

**Who's Afraid of Margery Wolf: Tributes and Perspectives on
Anthropology, Feminism and Writing Ethnography**

An Anthology by
Students of Margery Wolf
University of Iowa

Working Paper #277
January 2003

Introduction

by Sarah Ono & Jacqueline Comito

In her 1992 book, *A Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism & Ethnographic Responsibility*, Margery Wolf tells us that one never finishes the job of fieldwork. As she writes, “[we] leave the field site because we must, not because we feel we have finished the work.” The same must be said for teaching—eventually, one retires from teaching, not because one has finished the job, but because one must. In May 2001, Wolf retired from academia (but fortunately, not from anthropology). This collection of papers illustrates the broad spectrum of influence that Wolf has had on her students at the University of Iowa. Reflecting on students’ experiences and their discussions of anthropology, feminism, and ethnography with Wolf, these papers pay tribute to Margery Wolf as a teacher and mentor. They explore her contributions to anthropology, and the effects those contributions have had on her students’ own approach to writing ethnography.

The influence a professor has on his/her students often cannot be recognized or understood until after direct interaction has passed and all go their separate ways. In time, a professor’s impact on the emerging ideas and lingering impressions of an anthropologist-in-training can be seen in the work produced by their students. Since any particular version of a life event depends on the perspective of the teller and the position of the listener, these papers represent a unique view of Wolf as seen through the lenses of different students at various points in their educational careers, from pre-masters to recently post-doctoral students. The papers by Hough, Ramírez, and Burchianti discuss the ways in which feminist ideas influenced their ethics and behavior in “doing” anthropology. Tulley’s paper gives a unique perspective to a specific experience he had with Wolf while participating in her feminist theory course at Iowa, while Huntington recollects Wolf’s influence as her mentor and dissertation advisor. Taking a more literary approach, Carter explores the relationship of the anthropologist to the “subject” when writing ethnography. Having just completed fieldwork in China, Olson discusses Wolf’s contribution to China studies and the anthropology of China. Looking to the future of feminism and anthropology, Ono’s contribution raises questions about the new directions and understandings of feminist anthropology that await us. Drawing on a series of written exchanges between herself and Wolf, Comito returns us to a concern addressed by Wolf throughout her career, the craft of writing ethnography.

These papers were originally written as pieces to be read, with Wolf present, at the 2001 American Anthropology Association’s (AAA’s) Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. Wolf served as the discussant of the session, and her thoughts and comments are included in this publication. As the AAA celebrated 100 years of anthropology, Margery Wolf’s students took a moment to pay tribute to a professor of anthropology whose feminist perspective and analysis of how cultures have been interpreted, (re)presented and read have played a significant role in the transformation of the discipline.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Sarah S. Ono	1
	FEMINISM WITHOUT WOMEN: EXPERIMENTATION AND EXPANSION IN FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY	
2.	Michelle Ramírez	9
	FROM MIDWIVES TO MENOPAUSE: HOMAGE TO MY FEMINIST MENTORS	
3.	Margaret Burchianti	17
	HEARING TESTIMONY, WRITING TESTIMONY: DOING FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY WITH THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO	
4.	Jason T. Carter	25
	EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MY MASTER’S WORK...BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK	
5.	Carolyn A. Hough	33
	“FIRST DO NO HARM”: ETHNOGRAPHIC RESPONSIBILITY IN OUR OWN BACKYARD	
6.	Velana Huntington	41
	THE SUPERIORITY OF “WOLFS” OVER RABBITS AND FOXES: REFLECTIONS ON MARGERY WOLF	
7.	Stephen E. Tulley	49
	TALES OF THE RECALCITRANT “OTHER” IN THE CLASSROOM: ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPOSITION AND THE SCIENTIFIC ANTHROPOLOGIST	
8.	Kari Olson	57
	THE PROFESSIONAL IS POLITICAL: MARGERY WOLF’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHINA	
9.	Jacqueline Comito	65
	“DON’T TURN TO FICTION UNTIL AFTER YOU’VE FINISHED YOUR DISSERTATION”: HOW MARGERY WOLF INSPIRED MY APPROACH TO WRITING ETHNOGRAPHY	
10.	Margery Wolf	75
	DISCUSSANT’S COMMENTS	

**Feminism Without Women:
Experimentation and Expansion in Feminist Anthropology**

Sarah S. Ono

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Abstract

At a time so full of possibility, this paper attempts to raise questions and reflect on where a feminist anthropology might be headed, the anthropological endeavor as a collective process, and the importance of work that pushes the boundaries of “acceptable” anthropological research. Margery Wolf’s work has made a critical contribution to the development of a feminist anthropology and has guided a generation of young scholars at the University of Iowa to do research grounded in a theoretical orientation that is both intellectually rigorous and creatively motivated. As feminist anthropologists, we are continually re-shaping our shared understandings of the field, our positions as researchers and writers of ethnography, and of what is possible if we are willing to take risks, play with form, and challenge each other to think without limits. This paper is a tribute to Wolf, who even in retirement continues to push the boundaries of anthropology through the work of her students.

Biography

Sarah S. Ono is a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at the University of Iowa. Her current research considers the construction of community through an investigation of Hollywood.

FEMINISM WITHOUT WOMEN: EXPERIMENTATION AND EXPANSION IN FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY

When I think about feminist anthropology, I tend to begin by tracing its historical development from the mid-70s into these, the early years of the 21st century, and by mapping the influence of feminist contributions to anthropology more broadly. Recently, I feel as though I have come to the edge of my map, and as I stand on the edge and look into what at first appears to be vast emptiness, I feel anxiety. Lately, I have found that discussions of feminist theory and scholarship quickly turn to concerns that “feminism” as a concept, a category, or a framework is not working, or that it has been so problematized that it has become awkward and clumsy. In the back of my head, I hear the shadows of conversations about movement into a “postfeminist” period, and a need to move beyond feminism, to find a new term—something more “useful” perhaps.

In general, “feminism” is so heavily criticized that it feels a bit paralyzing to claim the identity, as doing so seems to invite challenges that, at times, appear to be coming from all sides. There are the challenges from those who do not want to encourage the feminist perspective—the “oh, haven’t we already been through this? Isn’t it enough that gender is now being included in the majority of courses, and recognized as a valid category of study by most?” Then, there are individuals who place themselves within the vast and diverse category of “feminist,” but who are also critical of feminism. I have witnessed exchanges where it appears that the most vocal critics of feminism are other feminists. On the one hand, this is okay; we mark ourselves with an identifier that credits us as being critical thinkers. On the *other* hand, we are bound in multiple ways by the task of speaking with the force of political collectivity while not homogenizing or essentializing the category or experience of “women.” Uniquely positioned according to class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, ideology, age, and history, the individuals who position themselves under the banner of “feminist” are diverse. While this diversity may not lead to easy consensus (on any topic), this variety is a strength, a strength that I hope will guide feminist anthropologists into new territories and terrains not yet mapped.

When I proposed that my Master’s research would explore Hollywood from a feminist anthropological perspective, at the time reliant predominantly on men in the movie making industry, it was Margery Wolf who said, “Do it. It sounds like it might be something really great.” There was no hesitation from Margery, and, at that stage, I think I would have let the project fall to the wayside if it had been met with resistance instead of encouragement, or if it had been proposed—as it later was by others—that I would be better suited to a different department. Instead, my Hollywood project has moved from a summer of Master’s fieldwork into pre-dissertation plotting, but the dilemma continues to be, how to approach an object that doesn’t have an obvious model to follow. In my own research, I am finding that existing anthropological maps, which too often present the discipline as a bounded space, have not yet outlined all of the areas that could be engaged by anthropologists. One aspect of a feminist approach is to redefine where we can go and expand on what we can speak to. Now let me say once explicitly, that just as I am currently unwilling to let go of the category “feminist,” I am equally unprepared to disassemble anthropology as a discipline. I like anthropology. All four fields if necessary. However, I also recognize that there are interdisciplinary discussions and

contributions from outside anthropology that complement our efforts and elevate our discourse. Anthropologists are not alone in thinking about the future of feminism.

So as I stand at the edge of my present map, there is anxiety. But this is not meant to be an anxious paper, so I have to mention that there is also a sense of hope, expectation, and excitement. As I look into that vast emptiness, vague forms are taking shape. The discussion of what might be possible in a future feminist anthropology is what I really want to talk about, what I want to raise questions about. I am not ready to throw out the category, the label, the word: Feminist. I like the word. I like what the word represents—even in moments when I cannot seem to articulate what it's all about, especially when, more often than not, there is anything but consensus on what the purpose of feminism is in 2001.

The *theoretical* contributions of feminist anthropology are outstanding. I mean to phrase the sentiment in this way because I think both readings of the statement are accurate—the contributions are both significant and unfinished. First, the theory produced under the umbrella of feminist anthropology has proved to be critical, timely, and lasting. Even if contributions are not always acknowledged as having roots in feminist theory, they nonetheless have been incorporated into our “post-crisis” understanding of writing ethnography. Here is the first point at which I would like to tip my hat to Margery Wolf, a scholar who was critical to my understanding of ethnographic representation years before I made my initial pilgrimage to Iowa.

The second interpretation, that the theoretical contributions of feminist anthropology are outstanding, suggests that before we consider distancing ourselves from feminism, or adopting yet another “post-” label, there is a need—as well as the space if we are open to it—to explore what is yet possible. Feminist thinking is still relevant and necessary to our expanding scholarship as anthropologists. Even now, we are working from a position that has new perspectives to offer and questions to raise. Contributions may be theoretical at the moment, but I have no doubt that there is incredible potential for future innovation and experimentation.

And now, to raise the question that provoked the title for this paper: Can there be a feminist anthropology without women? As with many conversations surrounding feminism, I don't know that I have found a satisfactory answer to my own question. I am, however, fascinated by the discussion. To recreate and puzzle through the layers of possible responses that this question elicits is well beyond the scope of this paper. What I hope this paper does is prod us all to think about what could reside in the spaces beyond the edges of our current map of feminist anthropology, to maybe nudge someone to push the zone of what is comfortable and safe, what is “acceptable.” Maybe this discussion will rally support for those attempting to do something different or do something familiar in a completely different way.

This discussion is about raising questions. Is the central or critical quality of feminist anthropology the focus on gender, or the centrality of women? Is it possible that the key aspect in a feminist work might also be a motivation to change existing structures? Can a

work be feminist in method and presentation and not speak primarily to gender? If it were entirely up to me, I'd say, "Yes, I think so." I know there is room for debate here but, in fact, I see this application of feminist theory and perspective to a wider range of subjects as a possible next step – or maybe a pause, or a side-step that gets feminist anthropology out of the gray area of unpoliticized gender studies, which are seen to be feminist because women or gender can be found in an index.

I run into the stumbling blocks of language—"women," "sex," "sex roles," "gender," "feminine," "feminized," "feminisms," "postfeminist"—terms situated in time, interchanged, replaced, overlapping, and used with different understandings. As such, there are a couple of distinctions I have been thinking about lately. I want to put them out there, as they have resulted from much of my thinking about the current state of feminist anthropology. The first distinction is gender versus feminism, and the second is feminist anthropology versus (for lack of a better word) feministic anthropology.

First—I am of the opinion that there is a difference between the terms "gender" and "feminist" and the work that each defines. I am not presenting the two as being oppositional to one another, nor as entirely independent. There are cases where the two can be used interchangeably, *but* I do not agree that one should *imply* the other. The compromise of substituting "gender" as an area of interest or specialty, in place of "feminist," might make feminism and its topics more palatable, but this maneuver also leads to assumptions that work relating to gender must therefore be feminist, as if this connection is inherent. I argue that not all anthropological work addressing topics related to gender are feminist. I strongly believe that gender is a useful and critical category, but gender does not necessarily get at, to quote Mascia-Lees and Black, "feminist anthropology's commitment to challenging and rechallenging assumptions about people's 'proper' place in the world...with its complex intergender, interracial, intercultural, and international conflicts in an ethically and politically sensitive way" (2000:106).

Next, I see a distinction between feminist anthropology and feministic anthropology. As mentioned earlier, there is a perception that feminist anthropology may be becoming obsolete because many courses now address women and gender, thus minimizing the need for a "special" emphasis, let alone a whole subfield. I see this kind of thinking as feministic anthropology. A feministic anthropology is one where courses include an ethnography by a woman, or about women, or better yet, a work with both qualities. I recognize that such incorporation is no small achievement, as even this gesture is still lacking at some institutions and in many classrooms. A feministic anthropology is a positive outcome of the influence of a feminist anthropology.

A feminist anthropology, however, is about restructuring or subverting power structures on some level. Maybe this subversion occurs through the form of representation we produce, or our rejection of conventional, academic anthropology and the constricting nature of universities as they begin to look more like corporations. Maybe it means refocusing our lenses on new subjects, or proposing a redefinition of the systems we are investigating. Feminist anthropology challenges existing power structures, and as such, it does not necessarily have to hold gender or women as its central object. Here, there can

be a feminist anthropology without women, but it is not enough to make anthropology feministic.

I agree with my colleague, Steve Tulley, when he says, “A critique of a position or genre should ideally begin with some familiarity of the object of criticism rather than build endlessly, like simulacra, on third- and fourth-hand accounts retelling the identical tale” (Tulley, this volume). Along the same line of thinking, once a critique has been mounted, as in the case of feminist anthropology, it is possible to fall into the trap of critiquing the critique and a similarly distanced, meta-discourse ensues. The exciting thing about the future of feminist anthropology is that it is able to develop theory as the focus shifts and evolves. We are not bound by the same arguments for all time. Feminist anthropology is very much still entrenched in the complexity of culture and therefore is positioned to respond as new questions arise. There continues to be utility for feminist anthropology, and I simply wanted to think aloud about the place of gender in contemporary and future feminist analysis.

Feminist anthropologists, among them Wolf, have questioned assumptions within our discipline since the early 1970s (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974), and it seems that we have reached a point where some benefit might come from questioning assumptions about feminist anthropology. Feminist anthropology has a legacy of being at the fore of positive strides in the field of anthropology. To maintain this tradition, to continue pushing boundaries – whether these are disciplinary, binary, or categorical – we must envision feminist anthropology expanding beyond a focus on women, beyond discussions of gender, beyond any of the topics previously addressed. It will take imagination and creativity and thoughtfulness, coupled with a critical mind, and a politic that aims to subvert accepted norms – even the accepted norms that have defined “feminist anthropology.”

There is still ground to be broken, and there are still plenty of “fields” yet to be explored by anthropologists, that could benefit from critical feminist evaluation. It was pointed out to me around the time I set about writing this paper that feminism is aimed at its own dissolution – the elimination of women as a marked category. In my estimation, we are not yet there. There is still a need for feminism and feminist anthropology. So as I squint with optimistic anxiety into the space being mapped all around me, I think of the territory that Margery has charted. As other papers in this volume discuss, mentors are important, but feminist foremothers can’t teach classes forever. The Margerys will inevitably retire. Even though this does not signify that Margery’s involvement with feminist anthropology is over, it does mean that there are no more office hours to monopolize with lengthy conversations and no more classroom discussions. Yet, there continues to be a need for broad-based support and a willingness to enter new “fields” – areas not exclusive to feminist anthropology, spaces and geographies and potentially ideas that anthropologists and scholars all over are grappling to figure out a strategy for how to tackle.

