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Reimagining anthropology: towards an anti-racist, feminist ethnography

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Reimagining Anthropology: Towards an Anti-racist, Feminist Ethnography

A Thesis

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Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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BY

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Introduction

I do not always want to have a politicized life. It tires me, rips me apart, and steals the best moments of my life. Yet I know that there is no way around it. I have to live and resist simultaneously on different fronts.

Marguerite R. Waller and Jennifer Rycenga, *Frontline Feminisms: Women, War, and Resistance*

I came to anthropology at a fundamental shift within the discipline. While the field of anthropology has been contested and negotiated in methodologies and theoretical frameworks for decades, my generation of anthropologists has begun to participate in the labor of our antecedents. Overwhelmingly, ethnography has been used in the service of colonization, ethnic, and cultural genocide under the guise of research. Its roots lie in medical and scientific racism, eugenicism, a legacy that prevails in the West today. As anthropology deepened a critical approach by young students of color like myself, we have had to grapple with a love for a field of study that has oftentimes been used to perpetuate white supremacy and eurocentrism.¹ While many of my fellow anthropologist's identities and communities were at the center of the violent ethnographies we were studying, we also found that the canonical work within the field reflected and maintained the same racist and eugenicist methodologies. The new generation of critical anti-racist anthropologist and ethnographers outside of anthropology were repeatedly asked how we will make an impact on anthropology? Where can anthropology and ethnography go?

The purpose of my thesis is to engage these questions through reimagining what ethnography as a feminist, anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and collaborative research methodology would look like for anthropology and other disciplines that employ ethnography. As a feminist anthropologist, this project reflects my interdisciplinary background in women's and gender

¹ Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan. "Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7, no. 4 (2001), 666.

studies, particularly from feminist theory, Third World feminism, Black feminist anthropology, and Indigenous and Native feminist theory and pedagogy. As I shall argue, to interrogate ethnography as a methodology, this work must be grounded in decolonial, anti-imperialist and anti-racist politics and policies that center the voices and struggles of Black, Native and Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women, and other marginalized people of color. Engaging with the West's application of a neo-colonial ethnographic methodology, I rethink the object/subject narrative, study processes of positionality and knowledge production in the academy, and analyze collaborative research and coauthored scholarship to examine the ways that ethnography may be designed, and utilized for justice and liberation.² In her scholarship and activism, Richa Nagar demonstrates what she refers to as a "series of experiments" for feminist ethnography,³ and I too am attempting to decipher, and offer, a solution to a better ethnography. As a scholar situated in the Western academy, I engage most with its methods. I argue that the West has a monopoly on the deployment of a racist outdated method and critique it, actively engaging with many locations of non-Western⁴ anthropology. In this way, I am critiquing the Global North's application of ethnography by studying and inserting the narratives of the Global South. To do so, I am "turning the gaze upon myself"⁵ as a Black, queer, middle-class and

² Sandra G. Harding, "Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (London, New York: Routledge, 2009).

³ Richa Nagar, *Muddying the Waters: Coauthoring Feminisms across Scholarship and Activism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 10.

⁴ Here I am using "West" and "non-West/ern" in a theoretical sense. I am referring to former colonial powers or settler-colonial states when referring to the "West," but not asserting that there is one West, Global North, or Global South. I am highlighting that former colonial powers and settler colonial states have created knowledge about the Global South and its peoples constructing civilizational hierarchies. These narratives should be challenged, and hold a lot of complex meanings in my thesis (which I attempt to explain).

⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

Western educated student of anthropology by reflecting on my own education and using this perspective to guide my analysis.

In my undergraduate and graduate experiences, I have had the opportunity to conduct many research projects of my own, utilizing ethnography in various ways. This hands-on experience has offered me insight into the ways in which ethnography can go awry, be successful, and most importantly, how it affects research participants. My first introduction to ethnography was in a 100-level course on cultural anthropology in my first quarter at university. While we learned basic terms important to anthropology, the course was mostly for non-majors to fulfill an elective. As one of three students majoring in anthropology within the classroom, it was here that I was introduced to a large pool of ethnographies meant to engage those that were not necessarily in the course for anthropology and rather for credits. Sifting through a diverse range of ethnographies, I began questioning why some of the work I read was collaborative and healing as displayed by authors such as Zora Neale Hurston in her research on magic and voodoo in Haiti and Jamaica (1938), while other ethnographies used harmful terms with essentialist and racialized ideas such as the ethnographic fieldwork conducted with Indigenous communities of Papua New Guinea in the late 60s and 1970s⁶ who were painted as backwards savages for much of history.⁷ I became curious about how the same tool, i.e. ethnography, produced vastly different outcomes.

Ethnography has been utilized in various forms. At times it has been a methodology for the sciences, art, and for others it is a method for the research that lies within the in between.

⁶ Chowning Morauta, "Indigenous Anthropology in Papua New Guinea [and Comments and Reply]." *Current anthropology* 20, no. 3 (September 1, 1979), 561.

⁷ Paige West, *Dispossession and the Environment: Rhetoric and Inequality in Papua, New Guinea* New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

Fundamentally, the purpose of ethnography is to offer a holistic approach to understanding humans, culture, and society using qualitative observation so that we might understand a “cultural membership;”⁸ by analyzing and observing people in the margins, ethnography is used to create aggrandizing, distinctive social experiences, or phenomena on single groups of people.⁹ Because of this, outcomes of research are most often informed by the opinions, identities, positionalities, and perspectives of the researcher. Through interviewing and observations, oftentimes within a fieldwork setting (most ethnography is conducted while the researcher is literally within the community that is subject to research), researchers may acquire descriptive data to attempt to make meaning of our lives.¹⁰

Famously, the moral and ethical intentions of practicing anthropology is never to commit any harm within communities, and furthermore, *intervene* in situations of harm.¹¹ This irony is not lost on me in that we are oftentimes the makers of said harm. Anthropologists, journalists, scientists, and researchers who both utilize ethnography or identify as ethnographers, take on the same intentional research that seeks not to commit harm to communities of inquiry. Many anthropologists regale the ways in which they enter and leave populations without being noticed or committing any meaningful impact within communities of research.¹² Though this is hyperbolic, it does little to address the ways in which anthropologists, through ethnography and research, have had an inverse result and affect communities they enter deeply:

Conversely, from the perspective of those located in the global south, north based researchers mostly used the south as a source of raw materials (data) to be processed, packaged, and marketed according to the demands of their professional fields, with little or no engagement with the socio-political and intellectual

⁸ Jane Singer, “Ethnography.” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2009): 1055.

⁹ Harding, *Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate*, 7.

¹⁰ Singer, 191.

¹¹ AAA Administrator, “Do No Harm.” AAA Ethics Forum, 2012.

¹² AAA Administrator, 2012.

debates or struggles that are considered pertinent in the places that the research sources and subjects inhabit.¹³

This relationship is particularly sinister because in many examples of fieldwork, researchers find it enjoyable to engage with the ‘natives,’ and ultimately leave, intruding within a system of relationships that existed long before them, believing that they have become close enough to represent them, otherizing them in this flawed process.¹⁴ This “intervention” is most often defined by the researchers own perception of said harm or impact, not the subject of said interference. This relationship invalidates the lived realities of research subjects. Moreover, once the research is disseminated in the academy, it is legitimized by its elitist paradigms and – unquestioned by fellow scholars – this structure leaves little room for the “subjects” (the others), to enter the academy to challenge said research, or add any substantial work given the exclusionary nature of the research endeavor academic institutions.

Whether ethnography is or is not important to research has been a debate in the academy (canonically) since the 1980s.¹⁵ While it is a topic of controversy, it is a tool that is still heavily utilized, and I argue, it is better to interrogate the ways that ethnography may change and grow instead of attempting to get rid of it. Diane Wolf in her own thoughts on ethnography and fieldwork notes that she is not advising for us to disregard traditional fieldwork methods:

My essay and this book are not meant to encourage future feminist fieldworkers to abandon the practice of fieldwork – to the contrary – nor can we offer ways to reconcile these deep contradictions. The book is meant to underscore and exemplify dilemmas of post inherent in the fieldwork and post-fieldwork process that plague the most self-conscious and well-meaning researcher.¹⁶

¹³ Nagar, 99.

¹⁴ Judith Stacey, “Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?” *Women’s Studies international forum* 11, no. 1 (1988), 23.

¹⁵ Richelle Schrock, “The Methodological Imperatives of Feminist Ethnography.” *Journal of feminist scholarship*, no. 5 (2013), 48.

¹⁶ Diane L. Wolf, “Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork,” in *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993), 38.

Likewise, discarding ethnography without analyzing it rids us of any accountability of the ways it has been used for harm. Feminist historians and anthropologists have best reimagined, and importantly, utilized a reformist ethnography that inserts the interpersonal, or “personal” as subject.¹⁷ Rather than seek out one “Truth,” the field of women’s and gender studies encourages finding flexibility and movement to account for varying social differences, and inequalities.¹⁸ Anti-racist and feminist scholars such as Judith Stacey (1988), Diane Wolf (1996), Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (2015), Jacqueline Nassy Brown (2009), Kamala Viswesweran (1994), Laura Nader (1972), Irma McClaurin (2001), Faye Harrison (1997), Sanjukta Mukherjee (2017), Richa Nagar (2014), and authors alike interrogate the meaning of ethnography and the ways anthropology, and academia, may grow – paving the way for this thesis. The purpose of my thesis is not to create a new discussion, but add to the ongoing conversations and critiques that scholars have engaged in. Because of this, I am engaging in a similar project of Viswesweran, many of the writers of *Black Feminist Anthropology*, and Richa Nagar of reinserting the work that has already been done by feminist anthropologist scholars, highlighting the ways that we have already the tools to change anthropology, and now must utilize them; in doing so, I will theoretically rework the field of anthropology. I am not attempting to re-perpetuate anthropology’s tendency towards compulsive categorization by implying there are “good” or “bad” anthropologists or ethnographies. I am looking to highlight those in the field that are overlooked and disseminate the systematic issues of racism, classism, gender bias, and misogyny that help to produce power differentials and problems within ethnography, and anthropology. We cannot look to the same systems (and methods in this case)

¹⁷ Stacey, 22.

¹⁸ Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986), 1055.

and hope for a different outcome, nor can we maintain the idea that the problems of our field are the product of a few, instead of a responsibility of us all.

