that experience is composed of social facts to be determined while reducing any distortion of subjectivity (theology or metaphysics) by the presence of the ethnographer. Therefore, positivism is based on the following assumptions outlined by Norman K. Denzin (2001): (a) There is a reality that can be objectively interpreted; (b) the researcher as a subject must be separate from any representation of the object researched; (c) generalizations about the object of research are “free from situational and temporal constraints: that is, they are universally generalizable” (p. 44); (d) there is a cause and effect for all phenomena—there are “no causes without effects and no effects without causes” (p. 44); and (e) our analyses are objective and “value-free” (p. 44).

Post-Positivism and the Performance Turn

The post-positive turn—or what is variously referred to as the “performance turn,” the “postmodern turn,” the “new ethnography,” or the “seventh movement” (Denzin, 2001, 2003)—has **reevaluated** the tenets of positivism. Positivism’s goal for objectivity, prediction, cause/effect, and generalization has been replaced by the recognition and contemplation of subjective human experience, contingencies of truth claims, value-laden inquiry, and local knowledge and vernacular expressions as substantive analytical frameworks.

THE METHOD AND THEORY NEXUS

This book serves as a resource for qualitative researchers who wish to emphasize critical analysis, ethical considerations, and theories and practices of performance. In order to proceed, I must first stress that criticism, ethics, and performance require a level of

theoretical understanding. Theory becomes a necessity because it guides the meanings and the vocabulary for each of these three domains. Theory is embedded in their definitions and functions: Critical analysis is grounded in social theory, ethics is grounded in moral philosophy, and performance is both a practice and a theory. In accepting the significance of theoretical knowledge, it is equally important for us to comprehend the way in which theory is at times the same as method and, at other times, distinct from it.

How are theory and method the same and different? They are the same in that theory is used in ethnography as an *interpretive or analytical method*. We often rely on theory—whether it is Marxist theory, critical race theory, or phenomenology—to interpret or illuminate a social phenomenon. However, though theory may guide and inspire us in composing a lay summary, designing interview questions, or coding data, it is not theory but a methodological process that directs the completion of the task. The relationship between theory and method has a long and provocative history reflected in disciplinary boundaries and research traditions privileging one over the other, as well as defining them as exclusively separate spheres.

The researcher engaged in ethnography, ethics, and performance needs both theory and method.

This tension between theory and method can be addressed by emphasizing what is significant about each as separate spheres and as inseparable entities. According to Joe L. Kinchloe and Peter McLaren (2000), critical theory finds its method in critical ethnography. In this sense, ethnography becomes the “doing”—or, better, the performance—of critical theory. To think of ethnography as *critical theory in action* is an interesting and productive description. The following quotation from Jim Thomas (1993) underscores this point. He refers to critical theory as “intellectual rebellion.” The passage is useful because, as it describes the approach of critical theory, it also describes the aim of critical ethnography:

The roots of critical thought spread from a long tradition of intellectual rebellion in which rigorous examination of ideas and discourse constituted political challenge. Social critique, by definition, is radical. It implies an evaluative judgment of meaning and method in research, policy, and human activity. Critical thinking implies freedom by recognizing that social existence, including our knowledge of it, is not simply composed of givens imposed on us by powerful and mysterious forces. This recognition leads to the possibility of transcending existing forces. The act of critique implies that by thinking about and acting upon the world, we are able to change both our subjective interpretations and objective conditions. (p. 18)

Critical social theory evolves from a tradition of “intellectual rebellion” that includes radical ideas challenging regimes of power that changed the world. As ethnographers, we employ theory at several levels in our analysis: to articulate and identify hidden forces and ambiguities that operate beneath appearances; to guide judgments and evaluations

emanating from our discontent; to direct our attention to the critical expressions within different interpretive communities relative to their unique symbol systems, customs, and codes; to demystify the ubiquity and magnitude of power; to provide insight and inspire acts of justice; and to name and analyze what is intuitively felt.