Margery has been my mentor, my critic, and my guide. I have been provoked by her ideas, and challenged by her honesty. In my experience, and to her credit, Margery has never underestimated the potential of feminist anthropology. Margery has taught by

example the importance, and potential power, of having an opinion, *and* expressing that opinion publicly, even when there is the chance of inviting challenge. I thank you, Margery and the authors in this collection, for indulging me as I ponder the yet unrealized future of this endeavor we call feminist anthropology.

Acknowledgements

Funding for travel and research related to this project has been provided in part by the University of Iowa Department of Anthropology, the University of Iowa Student Government, and the University of Iowa Graduate Student Senate. Thanks to this collection's contributing authors for all of your good work, Margery Wolf, Orion Meyer, natalie bourdon and Tara Hefferan at Michigan State University's WID *Working Papers* series, and my co-organizer, Jackie Comito.

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From Midwives to Menopause: Homage to My Feminist Mentors

Michelle Ramírez

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Abstract

This paper is a personal tribute to the feminist mentors with whom I have worked throughout my undergraduate and graduate education and illustrates my personal awakening into feminism, which has deeply informed my work with women's health in Mexico. For Master's research, I conducted a study with rural traditional midwives in Nayarit, Mexico, and found that local practices, like the *sobada* (external cephalic version massage), are still firmly entrenched even after decades of exposure to biomedicine. My Ph.D. research has shifted to women in their post-reproductive years in Oaxaca, Mexico, where I examine how social class mediates the experience and meaning(s) of menopause.

Biography

Michelle Ramírez is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Iowa. She has been conducting research on women's health issues in Mexico since the summer of 1996. Her research interests include: medical anthropology, gender, sexuality, ethnomedicine and Latin America. She plans to defend her dissertation, "Menopause: Meaning and Experience in Urban Oaxaca" in December 2002.

FROM MIDWIVES TO MENOPAUSE: HOMAGE TO MY FEMINIST MENTORS

There are probably just as many stories as there are women (and men) describing how one becomes a feminist or begins to see the world through the lens of feminism. For me, it all began with Mina Davis Caufield at San Francisco State University in a class called “The Anthropology of Women.” On the first day of class, Mina let us know that she was not only a feminist but a Marxist too! Having grown up in a very conservative Los Angeles suburb, I was thrilled to be in the company of subversives, and having just recently moved to San Francisco, I was eager for all sorts of paradigms to shift. We discussed menstrual taboos, sexuality, reproductive rights, colonialism and racism and read things like *Women, Culture and Society* and *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, anthologies still near and dear to my heart. It was the first time I had ever taken a course dedicated to studying women—it was wonderful! Then, at some point during the semester, *it* happened. I had what feminist writer Vivian Gornik (1998:376) describes as a “vital flash of clarifying insight” where you believe with every bone in your body that there is nothing *natural* about the oppression of women, that, in fact, it has been culturally constructed in many, if not all, societies around the world. I knew then what I had to do—I had to continue to lay bare the covert and tacit systems of oppression that are injurious to women.

After finishing my B.A. at San Francisco State and working several odd jobs, I began to entertain the idea of graduate school. During this time, I made yet another discovery—a geographical entity known as the “Midwest,” which actually had universities. I explored various graduate school options in this elusive, four-seasoned land and came across one particularly strange sounding place—Iowa. Much to my joy and surprise, I found that the University of Iowa had a burgeoning medical anthropology focus, in addition to a feminist track. I knew then where I needed to go for graduate school. Friends and family in California were incredulous about my pending move:

Friends/Family: “Now, why are you going to Ohio?”

Michelle: “Iowa, I’m going to the University of Iowa to study feminist anthropology.”

Friends/Family: “Feminist anthropology in Idaho?”

Michelle: “Feminist anthropology in Iowa, strange but true.”

The first year of graduate school was challenging, difficult and glorious. I was completely supported for the research I wanted to do—women’s health in Mexico. My first summer of field work was conducted in Nayarit, Mexico, in two very different villages. I spent the first seven weeks in a coastal fishing village called “Chamila” and later moved to a hot and dry mountain village called “Santa Ana,” nestled in the Sierra Madre mountain range. The original focus of my research was to investigate when Mexican women use ethnomedicine versus when they use biomedicine, and under what circumstances they might use both. The Mexican state pays nominal homage to the practice of ethnomedicine by setting up hospitals, usually in rural areas with large

indigenous populations, where biomedicine and ethnomedicine are jointly administered. Santa Ana featured one such hospital. The effectiveness of these institutions is highly debatable, but within this structure I was permitted to spend a lot of time with various traditional healers and biomedical doctors. Ultimately I focused my study on traditional birth attendants, known locally as *parteras*. *Parteras* in Mexico attend well over half of all births in rural areas (Sesia 1996).

In the 1970s, reduction of the high natality rate through massive population control campaigns became a national priority in Mexico. Midwives were identified as potential intermediaries for implementation because they were already present and represented no additional cost to an already very strained government health budget. Mexican health officers made efforts to incorporate midwives into institutional health care services through state-run training courses. Between 1974 and the early 1980s, more than 15,000 *parteras* underwent this training (Sesia 1996:123). I was fortunate enough to attend one such training course in a town close to Chamila.

During this three-hour course the instructing physician, “Doctora Gomez,” provided basic information on how to extract and store breast milk. This technique was to be taught to working mothers, who may not be able to feed their infants on demand. She then proceeded to recommend post-partum insertion of IUDs. This was to be done with or without the woman’s knowledge or consent if the *parteras* believed that the woman had “enough” children. And finally, Doctora Gomez stressed more than once that the *parteras* should not perform *sobadas*, or what is biomedically known as an external cephalic version massage, on pregnant women. The doctor indicated that the *sobadas* put women at risk for fetal detachment from the placenta and explained that the fetus will continue to move and reposition itself in-utero, thus manipulation of the fetal position was unnecessary and very likely harmful. At this point in the program, the *parteras* kept silent and nodded compliantly. One attendee was my key informant, and I knew very well that she performed *sobadas*, having been with her while she had administered one to a pregnant woman. Needless to say, my interest was piqued—how is it that these women felt “empowered” enough to go against biomedical orders? Could it be that they were resisting biomedical hegemony through the continuation of a local practice like the *sobada*?

Now, there is the IUD issue. Like most feminists, I found the recommendation of inserting an IUD post-partum without a woman’s consent to be extremely problematic. It violated my most deeply held beliefs about a woman’s right to bodily autonomy, and I had to find out if the *parteras* were actually following doctor’s orders. During subsequent interviews, I discovered that the *parteras* in my study reported never having inserted an IUD and, furthermore, did not believe it to be a good thing. My feminist consciousness gleefully exhorted, “Oh sister mine, is it because you are opposed to the co-opting of women by state sanctioned population control programs which ultimately serve as a Foucauldian-like surveillance of the female body?” (Fortunately my informants were not privy to these ruminations). “Doña Juana,” my primary informant simply and elegantly stated, “The uterus needs to rest after women give birth.” In my zeal to decry a ubiquitous patriarchal enemy, I believe I may have overlooked the *agency*

exercised by the *parteras* who, in continuing local practices like the *sobada*, simply know that “the uterus needs to rest after birth.”

So what does Margery Wolf have to do with any of this? Well, about 40 years ago, Margery did field work in a rural village in Taiwan and discovered that when we listen to women, the social universe looks very different than what we may have thought it to be. We may discover that something as seemingly culturally static as kinship definitions and allegiances are fundamentally altered when seen through the eyes of women (Wolf 1972). Perhaps it was this and/or years of experience, research and writing that led Margery to encourage me to look beyond what I might want to see in my data to fulfill my personal and political inclinations. She suggested I look into Lila Abu-Lughod’s (1990) idea about romanticizing resistance and that I listen to the women—listen to their stories. What I initially saw as acts of political resistance, I now believe to be a tenacious local practice that exists in concert with biomedicine. In the 1970s, Brigitte Jordan found that Mexican midwife training programs had very little influence on the *parteras*’ daily practice (Jordan 1993). Some 20 years later during my fieldwork, *parteras* were still doing their own thing. Several medical anthropologists have examined why biomedicine does not maintain exclusive medical authority in Mexico. This is, in part, due to Mexico’s medically plural, under-funded state programs, but, perhaps most importantly, it is due to the psycho-social importance of local practices like the *sobada* (Finkler 1991). What I ultimately found is that women will use both biomedicine and ethnomedicine—they will see an allopathic doctor if they need vitamins or want a sonogram, but they will also see a *partera* for a *sobada*. Local practices remain firmly entrenched even after decades of exposure to biomedicine.

My work now focuses on the end of women’s reproductive lives in Oaxaca, Mexico. Having done preliminary research on menopause in Merida, Yucatan, I found that reported experience varied dramatically from virtually asymptomatic to a wide array of symptoms including hot flashes, which were found not to exist or at least were not reported among Yucatec-Mayan women (Beyene 1989). My dissertation research question then evolved into “How does social class mediate the meaning, experience and reported symptomatology of menopause in urban Oaxaca?” To get funding for this research, as many of you know, I had to speak a language of bounded variables and testable hypotheses, which to a certain degree still are going to be a part of my dissertation. However, in a recent meeting with my advisor and current feminist mentor, Ellen Lewin, I was once again encouraged to listen to women’s stories and examine what these stories reveal about the social universe inhabited by Oaxacan women at the end of the 20th Century. I interviewed 93 women from many different social and economic backgrounds and heard 93 different stories. For example, 50-year-old “Doña Marta” had no formal schooling, was married at age 14 and has eight children. Her current occupation includes cleaning homes and doing laundry for Mexican and Gringo households in Oaxaca City. When asked, “What happens to a woman when she has menopause?” she responded, “You feel dizzy, things look dark because you’re letting down a hemorrhage. I felt this way, it affects your sight, I got tired, it was like my head was spinning. I laid down, closed my eyes for an hour and I felt better. But I was, my

body was left without any energy.” I then asked, “Does this have anything to do with when menstruation stops?” and Marta replied:

Yes exactly, for example we’re menstruating, the last child is born and you continue to menstruate for three more months, just a little bit—it’s like you’re menstruating and not menstruating because it no longer comes out with pressure or strength. This is to say that the hemorrhage comes down clear and it no longer has such a red color. It’s a thing that really diminishes the blood. It’s more like water that comes down, like colored water and it’s only a little bit. Then at three months or six months after the boy or girl is born, you will menstruate only a little bit, then you won’t menstruate. You’ll be two or three months without menstruating then you go to the *menopausi*. So at the *menopausi*, it’s not to say that you menstruate, it’s to say that the strong hemorrhage has come. Having the strong hemorrhage you are then clean. You are left all the time with nothing.

Interestingly, Marta did not use the word “*menopausia*,” which is the Spanish translation of the English term menopause. She used her own word, *menopausi*, to describe various colors, textures and flows of menstrual blood that occurred around the time of the birth of her last child, after which she was left clean.

Like Doña Marta, many other women in my study described menopause as changes or difficulties with their normal menstrual pattern. In fact, some considered it as simply part of the “illnesses” involved with menstruation. Other women, generally educated, professional and elite women described menopause in terms of lowering hormone levels and as a natural stage of the life cycle. For example, there was 48-year-old “Doña Alicia,” who lived in an affluent part of the city, had technical training after secondary school, got married at age 23, and had three children. She married a government official and works part-time teaching Spanish classes at a private language school, just to get out of the house. When asked what she knows about menopause, Alicia replied:

For me it’s a stage where women suffer a hormonal change, and I think more than anything, I think it is important to be prepared in your physical condition with nutrition but also to care for your psychological well-being. It’s a difficult stage for women, like adolescence because we can sometimes fall into a series of involuntary questioning. This is why one has to be prepared physically and emotionally.

This theme of being prepared for menopause to somehow help or prevent it from being too problematic only appeared in the upper socio-economic groups. These women felt that, although menopause was a difficult time for women, they would be able to prepare themselves for it by reading about menopause in magazines and periodicals, attending seminars, and discussing it with their doctors, who were often their social peers and with whom they were likely to have regular visits. Therefore, the risk prevention discourse currently circulating among biomedical practitioners was readily available for women in the upper socio-economic groups. Many of the poor women in my study: a) had no medical insurance and could not afford private doctors; and b) could not read or write,

and therefore did not have the same kind of access to biomedical models that more elite women had. However, most of the poor women I interviewed knew *something* about menopause. Byron Good (1977) has noted that when new illness categories are adopted in unfamiliar cultural settings, they are quite often fit into pre-existing semantic networks. For Doña Marta, it was a network of various changes in menstruation and the birth of her last child, after which she was “left clean.” For many other poor women in my study, menopause was a time of suffering related to or made worse by children living and working illegally in the United States, anxieties about money and just being plain overworked and tired.

I am deeply indebted to the women in my study who took valuable time out of their lives to talk to me about some of the most intimate corners of their lives. My work in return is to elucidate the aches and pains of culture, history and political economy inscribed on women's bodies (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987) by listening to their stories. Thank you Margery for your early efforts at making this kind of work possible, and indeed a viable academic enterprise. Thank you Mina, thank you Ellen—you have molded future feminists who will continue working on women's lives and women's stories.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Graduate College and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Iowa, for, without their support, study at Iowa and numerous field visits to Mexico would not have been possible. I would also like to thank the following granting and awarding agencies that have supported my research: The Stanley Fellowship for International Research, The T. Anne Cleary Fellowship, The University of Iowa's Student Government (UISG), The Research Institute for the Study of Man, The Leslie A. White Award, The National Science Foundation (Grant #: BCS-9910483) and The National Institute of Health/National Institute of Aging (Grant #: 1 R03 AG17655-01A1). Special thanks go to my dissertation advisor, Ellen Lewin, for her tireless support and to the rest of my doctoral committee: Mac Marshall, Florence Babb, Mike Chibnik and Maureen McCue, who have contributed their wisdom and support along the way. Lastly, I would like to thank my family, my dear friends and John Cotton for their unwavering support and love in and out of the field.

Notes

1. All town names and informant names are pseudonyms.

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**Hearing Testimony, Writing Testimony:
Doing Feminist Anthropology With the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo**

Margaret Burchianti

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Abstract

This paper is an exploration of the promising relevance of testimony to feminist anthropology. During research in Buenos Aires, I found that testimony became a fundamental part of my interviews with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the Mothers of the Disappeared. Their responses to the query, “Tell me about your child,” consisted of a kind of testimony, one which bore witness to the *day* of the disappearance of their child. Ethnography may be political, but testimony, I argue, is highly politicized, and therein lies its strength. I argue that the potential of testimony to call forth empathy in the reader and its accessibility to a wide audience make it a fruitful area for feminist anthropologists to work.

Biography

Margaret Burchianti is a graduate student in the feminist anthropology Ph.D. program at the University of Iowa. She completed her M.A. paper in May 2002 based on her research with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. Her major research interests include feminist anthropology, social memory, women’s movements and testimonial literature.