Methodology

Ethnography is most often described as a hybrid form of research that uses science-based design techniques, as well as art, music, and oral histories to describe groups and cultures.¹⁹ While it is a tool largely utilized in the field of anthropology, many social scientists such as geographers, sociologists, scientists, and authors use the methodology in some form because of the ways that it integrates various forms of data intake, “Ethnography references both a research and inscription (i.e., writing-process-to-written-product) practice. Ethnography is research in that it describes a *methodology* (distinguished from a research *method*) usually conceptualized as involving participant-observation within a community or field of study.”²⁰ Stripped of its complexities, the process of ethnography requires a form of studying, oftentimes including observation and fieldwork, varying forms of description of observations, analysis, and as Harry Wolcott, one of the most noted writers and theorizers of ethnography, describes that ethnography is a methodology when it is used to theorize— otherwise it is simply descriptive. Wolcott explains that it is not just a fieldwork technique to collect data, but a much more complicated process, “One can *do* ethnography anywhere, anytime, and of virtually anything, as long as human social behavior is involved (or *was* involved, in the case of studies made by archaeologists and ethnohistorians). The important question is not whether ethnography is feasible in a particular instance but whether and how cultural interpretation might enhance understanding of the topic or problem under investigation.”²¹ Likewise, Anthony Kwame Harrison refers to in his work on

¹⁹ David M. Fetterman. *Ethnography: Step by Step* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1998).

²⁰ Anthony Kwame Harrison, *Ethnography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press USA-OSO, 2018), 4.

²¹ Harry F. Wolcott, *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing* (Walnut Creek, 1999), 68.

utilizing ethnography, “representing” a group of people you look to study, theorizing around acquired data to further understand cultures and the social world.²² I begin my thesis by providing critical analysis of the popular disciplinary usage of ethnography. Here, I reinsert the critical, anti-racist, decolonial, and feminist work that has already been done in the discipline. I identify that the canon of anthropology is a false representation of the field as it highlights the work of a few, whilst ignoring predominately researchers of color’s prominent work. This process necessitates a historical mapping of groundbreaking, canonical, and critical ethnographies in anthropology and its adjacent fields. Because of the structure of the academy, it is important to note that while there is a lot of important work that has been done around critical anti-racist ethnography, much of this lies on the outskirts, or the ghettos, of anthropology. Various scholars who are, I argue, adding to the field of anthropology and theorizing around ethnography are not necessarily credited or named for their work.

I study texts that are not explicitly named as ethnographic work, but in methodology and format would be considered so in all other accounts. Engaging with some of the most distinguished anthropologists (introduced to many students of anthropology within their studies of anthropological theory) such as Bronislaw Malinowski, Ruth Benedict, Franz Boas, Napoleon Chagnon, Margaret Mead and Clifford Geertz, I identify the ways they have contributed to the discipline in both important *and* harmful ways. This aspect of my research critically examines the research structures, unethical praxes, and most importantly, the real outcomes of the work within the communities that were subject to research. Harry Wolcott, one of the most noted writers and theorizers of ethnography, describes that ethnography is a methodology when it is used to theorize— otherwise it is simply descriptive. Wolcott explains that it is not just a

²² Ibid, 4.

fieldwork technique to collect data, but a much more complicated process, “One can *do* ethnography anywhere, anytime, and of virtually anything, as long as human social behavior is involved (or *was* involved, in the case of studies made by archaeologists and ethnohistorians). The important question is not whether ethnography is feasible in a particular instance but whether and how cultural interpretation might enhance understanding of the topic or problem under investigation.”

Many anthropologists such as Black anthropologist and scholar Delmos J. Jones in his work *Towards a Native Anthropology* (1970) argue the ways that anthropology may be practiced without enacting harm and I further this argument by implying that it may also be empowering to the communities they are researching *with*; this language situates research participants as collaborators rather than “subjects.” Because of this, I also situate many theorists (anthropologists included) that utilize ethnographic research for the liberation of communities, advocacy, social justice, and furthermore, attempt to undo past harms. To do so, I utilize autoethnographies, academic memoirs, ethnographies of activism, and autobiographical research to interrogate the positionality, and identities, of the researcher in relationship to research participants, especially marginalized research participants. Utilizing the research that is co-produced or solely conducted by participants creates collaborative research and creates fruitful and empowering research for both the researcher and research participant. In my critical analysis of “good,” “bad,” and ethnographies that are just in the middle, I decipher what makes and breaks an ethnography, theorize around the methodology and epistemology of ethnography, and formulate what I believe to be the best way to sculpt an ethnography that is both fluid and accountable.

Defining Ethnography

Those who have considered it their private preserve to decide what is and isn't knowledge, art or culture have persuaded themselves that our determination to define these things for ourselves is a threat to their interests. In reality, it's their best chance for survival. The narrow mythologies upon which they have based their lives will not see them through another century. The denial of our interrelatedness is killing this planet and too many of its people.

Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: Essays for Radicals*

Ethnography is not a method limited to anthropology but has been defined by its usage in the discipline. Many of the methods of ethnography are shared by other disciplines, but anthropologists have claimed that our usage of said methods wield different, more nuanced outcomes, "...anthropologists argue that they gain a different and more holistic and profound understanding when they engage in a participant-observation regime."²³ Part of this understanding relies on the violent utilization of ethnography for mass conquer and the ways anthropology has impacted modern medicine and biomedicine as many physicians applied the data, and human remains acquired from ethnographic research to experimental, and medical practices.²⁴ The purpose of ethnography relies on its propensity to observe, understand, and define a culture, or a group of people based on ethnicity and common practices, "Anthropology's episteme rests upon the idea of being able to understand a culture or cultures other than one's own. This has historically involved translations not only of language, but also of concepts, meanings, customs, and understandings. Even in the 'prehistory' of anthropology, translation was vital in the colonial enterprise in order to conquer the territories and their peoples. This gave place to contradictory subject positions among the Indigenous people as those who spoke their

²³ Signe Howell, "Ethnography," *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. October 21, 2020, <https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/ethnography>. (accessed March 16, 2021).

²⁴ Cheryl Mwarira, "Biomedical Ethics, Gender, And Ethnicity: Implications for Black Feminist Anthropology," in *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 191.

native and the conquerors' languages were abducted from their communities in order to serve as translators;"²⁵ this episteme has been utilized by means of invasion. To reimagine ethnography, I must examine some of its definitions and meanings.

Ethnography is both a process, or methodology, and the written report of the data received from "doing" ethnography, "Ethnography is today used for both the actual fieldwork during which the anthropologist collects material, and the subsequent text - an ethnography."²⁶ While I am critiquing the ways that ethnography is "done," I am also analyzing the development of the written ethnography. Signe Howell explains, ethnography most oftentimes requires researchers enter into a community and attempt to participate in the communities culture and economy, whilst observing and collecting data, "Ethnography is a method of social research in which the researcher immerses themselves in the subjects' social setting to perceive things as they really are in order to recount and interpret their observations in a manner that will help their readers understand what it is like to be a part of the setting studied."²⁷ This exchange has relied on the ethnographer becoming an "insider" of the community of inquiry, learning the language of the society, living with those who reside within said community, and staying with them for an extended period of time which ranges for many researchers. Given this, the relationship of ethnographer and communities of study is dependent on imperialism and expansionism, "Normative ethnographic description itself is rife with the language of conquest: we extort tales and confessions from reluctant so-called; we overcome the resistance of recalcitrant subjects when we 'master' their language or 'subdue' their insistent questioning. The ethnographer finally

²⁵ Adi Kuntsman and Esperanza Miyake, *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Raciality* (York: Raw Nerve Books Ltd, 2008), 181.

²⁶ Howell, 2.

²⁷ Chidi Ugwu, "History of Ethnography: Straightening the Records," *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 9 no. 7 (2013): 68.

arrives when she renders a people or person 'subject.'"²⁸ Because of these early on depictions of human life and culture, anthropologists have been crucial to the creation of the Western medical institution and its subsequent products (inside and outside of the academy). Thus, anthropology's history of conquer links it to the production of knowledge and the Western academic canon.

Ethnography, Knowledge Production, and Constructions of Canon

Within Jacqueline Nassy Brown's ethnography on Black Liverpoolians, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*, she cannot rely on archives, or statistics, for data because if she were to use them for her research, they would imply that Black Liverpoolians did not exist in the 1900s. The lives of Black people in Liverpool were not documented due to their relationships to the seaports where they were sold during slavery, and later as sea men, entered and left Liverpool without the government believing it important to demark their existence (doing this would require legitimizing Black Liverpoolians as citizens).²⁹ Because of this, Brown's research relied on oral history to connect a history and timeline for Black Liverpoolians. Here, Brown does what many anthropologists do not: instead of theorizing around statistics and "hard" data, she theorizes around contexts. This type of research is non-normative for the canon of the discipline. Faye Harrison demonstrates in her own work on decolonizing anthropology that the need for said research is important, and was popular in the late 1960s,³⁰ and while I think this trend is growing once again, it is, and has always been, defined by the confines/barriers of the institution it is a product of.

²⁸ Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 60.

²⁹ Jacqueline Nassy Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

³⁰ Faye V. Harrison, "Anthropology as an Agent of Transformation: Introductory Comments and Queries," in *Decolonizing Anthropology Moving Further toward an Anthropology for Liberation* (Arlington: Association of Black Anthropologists, American Anthropological Association, 2010), 1.

For no matter what is challenged within the academy, its ability to change is limited to what it is willing to accept. For example, Brown troubles meanings of authenticity within her own research and ethnography as a method. She demonstrates that there is a want, and need, to prove authenticity in research so that it is legitimized in academia, and thus, the researcher attempts to find the most "authentic" story and truth that legitimizes their own research or thesis statement. Here she indicates a massive problem with the academy whilst falling into the same cycle she critiques – she produces a critical ethnography about a harmful methodology that is engrained within the knowledge production, and therefore the standard, of anthropology. In attempting to discuss diaspora, Brown questions whether diaspora is accurate, or matters, in the academy because it is often used by the West to identify one "race," whilst this language must simultaneously be used by people of the diaspora to explain their existence, "Why must origins, African culture, and now slavery be the stuff of 'authentic' diasporic debate?"³¹ We are in a conundrum. The conditions dictated by the canon have created the language we must use to justify ourselves within the institution. Here, the academy has created in what Francesca T. Royster refers to as conditions of impossibility where the very intellect that critiques the academy, within it, is held back by the academy itself.³²

The Nature of the Feminist Project

When academic engagements become locked into pure theoretical positions and loyalties, the possibility or impossibility of solidarity and responsibility is already pronounced, sometimes through their dismissal or celebration of a self-contained category such as 'the constructivist theory,' 'post-modernism,' or 'activist scholarship.' Consequently, the journeys in and through which the complexities of solidarity and responsibilities are felt, known (however, partially), and struggled with, either get relegated to methodological appendices of critical ethnographies

³¹ Brown, 99.

