

Review:

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**Ina-Maria Greverus, Sharon MacDonald, Regina Romhild, Gisela Welz & Helena Wulf (Eds.) (2002). Stability Upon Shifting Ground: Review Note of Shifting Grounds: Experiments in Doing Ethnography.** Hamburg, London: Transaction Publishers, 218 pages, ISBN 3-8258-6113-9, EUR 38 (Institutions)

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**Abstract:** This review is written in response to "Shifting Grounds: Experiments in Doing Ethnography," a volume of the Anthropological Journal on European Cultures. This review cites the history and implications of ethnography as a methodology within various academic disciplines while praising the authors within this text for their contributions to various ways of "doing ethnography." By investigating and considering the body as an ethnographic site where life and stories are performed and embodied, this article considers the varying ways the authors respond to experimental and performative ethnography while applying it to relevant and current issues within anthropology. By engaging both the anthropological and historical turn of ethnography, this book thematically discusses the mobility of fieldwork, time, space, multi-locality, tourism, and tradition/culture. Shifting Grounds does not only offer experiments in doing ethnography, it also offers alternatives for doing ethnography.

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**1. Introduction**

Ethnography has been described and understood in a variety of contexts from its conception within the field of anthropology. VAN MAANEN (1988) defines it as "written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture)" (p.1). He continues:

"Ethnographies join culture and fieldwork. They sit between two worlds or systems of meaning—the world of the ethnographer (and readers) and the world of cultural members (also, increasingly, readers, although not targeted ones). Ethnographies are documents that pose questions at the margins between two cultures" (VAN MAANEN, 1988, p.4). [1]

H. L. GOODALL (2000) introduces what he calls "the new ethnography" as "creative narratives shaped out of a writer's personal experiences within a culture and addressed to academic and public audiences" (GOODALL, 2000, p.9). Ethnographies are then "politically mediated" (VAN MAANEN, 1988), representative (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 1996, p.18), performative (DENZIN, 2003), and biased, influential and creative (GOODALL, 2000). [2]

The foundational texts in ethnography offer a way of portraying cultures and practices; nonetheless, decades of ethnography have brought forth decades of progress. VAN MAANEN explains the evolution of ethnography, saying that shifts occur when, "new faces enter the field, novel problems are put forth, or new narrative styles develop" (p.6). This book, then, offers alternative ways and methods of "doing ethnography," by offering a shift or change in the types of ethnographies being done and the topics that are covered. [3]

By reexamining and redefining what counts as ethnography as method, *Shifting Grounds: Experiments in Doing Ethnography* reasonably responds to all of the definitions and suggestions for what ethnography is and considers the implications of what ethnography might become. The articles offer readers an opportunity to critique ethnography from the position of both reader and researcher, an interesting perspective and position. The book offers an interesting glance at the presentation of ethnographic experiences and the "shift" that has recently taken place within the discipline for the practice of ethnography. [4]

## 2. Book Overview

The title of this special issue introduces an image that recurs throughout the eight articles/ chapters in this volume. "Shifting" implies movement, progress, and displacement; "Grounds," conversely, implies stability, foundation and security. The title and articles complement each other as a metaphor for the various ways experimental ethnography contributes to a grounded philosophy of investigation. [5]

### 2.1 Blurred boundaries: researcher and subject

In the opening chapter, Ina-Maria GREVERUS compares and complements short term multi-sited ethnography with long-term single-sited research. She describes ethnography as the movement of people and calls for collaboration between the researcher and the researched, petitioning for a mobile and multi-sited ethnography that extends beyond the "field." She sites various places of research that expand beyond physical location, while sharing various opportunities for experience that span from the self, to the home, to the foreign land. In this article she engages the reader in the importance of travel, awareness and experience in understanding ethnography. GREVERUS references "The Serendipity Principle," which refers to "an attentiveness for the moment or the discovery by chance or sagacity of phenomena not originally looked for" (p.37). It is this new awareness and possibility, she claims, that heightens the anthropological voyage and awareness. [6]

Elisabeth KATSCHNIG-FASCH, in her article, "The Hardships of Life: Cultural Dimension of Social Suffering," critiques the state of societal affairs and the imbalance of power. Her research project looks at the impact of poverty on society. Her paper calls for research that investigates societal issues and offers solutions and possibilities to long standing social problems. Through fieldwork and interviews, she finds that life meaning is based on individual suffering, urging the reader to change or modify their way of thinking. Her research includes a discussion of "double-binds" which explain the contradictions and conflicts that arise as a result of societal-based hardships and inequalities of job placement, education and opportunities. [7]