**HEARING TESTIMONY, WRITING TESTIMONY:
DOING FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY WITH THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO**

In June 2001, I traveled to Buenos Aires to do fieldwork for my M.A. paper on the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, *Linea Fundadora*, women whose children were disappeared by the military dictatorship during the late 1970s. These women formed one of the only effective public protests against that dictatorship. Twenty-five years later they are still mobilized, fighting for justice and the remembrance of the disappeared, as well as for current human rights issues, such as hunger and poverty. I was interested in what ways the cultural construction of maternal emotions has been a driving force behind the Mothers' human rights activism, particularly in the present. I knew that one of the Mothers' principal goals was to tell people about the disappeared, but I could not have anticipated the extent to which testimony became a fundamental part of my interviews with the Mothers. This paper explores why testimony should have a place in anthropology, especially feminist anthropology.

My first interview with one of the Mothers was held in a café, as many others would be. The roar of the cappuccino machine heightened my already sensitive nerves. I began my first interview with the question: "Could you tell me about your child?" I had meant for Matilde to tell me about her child's personality, interests, studies, and profession, as well as her relationship with her child. I hoped that this discourse would tell me how she thought about the life of her child, and how these thoughts have shaped her perception of her own human rights activism. To my surprise, Matilde interpreted this as a request for the story of what happened on the *day* that her daughter, Graciela, was disappeared.

Over the following two months, something strange happened. In *every* interview that I conducted with the Mothers of *Linea Fundadora*, the response to the query, "Tell me about your child," consisted of this kind of testimony, one which bore witness to the *day* of the disappearance. After this testimony, I would then ask: "Could you tell me more about what your child was like, and what your relationship with her or him was like?" One mother remarked to me: "What a wonderful topic to talk about!" The tone of the interview would then wholly change, and I received many warm and animated smiles, and extensive descriptions and stories about their children. I continued to ask questions that I thought would summon what I considered "useful" data for my project. But the emotional intensity of the initial testimonies stayed with me. The dramatic nature of what the Mothers were telling me made it clear that I had an ethical responsibility to them. What kind of data were they? Were they even data? What kind of responsibility did I have to write about them?

I believe that there are three ways to explain the Mothers' interpretation of my request. First, I believe that the Mothers have a psychological need to tell and re-tell these stories, that the telling of these stories affords them some kind of emotional release or relief. Second, the Mothers have good reason to assume that, as a foreigner, I am interested in that information. Over the last two and a half decades, the Mothers have searched out and been searched out by others to share these stories. Their testimonies have a patterned construction as a result of this. Finally, the Mothers had a political agenda in sharing their testimonies with me. The Mothers clearly understood why I was there; they clearly

understood the focus of my project. They understood what I didn't understand at the time – that I could do my research and help them at the same time. The Mothers want me to share their testimonies with people in the U.S. because the more people who know about human rights violations in Argentina, the less likely it is that these violations will be repeated in Argentina or elsewhere. The Mothers have a definitive political agenda, which is to get me to bring their testimonies to you. I share this agenda, but as an anthropologist whose research concerns women's movements, I have an additional agenda to collect data that will help me analyze how these women have mobilized. Yet these agendas are not mutually exclusive. I believe that hearing the Mothers' testimonies can help people in the United States, my audience, understand more fully what it means to be an Argentinean mother who has suffered through the disappearance of at least one child, and has taken political action to counter an oppressive and violent dictatorship.

In April 2002, I will be talking to the Iowa City Chapter of the Million Mom March about the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. My talk to them will not advance my academic program, but ethically I believe that I must do something. I must say something. The M.A. paper is a certain type of document, a document that probably will not allow me to fully share the Mothers' testimonies. As a feminist anthropologist, I feel my work must go beyond my own interests. Yet I hold out hope that I will be able to incorporate the use of testimony in my anthropological work as well. Margery is writing an anthropological novel because she feels that her data pushed her in that direction. As I think about my M.A. paper, I think about how my data will influence the choices I make in how I write it up. As an M.A. paper, boundaries are placed around what I will be allowed to do, but I believe that my data, as well as my relationships with the Mothers, compel me to give the testimonies direct attention.

Margery's interest in anthropological fiction has also helped spark my interest in testimonial literature. Like Margery, I believe that anthropological fiction and testimonial literature have the potential to disseminate anthropological knowledge to a wider audience than ethnography might. And like Kirin Narayan, I believe that we should maintain the border between ethnography and fiction out of respect for the lives of actual people (1997:143). I believe that the same idea applies to testimonial literature. What makes testimony compelling, *one* person bearing witness, is what also makes it *not* good ethnography. A border should remain between ethnography and testimony, but this does not mean that anthropologists cannot promote testimonial literature. Ethnography, anthropological fiction, and testimonial literature are all partial truths, though in different ways, and have the potential to forward a feminist political agenda. I believe that none of these genres should be completely privileged over the others. Rather, the purpose of the piece of literature should be taken into account, and whatever genre would be most useful for this purpose should be used. One of my colleagues has described Margery's project not as fiction, but rather as a "work of the imagination." Likewise, testimonies are not fiction, although they are mediated and constructed.

Ethnography may be political, but testimony, I would say, is highly politicized, and therein lies its strength. I would argue that just as other disciplines have incorporated ethnography into their enterprises, anthropology does not need to limit itself to the

written form of the ethnography. The strengths of our discipline make it an ideal place in the academy to seek out the publication of testimony, in terms of our access to people who might want to produce a testimony for a Western audience, and in terms of our ability to contextualize testimony for that audience. The anthropologist can produce anthropological fiction based on the scholarly knowledge she has obtained through fieldwork or historical research. Similarly the anthropologist who has worked in a particular area has knowledge of that area, which she can use to help publish a testimony or compilation of testimonies, in the most useful and ethical manner. The anthropologist can contextualize a testimony for a Western audience; in fact, this should be her responsibility when compiling testimony. She can point out that the testimony is the rhetoric of someone who occupies a particular social location in a particular cultural and historical juncture, and she can help the reader take this rhetoric into account when reading.

Testimonial literature is also useful in countering the tendency of anthropology to heighten or exaggerate cross-cultural difference. Lila Abu-Lughod has critiqued anthropology and its culture concept by arguing that, “anthropological discourse gives cultural difference the air of the self-evident,” and that “‘culture’ is the essential tool for making ‘other’” (1991:143). She proposes that we write “ethnographies of the particular” in order to subvert this tendency. She intends for this “ethnography of the particular” to complement, and not replace, other types of anthropological writing. I would suggest that anthropologically informed testimonial literature is another means by which anthropologists can counter our writing’s tendencies to construct an “other.” Yet, anthropology has also been criticized by post-modernists for the alleged crime of obscuring cultural difference. Donna Haraway has argued that empathy “produces results in human anthropology...forming part of a very mixed legacy that includes universalizing, identification, and denial of difference as the ‘other’ is appropriated to the explanatory strategy of the writer” (1986:104). I must respond by arguing that empathy, as it is constructed in Western discourse, can be immensely useful for a feminist politics. By empathy, I mean the respect of and the attempt to understand another person’s experience. I say *an attempt* because the belief that we can truly understand another person’s experience risks glossing over cultural and emotional difference. I agree with Ruth Behar, who in her book, *Translated Woman*, states “The feminist ethnography is located on the border between the opposite tendencies to see women as not at all different from one another or as all too different, for to go too far in either direction is to end up indifferent to the lives of other women” (1993:301).

If feminism is a politics that works towards the equality of women and men, and towards the elimination of the suffering of women and men due to various forms of oppression, then empathy is a pattern of thinking, even a type of politics, that we, as feminist scholars, must promote in our work. We might ask, what do we get out of a testimony of one individual? How can one person’s story be useful? My main argument is that testimonial literature actively promotes empathy in the reader. There is a definite paradox here. Yes, we can feel empathy through a testimony, but this empathy can be deceptive since it derives from the packaging of the testimony. My job as an anthropologist is to contextualize the packaging of the testimony so that readers develop a useful empathy

from reading the testimony, an empathy that takes into account cultural difference. In Western society, the active use of empathy, and emotions in general, in scholarship, tends to be denigrated, even decades after the critiques of objectivity began. If an author actively tries to cultivate empathy in the reader, she is accused of being manipulative, and her work is disparaged as unsound. Yes, testimonial literature is manipulative. But all literature is manipulative. Ethnography is manipulative in its construction of the anthropologist's authority. According to Donna Haraway (1986), in empathizing, we are actually colluding with the dogma of objectivity. I would argue that feminism needs to be grounded, in fact it is grounded, in our empathy with people's suffering. At the base of any struggle for political change, including feminism, is empathy towards someone's suffering. Otherwise, what would the driving force behind social change be? Ruth Behar has described anthropology as a form of bearing witness, as "the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing, and necessary form of witnessing left to us" (1996:5). I maintain that if the anthropologist can bear witness to suffering through the writing of ethnography, then she can also collaborate with people so that they can testify to their own suffering. When a person testifies to her own experience, it is much more potent than when an intermediary tells the story. Also I believe that we, as academics, through our control of the production of Western texts, dominate the telling of non-Western people's experiences, and have a responsibility to find additional ways to bring back "the news" (Wolf 1992:58).

Part of the appeal of anthropological fiction is the idea that fiction is more accessible to the wider population. Especially for feminist anthropologists, this opportunity to expand access of anthropological knowledge to more people is highly desirable precisely because feminist academic work is fundamentally political. It is necessary to engage in dialogue with people other than academics if our work is to achieve its greatest social potential. Again, ethnography may be political, but testimony is highly politicized. Kirin Narayan asserts that, "writing cannot singlehandedly change the inequalities in today's world; yet, in bearing the potential to change the attitudes of readers, ethical and accessible writing unquestionably takes a step in the right direction" (1997:36). Testimonial literature allows for this same expansion of access, since most testimonial literature is easier to read and less theoretical than standard ethnography. As Margery Wolf states, "If our writings are not easily accessible to those who share our goals, we have failed...Our readership must not be confined to intellectual elites" (1992:119).

In moments of self-doubt, I question myself. How can I write an M.A. paper when people's lives are such, when people are suffering? What good is that paper going to do? At these times, I remember the Mothers who encouraged me in my research, who talked with me for endless hours, who shared with me their most painful stories, and who told me how glad they were that I was listening to them and that I was going to write down their stories for others to hear.

Acknowledgements

My research in Buenos Aires was supported by funds from the University of Iowa Department of Anthropology and a University of Iowa Student Government Research Grant. My travel to the American Anthropological Association Meetings was supported by funds from the University of Iowa Department of Anthropology, a University of Iowa Student Government Scholarly Presentations Grant and a Graduate Student Senate Travel Funds Award. I wish to thank Margery Wolf for rekindling my interest in testimony through her teaching and work as a feminist anthropologist. I am grateful to my mentors, Florence Babb and Ellen Lewin, for their insightful comments and suggestions. Thanks also to Jackie Comito for her invaluable comments and encouragement and to all of my colleagues on the AAA panel for making our panel possible. I am greatly indebted to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo without whom this work would not have been possible.

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**Everything You Wanted to Know About My Master's Work...
But Were Afraid to Ask**

Jason T. Carter

Republic of the Marshall Islands Embassy

Abstract

This personal essay details the difficulty the author faced in coming to understand the subject of his life history research—a woman who died long before he ever knew her. In doing so, the author raises some important questions about the nature of the anthropologist's relationships both in and out of the field.

Biography

Shortly after receiving his Master's degree from the University of Iowa, Jason moved to Washington, D.C., where he interns at the Republic of the Marshall Islands Embassy. He is also a waiter.

**EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MY MASTER'S WORK...
BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK**

I sat on the couch waiting.

All around me lay scattered the tools of the trade (if anthropology can be called a trade)—the extra batteries, the crumpled receipts (or were those notes?), the one-of-each-color pocket notebooks, the photocopies, film canisters, loose change, the toppled towers of wrapped and unwrapped cassette tapes. The disorder of it all—on the couch, on the floor, on the floor under the couch—reflected the general state of my research here, in the Marshall Islands. But it was my first time. First time doing real anthropological research and first time being this far from familiarity. This is my excuse.

I was here to collect narratives about the life of Darlene Keju-Johnson, a Marshallese woman, an angry woman, a loving woman, a woman who managed to fuse her love, her anger, her identity into great things.

It was 1999, so I had arrived too late.

Her cancer saw to this, taking Darlene away three years earlier—leaving behind a husband, a large family, countless friends all over the globe, and an organization she began in 1986 to counter the many health problems in the Marshall Islands, an organization I was now working with.

To be perfectly honest, I, too, felt a bit left behind. No, that's not quite it. It was more of an "in the dark" sort of feeling. I never knew Darlene. Yet, I had gained the enthusiastic support of my advisor, obtained grants, and was actually doing research to collect this woman's life history. When was someone going to expose me as a fraud? The fraud I felt like.

These were my worries as I sat there waiting...waiting...waiting. These were my worries...but nothing was happening.

The wind wasn't picking up, the windows weren't rattling, no blowing drapery either.

Lights didn't flicker.

My skin didn't tingle.

Nothing felt even remotely otherworldly.

Still, I was confident it would happen.

It would happen. These things do happen, right? Well, this will, no, should happen. I deserve it. I need this to happen. I need to see or feel or hear Darlene, just once. Is one time too much to ask? Anything, I'll take anything. Wait, calm down, these things happen when you least expect it, so, calm down....

Worrying and waiting, but not hoping, not praying, just waiting...and trying my best to make it seem as if I wasn't.

In its own struggle, the air conditioning unit was sponging every stray sound out of the room and replacing them with the rattling of its rusty beige housing. The din of my own thoughts, however, was left unsponged. Part of me was thankful for this, for my own thoughts were all I had in this foreign place—these Marshall Islands, this middle of the damn Pacific Ocean. They spoke to me, and better yet, in a language I understood. The only problem was that this din between my ears was filled with questions, too many questions....

Come on, did you really think you would see/hear/feel her ghost? You never knew her, right? Right? Well, if her spirit does in fact roam the earth—which is a pretty ridiculous notion in itself—why would it visit you?

I eventually got up off the couch, certainly to do something anthropological, but I never stopped waiting. Wanting.

Why did it matter so much? Why did it matter that I feel something, that she appear? This question didn't come to me as I sat on that couch. It didn't come to me anytime I was in the Marshall Islands. Or even in Iowa City. It comes to me now though, more than two years after the fact, and with this hindsight, part of me feels silly.

Silly to think I would see Darlene's ghost. A ghost, come on. Anthropologists don't do that sort of thing. It must have been the loneliness, the insecurity, and the stress getting to me. How silly....

But I continue to come back to one question—why? Why in that moment, in that apartment, staring at that checked linoleum, in that state of mind, would a mysterious wind, flickering lights, tingling skin have meant so much?

The answer is simple. It would have meant that I connected with her...that I connected with a woman who died three years before I first heard her name...that I could have used the pronoun “we,” me and Darlene, when I spoke about my master's work. It would have meant approval. It would have meant that I was somehow more than simply the author, the researcher, the student...I could have been part of this story.

None of this is silly, really.