³² Francesca T. Royster, "Rememorizing Othello: Teaching *Othello* and the Cultural Memory of Racism," in *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's Othello* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2005), 55.

or articles on 'action' research, or they are dismissed a priori as invalid or unworthy of academic discussion. Such segregated conversations also serve to reinforce the problematic divisions between 'abstract thinking' and 'concrete doing.'

Richa Nagar, *Muddying the Waters: Coauthoring Feminisms across Scholarship and Activism*

There are many frameworks necessary for envisioning a new method of ethnography. Feminist frameworks are particularly important because of the ways that feminist theorists have challenged ethnography, its method of knowledge production, and its colonial past. While there is no one feminist method, I define my application of transnational feminist theoretical frameworks within anthropology and the critical theory relevant to the discipline. Here I ask what the tactics of a feminist epistemology can deploy to reimagine a better practice of ethnography.³³

Feminism is a structure, theory, and politic that asks those who value it, believe in it, and practice it, to better understand gendered oppression and alike systems of inequality. Similarly, transnational feminism asks us to do the same, but takes this framework and deepens ones understanding. Transnational feminism and theory is that of many things, theories and concepts; transnational feminism is a social thought that asks for those that are thinking through its lens to question power structures or oppressive hierarchies, so that we who practice it may be able understand the systems we are implicated within as well as why and how they have been created. Utilizing geography, history, economics, and other theoretical frames, transnational feminism contextualizes our social structures and positionalities. While feminism might question borders and nation states, transnational feminism questions why they were created in the first place? However, while transnational feminism deals with many of the theoretical functions of said

³³ Viswesweran, 50.

systems, it does not seek to fictionalize the repercussions or realities experienced by such systems. In investigation of harmful systems and structures, we often find that these constructions are fabricated (for ex. racism and gender are largely based on pseudo-science, culture, and society rather than “truth”), but the affect, or experiences, of racism, heterosexism, and heteropatriarchy are not of fiction.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her now classic piece "Under Western Eyes," and her response that followed, "Under Western Eyes: Revisited," offers what she describes as her feminist vision:

This is a vision of a world that is pro-sex and -woman, a world where women and men are free to live creative lives, in security and with bodily health and integrity, where they are free to choose whom they love, and whom they set up house with, and whether they want to have or not have children; a world where pleasure rather than just duty and drudgery determine our choices, where free and imaginative exploration of the mind is a fundamental right; a vision in which economic stability, ecological sustainability, racial equality, and the redistribution of wealth from the material basis of people’s well-being.³⁴

Though not without critique, feminism helps to break down theoretical borders present within the academy as an important theory of equality and justice, as well as a political stance against systems of oppression. Kamala Visweswaran explains this same importance of feminism writing, explaining, "The feminist way of knowing sees the process of positioning itself as an epistemological act."³⁵ While in the past (White) feminism tended towards a "sisterhood" for solidarity, transnational feminism argues that our interrelation occurs from our placements, or positionalities, within systems, and locating our marginalization(s), oppressions, and wielding of power. In other words, transnational feminism argues for a connection through differences for

³⁴ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 3.

³⁵ Visweswaran, 48.

solidarity. This practice is key for the anthropological project as positioning, and contexts, are what define the discipline.

Feminism provides a critical aspect to research methods that many researchers have avoided because of questions it asks for the world, our social order, and our implication within many systems of power and control. Viswesweran notes, "The 'feminist conjuncturalist' approach Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani describe calls for an understanding of the relationship between subjects and their histories as complex and shifting, yet not 'free.' They argue that this concept must be carefully specified, used to describe moments, social formations, subject positions and practices which arise out of an unfolding axis of colonization/decolonization, interwoven with the unfolding of other axes, in uneven, unequal relationships with one another;"³⁶ feminism in many ways deals with discomforts within research, evaluating the norm within anthropology and problematizing it until we can better understand why we do what we do and how we have come to practice ethnography. Diane Wolf expands on this very point explaining that feminism's goal is to understand why we understand what we know, "...the challenges to feminism by Third World feminists, feminists of color, and those in cultural studies and postmodernism encourage a conceptualization of feminist epistemology as a heterogenous enterprise with multiple strands. Its practitioners differ both philosophically and politically in a number of significant ways. But an important theme on its agenda has been to undermine the abstract, rationalistic, and universal image of the scientific enterprise by using several different strategies."³⁷ As feminism deconstructs, and blurs much of the makeup of anthropology and its research methods, it simultaneously looks to utilize said deconstruction to rebuild and imagine a world without reliance on categorization of cultural binaries and racist, Eurocentric ideologies.

³⁶ Viswesweran, 12.

³⁷ Wolf, *Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, 5.

Mohanty expands on this identifying that feminism is a project of historicizing and denaturalizing many of the ideologies that influence societal beliefs of exploitative systems such as capitalism, neoliberalism, and racism,³⁸ linking the project of feminism greatly to anthropology.

In her analysis on the history of feminism and anthropology, Henrietta Moore explains that the research gaze in the discipline is largely based on the perspective of men and their status in Western societies. Because of this, ethnography has sought to place "the other" in comparison to "us," and by analyzing in terms of comparison we have participated in a misrepresentation of many marginalized groups of people. She writes that women and marginalized researchers maintained a ghettoized status in the field as they either succumbed to the male gaze in research, or their work did not necessitate the respect that research utilizing this gaze acquired, "...much of the force of feminist research is lost through a segregation which consistently defines such work as the 'not male:' the 'female anthropology.'"³⁹ She eludes that a reason anthropologists invested in this form of anthropological practice do not want to integrate feminist frameworks in the discipline is because it looks to advance anthropology. This advancement would relieve many of the stakeholders within it of their power.⁴⁰ We find that the methodology that insights this fear deals with a politics of representation and personal experience.

"The personal is political" is a phrase that circulates often within feminist classrooms. It was one of the first pieces of feminist theory I was taught upon entering the academy. The expression asks that we understand personal experiences as politicized and that none of us, nor our identities, are neutral. In her analysis, Moore writes that with feminist frameworks we are

³⁸ Mohanty, 124.

³⁹ Henrietta L. Moore, *Feminism and Anthropology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 50.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

better able to understand the ways that our personal experiences, culture, and identities impact our perceptions of communities of analysis, and because of this, our research can never be considered impartial, “Theory always informs the way in which we collect, interpret and present data, and as such it can never be neutral.”⁴¹ Given that anthropological and ethnographic research may never reach neutrality, or subjectivity, attempting to do so perpetuates a research of violence.

A feminist, anthropological lens helps to better understand systems of power present within the academy, within our fieldwork, and within ourselves. It helps to better situate both similarities and differences within fieldwork and decolonize research methods that assume neutrality. These frameworks challenge the norm of anthropology, begging us to begin to reimagine an anthropology without borders, and *for* liberation.

Anthropologists of Color’s History in the Field

epistemicide: the derailing, silencing, or other destruction of Indigenous knowledges, memories, and relations to other cultures.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*

To reimagine ethnography, it is best to reexamine the history of anthropology by inserting the critical work that has already been done to identify, or perhaps accept, that the canonical academic realm is a false representation of anthropology. Given this, there is a necessary project of giving new meaning to the texts that have failed to break anthropology, and the academy's glass ceiling, that have already dealt with this attempt at better representation. Irma McClaurin notes, “The very fact that we must create a genealogy should bear witness to the way in which

⁴¹ Moore, 4.

anthropology has institutionalized our silence and erasure through the development and maintenance of institutional racism, as evidenced by the canon that is currently taught."⁴² It is not my intent to imply that women of color ethnographers have not also perpetuated harm within the field of anthropology, rather I am reassigning value to ethnographers of color's contributions while at the same acknowledging the systemic issues imbedded in Western ethnography and anthropology in which men and women of color have been educated to research through a White male gaze. Thus, this section is less a historical analysis, and rather a discussion of important methodologies and the theoretical frameworks anthropologists and ethnographers of color have offered. The future of anthropology is largely dependent on its past. Getting to a better, and critical application of anthropology requires a better grasp of where we have gone wrong in the field, as well as understanding its many histories instead of a White Western construction of it, "One cannot build a future without a sense of the past. Movements require history because history provides an explanation for oppression. And it impels action by offering a vision of a transformative future. Both the nature of that vision and the strategies for achieving it are rooted in historical understanding.' We cannot understand our feminist futures without a better understanding of the multiple origins of our feminist past,"⁴³ likewise, we cannot invest in our anthropological futures without a reconstruction, and reconfiguration, of its past.

In her reflection on her relationship to knowledge production and theory, Aurora Levins Morales reflects on the ways that her family cultivated feminism and activism from a young age, impacting her pedagogy as a professor and activist, "The intellectual traditions I come from

⁴² Irma McClaurin, *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 17.

⁴³ Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 16.

create theory out of shared lives instead of sending away for it. My thinking grew directly out of listening to my own discomforts, finding out who shared them, who validated them, and in exchanging stories about common experiences, finding patterns, systems, explanations of how and why things happened. This is the central process of consciousness raising, of collective testimony. *This is how homemade theory happens;*⁴⁴ this homemade theory, she finds, differs from the methods of knowledge production most common in the academic institution because of its tie with personal experience. While teaching, Morales considers the way that this impacts her student's perception of themselves and attempts at knowledge production identifying that they discredit their own experiences or are too sheepish to bring into discussion their lives. Instead, what they have best learned is how to arrange the published opinions of other scholars that achieved respect in the institution.⁴⁵ While Morales explains the ways that her family helped her to cultivate a theory from experience, her students were hindered by the academy's dismissal of said knowledge. Mohanty touches on this very point explaining, "The critique of essentialist identity politics and the hegemony of postmodernist skepticism about identity has led to a narrowing of feminist politics and theory whereby either exclusionary and self-serving understandings of identity rule the day or identity (racial, class, sexual, national, etc.) is seen as unstable and thus merely 'strategic.' Thus, identity is seen as either naive or irrelevant, rather than a source of knowledge and a basis for progressive mobilization;"⁴⁶ theorizing from personal experience proves difficult for many anthropologists of color and anthropologists attempting to study the lives of marginalized people of color because of a history that deems our participation

⁴⁴ Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: Essays for Radicals* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 30.

⁴⁶ Mohanty, 6.

in knowledge production through means of exploitation, and an active discreditation of the homegrown theory made within the confines of the academy.

