



Compte rendu de *At Home and in the Field: Ethnographic Encounters in Asia and the Pacific Islands*, de Suzanne Finney et al. (eds)

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## RÉFÉRENCE

FINNEY Suzanne S., Mary MOSTAFANEZHAD, Guido Carolo PIGLIASCO and Forrest Wade YOUNG (eds), 2015. *At Home and in the Field: Ethnographic Encounters in Asia and the Pacific Islands*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, xiii + 331 p., bibliogr., index, 9 black and white ill.

- 1 This is the kind of book you want to read both before *and* after you go to the field. Part 1, *Real Encounters: Predicaments of Ethnographic Fieldwork*, introduces the reader to some of the obstacles fieldworkers may confront, such as physical danger, gaining local permission to conduct research and the foibles and sometimes funny predicaments experienced by all fieldworkers, whether they admit it or not. We chuckle at Alexander Mawyer's being perceived by Mangareva grandmothers as a potential husband for granddaughters in 'Grandmothers, Sharks, and other Dangerous Things' but Mawyer valuably points out how even personal crises are anthropological moments that move the fieldworker .

«beyond abstract concerns and into the fabric of daily life, where the fundamental issues confronting local communities often find their actual expression.» (31)

- 2 The anthropologist swimming with sharks contributes to fieldwork's enduring romance but the persistent crises of Islanders facing environmental and cultural erosion and dangers such as the legacy of French Pacific nuclear testing are more profound (34). While these and other pieces in the book's nine parts may be anxiety-inducing for some

not yet blooded fieldworkers, the thirty-one contributors cogently explore fieldwork through a variety of lenses.

- 3 In 'Fieldwork as Transformative Experience' in Part 2, *Meaningful Encounters: Learning, Representing, Engaging the Field*, Serge A. Marek argues that the most important skill a researcher brings to the field is the ability to learn from the experience as it is happening. Being flexible allowed Marek to realize that "there was much more to the story of Māori urbanization" than the negativity and cultural resistance portrayed in the movie *Once Were Warriors* (Tamahori 1994) and other misrepresentations supporting the perception that:
 

«[the] City was for Māori exclusively a site of oppression, repression, and assimilation.» (42)
- 4 In a different and yet similar vein, Papua New Guinean newspaper columnist, Steven Edmund Winduo, shows us in Part 3, *Language Encounters: Voices, Discourse, Digital Practice*, how blogging encourages immediacy, sharing and response, and enables the "unwriting" of older discourses. Using this new form of communication, Winduo and others share in a "free market economy of [...] ideas, knowledge, and cultural information [...]" (104-105) that is available to a much wider and interactive audience.
- 5 In 'Manning Up: On Being a Chamorro Researcher with a Home Court (Dis)Advantage on Guam' in Part 4, *Identity Encounters: Gender, Ethnicity, Nationality*, James Perez Viernes reflects upon his experience as both "insider" and "outsider" when he returned to Guam after five years at the University of Hawai'i to research indigenous Chamorro Masculinity and US Colonialism. Expecting an easy rapport with participants in his survey, Viernes was dismayed by participants' discomfort talking about their sexuality with a fellow Chamorro who was not only older than many of the participants but also far more educated and obligated to the community who allowed him "the time and space to succeed as an academic". Realizing his dual positionality and responsibilities, Viernes continues to identify "avenues that allow Chamorro men to reveal their stories" and is learning "that while the conventions of masculinities identified elsewhere" are a part of understanding evolving Chamorro masculinities in the context of continued uscolonialism, he must do more to explore and foreground Chamorro "notions of family and community obligation, custom, and cultural competence" (123). Of course, being an "insider" is determined as much by social interaction and fulfilled obligations as being born into a society. In "'You Can Do It, Japan!'", in Part 5, *Marriage, Kinship, Social Networks*, Pamela L. Runestad explores how natural disasters make it possible to see how everyday social networks shift and change. They also show how "anthropologists are not outside social relationships in the field, so they can contribute to relief efforts through these networks" (155). After the 9.0 earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear plant disaster struck Japan on March 11, 2011, Runestad worked with friends and neighbors in Nagano - using and expanding their own social networks both locally and globally-- to help evacuees who had lost many of their family and neighbors develop new social networks and a renewed sense of connection.
- 6 Part 6, *Economic Encounters: Class, Development, Inequality*, the shortest section with only three pieces, is largely descriptive and seemingly has little to say about fieldwork methods and experiences other than that each of the contributors is engaging in 'homework'. In 'Tales of the Talā (Dollar)', however, Fa'anofa Lisaclaire Uperesa quietly and resolutely builds a case (beginning with herself and her family's personal

experiences) illustrating how local values about cars, mobility, and social status have been transformed in American Sāmoa.