Karl KASER identifies the important ways history can impact and influence the researcher's relationship both to and in the field in his contribution, "Between the Archives and the Field: The Historian in the European 'Wilderness.'" This article begins with history; KASER explains the relationship between ethnography and historiography and the development of historical anthropology. By looking back with awareness, he says that ethnographies can benefit from a historical perspective. During three weeks of field research (accompanied by an ethnologist and Ph.D. students), KASER found the experience both foreign and familiar. He had conducted ethnographic research before, but never within another culture. He discusses the implications of conducting research in Albania where he discovered historical and personal "Otherness." Comparing anthropologists and historians, KASER finds several points of departure and merging, including access, privilege, perspective and documentation. [8]

"Trafficking in History: Multi-temporal Practices," is the contribution of Sharon MACDONALD. She explains multi-temporal fieldwork as a version of "multisided" fieldwork that highlights the connectedness of time, location and culture. By citing the problems and possibilities of multi-temporal practices, MACDONALD writes about opportunities to focus on the present that acknowledge the past. Using her personal research on Nazi practices in Nürnberg, Germany, MACDONALD offers different ways of incorporating time (past/present) into ethnographic research. [9]

Helena WULFF writes about her immersion into the Irish dance culture in her article, "Yo-Yo Fieldwork: Mobility and Time in a Multi-Local Study of Dance in Ireland." By using participant observation and interviews, WULFF engaged in the practices she sought to research. She commuted (yo-yoed) back and forth between her home life and her life as an ethnographer. She describes and distinguishes yo-yo fieldwork and yo-yo fieldworkers who are identified by their back and forth movements from one place to the other. She shares, through her own research, the possibility and, perhaps, inevitability of becoming immersed and implicated by the culture that you are studying ethnographically. [10]

Gisela WELZ discusses the connection between the field and the discipline of anthropology in her article, "Sitting Ethnography: Some Observations on a Cypriot Highland Village." WELZ positions the field as a place that can be constructed, negotiated and manipulated. She distinguishes the privilege of the researcher

and the disadvantage of the researched, based on mobility and location, using the case study of a rural village in Cyprus. [11]

Regina ROMHILD discusses the "global connection" of western cultures and non-western audiences in her contribution, "Practised Imagination: Tracing Transnational Networks in Crete and Beyond." Here, ROMHILD traces the practice and use of imagination (in fieldwork) and finds ways that "ethnography can contribute to the understanding of how imagination works in social practice" (p.160). Her field of research is "imagination" (p.161), which she claims connects people and experiences across borders. The imagination, a place she insinuates can be a thread that connects stereotypes across territories and borders, becomes a point of intersection and departure. Her research calls for the legitimization of imagination, but she concedes that "place is needed to practice imagination" (p.186). ROMHILD concludes that imagination is based on reality and in order for an ethnographer to successfully utilize this ethnographic opportunity, place cannot be ignored, but rather, included between "the intersection of imagination and practice" (p.187). [12]

George E. MARCUS concludes the contributions with his article, "On the Problematic Contemporary Reception of Ethnography as the Stimulus for Innovations in Its Forms and Norms in Teaching and Research." MARCUS reflects on the evolution of ethnography in a historical and professional context. He critiques ethnography by discussing the challenges and changes the research method has experienced over the years. His article brilliantly compliments those preceding it while acknowledging the ethnographic audience as one that reaches beyond academe. His article responds to the supposed crisis of representation and definition ethnography is currently experiencing as it is used across time, across place and across disciplines. MARCUS acknowledges the history evolution of ethnography and bridges the possibilities earlier discussed. [13]

## **2.2 Backward glances, forward views**

The conversational tone of this book is especially appealing. The articles are uncomplicated in their presentation and adequately and interestingly relevant to the ongoing discussion about qualitative methods of research. These discussions vary from the role of history in the context of ethnography to the relevance and usefulness of the imagination. [14]

Contributing authors offer sample ethnographies that expand the borders of traditional ways of "doing" ethnography, limited by space, time and subject. The articles represent a celebration of the various methods of ethnography, embodiment and imagination. They open the door to creative and performative opportunities for researching in the new millennium that are not limited by the ways ethnographies have been done traditionally. Ethnography can now include the boundaries of the minds as well as the borders of the physical location. [15]

The articles position the field as a place and the field as a body. This framework is carefully constructed through the physical location of body, movement and

ethnographic placement in the field, and as a field, hence the shifting ground, challenging assumptions that ethnography is geographically restricted to homogenous communities or villages, but rather mobile cultures—cultures that WELZ refers to as "on the move" (p.138). [16]