In *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*, Jacqueline Nassy Brown deliberately inserts herself in her research. As a Black American, Brown analyzes her own identity in relationship to her co-collaborators, defining the ways that her experience differs, and in some way relates, to Black Liverpoolians. Traditional anthropological field methods ask that researchers instead attempt to hold an objective stance in the field, “According to this model, the production of knowledge takes place outside the realm of values and politics and under conditions of unbiased objectivity.”⁴⁷ Inserting the “I” in analyses is a technique that can help break down these barriers within research. Inherently, objectivity requires that a researcher believe that they are outside of the feelings, experiences, words, and conversations with, or shall I say *about*, research participants. The “I” forces the researcher to think about themselves, their relationship to those that they are gathering information from, or rather with, and helps the researcher to reflect on their own identities in relation to the field as well. Patricia Hill Collins demonstrates this methodology in her seminal work *Black Feminist Thought*:

Finally, writing this book has convinced me of the need to reconcile subjectivity and objectivity in producing scholarship. Initially I found the movement between my training as an “objective” social scientist and my daily experiences as an African American woman jarring. But reconciling what we have been trained to see as opposites, a reconciliation signaled by my inserting myself in the text by using “I,” “we,” and “our” instead of the more distancing terms “they” and “one,” was freeing for me. I discovered that the both/and conceptual stance of Black feminist thought allowed me to be both objective and subjective, to possess both an Afrocentric and a feminist consciousness, and to be both a respectable scholar and an acceptable mother.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Harrison, 5.

⁴⁸ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 9.

Displayed in Aurora Levins Morales' relationship with her and her students, this methodology is discredited and difficult to reconcile within an academy that denies it. It is a methodology that subverts many neocolonial mechanisms within anthropological praxes. Given this, I argue, brings fruitful research that challenges both the researcher and co-collaborators, or participants, of research. Because of the identities of marginalized anthropologists of color, the "I" is taught from a young age and discredited upon entering the elitist academic institution. Years ago, I was in a classroom with fellow students and professor discussing the cyclical nature of time and history. Many of us agreed that we are dealing with many of the same issues that our great grandparents dealt with and so on and so forth. Another student explained that the system that we are in now is the only system we can ever know. He'd been so invested in systems of capitalism, neo-liberalism, and in many ways white supremacy, that he could not fathom a past or future without it. Angrily, I interjected arguing that there are many cultures, and even histories, that did not rely on these systems and given this, there is a possibility that we can imagine a future without them. He responded that a lack of evidence or data meant that it did not exist. Of course he was referring to written texts and documentations to validate the existence of many groups of color (which to some extent goes against the ethics of anthropology), but what is important here is that while I was a first year undergraduate student, he was a graduating senior who had gone four years studying cultural anthropology, believing that there was no future without capitalism, and that, the cultures that have been greatly impacted by these systems of violence wielded by the West, ultimately worked under the same structures used for their own conquest. This is a product of epistemological violence. Faye Harrison adds, "The underlying assumption seems to be that cultural epistemological, and theoretical perspectives outside of the Eurocentric canon are less adequate, less 'universal,' and less 'scientific' - and other words, inferior; and both

modernist and postmodernist approaches have placed 'native' theorizing on tenuous ground."⁴⁹ This matter of adequacy has informed almost every, if not all, structures of the Western academic institution.

Black and Indigenous researchers have theorized around personal experience far before Eurocentrism plagued knowledge production of the Western academy. Once we begin to learn the ways that there is a great history of theory that precedes a Western institution, we can begin to see the ways that the knowledge production we know is warped. Furthermore, connecting feminism with anthropology is less challenging (or strenuous) when we begin to learn the ways that the disciplines are already deeply connected. This relationship is particularly prevalent once analyzing many of the nontraditional forms of ethnographic research (demonstrated by Zora Neale Hurston). When we begin to divest from archetypal anthropology, we find that it is quite easy to engage in a different model for our methodologies. In her own attempts to reconstruct anthropology through a Black feminist lens and analytical frameworks, Irma McClaurin explains this very idea, "It [research] dictates that we recognize that African Americans indeed have culture and Indigenous forms of theorizing, out of which enduring cultural beliefs and practices have developed in unique and diverse ways in the United States and throughout the African Diaspora."⁵⁰ Understanding this is critical for changing our anthropological and ethnographic praxes. But it is these very praxes that are also used by the academy, but not recognized by it.

Zora Neal Hurston is the best example of the disregard of the Black intellect within the academy (though she has in the recent decade been credited as a substantial anthropologist) as she was first a catalyst for delivering the Black American experience and subsequent data into the academy. Hurston was not recognized until recently for her work in anthropology, and even

⁴⁹ Harrison, 6.

⁵⁰ McClaurin, 17.

this recognition is limited. This marginalization in the field is related to the ways in which many anthropologists and ethnographers of color practice non-normative methods of research including, but not limited to, autoethnography, ethnographies of activism, academic memoir, homemade theory, experimental ethnography, and autobiographical anthologies. Most popularly used is the autoethnography in feminist anthropology which combines autobiography and ethnography allowing for a legitimization of personal experiences as theory, and knowledge.⁵¹ This method is a thoughtful methodology for knowledge production as it situates the researcher, the researched, and in this case the "speakers of subjugated discourses," as wielders of knowledge.⁵² Given this, autoethnography, and feminist ethnography, gave voice to the powerless – the powerless researcher and researched – which in many ways are synonymous here as we come from the communities of those who have been experimented on and exploited. Thus, there is a legacy of accountability to ourselves as the researchers and our co-collaborators.

Ethnography deals with the politics of representation and interpretation in complex ways. This representation is the method within the methodology of ethnography. Here I mean representation in the ways that the researcher perceives, and subsequently writes, about research participants, or co-authors/collaborators, as well as the ways that said participants want to be represented. I argue that an accountability of representation is seminal to anthropologists of color's praxes because it is both personal and political given the ways people of color's representation has been used for violence, "We gather and retell the stories of our side of history, free of the self-serving rationalizations of the looters. In the face of every act or word that would strip us of it, we tell, in all its anguish and beauty, the story of our ineradicable humanity."⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid, 18.

⁵² Ibid, 18.

⁵³ Morales, 20.

Representation in many ways has been the theory through ethnography because it is what gave way to the categorization of data. In ethnography, this representation relied on legitimizing a perceived pattern and in doing so creating the authentic "other" or savage. It is in this representation that anthropologists of color have most attempted to resist violent theory.⁵⁴ In this way, scholars of color have been utilizing an ethnography, and research methodology that dealt with theoretical, ideological, and methodological meanings of diversity and multilateral representations for much time.⁵⁵

The interrelation of representation, accountability, and academics of color is bound to our timid relationship with academia as we work through an institution that is one of the causes of our silence. Irma McClaurin expresses similar sentiment about her and other Black anthropologist's silence in the discipline explaining that our histories are most often told through, and therefore structured by, the historiographic practices that have silenced us. Our stakes are higher because we cannot quite enter the academy without perfection, but really our fate is of ignorance because we deal with contexts in a different way. If anything, it is that we do not have the option to choose between our identities. Whiteness is neutral, it is the choice-of while colored is not. Mohanty notes, "Besides being normed on a White, Western (read progressive/modern) or non-Western (read: backward/traditional) hierarchy, these analyses freeze Third World women in time, space, and history;"⁵⁶ White researchers, because of their perceived neutrality, believe that they have greater objectivity. I argue that anthropologists of color have a great theory, and history of accountability and representation, that produces fruitful research and data without relying on exploitative research methods.

⁵⁴ Nagar, 14.

⁵⁵ McClaurin, 5.

⁵⁶ Mohanty, 48.

The Legacy and Betrayal of Zora Neale Hurston: Insider, Outsider, and Other

Blacks and feminists, ever marginal to the authoritative discourse, cannot sit at the dining room table because they were never invited - having been hidden in the kitchen) to borrow an image from Langston Hughes), waiting to be called upon (as needed) for their 'anecdotal' opinions; nor will they be recognized by the hosts, who base their guest lists on their own exclusive criteria.

Irma McClaurin, "*Theorizing a Black Feminist Self in Anthropology: Toward an Autoethnographic Approach*"

Zora Neale Hurston is one of the most influential anthropologists and ethnographers in the discipline. Though she has provided important historical documentation of the lives of Black Americans and African culture, Hurston is frequently ignored within anthropology. Throughout the years, many writers and researchers have brought to light Hurston's impact and the ways she has been purposefully belittled in the field. While I argue that Black and Indigenous women have most oftentimes been the subjects of exploitative research, we have also provided much of the meaningful and important theoretical frameworks and research to the academy. Whilst there are currently ongoing discussions of the ways the academy should be decolonized and attempts to shift outdated and harmful methodologies, it is also important to discuss some of the ways that ethnographer women of color have participated in critical, nuanced, and decolonized methodologies for much time now. I use Hurston's legacy, and subsequent neglect in anthropology, as an example to disseminate aspects of the object/subject relationship in research and issues of insiders and outsiders. Finally, I use Hurston as a parable for the fate of marginalized theorist's fate in the academy.

Zora Neale Hurston is a name that is quite well known, as she is one of the most famous African American writers and folklorists to date. In fact, I am not at all trying to propose that Hurston is not a distinguished author or that her work is unknown. While she is best known for

her novels, her most notable work being *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she is not nearly as praised for the anthropological fieldwork she conducted in the 1930s.⁵⁷ As a student of anthropology, Hurston worked tirelessly doing fieldwork in hopes of pursuing a PhD, which she was ultimately unable to finish due to strain from publishers influencing her to focus on her fiction, instead of her research (though, similar to Visweswaran's critique of ethnography, I argue that fiction and research are one in the same because, like fiction, research has reflected the perspectives and observations of the researcher instead of the realities of research participants).⁵⁸ Her neglect of anthropological research may be due to her inability to finish her PhD or her studies (a consequence of the professionalization and hierarchy of both the academic institution, and anthropology as a product of it). While I do not necessarily believe that any formal education is required to produce important and recognizable work in anthropology, the hierarchal dimensions of the academy prevent many scholars from ever breaking into the institution to share their meaningful work.

Hurston crafted a particular form of participant observation that relied on using "informants," more appropriately termed collaborators or participants, to contextualize histories and stories, instead of observing and crafting her own opinions, or perceptions – a tool that had not yet been utilized by many scholars of anthropology.⁵⁹ Franz Boas, considered to be one of the founders of American anthropology, mentored Hurston's studies, and research. At the time, anthropology, specifically in the United States, was attempting to shift from its ethnocentrism and fundamentalist approach to a cultural relativist framework. While Boas early in his career invested in ethnocentrism, he later shifted his views and began investing in African American

⁵⁷ Frank A. Salamone, "His Eyes Were Watching Her. Papa Franz Boas, Zora Neale Hurston, and Anthropology," *Anthropos* 109, no. 1 (2014): pp. 217-224, <https://doi.org/10.5771/0257-9774-2014-1-217>, 221.