Call it rapport. Call it a relationship. Call it “going native.” An anthropologist, even one who is still a lowly Master's degree candidate, is supposed to “connect” at some level with his or her subject. It's what makes sociocultural anthropology a worthwhile endeavor. It's the social in social scientist. It is the gratification of participating in participant observation. It's the human in humanist. It's what stirs our theoretical or methodological thoughts. It is why I was waiting for a ghost to appear.

Sure, I was hanging out, listening, collecting stories, good ones might I add, about Darlene from those who knew her in different capacities: mentor, friend, colleague, sister, wife, etc. But without Darlene herself, something didn't feel right. I was sure things were missing, important things. But what I didn't know, and more importantly what I would never know, I couldn't know. As I prepared to write my master's paper, these questions posed themselves to me over and over again.

Well, it was really just one question asked in thousands of different ways....What would Darlene say?

It struck personally, too. I wanted not just to know about Darlene, I wanted to know Darlene....Writing her story was not enough. I wanted to know if she looked you in the eye when she spoke. What was her take on current events? Could you see her age in her face? What did her laugh sound like? Was she right handed? Was her walk hurried? How did she take her coffee? Did she get enough sleep? How did she hide the pain of her cancer? Did she talk about it? Would she have minded my presence? Would she have liked me?

This became my obsession. I thought about it all the time. I couldn't get away from it – from her.

Bad moments came in which I imagined myself possessed, haunted, or under the spell of some Marshallese magic (as if this were only true and I could claim some pure, real connection to the culture and people I was writing about). The therapist, however, called it acute depression. All I knew for certain is that I couldn't write...or sleep...or get out of bed. Staring at a blank computer screen typing nothing at all for hours on end, now that, I was capable of.

I suppose I should have been worrying about loftier issues—power, gender, class, race, the anthropologist's list just goes on and on. I was even taking Margery's Feminist Ethnography seminar at the time. I should've known better. Sorry Margery. There just didn't seem to be enough time. There didn't seem to be time to think about how my being white and male and from an upper-middle class background affected my research. Hell, there wasn't time because I was too busy worrying about the impossible—about if my being a upper-middle class white male would have affected an imagined relationship with Darlene.

This recognition, that perhaps my concern was misplaced, comes only in hindsight. Same with the realization that the connection that I really should have been worried about, stressing over, was not one with Darlene. She is dead after all...but I'm getting ahead of myself a bit.

If I may, I'd like to get some mileage out of the theme I started. This concern, my concern, with rapport, relating, connecting is a little spooky, but it is also your concern, the concern of all anthropologists. And it, too, is a little weird. Sure, there are no lit candles, no holding hands, no darkened rooms, but it runs close to an academic version of

a séance. We have no special tools, really. We come to a place, we ask questions, we hang around, we seclude ourselves away, scribbling notes, and then finally, somehow we are able to “channel” these different experiences, these different lives, these different worlds. Be they !Kung, Trobriander, Nuer, street corner dealers, abortion activists, or hospital nurses, the anthropologist revels in playing “the medium.” The one who brings the experiences, the voices, the lives of those in one world into focus for those in another. And herein lie many of our problems. We have difficulty explaining our methods. We ask ourselves: Might we be faking it? Are we really conveying that world, those experiences? What authority do we have to speak those voices? Is this ethical? Oh my god, might someone confuse us for travel writers? Oh my god, oh my god, might someone confuse us for journalists? Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god, might someone confuse this for fiction?

It’s not my intention to argue these questions. Some certainly must be asked. Others feel needlessly paranoid. What I would like to suggest, however, is that these questions, these concerns about representation, about connecting, even about ethics occupy too much of our time. Yes, I’ve said it. Anthropologists are too bogged down in this business of connecting.

Wait, I’m getting ahead of myself again.

As I’ve been writing, this one small portion of one particular interview has begged to be included. Who am I to say no? It was recorded when I stopped in Honolulu on my way back home from the Marshalls in July 1999. I visited with a long-time friend of Darlene’s, a Hawaiian woman named Joann. We met in her downtown office. Like everyone I spoke with about Darlene, Joann was extremely generous with her time and knowledge. Toward the end of the interview she said:

You know it’s really interesting....People close to me have died and...it could all be my imagination, but I, but some of them I’ve felt near for a time. Darlene was outta here. I mean, outta here. She was gone. It was like if we had an issue, it was our problem....I didn’t feel her around, I didn’t feel her hovering, I didn’t feel her....

I should have listened to her.

I don’t just mean about Darlene being “gone.”

I mean about moving on.

In fact, on this point we all should listen. We spend too much time worrying about connecting with those with whom we work and not nearly enough worrying about connecting with those who will read about that work. You think you have to worry about representation, about power, about ethics now? Imagine what things might be like if more people actually read what we wrote. This is not hypothetical. This must happen.

If, as I suggest, anthropologists fancy themselves “mediums,” ones who can “channel” the lives, the experiences, the culture of others, we have sorely neglected our audience. Looking around the dimly lit room of this academic séance we call anthropology, the only ones left holding hands around the table are other anthropologists. And that’s not an audience. That’s a choir we’re preaching to. Our audience has moved on. They’re watching television news magazines, surfing the Internet, listening to talk radio, and we are left grumbling about how the public is misinformed.

So what do we do?

Don’t look at me. I don’t even consider myself an anthropologist anymore. But I do know that the people in this collection present us with excellent examples of what anthropology needs to be. However, before any real change can occur, I think we all have got to stop worrying about and waiting for ghosts.

Acknowledgements

To those who so kindly entrusted with me their stories and memories of Darlene, I cannot thank you enough. To all my dear friends in Iowa City who helped me get through an extremely difficult time, whether or not you knew what was going on, again, I cannot thank you enough. To Sarah Ono, Jackie Comito, and Carrie Hough for their constant encouragement of this essay, and to Margery Wolf, for not only inspiring me to write such a personal piece for an academic conference, but for never once questioning what I was doing on the panel...thank you, thank you, thank you...but that's still not enough.

“First, Do No Harm”:

Ethnographic Responsibility in Our Own Backyard

Carolyn A. Hough

University of Iowa

Abstract

As Margery Wolf asserts in *A Thrice-Told Tale*, both global processes of change and the expansion of the field into the ethnographer’s own culture have fostered increasingly complex ethical dilemmas within anthropology. How should the anthropologist involve her subjects as audience members in the construction of ethnographic text? How does she ensure the anonymity of informants who live 30, rather than 3,000, miles away? This paper will address how the interface between feminist ethics and ethnographic responsibility as exemplified by the writings of Margery Wolf has influenced my own research with direct-entry (home birth) midwives in Iowa.

Biography

Carolyn A. Hough is a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology and an M.P.H. candidate in global health at the University of Iowa. Her current research focuses on issues of women’s reproductive health as it is affected by the interface between ethnomedical and biomedical systems in The Gambia, West Africa.

**‘FIRST, DO NO HARM’:
ETHNOGRAPHIC RESPONSIBILITY IN OUR OWN BACKYARD**

Hippocrates, the father of western medicine, was an unprecedented diagnostician and theoretician. Four hundred years before the birth of Christ, he was rooting out environmental and behavioral causes of disease and contemplating the moral responsibilities of the physician. Though sworn commitment to the original Hippocratic oath, complete with references to Apollo and Aesculapius, will seldom if ever be undertaken at contemporary medical school graduations, the grounding tenet of modernized versions intended to guide doctors through difficult decisions remains as it was centuries ago—first, do no harm.

As anthropologists and members of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), we do not ritually and publicly take such an oath, but we are held to the AAA’s Code of Ethics, which asserts that our first obligation is, “...to ensure that [our] research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom [we] work” (American Anthropological Association 1999:19). As a medical anthropologist, I have entertained thoughts of how physicians may do harm, how anthropologists may do harm, and how these fields overlap.

Most obviously, physicians have the authority to wield tools that, if used improperly, may do serious bodily harm to their patients—scalpels, bone saws, narcotics. Doctors are allowed to, expected to, touch, cut, and enter our bodies in the name of diagnosis, treatment, and cure. This authority is grounded in a body of knowledge that the budding physician begins to acquire years before she will don a white coat and begin to treat patients. She spends years studying human anatomy and physiology, she learns to interpret signs and symptoms of pathology, and she is taught how to read x-rays and lab results. Her education and training begin to provide her with the skills to make transparent what we, as patients, often cannot see—the problems that underlie our pain and discomfort, our feelings of illness. When we seek a physician’s care, we ask that practitioner to make us transparent, to explain us to ourselves. The ethical physician will thoughtfully consider how to make a diagnosis, treatment options, or a prognosis understood to the patient herself and to her loved ones, how to clarify a specialized body of medical knowledge and make it accessible to those she serves. Withholding information or failing to ensure a clear explanation can harm just as surely as any surgical implement.

The anthropologist’s job may also be thought of, at least in part, as an attempt to clarify, to make transparent. We attempt to explain others to ourselves, drawing upon a body of knowledge that we refer to, broadly, as theory. Though we have lately envisioned and contemplated a “public anthropology,” the theme of the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 2000, the written work of anthropologists continues to circulate within academia and not far beyond. And with an audience of peers in mind when we write, how much do we attempt to clarify? Reflecting on post-modernism and the “new ethnography” within *A Thrice Told Tale*, Margery Wolf challenges us, stating, “If our writings are not easily accessible to those who share our goals, we have failed” (1992:119).

Through the act of writing, we assert our authority as anthropologists to examine and diagnose the groups and individuals we work with in the field. If the physician must adequately explain the patient to herself, what is the ethnographic responsibility of the anthropologist who attempts to explain her informants in writing? Though we do not (typically) incise or inject our informants as a doctor would, we certainly enter their lives to uncover their stories and secrets and understand the intimacies of their daily routines. How should we, how can we, go about making our interpretations of our informants' lives transparent to them, useful to them?

Perhaps this question is most relevant to anthropologists who do or have done fieldwork among "our own" within the United States. Not only have global processes of change assured that, "A barefoot village kid who used to trail along after you *will* one day show up on your doorstep with an Oxford degree and your book in hand," but the expansion of the field has further enabled the ethnographer to study within her own culture (Wolf 1992:137). Ethical issues—such as the preservation of anonymity and confidentiality of informants and their accounts, and the inclusion of informants in the production of a text—are brought to the foreground when one's informants possess the cultural capital to potentially critique the anthropologist's work.

During the summer of 1999, I conducted M.A. fieldwork with direct-entry/home birth midwives in Iowa. I drove across flat stretches of highway and down dusty dirt roads. I sat on the living-room sofas and at the kitchen tables of my informants, who offered me iced tea and pasta salad and who looked and talked a lot like me—a white, middle-class, educated woman from middle-America. There was to be no exotic arrival trope in my first fieldwork experience; I was already there. That fall, I began to contemplate how I would chronicle these midwives' accounts of their practices and their struggle with issues of legalization and licensure in a state where their work has been classified as the practice of medicine without a license, a class D felony. Some midwives argued that seeking legalization through legislative measures would fundamentally alter their delivery of care by forging strong ties to biomedicine and the State—an unacceptable proposition. Others claimed that these measures would serve to legitimize direct-entry midwifery and create a formal peer-review process that would ensure quality care.

At the same time, I was taking Margery Wolf's Feminist Ethnography course, a graduate seminar at the University of Iowa. During each session, we addressed issues of representation and reflexivity, politics and theory. Several questions were always hovering over our heads including, "What constitutes feminist anthropology or ethnography?" and "What are the feminist ethics that should inform feminist anthropology?" When I discussed my own research with Margery, these questions were no longer hypothetical. I quickly learned that pinning down feminist ethics and how they may be implemented in anthropological fieldwork is a complicated matter. First, just as it is misleading to speak of *a* feminism rather than many feminisms influenced by nationality, class, race, sexuality, and political affiliations, there are, clearly, many constructions of feminist ethics that are influenced by these various conceptions of what feminism *is*. However, as feminists who share this self-ascribed label, we also share a consciousness of and sensitivity to issues of power and authority. If one of the major

goals of our work as anthropologists and writers is to, as Margery Wolf contends, "...dismantle [sic] hierarchies of domination," this cannot be accomplished without a critical examination from an ethical standpoint of the methodology we will employ (1992:119).

How could I write my master's paper from a political standpoint without appearing to "choose sides" between informants who advocated legalization and licensure and those who opposed it? What was my ethnographic responsibility to these women who voluntarily shared the stories of their lives and work with me? In many ways I was being called to "reduce the puzzlement" while maintaining the complexity of my informants' accounts (Geertz 1973:16-17 in Wolf 1992:127). Furthermore, I felt challenged to engage anthropological theory and produce a decisive or authoritative text while also making the work accessible to non-anthropologists (specifically, my informants) and creating the opportunity for their feedback to influence the final product. This challenge emerged from my own sense of anthropological feminist ethics, through which I endeavored to balance the weight of my interpretations with those of my informants.

As is written in *A Thrice Told Tale*,

Experience is messy. Searching for patterns in behavior, a consistency in attitudes, the meaning of a casual conversation, is what anthropologists do, and they are nearly almost always dependent on a ragtag collection of facts and fantasies of an often small sample of a population from a fragment of historical time....As ethnographers, our job is not simply to pass on the disorderly complexity of culture, but also to try to hypothesize about apparent consistencies, to lay out our best guesses, without hiding the contradictions and the instability (Wolf 1992:129).

I am challenged to locate the method of our writing, which works as an outlet for a multiplicity of perspectives that reflect the complexity of life-as-lived, in an ethics that calls me to do justice to the complicated truths of my informants' lives rather than a more abstract, rhetorical principle that decenters one's authorial authority (Wolf 1992:123).

I hoped to present my informants with a picture of themselves taken by an outsider—illustrating their similarities and differences, highlighting the elements of their discourse that united and divided them. In some ways, just as a doctor needs to know "where it hurts" to begin an assessment, I knew that my analysis would benefit from the input of my informants. As the writer of anthropological texts, one necessarily exercises the authority to uncover what is hidden, to see things that true insiders may be unable to.

For this project, I felt it was equally important to take the ethnographic responsibility necessary to make my analysis comprehensible to my informants, a group of literate, educated women of my own country, my own culture. What is the use of anthropological theory if it does not contribute to the creation of texts that may be useful to the individuals and groups we work with, texts that not only "do no harm," but may actually benefit those who make our work possible?

The process of writing with my informants in mind, knowing that they would receive a draft of my master's paper along with a letter encouraging them to comment, provide feedback, make suggestions, or ask that details be omitted for the sake of anonymity, underscored this responsibility. This accountability forced me to make plain the body of knowledge, the theory, from which I was constructing my written account so that it could circulate beyond my faculty committee and peers within the anthropology department. Perhaps my written work would enable my informants to see their debate over legalization in a different light, or would serve as a jumping-off point for increased dialogue about these issues.

Furthermore, it was never my goal to offer solutions or even my own perspective on the question of legalization—if my own sample of experts and insiders couldn't come to a consensus, how could I pretend to know better than they? However, I did offer analysis of the various reasons *why* there is a debate over whether or not direct-entry midwives should be licensed in Iowa and how an altered relationship with the bio medical and legislative bodies within the state may or may not fundamentally change midwifery as it is currently practiced. I encouraged the midwives to comment on my interpretation of both sides of this controversy. In the end, only one midwife responded with her own commentary, but I feel that the effort to include informants in the writing process was an important first step toward fleshing out a feminist methodology for my own anthropological research.