As implied in the title, these articles suggest and propose new and interesting ways of "doing ethnography," while critiquing and investigating—sometimes praising and incorporating—the work of others. There are opportunities, nonetheless, for the possible incorporation of more current texts that are relevant to this academic and ethnographic "shift." The "shift" introduces numerous ways of doing ethnography and thinking about ethnography as there are numerous ways of living and being in the world. Edmund HUSSERL's philosophy of phenomenology argues that human consciousness determines how we understand and experience the world around us (LINDLOF & TAYLOR, 2002, p.33). The articles, therefore, reflect a hermeneutical approach that allows the reader to consider the experience and perspective of the author. This is a philosophy that is shared with similar disciplines. [17]

This journal offers an exciting glance forward for ethnographers by offering alternative ways of being in the field and understanding different cultures. The authors encourage the incorporation of ethnography as a method of inquiry into various disciplines, including communication, psychology, sociology and anthropology, acknowledging the limitless possibilities of this genre. [18]

Written to evoke readers and ethnographers alike to consider new possibilities for the genre of anthropological inquiry, this book could attract various audiences and academic disciplines. The book focuses on anthropological and ethnographic scholarship but offers alternatives for other fields as well by examining these contributions to qualitative inquiry as a tool, resource and example of the ways we can live in and write about the world. By viewing ethnography itself as the movement of people, I was introduced to a possibility that I had not openly considered: that "field work has always been mobile, with the ability to transport the reader from their physical location to the geographical site the author describes." [19]

The book also uncovers ways that shifting ethnographic ground could result from an audience shift. The book often poses interesting questions, including, who are we writing ethnography for? Who are we writing about? Where is the field? Who is authorized to research? What are the stipulations of a legitimate study or site? The first article both responds to and posits several of these questions as it comes in conversation with the reader/ethnographer. [20]

Shifting Grounds serves as a special contribution to qualitative research at a time when scholars new to the field are seeking ways of legitimizing their methodology. Focused primarily on the cultural experiences and implications in Europe, this book incorporates varying perspectives and means, suggesting it can be applied and re-applied in varying contexts and geographical locations, challenging the assumption that "everyday life is not necessarily lived in situ" as

the editors outline in their introduction (GREVERUS et al., p.2). Lived experiences are not isolated to one country, making this collection attractive to a diverse and geographically wide audience. [21]

Readers of ethnography and methodology alike will benefit from the contents of this journal. The contributors all offer unique styles and opportunities to test new methods for doing ethnography, understanding other people and their habitation and sharing the information with an audience. This type of writing encourages a wider readership, inviting audiences other than merely, and/or substantially, the academic. It also leaves room for the involvement and incorporation of varying disciplines. [22]

### 3. Evaluation

In response to FOX and GINRICH (2002, pp.7-8) who HANNERZ cites in the epilogue of the book as making an appeal for "elements of divergent national anthropologies and expediting an international conversation," *Shifting Grounds* is a way of beginning that conversation, a conversation that invites me as an American and as a minority to contribute my voice, my body, my experience and my ways of doing ethnography. It is a conversation that contributes to scholarship, but is not exclusive to purely academic audiences. [23]

As an ethnographer and auto-ethnographer, I found the connections between the articles useful. I share GREVERUS' desire to present ethnography as an opportunity for collaboration between the observer and the observed and between the location of the physical body and the site of the physical body. As a member of a minority, I related to KATSCHNIG-FASCH's introspective and retrospective view of power and poverty as a recurring theme in my own work. I also related to ROMHILD's use of imagination in her work, KASER and MACDONALD's use of historical implications in the present and WULFF's consideration of the back and forth movement of ethnographers. These struggles and negotiations researched and reported in England mirror my life experiences as an American. This presents further evidence that the articles offer an opportunity for both readers and researchers to come together. [24]

By engaging both the anthropological and historical turn of ethnography, this book thematically discusses the mobility of fieldwork, time, space, multi-locality, tourism and tradition/culture. *Shifting Grounds* does not only offer experiments in doing ethnography, but also offers alternatives for doing ethnography. [25]

Additionally, the book includes articles that can be read independently or chronologically. I would highly recommend this book to students and scholars who are interested in experimental and creative methods of doing ethnography. This book is suitable for new ethnographers and veterans alike—offering engaging stories and ethnographies that can be read exemplars or templates for other projects. It provides backward glances from and forward visions to the use and critique of ethnography, glances that will undoubtedly offer stability while leaving

room for changes (shifts). Its appeal could easily reach beyond the "grounds" of academe and beyond the "grounds" of a geographical "field." [26]

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