⁵⁸ Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: Essays for Radicals* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 218.

foundations, an important aspect of his mentorship of Hurston.⁶⁰ In his analysis of Zora Neale Hurston's relationship with Franz Boas, Frank A. Salamone reveals some of Hurston's early influences in the field explaining, "Hurston's methodology was based on total immersion, more participation than observation. This was, as Boas noted, part of her style even before she entered anthropology."⁶¹ He later writes that Hurston shifted the subject/object relationship through this methodology because much of her work relied on her own relationships with those she researched, of alike identities, and focused on narratives instead of analysis of a single trait, action, or event of a peoples. In short, Hurston provided a practice of anthropology that was not inherently exploitative or looking to gain information from a community. Rather, she was considered more of a translator and author than a researcher attempting to package information for another audience (the audience being the reader of said research). This is partly due to a great amount of her research being done in the very community she grew up in (present in both *Mules and Men* and *Tell my Horse*),⁶² or simply because she was worked with people of similar identities. Because of this, Hurston purposefully utilized research methodologies that portrayed people's, specifically African American's, humanity and wholeness in a field that most oftentimes looked to paint us in half-truths. Salamone reflects, "Hurston fostered an anthropology which embraced every aspect of human life."⁶³ Instead of doing research for the sake of an award (a degree, published book, etc..) her work relied on the interest of unvarnished life and culture. Her ethnographies, and novels, though the two are synonymous in this case, were exploratory stories rather than falsified diatribes of the lives of Black people.

⁶⁰ Ifeoma C. K Nwankwo, "Insider and Outsider, Black and American: Rethinking Zora Neale Hurston's Caribbean Ethnography," *Radical History Review* 87, no. 87 (2003).

⁶¹ Salamone, 218.

⁶² Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008).

⁶³ Salamone, 218.

Hurston, I argue, was partly utilized within anthropology to gain information and research from African Americans about the negro experience by a negro herself. In the foreword of Hurston's autobiography, *Mules and Men*, Arnold Rampersad writes, "In one sense, it is possible to say that Hurston had become more of an African-American cultural nationalist, seeing more of the world and herself in terms of race and her own blackness,"⁶⁴ revealing the ways that Hurston learned more about herself, and her blackness, by studying others. Encouraged by Boas, Hurston was the archetype of an "insider" anthropologist who could gain insight because she was the very topic of research through such "familiarity." Identifying oneself as part of the community of study, oftentimes the researcher believes they are an insider, but, I argue, to truly become an "insider" of a particular community requires an understanding of multilateral and historical contexts, experiences, identities, and constructions. The insider really becomes *both* insider and outsider when understanding that no matter the set of identities or community of study, there will always be similarities and differences as a result of living through the same structures and systems.⁶⁵ Let me explain more about the insider and outsider dynamic within anthropology.

"Familiarity" and "insider" are one and the same in anthropology. Many critical feminist anthropologists have oftentimes called into question what a real "insider" can look like. Often, the insider must have similar or the same identities to equate to the same experiences, and finally, interpretations of a group of people. In my opinion, "familiarity" or becoming insider (with a capital I), which is present within Hurston's autoethnography/autobiography *Mules and Men* and published work of her ethnographic research *Tell my Horse*, occurs when the researcher

⁶⁴ Arnold Rampersad, "Forward: Mules and Men," in *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 17.

⁶⁵ Ann Russo, *Feminist Accountability: Disrupting Violence and Transforming Power* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2019), 135.

attempts to understand many of the contexts from the subject of research. This, I believe, changes the researcher from objective participant to subjective participant in their own research, and thus, a true "insider." While I argue that there is no real "objective" participant within research, Hurston's research presumed this and queered the position of research participants. Black anthropologist Karla Slocum reflects similarly on this insider relationship within her research in the Caribbean mentioning this deviation in personal identity in the field:

...As we analyze how we differ from those we study and consider the impact of such differences on our research goals we can still identify a set of responsibilities to which we will adhere in our work and which we hold toward the people who participate in our research. If our purpose as engaged Black feminist anthropologists is a political one, we can draw on our knowledge both as insiders and outsiders. In this way we can better connect the field experience with our politics.⁶⁶

Slocum better explains that there is not a separation of insider and outsider, and rather a connection or contract between the two, nor is one or the other guaranteed in research. Slocum later poses whether the "insider" is most oftentimes achieved in anthropology by ethnographers of color rather than white anthropologists who must gain trust to gain information (a relationship trite with exploitation). Because the insider relationship coincides with a history of colonialism and imperialism we must further problematize the relationship between identities and research, "The white presence is publicly invisible but, as in the rest of the region [in Caribbean territories], has left the imprint of its domination through various postcolonial social configurations such as a popular valuing of things European, and more recently, things American."⁶⁷ I have at many times read white anthropologists of the 1930s and so on boast about insider research done by Black and Indigenous anthropologists, but I wonder if it is best to

⁶⁶ Karla Slocum, "Negotiating Identity and Black Feminist Politics in Caribbean Research," in *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 146.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 133.

question the ways in which white ethnographers, and researchers, are the real insider ethnographers. Anthropologists believe that to best observe a community of interest, you must gain their trust and essentially become an “insider” of the community. White anthropologists did this until the 1930s when a fundamental shift occurred in the field.⁶⁸ White anthropologists found themselves less inclined to enter communities of color, largely because of a lack of trust from Black and Indigenous people (directly related to colonialism and imperialism), and furthermore, could no longer gain the information they needed. Whilst more people of color at this time were able to enter the academy, they simultaneously were asked to do research from the “inside” of their communities. Under the guise of racial, gender, and cultural similarities, or sameness, ethnographers of color were perceived by their White colleagues to be an inside eye into the lives of Black Americans, Indigenous communities in the pursuit of neocolonialism by way of providing insights on how to best manage colonial or neocolonial *subject*. This was particularly true for anthropologists, and other social scientists, employed by the U. S. government before and during the second world war. It is here that ethnographers of color were assumed to have the same experiences of their own communities, and therefore, tell the most accurate of stories. The one thing that we might be able to call an “universal truth” is our connections, and implications, within imperialism and colonialism which is *inherently* connected to whiteness and white people. The insider then is the one that best grasps, enacts, and contextualizes hierarchal systems of power and oppression whilst placing themselves in those same structures. I argue White ethnographers have dis-identified as “insider,” and spend time theorizing around the *wrong* topic because, being an insider in this case requires *identifying with* colonialism, colonization, and

⁶⁸ Salamone, 217.

imperialism to place oneself in it.⁶⁹ This paradox, though uncomfortable, would allow for a better understanding of White ethnographer's own relationship to the "*subject*." To do so would problematize the subject/object relationship that so many argue for because of placing ourselves as an insider instead of visiting outsider. This is pointed to in Abu Lughod's work who stated that no matter how close the researcher may become to a community of study, they will *always* leave and therefore there can be no true ethnography without exploitation. Participant observation requires that you also place yourself in all of the systems that we observe instead of objective observers of the "other." By consistently, and unapologetically, inserting herself in her own ethnographic research, writing, or translating, the narratives of Black and Brown people, and fraying the dichotomy of subject/object research narratives, Hurston did just that. In doing so, Hurston did what many feminist scholars coined as "dealing with the context" of the field. Thus, she is one of the *founders* of participant observation and critical insider research methods in ethnography. Hurston's work triumphs in the field as early on depictions of what decolonized methodologies, and in turn, anthropology, can look like as she worked through race, class, gender, utilizing situated knowledges before the phrase was in vogue of academic jargon. Her fate as a forgotten Black theorist, scholar, and researcher, is indoctrinated within anthropology, which here can be understood as the local, and the academy (national) is then the legacy of women of color ethnographers within the discipline.

It would be a grave error to discuss Hurston's subsequent professional disappearance without explaining why it occurred. To be both Black and a woman in the academy rids you of any long withstanding legacy in it. Patricia Hill Collins simply states that Black women have had

⁶⁹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2009.

quite a long history, and legacy, of struggle,⁷⁰ and as I have argued in thus far, more times than not, a legacy of struggle is our fate. Kamala Visweswaran discusses the ways that Black, Brown, and Indigenous feminist theoretical praxes is oftentimes invalidated, and or discredited as the standard because it relies on the personal as political, and therefore, personal stories and oral history to construct truths, "...the works of women ethnographers were not viewed as textually innovative, I would now argue that this dismissal of feminist ethnography rests in part upon a fault (albeit gendered) understanding of what constitutes 'modernist' anthropology."⁷¹ Here she focuses on gender and anthropology, but this may be used to analyze many facets of the academy's limitations to women of color writers and scholars. While we want the insights and research *about* marginalized communities of color (present within Boas' relationship to Hurston), we do not want the face of this research if it is of color. Much like the repeated use of Sara Baartman's remains in museums, and her story within courses about ethics, we learn many lessons and parables, we take and steal the integrity of Black women's thought and intellect, but alas, to include her, Baartman and Hurston, in the academy, as an equal, or even as worthy, would mean a reconstruction of the entire system itself.⁷²

"The Other" and Her Research: Troubling Politics of Studying Up

How has it come to be, we might ask, that anthropologists are more interested in why peasants don't change than why the auto industry doesn't innovate, or why the Pentagon or universities cannot be more organizationally creative? The conservatism of such major institutions and bureaucratic organizations probably has wider implications for the species and for theories of change than does the conservatism of peasantry.

Laura Nader, *Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up*

⁷⁰ Collins, 30.

⁷¹ Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008), 13.

⁷² Angela Y. Davis, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Moment* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

Whether there can truly be an “insider” in the field has been a topic of debate in anthropology for a long time. The native anthropologist is largely a product of the white anthropologists’ education and social limitations, and in some ways guilt, of entering Black and Indigenous communities to conduct research. The White anthropologist often perpetuates oppressive attitudes towards the “other” handed down from the discipline’s historical legacy. The White anthropologist also feels guilt, aiming to reinvent the discipline and its views towards the other. The Black anthropologist aims not to replicate and to decolonize the discipline. The Black anthropologist is however educated in a White setting and may embody (through his or her socialization) the very attitudes they are trying to undermine (see Nader’s assemtation’s below). While the “native” anthropologist has been in conversation for quite some time in the field study there is less to be said on marginalized anthropologists and women of color ethnographers working in the field with subjects of privileged identities. I argue that there is a particularly underdeveloped conversation to be had about *the other* studying *the one*, or in the words of Simone De Beauvoir, *the individual*. I suggest that the shift in the field to “native” and or insider anthropology comes from a means of exploitation, and it is assumed that marginalized researchers cannot research those of privilege. The complexities of studying up from the margins is full of possibilities and interesting research outcomes. In her less cited work, Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw describes a basement to best imagine hierarchies as a building with floors representing both society and marginalized identities

Imagine a basement which contains all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age and/or physical ability. These people are stacked – feet standing on shoulders – with those on the bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors, up to the very top, where the heads of all those disadvantaged by a singular factor brush up against the ceiling. Their ceiling is actually the floor above which only those who are *not* disadvantaged in any way reside. In efforts to correct some aspects of domination, those above the

ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that “but for” the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room.⁷³

Hauntingly, this theory stirs up images of history textbooks exhibiting slave ships attempting to display the insidiousness and disturbance of slavery, but instead, this slave ship is metaphorical and best imagined as the air that we breathe. What I have argued thus far is that women of color have provided critical theoretical frameworks for the field of anthropology, whilst bearing the brunt of systematic erasure in the academy. But what is the research outcome of those enslaved studying oppressors and or colonizers? The image of the basement takes greater shape when interrogating the positionalities of researchers participating in the process of studying upward of those with privileged identities. I offer an analysis on the complexities of this research, and ethnography, done from the “other.” To discuss research from the “other,” I must also conceptualize how anthropology in large worked to construct it, so I will begin there.