In the creation of this text, I employed methods informed by feminist ethics with the aspiration that this undertaking would not only do no harm to my informants, but might also be beneficial to them. What became central to this project was a writing process that would make the paper accessible and a review process that would enable my informants to comment upon and, if necessary, criticize my analyses. As anthropologists, our tendency has been to keep our diagnoses, our interpretations of the cultures we study, to ourselves. When we study groups or individuals who are much like us or who share our culture, this position becomes more difficult to justify. One of our formidable challenges becomes writing with our informants in mind, as readers, editors and potential beneficiaries of our efforts.

Acknowledgements

Funding for this research was provided in part by the University of Iowa Student Government and the University of Iowa Department of Anthropology. Special thanks to Jackie Comito, Sarah Ono and Margery Wolf.

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The Superiority of “Wolfs” Over Rabbits and Foxes: Reflections on Margery Wolf

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Abstract

This paper is a reflection on my relationship with Margery Wolf in particular and my reflections on feminist anthropology in general. I begin with a story, an e-mail, that Margery sent me while I was finishing my comprehensive examinations. In the story, it is revealed that one’s advisor is the most influential person (or lion, in this case) during the writing of one’s dissertation. I posit that, while I have a wonderful mentor in Margery, many other feminist scholars do not have such an opportunity. I suggest further that, although mentorship has been a goal of the Association for Feminist Anthropology, students are slipping through the cracks due to the apparent lack of mentorship. I state that, as instructors and professors involved with the AFA, we need to make a wider and more concerted effort to reach out and mentor those students who want guidance and support.

Biography

Velana Huntington is currently finishing her dissertation at the University of Iowa on embodied notions of wellness, health, and healing in Orisha, an African Diaspora religion, as it is practiced and lived in the Midwestern United States. Her interests include ethnography, feminist anthropology, African Diaspora religions, embodiment, interpretive medical anthropology, and Native America.

**THE SUPERIORITY OF “WOLFS” OVER RABBITS AND FOXES:
REFLECTIONS ON MARGERY WOLF**

The title of this paper is a play on a parable, “The Superiority of Rabbits Over Wolves and Foxes,” which Margery Wolf, my chair, sent to me while I was finishing my last comprehensive examination. The story goes something like this:

One day a rabbit came out of her hole in the ground to enjoy the fine weather. The day was so nice that she became careless and a fox snuck up behind her and caught her. “I am going to eat you for lunch,” said the fox.

“Wait!” replied the rabbit. “You should at least wait a few days.”

“Oh, yeah? Why should I wait?”

“Well, I am just finishing my dissertation on ‘The Superiority of Rabbits over Foxes and Wolves.’”

“Are you crazy? I should eat you right now! Everybody knows that a fox will always win over a rabbit.”

“Not really, not according to my research. If you like, you can come into my hole and read it for yourself. If you are not convinced, you can go ahead and have me for lunch.”

“You really are crazy!” But since the fox was curious and had nothing to lose, he went down the hole with the rabbit. The fox never came out.

A few days later the rabbit was again taking a break from writing and sure enough, a wolf came out of the bushes and was ready to set upon her. “Wait!” yelled the rabbit. “You can’t eat me right now!”

“And why might that be, my furry appetizer?”

“I am almost finished writing my dissertation on ‘The Superiority of Rabbits over Foxes and Wolves.’”

The wolf laughed so hard he almost lost his grip on the rabbit. “Maybe I shouldn’t eat you. You are really sick in the head. You might have something contagious.”

“Come and read it for yourself. You can eat me afterward if you disagree with my conclusions.” So the wolf went down into the rabbit’s hole and was never seen again.

Finally, the rabbit finished her dissertation and was out celebrating in the local lettuce patch. Another rabbit came along and asked, “What’s up? You seem very happy.”

“Yup. I just finished my dissertation.”

“Congratulations. What's it about?”

“The Superiority of Rabbits over Foxes and Wolves.”

“Are you sure? That doesn't sound right.”

“Oh, yes. Come and read it for yourself.” So together they went down into the rabbit's hole. As they entered, the friend saw the typical graduate apartment, albeit a rather messy one after writing a dissertation. The computer with the controversial work was in one corner. And to the right there was a pile of fox bones, on the left a pile of wolf bones. And in the middle was a large, well-fed lion—the rabbit’s advisor. The moral of the story? The title of your dissertation doesn’t matter. The subject doesn’t matter. The research doesn’t matter. All that matters is who your advisor is.

I happen to know that Margery doesn’t believe most of that; as a feminist scholar, she believes that what you do, how you do it and who teaches you *how* to do it are quite important. Perhaps equally as important, Margery was never found hanging out at my house or making dinner of any nay-sayers that were lurking around, though that could have been rather advantageous as I was writing and informally defending while writing. I wish I would have thought of that before now...

That said, we work within a “community of practice,” one which Lave and Wenger (1991:29) viewed as being meaningful in a personally apprenticing way, and one in which I see us continually learning our “trade” from (feminist) anthropologist-scholars who have been “doing” anthropology longer than we have. As we read the ethnographies assigned in seminars, as we awkwardly stumble through our first fieldwork experience, as we write and defend numerous papers, we are learning to become full-fledged members of our anthropological community. We, like the discipline, continue to evolve and grow as we learn how to “do” feminist anthropology beyond the classroom. As students, we are engaged in a discipline in which active and meaningful guidance is imperative, especially since we still were debating whether or not there could even be feminist ethnography not more than ten years ago (Abu-Lughod 1990; Bell 1993; Stacey 1988). I would suspect that many of us think, or know, that feminist scholarship is meaningful to the discipline as a whole. It is my contention that active mentorship and faculty participation with students (and new-comer faculty) are key to “getting the news out” about the relevance of feminist anthropological thought and practice (Watson 1987:36). It is also important to note that feminist apprenticeship is not simply about the dyadic relationship between a professor and her student; it is about connecting to a wider

feminist anthropological community of which both scholars are part. Although a mentoring program was set as a goal of the AFA around 1998, there are still people from all four fields who are not aware of, or who do not know where they fit into, this community. These men and women think they have few options, especially when contemplating feminist issues as applicable to their research.

Recently, I had a discussion with a friend of mine who does not see herself as a feminist anthropologist, in part because “it’s too exclusionary.” She went on to state that she saw feminist anthropology unfortunately as (still) being more about “making it as a woman in a man’s world” than creating a set of meaningful social networks in which feminist scholarship could be more widely discussed, theorized, and practiced, thus possibly further transforming the discipline. I, personally, don’t see “it” as making it in a man’s world so much as I see feminist anthropologists trying to make it in an *institutionalized* male academic world, which is antithetical to a community of feminist scholars in the first place. The institutionalization of knowledge is built upon ideals of male teaching and learning. That is a fact. Unfortunately, I have had my friend’s sentiment echoed by acquaintances at other universities—white women and minority women who actually do consider themselves to be second- or third-wave feminists but who may not have access to splendid and knowledgeable mentors, and who seem to lack support and guidance within feminist scholarship. Our community is wide and varied; we consist of mothers, of all races, of lesbians, of minorities, of differently-abled, and of underprivileged peoples, and our mentorship should reflect that diversity.

I have been lucky to have feminist support and guidance as I seek to better my scholarship and pedagogy. My relationship with Margery began about six years ago, when she agreed to take me on as a “messy” student whose research interests did not fit easily into any one departmental category. I learned from her all I could about feminist theory and ethnography and she, in turn, learned about the American worlds of Vodou, Orisha, and Santeria. Mentorship *is* a mutual and intensive growth process. Under her guidance, I have been academically nurtured and allowed to take my ideas to new levels, but in terms of the growth of my work, I also have been allowed the freedom to fall out of the proverbial nest and onto my not-so-proverbial face. Margery’s counsel taught me the basics; her trust has bolstered me in many ways and, specifically, in my endeavors to do it all as “right” as I possibly can. And as such, I have fallen, I have gotten back up, and I have learned. Crucial lessons, at that...

But what about those up-and-comers who don’t know what a mentor could mean to their work and scholarship? Sure, those of us who are eligible to apply for the AFA grants as minority or differently-abled students have the opportunity to check a box and seek a mentor, but we as feminist anthropologists could expand much further. Just think: what if no feminist scholar needed to check a box in order to get guidance and support? What if that were built into our pedagogical and communal practices? Should it not be? We have a growing, diverse and strong community, of which I have only been a part for a relatively short time. It is still not an easy thing to be labeled the “f-word,” as many people in my own department can attest; there is overt hostility at times, and there is ignorance. And there is still the ever-present male bias. Losing scholars like Margery to

the calling of retirement in California only accentuates the questions that many students feel regarding their own feminist scholarship. Again, I consider myself lucky to have had Margery as a teacher, advisor, and mentor. Her guidance is something that can never be taken away and that will direct my actions as a teacher and mentor for other, future feminist scholars.

I am at a crossroads in anthropology. I will finish my dissertation soon and will move into the realm of teacher, of professor. I hope to be able to pass along the knowledge of feminist scholarship to my students in a way that resonates with, and is accessible to, them. We need strong support and guidance—*mentorship*—within our 21st century feminist anthropology. We need open and honest dialogues about our strengths and our weaknesses. We need to learn from each other. Most of all, we need to engage the idea of mentorship more fully so that future feminist scholars feel as though they have someplace to turn when questions arise and problems abound. We are a community of practice, however fluid, hierarchical, and “imagined” (Anderson 1983). We are a community that needs to fully engage turning feminist theory into a more immediate, guided, and fleshly practice. By this, I mean we need to continue to practice what we preach: we need to truly accept difference, expand thought, teach well, and guide others.

In all honesty, I have had a difficult time in writing this paper in Margery’s honor, how not to overdo the personal and professional accolades (which she did not want), while still paying tribute to her for her services to me (her student) and also addressing wider issues within feminist anthropology. Earlier, I mentioned that we, as feminists, are widely represented in our community as we come from all walks of life and experience. I embrace that and have been “taught” by many good scholars *how to* embrace that difference, as I write from the point of view as an ethnically-mixed woman, wife, and mother who comes from a humble background and who happens to be getting her Ph.D. I have remarked to others how daunting it is for me to be sitting here now, lamenting the fact that we need better and more fulfilled ideals of mentorship in our feminist community. I feel libelous. After all, it is you, my feminist friends and colleagues, along with Margery, who have taught me about my community and about feminist anthropology, and I think I have learned well. We need to continue all of our legacies by being good teachers and great scholars, and we need to continue to grow. We need, I think, to open up more to our “community.”

I will end with Bambara, who wrote in *The Salt Eaters* (1980), “The dream is real, my friends. The failure to realize it is the only unreality” (quoted in Moraga and Andzaldúa 1983:vii). We will grow and change throughout this century, and we will embody an engaged and personally meaningful feminist anthropology and pedagogy. Hopefully, I have placed my reflections on Margery, as my chairperson and mentor, within a larger framework, one which extends from her own scholarship and practice, through my own, and to those who are still following in her footsteps.

Acknowledgements

I give many thanks to Margery for her guidance and care throughout my graduate school career and with my dissertation. I appreciate Jackie and Sarah for inviting me to present on this panel. It was magic. That the Michigan State University WID Publication Series approached us about publishing our panel's papers is special for me as Margery's student: Thank you. I am grateful to the AFA, UISG, GSS, the Graduate College, CSAS, and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Iowa for the funding that allowed me to both conduct research and/or present at the conference. Lastly, I thank Dan and Dylan, my family, for putting up with an anthropologist wife and mom.

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**Tales of the Recalcitrant “Other” in the Classroom:
Ethnographic Exposition and the Scientific Anthropologist**

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Abstract

In the wake of the much-touted “science wars,” both humanistic and scientific anthropologists have, for the most part, failed to engage in any fruitful dialog fording this great philosophical divide. Conciliatory gestures are even rarer to find among aspiring graduate students, who must negotiate their postgraduate matriculation with a keen eye to the epistemological allegiances of both faculty and fellow students. What, then, befalls the hapless student firmly entrenched in anthropology’s scientific ramparts who enrolls in the course, “Reading and Writing Ethnography”? This paper playfully turns the concept of anthropological “other” on its head through the personal reflections and travails of a scientific anthropologist running the textual gauntlet with Margery Wolf and colleagues at the University of Iowa. In recounting this memorable seminar, I argue that a reconciliation of sorts is possible through appropriate attention to the historic accomplishments of anthropological research and a grounded knowledge in the philosophy of social science.

Biography

Stephen Tulley is a doctoral candidate at the University of Iowa specializing in economic anthropology. He is completing a dissertation on the development and social impact of commercial chocolate and mole production in Oaxaca, Mexico. His work examines the intersection of industrial food manufacturing, consumption, gender, and identity.

TALES OF THE RECALCITRANT “OTHER” IN THE CLASSROOM: ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPOSITION AND THE SCIENTIFIC ANTHROPOLOGIST

Reading and Writing Ethnography

In the fall of 1996, I was on the verge of taking my comprehensive exams at the University of Iowa and looking for an additional class to make up some units. One of the more viable courses I spotted was Margery’s “Reading and Writing Ethnography” seminar, a course noted for its examination of rhetoric in ethnographic writing with a keen eye to recent debates over voice and representation in anthropological texts, a critical tradition which Reyna (1994) and others have labeled “literary anthropology.” When I informed my fellow students that I had enrolled, I was met with looks of amazement. No doubt many were thinking, “What ever made Stephen enroll in *that* course?”

Given my background, they had good reason. Prior to coming to Iowa, I had written my master’s thesis on the social networks of rotation credit associations among Latinos in the greater Los Angeles area, using the requisite algebraic measures of social network analysis to map out the social structure of these informal savings associations (Tulley 1995). At Iowa I had helped in the department’s “Data Analysis” course, covering the section on formal methods in cognitive anthropology and aiding colleagues through the travails of the Anthropac software program in the computer lab (Borgatti 1996), especially its unfamiliar DOS-based operating system and notoriously unforgiving Pascal programming. Furthermore, I had just returned that summer from three weeks at the National Science Foundation’s first annual Summer Institute for Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology held at University of California, Irvine. If anyone in the department could be labeled a positivist, I was it. To place such a student in a class where the readings included Geertz, Marcus, Clifford and others, must have seemed akin to placing a live fish in a steamer.

I am happy to report that by the end of the semester, I had thoroughly enjoyed the class and felt that I had succeeded in rankling a few of my fellow colleagues’ assumptions about their field, even if my own theoretical allegiances remained relatively unchanged. Nonetheless, it was a great opportunity to evaluate influential writings and review certain key debates under Margery’s direction.

In The Classroom

To begin the course, Margery felt it necessary to return to a few examples of what we might call “old-timey” monographs from the genesis of modern anthropology, such as Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, and other members of anthropology’s famed hagiology. For me, this was a return to the familiar. I earned my bachelor’s degree at the University of California, Los Angeles from a contingent of well-seasoned anthropologists, almost all of whom retired shortly after I graduated. Reading thick, dusty, and yellowed monographs characterized much of my undergraduate experience.