If, as Kinchloe and McLaren (2000) suggest, critical theory finds its most compelling method in critical ethnography, then we must not only comprehend the necessity of theory but also its *method*. Enrique G. Murillo, Jr., (2004) states,

Theory is linked to methods, and methods to the scenes studied, grounding one's work. The methods rely heavily on direct observation (participant observation), open-ended interviewing, and textual analysis of human products. However, the degree and extent of utilization of each of these methods depend on the researcher's purposes, the guiding questions, theoretical framework, and the scene itself. (p. 157)

Although theory may fund the guiding principles of our doing, there is a necessary and distinct attention that must be given to the guidelines, techniques, and processes of that doing itself—our method. Theory, when used as a mode of interpretation, *is* a method, yet it can be distinguished from method (and indeed take a backseat to method) when a set of *concrete actions* grounded by a specific scene are required to complete a task. Murillo eloquently reminds us that methods are not simply isolated or immutable activities but are contingent on our purpose, our fundamental questions, the theories that inform our work, and the scene itself.

* * *

I began the chapter with a story about representation. I will end this chapter by coming back to the story and the central question it raised: How do we represent others and their world for *just* purposes? We have begun to address the question in this chapter by introducing the themes of *positionality*, *dialogue*, *otherness*, and the *theory/method nexus*.

KEY TERMS

- **Critique.** Critique is to deconstruct and reinvent those epistemological certainties that foreclose alternative possibilities for ordering and reordering authoritative regimes of truth and to discern and unveil the relationship between mechanisms of coercion and what constitutes knowledge. Critique occurs when a subject gives itself the right to question truth as truth operates through power and to question power as it operates through truth. It is to care for the self as a subject that is in formation and to excavate and deconstruct those limits and meanings that circumscribe your

subject-hood in advance of your coming into being. Foucault reminds us that critique is the courage to break open “the limits of what I might become and the limits of what I might risk knowing.”

- **Positionality and Belonging.** Belonging precedes being. The various relations and locations of where and how we belong with and to others define our being, i.e., how we think, feel, and see the world around us as well as the orientation of our bodies, gestures, and musculature. This is what the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*, i.e., characterized by a set of acquired sensibilities, dispositions, schemata, and tastes that are not based on biological instinct but are culturally learned modes of being, thinking, value, and behavior that derive from deeply positioned home-place worlds that we inhabit with others. Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we denounce the power structures that surround our interlocutors. A concern for positionality is a reflexive ethnography; it is a turning back on ourselves. When we turn back on ourselves, we examine our intentions, our methods, and our possible effects. We are accountable for our research paradigms, our authority, and our moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation.

- **Reflexive Ethnography.** We are concerned with the multi-layered process of self-awareness and self-critique as well as the element of observing the self within the full dynamics of the research process. The fieldworker is reflexive about their reflections or intentionally thoughtful about the how, why, and what of their thoughts. Grounded in the depth of reflexive ethnography are a few guiding questions: What is changed by my presence? What are my knowledge gaps, or what is it that I don't know that I don't know? What is my evidence and what does it do? What purpose does this work serve? And so forth.

- **Auto Ethnography.** The term autoethnography was first used when ethnographers conducted research in their home culture or with their same cultural members. This gradually began to change in the 1980s with the performance turn and a new evaluation of storytelling as a cultural and critical phenomena. Self-reflexivity as autobiographical storytelling and personal experience now became data in the form of autoethnography. The autobiographic was joined with the ethnographic to form an ecology of self that was now both the subject and analysis of self that was (at its best) inextricably joined with Others. Autoethnography “as a form of ethnography,” Ellis (2004) writes, is “part *auto* or self and part *ethno* or culture” (p. 31) and “something different from both of them, greater than its parts” (p. 32).

- **Dialogue/Otherness.** Dialogue emphasizes the living communion of a felt-sensing, embodied interplay and engagement between human beings. Dialogue keeps the meanings between and the conversations with the researcher and others open and ongoing. The conversation with others that is brought forth through dialogue reveals itself as a lively, changing being through time and no longer an artifact

captured in the ethnographer's monologue or written transcript—fixed in time and forever stagnant.