A critique of the field of anthropology is that it deals with the politics of representation through the researcher’s perceptions, convincing the reader that it is both factual and the universal truth. Visvesweran explains:

If we agree that one of the traditional ways of thinking about fiction is that it builds a believable world, but one that the reader rejects as factual, then we can say of ethnography that it, too, sets out to build a believable world, but one the reader will accept as factual. Yet even this distinction breaks down if we consider that ethnography, like fiction, constructs existing or possible worlds, all the while retaining the idea of an alternate ‘made world.’ Ethnography, like fiction, no matter its pretense to present a self-contained narrative or cultural whole, remains incomplete and detached from the realms to which it points.⁷⁴

We find that not only is the “made world” a fictional construction, the given testimonios of various marginalized cultural groups were more times than not of the last living members of a

⁷³ Kimberlé Crenshaw “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *Living with Contradictions* (1989): 151.

⁷⁴ Visvesweran, 1.

particular community. Thus, history is constructed by the memory of an elder, reinterpreted by a researcher of privilege, and distributed for an audience to gain information about “them.”⁷⁵ Given the capacity, or rather flaws, of memory, connected with our interpretations being systematically controlled and guided by histories, class, race, (and really *all* identities), what is finally transcribed, edited, and distributed is, to be frank, a making of imaginative and wild fiction. If ethnography is a work of fiction, the subject, or the other, reflects more of the wants of the researcher, not the actualities of a research participant. To create the “other” requires the work of many:

...the conversation of that authority into the control of markets, organizations, and government policy.’ Authority in both its classic and anthropological sense is the ability to influence without resorting to the use of force or negative sanctions. Authority itself may emanate not only from a person but also from an inanimate thing such as a text, treatise, or institution. The influence of authority is a reflection of the legitimacy granted by a culture or society upon the judgment of the authoritative figure; such judgments of meaning and value are deemed valid and true and therefore carry considerable weight.⁷⁶

To re-perpetuate it, required an institutionalization of the very methodology. Ethnography purposefully constructed the other and the flawed, non-critical research produced from it is a product of ethnography’s legacy of violence. In her work on the importance of “studying up” in the field of anthropology, Laura Nader explains the ways that this creation of the other was twofold: whilst the academy participated in crafting an “other,” the public and the research, or the academy, react to one another. Thus, the marginalized group reacts to their depiction, is convinced to play their role (or defy it in a system that crafts it), and those of privilege believe in and maintain it.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 6.

⁷⁶ Mwarira, *Biomedical Ethics, Gender, and Ethnicity: Implications for Black Feminist Anthropology*, 189.

Contributing to research as the “other,” in the field of study that helped to construct it is a bizarre relationship. Many of the contributing authors to *Black Feminist Anthropology* discussed in their own work the ways in which their politics and identities better informed their research rather than hindered it. A grappling with situated identities within research, and its impact on research participants, was of great concern when many of those who founded the discipline of anthropology were not doing the same.⁷⁷ Additionally, they debate whether entering into the academy obscures whatever insider access they may have had before, questioning shifts in privilege and class, fundamental to the West’s ethnography, “...professional Western training (an acculturative process) affords the native anthropologist the opportunity to partially transcend what he calls ‘the insider perspective’ and thus eliminate what he presumes is an inherent bias that must be discarded to create the distance necessary for scientific inquiry.”⁷⁸ It is fair to criticize the positionality of a researcher that is returning to their community as there is oftentimes a shift in positionalities where they are no longer socially, and sometimes economically, the same as they were when *in* a community, therefore, something has altered. Here, I argue, that while positionalities are not stagnant, the oppressed may never shift into the status of the oppressor.

Two winters ago, when I studied abroad in India, I got into a tempestuous debate with another student after critiquing an Indian student’s research on the working class, impoverished areas of India. Whilst Indian herself, she grew up middle class and was presumed, by other researchers, predominately non-Indian, to know the ins and outs of lower-caste and lower and

⁷⁷ Irma McClaurin, “Theorizing a Black Feminist Self in Anthropology: Toward an Autoethnographic Approach,” in *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*, Irma McClaurin (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 56.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 58.

working-class India, having never lived there, but done the research. Whilst having more knowledge than perhaps I may have had about lower caste, class differences and "slum" areas of Mumbai, I did question the intent of displaying the "realities" of a marginalized community without experiencing this marginalization herself. It is important for me to explain now that I am not attempting to argue that research cannot or should not be done by people inside or outside a particular community. Within anthropology, this has been a point of contention where Anglo researchers have perceived the "insider" to have a special lens in the field, "This perspective includes arguments that native or indigenous researchers would offer a critique of colonialist, racist, ethnocentric, and exploitative anthropology, balance the distortions presented by white or Anglo researchers, creatively use their special standpoint or double consciousness, or be privileged to a more intimate view;"⁷⁹ but it is imperative, and necessary, that the researcher is investigating their own identities, understanding many histories and contexts present in people's lives, and questioning meanings and perspectives in the field. Wolf adds further to a discussion of shifting identities in the field explaining, "Indigenous field workers are often 'marginal natives' and often feel they are both insiders and outsiders due to class, cultural, rural/urban backgrounds, or language, in addition to having spent use in the Western universities."⁸⁰ After some time going back and forth in the back of a bus on the last day of our long trip, we concluded that it is less about the identities of the researcher opposing the place of their research and more about the necessity for grappling with multiple contexts, oppressions, and constructions of histories. Wolf expands on this same topic explaining the ways that a fluidity of relationality can render an opening of relationships, and alliances, in the field, "...one's position in the social hierarchy vis-à-vis other groups potentially 'limits or broadens' one's understanding

⁷⁹ Wolf, *Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork* 15.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 16.

of others. Members of the dominant group will have viewpoints that are ‘partial and perverse’ in contrast to those from subordinated groups, who have greater potential to have fuller knowledge;”⁸¹ thus, the anthropologist may cease, or relinquish our “insider-ness,” in the same way that our “outsider-ness” changes as well. Our shifting positionalities can and will change in relationship to those that we research; instead of claiming one or the other (insider/outsider), it is better to grasp the meanings, and contexts, of both.

Research from the Margins

Dr. Sanjukta Mukherjee in her article “Troubling Positionality: Politics of ‘Studying Up’ in Transnational Contexts” builds on the process of researcher’s “studying up,” coined by Laura Nader in *Reinventing Anthropology*. Focusing on the software industry in India, she explains that it is critical to utilize feminist, transnational, and postcolonial frameworks when doing any research, and especially when doing research from the margins, it is equally important to work through such concepts as there is, unfortunately, a difficult inter-relational danger when working with those “above.”⁸² The written theory on positionality and its subsequent politics in the field overwhelmingly focus on the researcher gaining rapport with a community that is on the margins, ignoring the researcher in the margins doing research of those from above. Diane Wolf adds:

The terms ‘double consciousness,’ ‘outsiders within,’ and ‘double vision’ describe the position of academics of color who study their own group, being and seeing in two different, often incompatible, worlds. These concepts suggest that because of double or multiple positions, these academics gain and offer particular insights into their own group that may not be experienced by an outsider.

⁸¹ Ibid, 13.

⁸² Sanjukta Mukherjee, “Troubling Positionality: Politics of ‘Studying Up’ in Transnational Contexts.” *The Professional geographer* 69, no. 2 (2017): 298.

Common and shared positions due to race, class, gender, or nationality do not always, or do not necessarily, lead to common understandings, however.⁸³

Given the difficulty people in the margins have entering the academy, there are even more adversities, and risks, in the field from potential research subjects of privileged identities.

The logistics of studying up are complicated – they require an ethnographer that is aware of social strata, politics and nation states, and a grappling with history that is not readily available to many. It necessitates an ability to analyze the self, and the ways in which our own identities, as researchers, impact the work and subjects, or co-collaborators, of research. Wolf explains, “Despite partial or complete immersion that can render the researcher feeling unempowered and dependent, inequality may still persist between the researcher and her subjects. This is particularly evident because the fieldworker has the ability and privilege to leave the field location once the research is over;” Wolf goes on to describe that the decision of what to mention and or leave out when engaging with research participants leads to various outcomes that can sometimes benefit the research and at other times lead to negative effects. This enigma is largely a question of the researcher’s ethics in the field as “leaving out” information about oneself can be a matter of safety whereas in other instances it may lead to a closer bonding towards collaborators.

The researcher that lies in the margins navigates many complexities of their identity placements. These difficulties include lying while in the field because revealing said identities will lead to violence. Some marginalized researchers find themselves manipulated by their research participants of privileged identities. For ethnographers and researchers in these margins,

⁸³ Wolf, *Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, 14.

we must disrupt the standard of the academy so that their (our) erasure, silencing, and violence is not guaranteed, and look to better ways to interrogate this positionality of research.

Anthropologists and the A-ha Moment: Collaboration in Research

I have read many ethnographies in my schooling and have always been somewhat mystified by anthropologists who went into "the field" with a question and answer already in mind. The discipline's façade of science, and the subsequent professionalization of anthropology, has influenced our methods of research significantly. Due to this, we mirror the scientific method and hypothesize what we think we will discover in the field. More times than not, what we think we will "discover" is impacted by what we *want*, and this want greatly affects our results. I argue that we cannot discover something about a living group of people that is already known by themselves. Realistically, seeking out truth from a group of people reflects our own experiences, identities, and positionalities as researchers. Time and time again, there is a reckoning that anthropologists experience within the field. They find that what they wanted from the community they wish to study, is not what the community wanted to give. Anthropologists that practice more collaborative, activist based research repeatedly change their research interests to reflect their participants and co-collaborators, whilst those who are interested in an exploitative, traditional ethnography turn to manipulative methods to get the information that they want (oftentimes seeking the "authentic" experience or representation of a group of people, this exchange displays the hierarchal relationship in the field between researcher and research participants). I call this experience the "a-ha" moment, because for those of us that are seeking an ethnography for liberatory purposes are often shocked in the field by our naiveté. Within many written ethnographies, the a-ha moment reveals many of the complexities of representation and

the ramifications of ignoring hierarchies between researcher and research participants when working towards collaborative research.