Of course, Margery had placed these in the syllabus for a purpose. A critique of a position or genre should ideally begin with some familiarity of the object of criticism rather than build endlessly, like simulacra, on third- or fourth-hand accounts retelling the identical tale. Because I have an interest in anthropological antiquaria, it was a concept I was in total agreement with. But I fear that some of my colleagues were presented with a disquieting revelation about their field of study; namely, that anthropology has well-defined history and, in accordance with Santayana's dictum, returns from time to time to debate old issues in new and varied forms.

From there we moved on to read and discuss the various authors who have become noteworthy through challenging the norms of conventional textual representations (as they saw it) and arguing for a new breadth of innovative styles, akin to what Clifford calls the "general trend towards a specification of discourses" (1986:13). During these discussions I engaged the critical tenor of the readings, but I also attempted to place earlier ethnographic texts within their particular historical contexts. For me, part of the allure of the AAA Annual Meeting is to attend one or two panels sponsored by the Association of Senior Anthropologists. At a memorable panel on the very question of the textualist critique, one panelist commented that if she had actively placed herself in her earliest articles, no editor in the field would have accepted such a piece for publication. I raised this issue during class and, if memory serves me, it was received rather well by my colleagues. But the best part about that day was that this brief example allowed Margery to comment about her personal experiences publishing her early work.

As the semester progressed, I remember commenting increasingly on the historic contributions to anthropological debates and, more importantly, on discussions in the philosophy of science about evidence, causation, and levels of explanation, and how these could contribute to argumentation in ethnographic writing. I was a bit surprised that more than a few of my colleagues lacked this background, but Margery's comments indicated that she had thought about these same issues. My efforts seemed to culminate the week we were assigned Paul Roscoe's "Perils of Positivism" article from *American Anthropologist* (1995). We had been meeting in a designated seminar room, seated around a long, yet imposing, rectangular table. On this day, without much aforethought, I found myself positioned at the very end. Margery began with a brief commentary on the readings, but then said something like, "Since Roscoe deals with positivism, let's hear what Stephen has to say about it." I found myself looking at two phalanxes of stares on either side of the table, patiently waiting for some insightful statement on my part.

To this silent challenge I retorted, "Which positivism is Roscoe talking about?" and proceeded to give a brief history of the concept and qualify the various types that have been debated over the years, from Comte to the Vienna Circle to Popper's critiques and trends in current philosophical thought commonly defined as "post-positivist." Again, I noticed Margery silently nodding her head, something she often did when I spoke, which led me to wonder if she was acting in subtle agreement with me, or indicating publicly that she thought I was daft.

I carried this debate into our discussions of an ethnography we were all required to read, Phillipe Bourgois's *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (1996), which consists of long passages transcribed from taped interviews Bourgois conducted with a small group of informants in East Harlem. The class almost unanimously praised his account, and I concurred that it afforded the reader a well-written, highly detailed account of the travails and reflections of drug users in this part of New York, particularly his two key informants whose experiences constitute the core of the monograph. But I demurred from the warm comments my colleagues were offering since I noted that a fine-grained analysis of two to four individuals does not necessarily mean that the ethnographer has adequately captured the social life of the local community, at least as represented in the text. And I was even more critical that Bourgois extrapolated from this microscopic analysis to a critique of the entirety of United States' drug policy in his concluding chapter. My recollections of Margery's responses to my misgivings were generally positive, if not forgiving in nature. I also could not help in building upon my previous arguments in class that humanistic and scientific approaches could exist alongside one another without enmity. Nowhere was this more clearly revealed than in the choice of publisher. Bourgois's book was one in the "Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences" series by Cambridge University Press, edited by Mark Granovetter. Most of the books in this series used social network analysis or methods typically encountered in the "harder" social sciences.

My final paper and presentation focused on what I termed "The Rhetorical Toolbox of Economic Anthropology," which examined both the methods of argument in this subfield and the role of interpretation in quantitative data. I fully admit that I have had some fun over the years as I point out to colleagues the extent to which interpretation underlies much of advanced statistics. On more than one occasion, I've seen fellow students experience what can only be called cognitive dissonance as I explain to them that the multidimensional scaling (MDS) plot they are seeing on the computer screen has four dimensions, although it is only displayed in two, and that since they have 30 variables in their data set, one can represent this data mathematically in up to 29 dimensions. A similar response greeted me when I showed the class that in one given statistics program one could smooth a line 19 different ways through the same bivariate plot depending on the mathematical formula used (SYSTAT 1996). I also introduced the class to the pioneering works of Edward Tufte, who has written three critically acclaimed tomes on the aesthetics of visual representation of quantitative data (Tufte 1983, 1990, 1997) and briefly, perhaps too briefly, covered the arbitrariness of confidence intervals in inferential statistics.

If my fellow students in the class had any problems following the logic of my presentation, Margery certainly didn't. During office hours she admitted that she was aware of these issues since she "used to do that stuff." She also confided that in the distant past she had personally witnessed someone "controlling for gender" in a data set by eliminating females from the sample. This first-hand knowledge of how scientific anthropologists work has afforded Margery a certain air of authority in her scholarly work since, although now engaged in the construction of experimental ethnographies, she is fully aware of the inherent role of interpretation and rhetoric in analyzing and

presenting data, both “hard” and “soft.” This background also allowed her to act as a useful fulcrum in classroom discussions between those fully enmeshed in the humanistic and scientific realms of anthropology.

Margery’s responses to my arguments in class, however, were not without some misgivings. As part of my presentation, I had introduced the class to the use of icons in presenting multivariate data (used to sort data or look for clusters, rather than represent numerical information about the data). One of these was the use of Chernoff faces, cartoons which vary the size, length, and form of eyes, ears, nose, hair, etc., to represent the interrelatedness of a set of variables. Along with Fourier blobs, it is one of the most experimental ways of presenting quantitative data, but one that didn’t sit well with many people. And for Margery, it was just too much. She publicly declared, “I just don’t like them.”

Conclusion

To conclude, in the abstract for this presentation I had mentioned that during the much-touted “science wars”—which some believe are drawing to a close, if not already finished—polemicists from the humanistic and scientific poles of anthropology lacked candor in debates over the future direction of the field. The late Eric Wolf reminded us of this historic tension in his often-cited definition of anthropology as “the most humanistic of the sciences and the most scientific of the humanities” (1964:88). Anthropologists will always have diverse audiences to whom they bring the results of their work. In light of the textualist critique of ethnography, some anthropological writing will be changed for the foreseeable future, but even some of the most stringent adherents of these new forms of ethnographic exposition acknowledge that some portions of the literature will remain largely unchanged. To the benefit of anthropology, however, our traditions in ethnographic exposition allow for both the personal and highly reflective account along with the more systematic and mundane texts intended to address some point of theory. An envious geographer once told me that anthropologists were lucky to have this option available to them. Margery’s scholarship over the years has likewise moved from the more traditional to the more experimental and has demonstrated a thoughtful examination of associated writing styles and related issues concerning ethics, reflexivity, and voice. And it is to Margery’s credit as an educator that she brought these personal experiences to students in classes like “Reading and Writing Ethnography,” lifting a few members of the next generation of anthropology from the reflexive miasma they often feel upon closely reading contemporary theory and showing them that there can be a bright and positive future to the field they are embarking upon.

Acknowledgements

I would like to offer thanks to my colleagues for the invitation to participate in this festschrift for Margery Wolf. Unlike many of those on this panel who have worked closely with Margery during their graduate school matriculation, my contact with our honoree has been more limited. Nonetheless, it is my hope that my recollections of a memorable course I took with Margery will help to shed a bit of light on her scholarship, if not her pedagogical skills, and wider debates in the field.

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**The Professional is Political:
Margery Wolf's Contributions to the Feminist Anthropology of China**

Kari Olson

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Abstract

Margery Wolf, in addition to being a supportive mentor to her students, has been a pioneer in the field of feminist studies of Chinese society. This article traces her early China works and her theoretical contributions to the study of Chinese family dynamics, as well as her personal career path, which began by accompanying her anthropologist husband to the field. Wolf's works were original in both content and style, and despite her unconventional career path, were well received by anthropologists at the time of their publication. Although early anthropological works by "wives of anthropologists" have been ignored by some postmodernists, and deemed "unprofessional" by some feminists, Margery Wolf's China books have been and continue to be influential, and are well lodged within the anthropological canon of China.

Biography

Kari Olson is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Iowa. She has conducted dissertation field research on women's reproductive health in urban China, and her main research interests are contraception, abortion and body politics.

**THE PROFESSIONAL IS POLITICAL:
MARGERY WOLF'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHINA**

Introduction

The first time I walked into Margery Wolf's office some eight years ago to inquire hesitantly about applying to grad school, she said to me, "It's time to do something." I was not at all confident that graduate school was the next step in my life, but she seemed sure of it. I appreciated her push at the time, and I appreciate it even more now. So, I am thankful for the chance to participate in this series in her honor today. I was lucky to be the last student of China that Margery agreed to advise, since she no longer works there. To begin with, I'd like to make a few comments about Margery's China works and their reception by anthropologists at the time, and over time.

In order to contextualize Margery's academic works in relation to her personal life, I informally interviewed her for this paper. The feminist dictum, "the personal is political" could also be phrased "the professional is political." This is no more or less true for Margery than for other scholars, and I know how true it is for me. Feminist anthropologists have asked whether there can be a feminist ethnography. As I sneak into the bathroom of this hotel to use my breast pump and worry about milk stains on my clothing, I wonder whether there can be a feminist anthropology conference. I am the mother of two. There has never been a Ph.D. in my family. When I take my husband to the field, he comes along as a well-funded scholar in his own right and often gets a better reception by the host country than I do. The professional *is* political.

But the professional is also personal and therefore, unique. One's personal situation may affect the outcome of one's professional life, but it does not determine it. So, I want to trace Margery's unconventional career path today because for me it is a testimonial to what can be accomplished where there is perseverance (not to mention talent).

Another point I want to make regards the significance of Margery's work to the anthropology of China. Feminist anthropologists have decried the neglect by some postmodernists of feminist experimental writings (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen 1989). While this is certainly true, it does not follow that all early experimental writings by women have been neglected by anthropology as a whole. Margery's work is proof of that, and she should be recognized for the significant contribution she has made to the discipline.

Herstory

Margery did not come to anthropology in the traditional way. She did not go into the field as the last phase of a graduate program but went to Taiwan with Arthur Wolf, an anthropology graduate student. She went along as his wife, a research assistant, and a self-perceived budding novelist. But it is impossible to live for over two years in a remote village in a foreign land and not begin to make some observations of one's own. Margery's first book, *The House of Lim*, is the true story of the farm family that housed the Wolfs in the rural village where they lived in Taiwan (Wolf 1968). The book was

lauded by anthropologists and China scholars as being an innovative ethnography, offering both valuable anthropological insights and enjoyable reading. With *The House of Lim*, Margery did not self-consciously write an experimental ethnography, but by today's standards, she succeeded in doing so. In *The House of Lim*, Margery positioned herself in the text and considered possible biases in her data collection. She wrote in a creative format and an accessible style. Her subjects had individual hopes and desires. Therefore, with this book she countered postmodern critiques of traditional ethnographies in that she was reflexive, allowed agency and was textually innovative.

Although these characteristics were not the source of its praise when published in 1968, *The House of Lim* was well received by anthropologists. As Margery herself put it, "*The House of Lim* caused quite a splash." One reviewer stated that with this book she, "Now qualifies...as an anthropologist" (van der Sprenkel 1968:686). A leading China anthropologist called *The House of Lim*, "One of the most popular ethnographic texts available on Chinese culture" (Watson 1975:1039). Its continued use in anthropology courses across the country still gives credence to this statement.

Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan

Margery wrote her second book, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*, in a more standard ethnographic style, though still straightforward and readable with little academic jargon (Wolf 1972). Her editor told her to beware of flaws in logic because her writing was so clear that the errors would jump off the page as readily as the insights. She places herself in the text, using the pronoun "I" to remind the reader that the account is from her point of view. Margery said that she was more self-conscious writing this book than *The House of Lim*, not because she was trying to be taken seriously as an anthropologist, but because after *The House of Lim*, she was being taken seriously as an anthropologist. In a review of *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*, a leading China scholar wrote that this book, "Deserves even wider use [than *The House of Lim*] in university-level courses dealing with East Asian societies" (Watson 1975:1039) and that it gave cause to "reexamine all...earlier theories regarding the structure of the family in Chinese society" (Watson 1975:1040).

In this book, Margery contends that the traditional Chinese family looks very different from a woman's perspective than from a man's. When Margery considered the Chinese family, she did so from the perspective of its most vulnerable members, young married women, new brides who had come from outside the village and had no prior prestige or even personal connections within the family or the village. The way for a young bride to gain status in the family was through childbearing, especially the bearing of sons. A young bride's focus, therefore, is on what Margery calls "the uterine family": a woman and her children. This is where she garners affection, care in old age and ultimately some prestige in the family. Her aim is to foster the loyalty of her sons, at the expense of their wives and their father, as she ages and requires a son's care and respect. Previous conceptions of the Chinese family focused on the patrilineage and its importance in the minds of family members. But Margery showed this to be a male perspective, as a

woman has little stake in this long line of patriarchs or their future continuation. A woman's interest in bearing children was of a much more personal and immediate nature.

Women in Chinese Society

Margery's third book, *Women in Chinese Society*, co-edited with Roxane Witke, was a compilation of papers presented at a Chinese studies conference (Wolf and Witke 1975). As Margery was now considered to be one of the top experts in the burgeoning field of women's issues in China, she was asked to chair the women's section of the conference, which took place at a big fancy hotel in downtown San Francisco. She said of the event, it "seems like a funny milestone for an undereducated kid from Santa Rosa." Maybe this sentiment was what caused her to later write "Because of my lack of academic credentials, in the first part of my career I was very much an 'outsider within'" (Wolf 1996:215).

Revolution Postponed

In 1980 Margery went to Mainland China to research women and the family under communism. Although she was well funded with a grant from the National Academy of Sciences and by a now, well-known scholar of China, she had difficulty convincing her Chinese hosts that she had a serious project to undertake. They were more inclined to facilitate her husband's research, although this time it was *her* project that was the major reason for their journey.

Despite this and other difficulties doing research in the People's Republic of China, Margery was able to gather a significant amount of data and write her fourth book, *Revolution Postponed* (Wolf 1985). In the book, she considered the uterine family concept and whether it applied in the context of communist China, thirty years into the revolution. She wrote, "My best guess is that the uterine family has disappeared because the need for it has disappeared. Urban women do not express the same degree of anxiety about their old age that they used to. Young women work and expect pensions.... Moreover, the male family is no longer the threat in contemporary urban China that it was in rural China" (Wolf 1985:207). Furthermore, Wolf found that their new double-burden of work outside and inside the home affected the quality of women's relationships with their children, who were usually cared for by grandparents or daycare centers.

