

Colonizing Ethnography

The object of study intended by Beverly Skeggs in her essay, "Theorising, ethics and representation in feminist ethnography", is feminist ethnography and more particularly the positioning of feminist ethnography in respect to the other kinds of established ethnographies she starts listing and introducing in the second section of her essay. Skeggs dedicates ample sections to present her own experience at the time in which feminist ethnography was not established. In this respect, readers analyzing her text, might deduce that the long, first persons yet rather humble accounts of her experience as an ethnographer, is the work of a feminist hero, a pioneer bringing yet a new discipline within the multi-disciplinary constellation of gender scholar. Her essay can be then view, or reviewed, under the perspective of a feminist conquistador, setting yet another flag in the new continent opened up with the gender study academic claiming. After such definitions of the different kinds of ethnographies, Skeggs only implies a newly coined brand of ethnography, the feminist ethnography and moves forward in providing a set of considerations (namely the amount of ethnographic data and its volatility) which are however too general to validate feminist ethnography as a field of its own. Among these considerations brought forward again by "her long experience as a feminist ethnographer", the last part of her essay is dedicated to the moral and ethic issues of working with lower class cases. Again here, Lady Beverly, expresses in writings the implications of getting too close to the subjects she uses in her study and revealing publicly data that might compromise them. In the very last section she attempts instead to defend her essay, already pledged by feminism, by possible critics.

In the introduction of *Writing Culture*, James Clifford seems instead to be concerned with a different object of study. He is also talking about ethnographic research and he promptly shows the reader his familiarity with all the various currents and historical contexts as well as the main actors. However, what he latter comes to talk about, as well as the examples he provides, seems to be related to a rather traditional kind of ethnography, which sees the ethnographer living among indigenous tribes rather than analyzing a phenomenon belonging to his own cultural domain as in Skegg's case. Sir James's essay is however of relevance in indicating the literary qualities of ethnographic writings, resembling, in this respect, a work of fiction. He then goes forward in claiming that, when this fiction-like work is "good" (however this can be assessed), then the ethnographic work becomes like a "true fiction". The adjective "truth" is obviously problematic and Clifford begins here to reposition ethnographic research in a post-colonial reality in which there is a tendency of providing partial fragments of truths rather than absolute ones. In this respect, he brings forward the example of a recently

published book by Richard Price, an established ethnographer who gave only partial insights on an African culture leaving many a gaps among these fragments. Here Clifford indicates the actual quality of such relative way of accounting which allows new possible insights on the subject and further allows the reader himself to be active in interpreting and filling the holes left among each of these generated ethnographic fragments. Due then to all these new settings, to which we can add the advent of “indigenous ethnographer”, Clifford’s introduction can be viewed as a text aiming to reconsider the positioning of ethnographic research in the early nineteen eighties.