- **Informants/Consultants/Friends/Subject or Members/Interlocutors:**

Informants: a person who gives information to another. *Consultants*: a person who provides expert advice professionally. *Friends*: a person whom one knows and with whom one has a bond of mutual affection. *Subjects*: a person of intentional identity, from bell hooks idea that “people resist by identifying themselves as subjects by defining their reality, shaping new identity, naming their history, telling their story” (p. 43). *Members*: an affiliate or associate that belongs to a common collective. *Interlocutors*: a person who takes part in a dialogue or conversation, a participant in a discourse. NOTE: I have favored the term “subjects” throughout my ethnographic work, in keeping with the agency of the term mentioned in bell hooks’ description. However, convinced by my students and Conquergood’s description of *interlocutors* as integral to conversation and dialogue, I now use subjects and interlocutors with the latter more pronounced in my recent writing.

- **Theory/Method as Critical ethnography** becomes the “doing” or the “performance” of critical theory. It is critical theory in action. Theory, when used as a mode of interpretation, is a method, yet it can be distinguished from method (and indeed take a backseat to method) when a set of concrete actions grounded by a specific scene is required to complete a task. We rely on theory—whether it is Marxist theory, critical race theory, or phenomenology—to interpret or illuminate a social action. However, in composing a lay summary, designing interview questions, or coding data, theory may inspire and guide, but it is a methodological process that directs and completes the task.

- **Method/Methodology:** *Method* is a tool, procedure, strategy, or (systematic) plan for solving a problem, conducting research, or completing a task. *Methodology* is the explanation, analysis, or study of the methods and how knowledge is acquired.

* * *

In the following chapter, an examination of methods is explored in greater detail. After the methods chapter, a series of hypothetical case studies are presented to illustrate how theory is applied as an interpretive method. Chapter 2 specifically discusses initial methods employed as the researcher enters the field, including such topics as “Starting Where You Are,” “Being a Part of an Interpretive Community,” “The Research Design,” “The Lay Summary,” “Interviewing and Field Techniques,” and “Coding and Logging Data.” Chapter 3 comprises three fictional case studies or ethnographic stories that use key concepts from particular theoretical frameworks. Case 1 includes key concepts from *postcolonial* and *Marxist criticism*; Case 2 includes key concepts from *theories of phenomenology*, *subjectivity*, *symbolism*, and *sexuality*; and Case 3 includes key concepts from *critical race* and *feminist theory*.

WARM-UPS

1. Take an image—it can be from a photograph, a painting, an advertisement—and speak from the points of view of the various objects or characters within the image. How are they each expressing differently what it means to be within the frame or parameters of the image? How are they expressing their relationship to the other figures or images around them? In your various voicings of what is within the image, are you giving more emphasis to one or more images over others? Why or why not?
2. View the film *Rashomon* or observe a similar story that is constructed from several viewpoints that each tell their side of one story. How does the writer, filmmaker, or teller construct the narrative to give voice to the various characters? What devices are used?
3. Choose a current situation in world events in which two competing sides have been locked in enduring opposition and conflict. Speak from the position of each side with sincere, calm, and thoughtful persuasion and belief. Then, speak as the critical ethnographer in an effort to interpret the situation in order to make change.
4. An inexperienced fieldworker is conducting fieldwork at a senior citizen daycare center. She has been working at the center for more than two years. After providing informed consent at the beginning of the project, her primary consultant has just informed her that he does not wish to be included in the study. He asks that all interviews and other relevant data relating to him be excluded from the study. If the student does not include data from this consultant, most of her research will not be of use. She will not be able to complete her research in time for graduation. What should she do?
5. What would be the three most challenging “Lies” for you in the field? What do you anticipate would be the consequences?
6. What “Conceptual Errors” have you internalized and enacted the most during your academic experiences? What have been the consequences?
7. What are the “Moral Transgressions” that you have witnessed the most and least? Which ones do you feel you most want to avoid and why?

NOTE

1. In my book *Acts of Activism* I discuss in more detail the cultural tradition and the debates surrounding the Trokosi/Troxovi practice. See bibliography.

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