More than ten years after Margery made these observations, in the early 1990s, Cecilia Milwertz, went to China to study how urban Chinese women were coping with the one child family policy. After more than a decade of economic reform and opening in China, she concluded that the uterine family concept had reasserted itself, though with different motivations for women. Like many other scholars, Milwertz (1997) found that many pre-revolutionary assumptions about women and gender relations reemerged in reform-era China. One of these was the ideal of the "virtuous wife and good mother." Milwertz shows that in the more affluent urban China of the nineties, the mother of an only child plays out her traditional role of "good mother" by expending endless hours and resources on the education of her only child, son *or* daughter. Milwertz argues that "women adjust

to the situation that they have only one child by applying a known sphere of action—the uterine family” (Milwertz 1997:146).

Conclusion

In her essay “Can There be a Feminist Ethnography?,” Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) ponders the history and plight of feminists in anthropology. She says that a woman’s tradition of experimentation in ethnographic writing was largely undertaken by the “untrained” wives of anthropologists. She goes on to say, “The problem with the alternative ‘woman’s tradition’ in ethnographic writing is that it is not ‘professional’ and having no prestige might only reluctantly be claimed and explored by feminist anthropologists uncertain of their standing. Feminist anthropologists, in asserting their professionalism, may have had to differentiate themselves from these women and to distance themselves even from the desire to communicate to a popular audience...” (Abu-Lughod 1990:19). Ruth Behar and Barbara Tedlock have also bemoaned the exclusion of early women’s writings, especially “unprofessional” women, from the anthropological canon (Behar 1995; Tedlock 1995).

As we consider our foremothers of feminist ethnography, we should consider each case carefully. As I have shown, Margery’s works were taken seriously by anthropologists, and are a part of the canon of the anthropology of China. Her works were widely reviewed, each one more frequently than the last. She is routinely cited in studies of gender and family in Chinese society, and her groundbreaking ‘uterine family’ concept continues to be a useful analytical tool. Furthermore, she led the way for subsequent generations of feminists to do anthropology in China. There were many budding feminist scholars of China tripping over each other last year in Beijing, each of us vying for interviews with China’s top feminists.

As I begin to write my dissertation, I struggle with the concept of professionalism. I struggle with the desire to write it exactly the way I want to, and the way I know I should in order to get a job in academia. I struggle for a way to be responsible to my informants and the highly personal information they have shared with me. Others on this panel have raised many of these same issues. But when I look back over Margery’s career, I am inspired. Perhaps because she was not initially bound by academic constraints, she did something new with form and content, and it *was* accepted by the “professionals.” In retirement, Margery has come full circle. She is currently working on a fictional ethnography or an ethnographic fiction—she says she still hasn’t fully resolved the tension between the two, and she is not sure it can be or needs to be. But she continues to experiment with form and content.

So, we *do* wish to associate ourselves with Margery Wolf—wife, novelist and professional anthropologist. Her career speaks for itself. Her works are many and influential. But mostly we feel lucky to have her as a mentor as we – wives, mothers and anthropologists all – attempt to make our way in this discipline.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Sarah Ono and Jacqueline Comito for organizing the AAA conference panel on which this collection is based. Thanks to Jacqueline Comito and Stephen Tulley for comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Thanks to Margery Wolf for inspiration.

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**“Don’t Turn to Fiction Until After You’ve Finished Your Dissertation”:
How Margery Wolf Inspired My Approach to Writing Ethnography**

Jacqueline Comito

Iowa State University

Abstract

To write ethnography, especially a dissertation, one must welcome the interpretations of others (beginning with your committee members). This paper discusses the process I took in writing my Ph.D. dissertation ethnography as a “drama.” The seed for exploring different forms of ethnography was planted in Margery Wolf’s feminist theory course, which I took my first semester at Iowa. Through the presentation of email correspondences between myself and Wolf, this paper explores the influence Wolf has had on my development as an anthropologist and as a writer. These letters reveal Wolf’s humor and approach to mentorship. The candid letters show some of the difficulties faced by students, inspired by feminist perspectives, who choose to be creative with the ways in which they write ethnographies.

Biography

Jacqueline Comito is a writer, artist, teacher and anthropologist. The ideas of kinship, memory, identity, food and language are woven through all of her work. She successfully defended her dissertation entitled “Remembering *Nana* and *Papu*: The Poetics of Pasta, *Pane* and Peppers Among One Iowan Calabrian Family” and graduated May 2001 with a PhD in anthropology. Over the last eight years, she has been involved in community development work with projects relating to highway safety, environmental health, recreation center usage, emergency medical service systems, telecommunication systems, organic farming and farmer’s markets. In the summer of 2000, she established a community-based research and consulting firm “Community Based Solutions.” Since 1995, Jacqueline has been the Assistant Editor for the Society for Applied Anthropology *Newsletter* and is an affiliate professor in anthropology at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. Prior to her training in anthropology, Jacqueline got her B.F.A. and M.A. in theater and her plays have been produced at several different colleges and universities in the Midwest, the University of Colchester in England and at the New Federal Theatre in New York City. Using all of her training and skills (artistically and anthropologically), she also serves as a mentor and advisor for individuals needing clarity and inspiration. Jacqueline is currently working on an expressive piece about death, life and family using images, words, and memories. In addition, she is also working on adapting her dissertation for a more populous audience through the inclusion of recipes and photographs.

**“DON’T TURN TO FICTION UNTIL AFTER YOU’VE FINISHED YOUR DISSERTATION”:
HOW MARGERY WOLF INSPIRED MY APPROACH TO “WRITING” ETHNOGRAPHY**

“Don’t turn to fiction until after you have written your dissertation.” These were Margery Wolf’s parting words to me after she agreed (for the second time) to serve on my committee. Her retort had come in response to my uttered frustration that I would rather be writing fiction than my dissertation.

That was early spring 2000. It had been almost three years since we both decided that my committee would survive without her wit and insight. Three years in which our conversations were limited to the occasional exchange in the hallway or at a party. Three years in which I had written my comprehensive exams, my prospectus and conducted fieldwork without her input. But now, my dissertation had moved out of the realm of “conventional,” and I needed the support, justification and guidance for this approach from a feminist perspective and from Margery.

My relationship with Professor Wolf began in the fall of 1996. As a new student at the University of Iowa, Margery’s feminist anthropological theory course seemed a refreshing change to my master’s work. From early on, she and I took to each other like garlic and anchovies—pungent and overwhelming together but somehow ultimately satisfying, if that is what you like. Throughout that semester, I spent many hours in her office as I grappled with anthropology, feminism and academia. Margery was not always patient with me or even sympathetic, but she was always honest, stimulating and engaging—which is exactly what I most sought in her mentorship.

Her advice, on that day, would go unheeded. I did turn to fiction. I read, not wrote, fiction in order to inspire my approach to writing ethnography. Many of our exchanges occurred via emails—several of which make up the bulk of this paper. The purpose behind using the emails as text is to allow Margery to give voice to herself and to best represent the moments as experienced.

Sat, 6 May 2000

Margery,

Just wanted to let you know that I just spent the evening re-reading *A Thrice Told Tale* and it makes much more sense to me today as I am trying to write my memory ethnography than it did three years ago when I first read it... Unlike many of the anthropologists from the postmodern/feminist movement, I am a playwright who has turned to anthropology because I recognized that my development as a writer could be better served by the theoretical and methodological tools that were being offered in anthropology. I am not an anthropologist who is turning toward fiction (or in my case dramatic form) in order to explore issues of content and form. Rather I am turning back to something that is familiar and readily available to me. A tool that will best help me communicate

my experience in the field last year, but also communicate my experience in writing the dissertation by using the two-column page.

On one side I am exposed in the complexity of my different relationships while doing the work: I am anthropologist, daughter, niece, cousin—my behavior can be as easily analyzed as the other social actors but I am giving no more privilege or voice (in some ways I am opening myself up to a lot of criticisms and potential analysis). On the other side: I become the ethnographer and the narrator who explores all the issues of memory, kinship, food and identity in a time and a place that is left purposely vague. In addition are the analytical voices of some of the other social actors who are stepping out of their roles in the performances to share in my work as narrator. In other words, the “field” world and then the “write-up” world are being represented in a way that a conventional ethnographic narrative does not expose.

I am writing my memory ethnography in this style because it seems to best fit the material and my overall theoretical concerns. I am not doing this to be clever or “creative.” In other words, I am working on telling and showing my reader the points that I am trying to make about memory, kinwork...and identity... Meanwhile maybe my overall goal in doing this project is so that other people will both enjoy and gain an understanding of this wonderfully frustrating but beautiful family I have known all my life.

So, here’s my point: I do have a point—maybe just maybe—my dissertation thesis is one (of many currently being written—I hope) that is of the next generation—beyond the postmodern critique. I am taking all of the arguments of the last couple of decades and running with them rather than trying to defend it—I am taking it for granted... Rather than writing an “experimental” ethnography for an elite audience that is inaccessible to the average Ph.D., I am returning to one of the oldest written literary forms in order to make the work accessible to a multitude of audiences. Much like a good play is built on a layer of meanings that appeals to the different layers of knowing in the audience, I hope that my dissertation thesis (if it ever goes beyond the thesis form) is sophisticated enough for the Ph.D.s in anthropology but accessible enough so that my family can have some appreciation in it... So, thanks for writing the book—I am finding it enormously useful.

Jackie

Sun, 07 May 2000

Jackie,

I am glad that *TTT* has become useful to you. How often that happens to me! A book or article that I read and said, "Yeh, okay," and set aside comes back when I need it to stimulate an argument, a project, a new perspective... I agree emphatically that you need to make the statement up front and loud that this is NOT FICTION and that you are not being "experimental"... You are NOT EXPRESSING YOUR SECRET POSTMODERN LEANINGS, but you are using a traditional literary structure (classic drama) as a way to present a set of ethnographic data in its purest form. The comments you make toward the end of your email..."a good play is built on layers of meanings that appeal to the different layers of knowing in the audience" is particularly useful in explaining why the form is basic, not artful experimentation. Indeed, good anthropology recognizes that there are layers of knowing in every informant and layers of meaning must be sorted in every field encounter.

As I listened (read) to your thinking, I wondered more about how you were going to get all the levels of academic complexity into the right-hand column. This is where your challenge rests as an anthropologist. By reserving your left-hand column for the play and only the play (right?), the right-hand must encompass: theoretical positioning, e.g. the partiality of knowledge in any one head, positionality, conflicting theories and arguments re: ethnicity, the mass of identity literature, reflexivity (in field practice as well as writing), sorting for the reader the truly complicated power relations (in Des Moines, you are the child as well as the interviewer, in Calabria, you are the rich American as well as the unmarried relative), integrating the work of others into your own theoretical positions, and etc... Can you retain the structure you have chosen totally or are you going to have the traditional lit review and a couple of other chapters that situate the central piece as the core but not the whole dissertation. I strongly recommend this, politically, but would be delighted to hear about how you might be thinking of doing it differently... I am really excited by this project, Jackie. It is NOT going to be easy, but you can do it.

Margery

29 Aug 2000

Dear Jackie,

For some reason I couldn't sleep last night so I read your dissertation. I like it very very much. (Your family sounds terrific—count your blessings!) The double column works well for me—the commentary is immediate or it can be ignored until one is ready for it. As I read it through last night, almost in one sitting, I realized that the disadvantage of this approach is that the analysis is disjointed and doesn't lead the reader down the primrose path most of us expect in a work of this sort. This of course puts an enormous burden on your conclusion and here, in all frankness, I think you have not yet done what you need to do. It is too brief, it is superficial, it does not tell me what I just saw...what it means or should mean to me as an intellectual experience.

There are many postmodern ways in which you could blow this particular critique off. Don't even think about them. You really need, in my humble opinion, to do a careful revisit of your columnar comments and write a conclusion that is hefty, a bit erudite, and most importantly makes me sit up at 3:30 a.m and say, "Of course, that is what it was all about." You are a very creative person, friend Jackie. This will be a bang-up special dissertation when you finish, but you still have some serious work to do here... Thanks for a good read on a sleepless night.

Margery

29 Aug 2000

Margery,

Thank you so much for your criticism. It is wonderful to get it. I am not so attached to my conclusion to not respect and see the wisdom of your comments... I don't think I can take it to the next level without guidance and help... But, Margery, maybe at this moment I am slightly scared because a lot of what I did with the piece came from a side of me that flies on instinct (mind you, a learned instinct). Perhaps my weakness as a writer (and my strength as a playwright) is pulling it all together for the reader so they can say "Ah ha, this is what it is all about!" That doesn't mean I can't do it. I know I can. On the other hand, this can be the fun part—tweaking and rewriting until it says what it should say... Thank you again.

Jackie

15 Oct 2000

Dear Jackie,

Just finished reading through half of the whole ms. That means that I tried just reading the right-hand column without looking at the left-hand column (well, I couldn't resist a peek or two). It confirms my earlier hunch that though the left-hand stands well on its own, the right-hand doesn't have a logic to it by itself. I know you didn't expect it to, but your chair may. I wonder if you have thought about this interesting problem at all. I am not saying that I think it should read like a carefully formed essay, but perhaps it might be integrated a bit more? That really is a query not a tentative suggestion. I am not sure what I think yet. It is, after all, an experimental form and you have to expect that it will have some rough spots to be honed. I'd be interested in hearing your thinking on this.

Best

Margery

15 Oct 2000

Margery,

It is a good question that you raise but I don't think I ever saw my analysis as standing alone or even being read without the other. I imagine that it all needs to be a little more finely tuned but I think I can defend why it is the way it is and I hope Laurie gives me the chance to support it both verbally and then in rewrites if she has some problems with it. ...The right column is really anthropology at work and it doesn't really exist absent culture and it does not stand-alone—it is often an incomplete thought when there is no reference to the data/culture.

In a lot of ways, I know that this is my dissertation to write and defend. I will reject no criticism that I feel reasonable and challenging to what I am trying to do. You know I had one of my plays read in a reading series named after Zora Neale Hurston. Well, sometimes I have thought that maybe my connection to her will go deeper—that maybe I won't ever get the Ph.D. but I will publish my dissertation as more of a novel. Like Hurston, my years at Iowa have been short but important to my career but...(I'll just leave that hanging there.)

...Thanks so much again for all of your good words. You really have been a thread that has kept me going and focused and I cannot overstate

the importance that has played in the last year. Here's to getting back to good writing—yours and mine!

Jackie

26 January 2001

Margery,

I am diligently working this weekend on my fourth draft and I guess I will be getting it off to all of you within the next two weeks. Laurie is going to email you all to give you a heads up. Is it normal for me to be feeling utter insecurity at this point, because I am. Laurie seems very pleased with everything but Episode One and I am fixing that this weekend. I know that this dissertation is unconventional but it has become normalized in my mind. I was feeling really pleased with the whole process and how it has changed and grown until Laurie made the comment that she was uncertain how my committee would respond to this dissertation and she seems really nervous about it. So, I am really nervous about it.

I know none of you who know me would believe that this process could be a humbling experience for me but it has been. I have never been able to get my tongue or my mind around the language of academia and it is really funny that the completion of a dissertation would result in my firm realization that I don't belong here. Did I write the dissertation in the style that I did because I am incapable of the other writing? Am I like El Greco who they say painted the way he did because that is the way he saw the world? Did I write this the way I did because it is the way I see the ethnographic experience?