In my own schooling, I have found that many students attempt to find their research niche, attaching themselves to an idealized perception of a people or place. Many of our own faculty and departments within my university have an expertise of a certain culture, ethnic group, or community, and so we are taught in sections, ideologically breaking up the world into units. This capitalistic neo-liberal regime makes it so that this is very common within Western schools. It is here that we are conditioned to fetishize the other because our research, and status as anthropologists, depends on it. When we are given texts, pictures, and movies about people, they are idolized (and I mean that these people are also largely fictionalized depictions of marginalized). Upon entering the communities we have spent years "studying" in the academic institution, whether in research in a doctoral program or an undergraduate study abroad, we find that our preconceived assumptions reflect the West and our schooling rather than the communities we would like to study and research with.

In many instances, the focal point of research changes upon entering the space/ community of study; the theoretical frameworks and context of a given place are perhaps the most important piece within "the field" that is missed when a researcher enters a community with a research topic, question, or theme already picked and planned. In her research in the Caribbean, Karla Slocum discloses her own struggle with this reconciliation, or negotiation, of identities in the field, "Many mention having to reconcile their preconceived assumptions about a link between themselves and the people they would study, whereas others admit grappling with the ways they were locally constructed (unexpectedly) as racialized, gendered, and national

researchers."⁸⁴ Kimberly Eison Simmons writes of her surprise in her work in the Dominican Republic after learning of the ways Black Afro-Dominicans organized around racism and sexism on a national level that she could not imagine for the United States, changing the scope of her research.⁸⁵ Diane Wolf grappled with similar changes in her fieldwork experiences in *Dilemmas in Feminist Research*. As scholars, we need to better prepare for research that does not seek out what will give an outcome of research that we want. Given the history of anthropology, and the Western academy, I argue that it does not matter what we want (see *The Nature of the Feminist Project* for context), and it is better for us towards mending the harm of violent research methodologies. This requires that we rethink our relationship to our research, and our inquiries in the field.

It is naïve for us to believe that we can properly represent another person's experiences when we are learning of them for the first time in a classroom or fieldwork setting. A degree does not grant expertise on a group of people, nor does a lifetime of study. Thus, the a-ha moment is a matter that deals with the institution, and our complacency within it.

An Ethnography for Liberation

A theory of liberation must be created to articulate the feeling of oppression, to describe this oppression as real, as unjust, and to point to a cause. In this way the idea is liberating. It restores to the oppressed a belief in the self and in the authority of the self to determine what is real.

Yvonna S. Lincoln and Kamala Visweswaran, *Defining Feminist Ethnography*

It is our duty as anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and feminist anthropologists that we do not repeat the colonial methodologies of our discipline's past - for us, for our future, and future practitioners of anthropology. Linda Martin Alcoff notes, "We must be able once again to say with conviction

⁸⁴ Slocum, *Negotiating Identity and Black Feminist Politics in Caribbean Research*, 140.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 86.

that what is at stake in our struggle is no less than the truth about the world. We must once again be able to show how fascism and colonialism have no real respect or reverence for truth. And to get to this point, a liberatory language must be able to epistemically account for itself, by justifying its processes of justification.”⁸⁶ Through my reflections, analyses, and theorizing, I offer a set of values and methodologies to an intentional ethnographic praxis. This template, and syllabus, offers tools to construct an ethnography that empowers, anti-racist, critical anthropology.

History Has Given Us What We Need

As anthropologists, we first must recognize, and respect, that African Americans, Indigenous and Native people, Third World women, and those of us who have been intergenerationally affected by anthropologies violence have traditions of theorization, cultural beliefs, and practices.⁸⁷

Aurora Levins Morales writes, “The role of a socially committed historian is to use history, not so much to document the past as to restore to the dehistoricized a sense of identity and possibility;”⁸⁸ as socially committed historians and anthropologists, our duty to understanding, historicizing, and contextualizing our history is crucial. Reinserting the narrative and theories that have been lost in many social sciences is one of the tasks of an anti-racist, feminist anthropologist. This method requires regularly questioning how we have come to know our standard of knowledge and why?⁸⁹ Contextualizing how the ignorance of women of color feminisms and theory has happened, whilst utilizing the frameworks that have been left/created are critical for practicing an ethnography of liberation.

Research without the “Object”

⁸⁶ Linda Alcoff, “An Epistemology for the Next Revolution,” *Transmodernity* 1, no. 2 (2011), 71.

⁸⁷ McClaurin, 17.

⁸⁸ Morales, 24.

⁸⁹ Alcoff, 69.

Inserting ourselves within our own research is necessary for a decolonized ethnography. For many ethnographies, the “I” is limited to the introduction and conclusion of the text, whilst the general analysis attempts to use objective language.⁹⁰ Many researchers do this because we believe that we can objectively observe, and analyze, our research subjects, when we are in fact subjects of our research as well. Researching through our identities and multiple positionalities is imperative to critical research, thus instead of fearing the “I” we must instead insert the “I,” the “we,” and the “us” in our analyses. By suggesting that “if we get rid of traditional notions of ‘objectivity’ and ‘scientific method’ we shall be able to see the social sciences as continuous with literature-as interpreting other people to us, and thus enlarging and deepening our sense of community.”⁹¹ This methodology means that there is no subject, nor object, within our research and rather, we are co-collaborators and creators of knowledge.

Collaboration Is Necessary for All Research

Nagar writes that a “speaking with” approach to research helps us, as researchers, situate our multiple contexts and positionalities within our research and requires a careful listening, and care, for research subjects involved.⁹² This approach asks that researchers reflexively consider our own identities in relation to research subjects, and additionally uplift the subject from research object or participant, to co-researcher. All ethnography is inherently “collaborative” because it requires working with and gaining information from others. Because of this, anything written/published after research is done should be discussed with all research participants, and conversations about co-authoring must be had (I say this because not all research participants

⁹⁰ Kamala Visweswaran, “Defining Feminist Ethnography,” in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in the Handkerchief* (Walnut creek: Alta Mira Press, 2003), 77.

⁹¹ Jim Miencaowski, “The Theater of Ethnography,” in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*, edited by Yvonna S. Lincoln and Norma K. Denzin (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2003), 420.

⁹² Nagar, 15.

want to be explicitly named or want to participate or collaborate for a number of reasons, some being positionality, social location, politics, etc.). Brown displayed in her own ethnography that the work of research is not actually done by the researcher, rather it is the work of the researched whilst we are most times the transcribers, and translators, of their words.⁹³ Nagar notes on the policing of knowledge production, “A related problem arises when the lenses the academics deploy to address questions of epistemic hierarchies betray the logic and investments emanating from our own locations. Structural asymmetries Grant Metropolitan researchers access to more resources, richer rewards, and control over the means of widespread dissemination of knowledge. This material hierarchy can result in a taken for granted epistemic hierarchy in which Metropolitan knowledges are privileged as ‘sophisticated’ and where non-metropolitan knowledge are perceived as raw data or stories that need to be framed and put into perspective by the formerly certified intellectual.”⁹⁴ Utilizing a speaking with breaks down the hierarchal and exploitative relationship gained that speaking to deals with and instead allows all research participants to wield knowledge and mine data.

The Personal is Political and the Political is Research

The feminist phrase, “the personal is political” relates to anthropology and ethnographic methods greatly. The “personal” deals with personal stories, experience, and histories. Given that anthropology concerns the representation of said stories, the process of ethnography is politicized. Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones explain in their writing on feminist research methods, “Theory, for us, is not an abstract intellectual activity divorce from women's lives, but seeks to explain the conditions under which those wiser live. Developing this understanding has entailed looking at the material actualities of women's everyday experience and examining the ways in

⁹³ Brown, 83.

⁹⁴ Nagar, 3.

which we are represented in represent ourselves within the range of cultural practices, such as the arts in the media;”⁹⁵ the divisions that we have made between the self and scholarship limit our research and lead, as Viswesweran refers, to fictive data and representations of our lives. A liberatory ethnography necessitates we better discern theory as experience, the experience as personal – and this is political.

Research Must Be Accessible

The standard of the academic institution has been to limit the availability and accessibility of research. Given these limitations, it is also through these texts that the canon is created and tightened. For this reason, ethnographies must go beyond what is “theoretically exciting or trendy” within the institution.⁹⁶ Instead, Nagar notes, our research and data must go beyond the bounds of the Western academy to the communities that we do not yet hold affinity to.

Introducing research that does not address the theoretical frameworks most popular in the institution risks ghettoization, but the success of it helps to change the canon, “...the entry of marginal texts into the modern curriculum not only ‘opens up’ the canon but opens to question the idea of a canon. For what is at stake, as Cornel West reminds us, is not simply the canon, but a cultural and historical crisis, namely, ‘the decolonization of the Third World associated with the historical agency of those...exploited, devalued and degraded by European civilization’ that renders a radical reordering of the canon necessary.”⁹⁷ Entering into the academy in nontraditional ways takes a reconceptualization of the ways that we can convey data. While many ethnographies are written and published, a more experimental approach to distributing ethnography can be more accessible and trouble the institutional norm of data acquisition.

⁹⁵ Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones, “Thinking for Ourselves: An Introduction to Feminist Theorising,” in *Contemporary Feminist Theories*, Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 1.

⁹⁶ Nagar, 96.

⁹⁷ Viswesweran, 39.

Experimental ethnography can include films, zines, graphic novels, fiction, theatrical performances, museum exhibits, and audiobooks.

Resisting the Narrative of "the Other"

The depiction of “the other” within anthropology is a violent and outdated portrayal of Black, Indigenous, and Third World people still perpetuated in contemporary uses of ethnographic research methods. The portrayal has relied on the idea that those with various cultural practices and ethnic appearance differ from White or Anglo people, and therefore, they are lesser. This depiction furthermore convinces the researcher that we can somehow save those who are subordinate from “us.” Aimee Meredith Cox writes in her own ethnographic research that her research subjects do not need saving, nor do they need researchers to study them, “I ask that instead of approaching their stories as narrative puzzles to be solved by superficially affixing them to the theoretical perspectives developed through Black feminism, queer theory, youth cultural, and girlhood studies, for example, we explore their potential to inform and transform theory and, thereby, its ripple effect on policy and material realities,”⁹⁸ resisting the other requires that we consider our ethnographic intervention as a personal endeavor instead of the demand of communities of interest (see *Anthropologists and the A-ha Moment*). Instead of searching for “the other” researchers can give informants, or co-researchers, control over the depictions of themselves, and thus, the social construction of meaning of their own identities.⁹⁹ Nagar adds, “...the responsibility and labor of telling stories involves a series of delicate negotiations through which one must underscore the impossibility of ever accessing ‘lived experiences’ and where one’s engagement with who is speaking, who is referenced, and who is

⁹⁸ Aimee Meredith Cox, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 8.