«Without a car you walk to the bus and shorter distances [...] [you] rely on stores closer to home [...] [or] on relatives and friends for rides.» (178)

- 7 Without a car, you are stuck in the village and unable to attend “things like business and organizational dinners, special events, and evening shopping” since buses stop running at dusk. You are unable to socialize or be “seen” in McDonald’s or at bars or club, staying home on weekends because you don’t have a car to get around (179).
- 8 Part 7, *Green Encounters: Environment, Sustainability, Restoration*, focuses on one of the most pressing issues of our time: how humans interact with their environments. In “They Came for Nature”: A Political Ecology of Volunteer Tourism Development in Northern Thailand’, Mary Mostafanezhad examines the sometimes contradictory perspectives of her host-community members, NGO practitioners, and volunteer tourists. Mostafanezhad hears competing discourses in the field: NGO workers privileging “scientific knowledge over other ways of knowing” (211), volunteers using strategies and models learned in Euro-American universities to teach villagers conservation and sustainability, and villagers and outsiders alike recognizing that the forest surrounding Mae Nom Village is “pristine” and that the local community are already “exemplary stewards of their forest” (214). In terms of political ecology, the question of “whom are we conserving for?” looms large. When Mostafanezhad asked a woman why she thought the volunteer tourists were drawn to her village, she replied that “they want to see nature [because] they have already destroyed their own natural environments” (209).
- 9 The stories in Part 8, *Political Encounters: Power, Conflict, Resistance*, show how political encounters occur within everyday practices including conflicts over social identities, natural resources, and political territories. Melisa Casumbal-Salazar examines gendered indigenous resistance to the Chico IV dam and hydropower project in the Cordillera Mountains in her chapter, ‘Narratives of the Vulval Curse in Bontok and Kalinga, Philippines’. During a year of fieldwork in the Cordilleras, Casumbal-Salazar amassed an archive of narratives from the 1970s and 1980s and interviewed more than fifty people (scholars, activists, villagers, officials, NGO workers, women, men, elders, and youth) about the disrobing tactics of women against the development project that have since inspired both indigenous groups and feminist struggles. She argues that older women’s tactic of shedding their clothes and exposing sexual body parts was an assertion of political autonomy and territorial control (235).
- 10 The book’s final section, Part 9, looks at *Deep Encounters: Worldview, Religion, Spiritual Practices*. In ‘Losing My Mind and Loving Mosquitoes, Crickets, and other Jungle Inhabitants’, Geoff Ashton reflects on field research and its frustrations at a Buddhist Meditation Retreat in Thailand. Ashton likens the introspective self-study involved in Buddhist meditation to what happens during ethnographic research: participants are prohibited from speaking with others so direct observation and a heightened consciousness of what is happening around oneself enables introspection and self-awareness. In the early stages of fieldwork, you may not know the rules or the language. Surrendering to the experience, or relaxing into the new environment, the initiate experiences profound transformations and understandings. In Ashton’s case he grew to tolerate a very noisy cricket without giving in to the temptation to annihilate it with his sandal.

- 11 In his *Epilogue: Fieldwork Today*, Geoffrey White notes that the “authors describe a stunning variety of problems and predicaments confronted in the course of carrying out their research” (296). In my mind, this is the book’s major contribution and I commend the editors and contributors for serving a rich banquet of a reader that is eminently usable in and out of class. My only quibble is with the introduction where yet again we are told in the words of George Marcus and James Faubion (2009) that contemporary fieldwork “is not what it used to be” (those of us who continue to go to the field in our dotage already know that) and that “Emerging trends in ethnographic writing now highlight autoethnography, narrative, and politically engaged participant observation” (1). The authors would do well to look up and read some of the many highly reflective readers on fieldwork that came out in the last century such as Peggy Golde’s *Women in the Field: Anthropological Experiences* (1970, second edition 1986) and Tony Larry Whitehead and Mary Ellen Conaway’s *Self, Sex, and Gender in Cross-Cultural Fieldwork* (1986). If I were still teaching, I would pair Whitehead’s reflections on being black and yet being perceived as a “big, brown, pretty-talking man” in a West Indian community that prioritized his American status over his race with Viernes’ difficulties in being both “insider” and “outsider” when he returned to Guam to do research – or *homework* – in his own community. That said, *At Home and in the Field* is the kind of book I would assign my students.
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