Anyway, I can imagine everyone feels insecure no matter how they write their dissertation at the point when they are getting ready to send it out to the committee?...

Jackie

31 January 2001

Jackie,

Yes, I think feeling a bit insecure is sort of normal at this phase. It is a feeling you haven't had a lot of experience with so it probably feels even

worse for you. Buck up, my friend. The deed is done (almost). Have you maybe focused too much on THE COMMITTEE without thinking about who the folks are on that committee? Count them off. You have more supporters than even potential critics and even the latter will be fair. And you *know* it is good.

Margery

31 January 2001

Margery,

...I do feel insecurity—just never to the extent to which it shows...

Jackie

By March, I had circulated my dissertation to my entire committee and my defense was set for April 5th. Two committee members were not pleased with my choices. One member found the work to be “literary,” which this person said was enjoyable to read but made it intellectually suspect. The other committee member had “real concerns” about my use of transcripts/drama metaphor and format. She found it “impossible to read” and that the “cooking conversations/events” were not scripted in the first place and to “‘frame’ them as dramatic is to impose a structure on them that does not seem to exist naturally.” As if third person or first person narrative is a more “natural” representation of what happens in these moments?

13 April 2001

Jackie,

I may not have had the chance to say it, but I was really really proud of you in your defense. You handled yourself so well.

Margery

My sense of poetry would have me end this paper right here and give Margery the last word. But I could hear that little voice I call “Mini Marge” tell me I haven’t done my job. I haven’t pulled it together so that my audience can say, “Aha! This is what it means.”

So with some reluctance, here’s the first “Aha”: write from your data and from what you know. Do not write to conform to the standard. Ethnographies emerge from a lived experience. While I struggled with the shape of my dissertation—months of writing outlines and pages that would be discarded, my chair Laurie Graham encouraged me to let my data guide the ethnography—use my data, she would say, write my data. Margery

reminded me to trust myself. I finally did, and it didn't look like a conventional ethnography. (Here my colleague Steve will point out that a dissertation is not meant to be an ethnography. My work was not conventional no matter what you call it). I panicked. I knew it needed several more drafts (like anything we write). Would it need to be different, more typical, to make it past my committee and the graduate college? Individuals with tenure get to do these things—not students. Margery kept telling me to do my best work, work hard and then trust what I knew and that I knew it was good. Those simple words carried me through some difficult months.

Second “Aha”: know what is serious and what is not serious. Even if I didn't realize this at the time, I put Margery back on my committee because I knew I could laugh with her, and she hardly ever spared my feelings. She seemed to understand that creativity comes from not taking ourselves too seriously and that, as students, we need a safe space to write. Otherwise, innovations will never happen.

My final “Aha”: do not let others tell you who you are and what you are—labels like “postmodernist,” “feminist,” “post-structuralist,” “student,” and even “Ph.D.” are dangerous if they taint the ways in which others read your writing – if they block others from understanding and respecting what you do or, in the case of having tenure or a Ph.D., cause others to be too accepting based on status rather than merit. Margery read my dissertation with an open mind, not expecting anything in particular except honesty and clarity. We should always read the works of others (particularly students) with an open mind—they just might know what they are doing. We shouldn't demand that they do the familiar but that they do their best work. Don't be afraid of the unfamiliar. Innovation comes from small groups sharing different ideas rather than large groups wallowing in sameness. As Sarah Ono quotes in her paper, our common goal (across subfields) when we do anthropology is to challenge and rechallenge beliefs about “people's ‘proper’ place in the world.” Starting with us. All of you should practice saying to yourself what Margery has told me, Sarah and many others—“Do it. It sounds interesting.”

And Margery, you were wrong. We should turn to fiction, at least good fiction, before we finish our dissertations. If all we read is other academic writing and other ethnographies, the form through repetition will only duplicate itself in the future. Many here believe, as I do, that we need to write better ethnographies. In order to do that, we need to be reminded as we write our ethnographies of the power of the written word to lift the human spirit and to continually challenge the assumptions of self as the instrument of knowing.

And Margery, I hope that when I retire, others will look at my career path and say, as they do of yours, “not everyone could do it that way.”

Acknowledgements

My deepest appreciation goes to Margery Wolf for her guidance and friendship through the years. I would also like to thank my colleagues who were a part of the December 2001 AAA Session honoring Margery. The quality of the papers and the warmth and affection in the room were as much a tribute to Margery as any of the words we used. Kari, Carrie, Michelle, Velana, Steve, and Margaret, I am proud to call you my friends and fellow scholars. Jason and Sarah, it is always a pleasure to collaborate with you, and this session would not have happened without your creativity and energy.

WHO'S AFRAID OF MARGERY WOLF?

Discussant's Comments

Margery Wolf

I was honored, flattered, touched and entertained by the papers presented here and at the American Anthropological Association's Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. in November of 2001. And I am delighted, as I am sure the writers knew I would be, by their informal style, their irreverence, and the occasional earnestness that now and then slips out from under the sophisticated veneer required of graduate students. The University of Iowa should be proud of the quality of their students and of the individuality of these students. These students forge their own paths and pursue their own goals with determination. I have learned a lot about anthropology from them.

Feminist anthropology means different things to different practitioners—and of course to its critics. Like anthropology writ large, feminist anthropology is subject to debates and, in my time, has passed through major theoretical reorientations. To my thinking, this means the discipline is vibrant and responsive to fresh ideas, inventive methodologies, and new research needs. Just as some of our creative contributions have been incorporated into non-feminist anthropology and other disciplines—sometimes rather rudely forgetting to credit the source—we also are making use of some new ways of “looking” used by other disciplines. That faint tinge of positivism that Stephen Tulley discovered in my dissolute past makes it more difficult for me than for some of my students to accept all of cultural studies, but that these studies have value for us as feminist anthropologists, I will readily accept. This kind of cross-fertilization is important. If it takes, if it produces viable offspring, fine and good. If it doesn't, what has been lost?

I must admit that when I retired last summer, my attitude toward feminism had become somewhat jaded. Too many feminists in the academy appear to have lost their grip on what it is we are about here. But feminist anthropologists still seem to have a vision of what we can do, even if the how and the when are a bit hazier than they once were. Feminist anthropologists are better grounded than feminists in other disciplines, I think. Last year's AAA theme of public anthropology resonated with the feminist crowd and suggests to me, anyway, that feminist anthropologists as a group have not lost their way in the mapless terrain of more and more abstract theorizing. Is it possible that in a few years we will find feminist theory deeply engaged with computer modeling or even game theory? I somehow doubt that, but I know some very good feminists who use such methods as well as feminist theory in their work.

Sarah Ono's paper is a good example of how feminist anthropologists struggle with the whither-goest-we problem. She says she doesn't want her paper to be read as an anxious paper. It is, but it is not a discouraged paper. I would call it a worrying paper. Sarah came to the edge of her personal map, and began to worry that edge like a pup with a

slipper. In the paper she presents here, she takes a look back and a look around and comes up with a very nice distinction between feminist anthropology and feministic anthropology, the latter being the path which is used by some to bypass our politics. Sarah's position on the relationship between gender studies and feminist studies is, for me, more problematic. I see no reason why a feminist could not study an all male activity with all males as subjects and still maintain her feminist credentials. However, if this male activity and the men engaged in it are constructed in a context that privileges them because of their sex, one must address gender—just as one cannot really make female central to your research without addressing gender, i.e. the relationship between women and men. It is unlikely that any power structure can be dismantled or even permanently altered without considering the effect of gender asymmetry on that structure. As I see it, the distinction between gender studies and feminist studies is one of politics. The former, gender studies, aspires to being apolitical and is therefore at best afeminist. Feminist studies is proudly political in that we openly press for change and do not take the asserted objectivity of gender studies seriously. Sarah's paper is an excellent think piece. Besides pointing out some possible trails through the mapless terrain ahead, she has given some of the old landmarks new meanings.

Learning to hear. Several of the papers had this theme, albeit from quite different sources. Michelle Ramírez credits me for her own good sense in learning to hear what her informants were saying to her. She had a field experience we all as feminist fieldworkers have had at least once. We know our politics and slip into interpreting our data before we gather it, let alone analyze it. Usually one or two intrepid subjects recognize our errors and set us straight before any real damage is done, assuming we can hear them. Of course, non-feminist anthropologists have also been known to go into the field with the answers to their research questions already in their heads. The difference is that they are less likely to be aware of how their politics have influenced their answers and even their questions.

Margaret Burchianti's paper taught me to be less skeptical about *testimonios*. Indeed, I wish I had *heard* rather than just listened to the “speak bitterness” sessions imposed on me as a fieldworker in China in the early 1980s. These accounts were, as Margaret points out for the Mothers, all of a similar format and style of presentation. I dismissed them as something they were required to do by the political officer of their units, but I was impressed at how some of these older women really got excited about telling their stories. Unfortunately, my cynicism was increased when the women on one of the communes where I worked told Arthur Wolf and me long tales about rich landlords who had stolen the land from their poorer neighbors and turned them first into tenant farmers and then into slaves. Land studies I had access to made it clear that there had never been tenant farming in this area, nor had there been large landholdings. It was an area of small, impoverished farms. When in a moment of impatience I finally confronted a clearly astute woman with this pretty obvious discrepancy, she told me that her brigade didn't have very good stories to tell foreigners but the government had sent an exhibit around the year before explaining all about landlords and how mean they were, so they used those stories. Her comment was apt. “What does it matter whether it happened to me or to some other woman just like me? It happened somewhere and it was wrong.” This was

the same brigade whose party secretary had gotten copies of the questionnaire I was required to give the Beijing authorities before I set out on my travels and worked out a set of answers that the women were to memorize and recite back. They were very good at their recitation, but this was the third or fourth month of my study, and I had long ago abandoned the script designed for the officials. It was when *they* began to hear what I was asking and discovered I really was interested in them as individuals, that we all relaxed and began to enjoy ourselves...except for the officials, of course. Like Margaret's Mothers, my Comrades wanted me to take back the news. They were being responsible citizens, and when they finished with their responsible behavior, they were happy to talk about their current lives. My disdain for the scripted material was perhaps a breach in ethics, and it was also a loss of data.

Jason Carter's paper suggests that he is one who listened very hard, so hard that for quite some time, he couldn't hear, and when he did hear, the message was not the one he expected. Jason also gently chides us feminist anthropologists and urges us to stop obsessing about the perils of being responsible fieldworkers and ethical researchers and just get on with the job. This is good advice—sometimes we do come close to paralyzing ourselves by fretting over our methods and our informant's mental health. In the first feminist ethnography class I taught at the University of Iowa, I came close to losing an entire generation of feminist scholars. The readings and my excitement over finally getting to teach the course were too strong—in a mini-rebellion halfway through the term, I was told that one had to face just too many ethical and conceptual terrors to make doing feminist ethnography practical. Needless to say, I began at once to encourage more critical assessment of our readings. In this case, I had not listened closely enough to my own words to hear their affect on those who were just starting out.

Jason talks about “moving on,” and I hope moving on does not mean moving out. Moving on can be accomplished in several ways—walking through the issues and then doing the best one can; forgiving ourselves for our lapses from perfection; adjusting our personal goals for a more practical fit with a wider “reality.”

Carrie Hough's paper is based on her research with midwives in Iowa, exploring the pros and cons of legalizing midwifery. For good academic reasons, she did not want to even appear to take sides on the issue and for equally important ethical reasons, anonymity was important. In the narrow eyes of the law, some of these good women might become felons for practicing their calling. However, Carrie also wanted her work to have practical value. She wanted to present it to those who had shared their concerns with her as another perspective on their dilemma. She didn't want to push for one or the other sides of the legalization question but simply to show them how someone from the outside might think about the topic. Doing research in the United States brings ethical issues out of the abstract and into the daily news. Our findings have an interest to people who live just down the street. This is, of course, a step in the direction we as feminist anthropologists have claimed we want to go, a step toward changing the world. But sometimes that step feels a little scary.

Velana Huntington, another feminist anthropologist working in the United States on Orisha, Vodou, and Santeria, has had experiences similar to those of Carrie. In her research she wants to tell her informant's stories accurately, but she also bears the enormous responsibility of protecting their privacy and of keeping confidential the lore and rituals she has been taught by them. It is yet another example of the difficulties in fulfilling the first requirement of ethical anthropology: "Do no harm." Although research in the United States may seem to be more exposed to the public and confidentiality more difficult to maintain, it is no less critical to accept that responsibility if one is working in China or a small village in Latin America. It just looks easier.

Stephen Tulley, our recalcitrant "other," according to his paper title, has indeed been our pet positivist. He continues to insist that his theoretical orientation was unsullied by a semester of close contact with feminists, post-modernists, and other unsavory types. He certainly played a useful role, however, in the seminar he took with me. It really isn't much fun preaching to the choir so it is frequently necessary for me to make provocative statements to get debate going. Stephen often saved me from this task. He raised questions that were good for budding feminists and even some fading ones to think about and to argue about with a true believer. If I failed to convert him to the newer, softer anthropology, so be it. But, do notice that he admits that even scientific data is "interpreted" and that rhetoric comes into play in that interpretation. And for anyone who may have missed it, I must point out how reflexive he is in this paper presented at the American Anthropological Association's Annual Meeting. I am confident that his reputation will survive this lapse.

There is another theme that runs through or is at least touched upon in each of these papers. In Kari Olson's paper and in Jackie Comito's paper that theme dominates. This is, of course, the sayings of and the career of Chairman Wolf. Kari is a China specialist who now knows far more about contemporary China than I ever did or ever will. She took on the task of summarizing my aberrant career, making it seem even to me more successful than it actually has been. Jackie's paper is a deliciously naughty use of emails (yes, with my permission) that reveal as much about her as about me. Garlic and anchovies, indeed! But please note that the mini-Marge voice seems to have planted something in her brain that she can't shake: don't quit before you are done and you aren't done until you have told us why we read it. I have to reveal that this is not an original thought. I heard it from a wonderful teacher at Santa Rosa Junior College who told me I was a writer, an exciting piece of news for that young woman from the wrong side of the tracks. Once the excitement passed, the critical comments that appeared regularly on my stories centered me and focused me on a different future than I had anticipated. Jackie didn't need that. She knew where she was going. She just needed to slow down and get there by way of her best work. That wasn't my doing, that was hers.

All of the praise words I heard when these papers were presented delighted me because, in nearly every case, they were modified with a bit of irreverence, a bit of anchovies, and maybe even some pickled ginger. As I see it, my role as a teacher was to provide space and some interesting (to me at least) readings. These students did the rest, and they did it very well. My own evaluation of an article or a book was transformed many times by the

alternative readings it received from students in seminars. I learned early on that it was better *not* to lay out my opinion of an assignment early in a class period—and not always for pedagogical reasons. Often I was afraid of humiliating myself in the face of their careful readings and re-readings.

I admit I am proud of the Iowa students I worked with over my 16 years of tenure at the University of Iowa. They take care of each other, critique each other's work, mentor each other, and are kind to their aging faculty.

The answer to the question posed by the organizers of this collection of articles, "Who's Afraid of Margery Wolf?" is pretty obvious. No one. And that is how it should be.