⁹⁹ Miencazowski, *The Theater of Ethnography*, 416.

listening can become legible only when contextualized within multiple and shifting social relations in which they are embedded;”¹⁰⁰ for research to be empowering or liberatory, it cannot produce a subject of oppression.

Knowledge Production is Not an Intervention: Radicalizing Ethnographic Research

As researchers, if we are not looking to change systems of power and oppression then we do not need to produce research. Nagar, quoting Geiger, writes, “Self-reflexivity ‘does not redistribute income, gain political rights for the powerless, create housing for the homeless, or improve wealth.’ Terms like appropriation, exploitation, and even surveillance are often attached to the very concept of ‘western’ research among ‘nonwestern’ subjects, leading many western scholars, especially students, to conclude that they cannot step into ‘other’ worlds and societies for research purposes, or that it should not be done because it is inherently unethical.”¹⁰¹ Whilst I am not attempting to discredit the importance of research, or even the important findings of many social scientists, I am posing that producing said research is only a part of changing structures. Researchers must resist the elitist, White supremacist institution, as well as actively work towards changing it. Knowledge production is not a means of social intervention, but rather, a tool that we must utilize for social change.

¹⁰⁰ Nagar, 14.

¹⁰¹ Nagar, 84.

Syllabus for Anti-Racist, Anti-imperialist, Feminist Ethnography

Course Description:

This course introduces students to ethnographic research methods and encourages them to interrogate and critically engage ethnographic methodologies. This course is designed to help students craft their own critical research methods and hands on experience with fieldwork. We closely examine different critiques of ethnographic research. We will cover the theoretical work of feminist studies, feminist anthropology, critical race theory, and Native and Indigenous feminisms. Through this, we explore ethical dilemmas of research, experiment with methodologies, and craft our own ethics of research. In this course we will utilize debates, movie screenings, and case studies to discuss the history of fieldwork and ethnography, the object/subject narrative, and insider/outsider narratives. As a result, this course prepares students for practicing their own research methods, theorizing from the personal to engage in a critical and nuanced ethnography.

Course Goals:

1. Acquire a working knowledge of ethnographic research methods.
2. Learn about the history of field-note taking and ethnography.
3. Demonstrate theoretical understanding of ethnographic methods.
4. Understand the theoretical frameworks that have influenced the practice of ethnography.
5. Be able to explain, analyze, and critique popular research methods.
6. Be able to craft personal ethics and praxes of research.

Organization of the course:

Students will be exposed to several ethnographic research techniques from feminist, experimental, and decolonized ethnographies, in class debates, case study analyses, and semi-

structured interviewing. This course will analyze the main components of critical ethnography for a final reflexive research project employing ethnographic research methods. Consequently, the reading and writing assignments will focus on the process, ethics and experience of conducting ethnographic research.

Required Texts

Davies, Charlotte Aull. *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*. London: Routledge, 1999.

*Harrison, Faye Venetia. *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*. Washington, D.C: Association of Black Anthropologists, 1991.

*Lincoln, Yvonna S., and Norman K. Denzin. *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003.

*McClaurin, Irma. *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

*Visweswaran, Kamala. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008.

*Denotes Readings available via free E-book. Additional readings will be available on D2L.

Course Requirements

- 1) Class reflections. There will be 2, 3–5-page reflections at week 5 and 9 which will include analysis, critique, of the courses readings and in-class activities. The first half of the paper should reflect on what you've grasped from classes exercise and activities, connecting to the readings assigned. The reflection must make connections between concepts in the readings and the experience of the activities. The second half of the paper must include questions, reflections, and insights you have on research methodologies. This assignment is not a journal reflection and requires you integrate and reflect on the notes, ideas, and unsolved answers you have had in class. The reflection will be cumulative and must use at least 3 quotes from past assigned readings. The first reflection

will reflect your engagement with new material and the second should show growth in thoughts, ideologies, and ethics.

- 2) In-class activity write ups. There are three in class activities that you will reflect on and discuss in a 2–3-page paper. The first, administered in week 3, will engage our activity on reflexive research praxes. The second assignment will reflect on class discussions, and debates on experimental ethnography, autoethnography, and ethnographies of activism. The third assignment will be administered in week 7 and reflect the class film screening. For this assignment, discuss the process of the activity, how it engaged in critical analysis of research methods, and analyze the ways it can, or cannot, reimagine ethnographic methods.

- 3) Final research project. The final paper is based on your own research practices. You will work throughout the quarter to refine your own understanding of research ethics and methodologies, crafting them from our in-class activities, and reflecting on them in reflection papers. Each student will begin crafting your own template for conducting research and partnered with another student to interview. Students will be asked to finish template by week 7 and utilize it to interview your research partner. Examples of interview themes/questions include your experience choosing a college, choosing a major, discussion of family, music tastes, etc. (themes should be noninvasive and of interest of both you and interviewee). For your paper, please use the “IMRAD” structure, at least three sources from the course, and 2 outside sources. This paper will 7-10 pages long and include a short presentation of your findings and reflections during week 10.

Course schedule

Week 1: Course Information

Objectives:

- Introduction to the course and its goals
- Familiarize ourselves with the syllabus and required books
- Review what we know about research methods, ethnographic research, and fieldwork

Read and prepare to discuss:

- American Anthropological Association's, Association of Indigenous Anthropologist's, and Association of Black Anthropologist's code of ethics available online

Week 2: Ethnography and Research Methods

Objectives:

- Learn a brief history of ethnography and qualitative research methods
- Engage with critiques of ethnography
- Discuss important theoretical shifts in methods within anthropology

Read and prepare to discuss:

- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles." *Signs* 28, no. 2 (2003): 499-535.
- *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*. Washington, D.C: Association of Black Anthropologists, 1991.
 - Chapters 1, 5, & 6

Supplemental Reading

- Hymes, Dell H., and Laura Nader. "Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up," in *Reinventing Anthropology*, edited by Dell H. Hymes, 284–311. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Week 3: Reflexivity

Objectives:

- Learn about reflexivity in anthropology
- Gain a critical lens of reflexivity
- In class activity on reflexivity

Read and prepare to discuss:

- Wolf, Diane L. "Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork" In *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, 1–55. Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993 (Introduction only)
- Davies, Charlotte Aull. *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*. London: Routledge, 1999.
 - Chapters 1 and 2

Week 4: Experimental Ethnography, Autoethnography, and Ethnographies of Activism

Objectives:

- Begin to read different types of ethnography
- Experiment with different forms of ethnographic research methods

Read and prepare to discuss:

- McClaurin, Irma. *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2001.
 - Introduction and chapters 2, 3, and 5

Week 5: Experimental Ethnography, Autoethnography, and Ethnographies of Activism cont'd

Read and prepare to discuss:

- Salamone, Frank A. "His Eyes Were Watching Her. Papa Franz Boas, Zora Neale Hurston, and Anthropology." *Anthropos* 109, no. 1, (2014): 217-225.

- *Lincoln, Yvonna S., and Norman K. Denzin. *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003.
 - Chapters 3, 5, & 19

Week 6: Insider/Outsider Narratives

Objectives:

- Gain an understanding of the insider/outsider argument in anthropological research theory
- Be able to critically analyze the research of both the “insider,” “outsider,” and researchers who identify as both

Read and prepare to discuss:

- Nwankwo, Ifeoma C. K. “Insider and Outsider, Black and American: Rethinking Zora Neale Hurston’s Caribbean Ethnography.” *Radical History Review* 87, no. 87 (2003): 49-77.
- Mukherjee, Sanjukta. “Troubling Positionality: Politics of ‘Studying Up’ in Transnational Contexts.” *The Professional Geographer* 69, no. 2, (2017): 291-298.

Week 7: Subject/Object Narratives

Objectives:

- Use the insider/outsider argument in anthropology to critique and engage with “objective” research methods

Read and prepare to discuss:

- McClaurin, Irma. *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

- Chapter 4
- Visweswaran, Kamala. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008.
 - Introduction and chapter 2

Week 8: Ethnography for Liberation

Objectives:

- Begin discussing our own research praxes and ethnographies

Read and prepare to discuss:

- Find 2-3 ethnographies that interest you, skim them, and bring them to class for discussion

Week 9: Crafting Our Own Ethics

No class readings for this week

Week 10: Reflections and Course Wrap-up

Student presentations will be this week

Conclusion

The more things seem to change, the more they stay the same.

Corinne Bailey Rae, *“Put Your Records On”*

The field of anthropology must explicitly address past harm, analyze the ways in which it was enacted, and formulate nuanced methodologies to enact change. Ethnography, as I have outlined, has for too long been used to institute harm and violence on underprivileged and marginalized communities. While it will continue to be used inside and outside of scholarship, it is time to include the stories and research of those kept out of the academy, and reimagine the very meaning of fieldwork, participant observation, and collaborative research. Anti-racist, anti-imperialist, decolonized, and collaborative ethnography is imperative for the field of anthropology to grow. Ethnography has been used to tell the story that we want and expect. As it is molded in the West, by the West, it tells a skewed story of colonialism, violence, and trade. It is both fiction because of the ways that it has been utilized *and* through the truths and understandings of the subject, whether the subject is researcher or researched. Ethnography is inherently a politics of representation, and I would add interpretation, so it is, and always will be, political.

Liberation is not one thing; we must always be changing and interrogating what must be different within our practice of anthropology and our methods. Years ago, I was told by a friend that they hope they are deemed problematic in 10 or 20 years - that if we were all still in the same place we were when we believed we were at our most critical and radical, we have failed as a society. The same is true for our methodologies that we deem as progressive, liberatory, and emancipatory. In the moment, we must do this work, and for the future, we must change to reflect the needs of the people, the other, and the world, “...What is co-authored as a result of an

evolving struggle is never set in stone and is forever changing with political and social exigencies."¹⁰² Likewise, if we are not consistently questioning, analyzing, and reimagining anthropologic work then we have failed as anthropologists. For an ethnography of liberation to work, we must all be comfortable with not succumbing to the limits of the academy. Nor can our endeavors within the academic institution rely on twisting and redefining the same academic debates.¹⁰³ Following the same trends and patterns of the academic institution has led us to perpetuate the same harmful methodologies. An ethnography for liberation will sculpt an anthropology for a revolution. With a theory, and anthropology for liberation we will become fluent in each other's histories and reimagine a new world.

¹⁰² Nagar, 96.

¹⁰³ Nagar, 421.

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