Introduction

Women writing culture: another telling of the story of American anthropology

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> The absence of models, in literature as in life, to say nothing of painting, is an occupational hazard for the artist, simply because models in art, in behavior, in growth of spirit and intellect – even if rejected – enrich and enlarge one's view of existence. (Alice Walker, 1983)

> I have seen a woman sitting
> between the stove and the stars
> her fingers singed from snuffing out the candles
> of pure theory Finger and thumb: both scorched:
> I have felt that sacred wax blister my hand. (Adrienne Rich, 1989)

Invocation

The publication, in 1986, of the anthology *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* set off a debate about the predicaments of cultural representation that shook up American anthropology and brought a new self-consciousness to the discipline (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; cf. Geertz, 1988). Even those who shredded the volume in their critiques acknowledged its importance by giving it their serious attention (Scholte, 1987; Sangren, 1988; Spencer, 1989; Geertz, 1988: 131). At 25,000 copies, the book has also sold well, a rare feat for an academic collection of essays published by a university press.

That *Writing Culture* became the kind of book which anthropologists could vehemently disagree with, but not ignore, is remarkable if one considers that its major purpose was to make plain an incredibly obvious fact: that anthropologists write.[1] To be sure, the various contributors took pains to show that anthropologists are writers of a peculiar sort, who have to deal with varying degrees of authority, allegory and angst, for their aim as authors is always to tell about what happened in 'the field' after they

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have returned to the academy, and usually a nice home in the suburbs (though this was implied more than overtly stated). The book's most solemn move was to question the politics of a discipline that depends on the words of (frequently less-privileged) others for its existence and yet offers none of the benefits of authorship to those others who participate in the writing of culture with the anthropologist.[2] Only Mary Louise Pratt, the lone woman contributor to this otherwise all-male anthology, and a literary critic no less, dared to wonder aloud whether it truly was such a great honor to be scripted into the books anthropologists write. How was it, she asked devilishly, with the liberty of someone from outside the discipline, that anthropologists, who are such interesting people doing such interesting things, produce such dull books (1986: 33)?

Writing Culture had an immense and unexpected impact on feminist anthropologists. Women readers in the profession were knocked off their feet with the power of something like a tidal wave. Those of us who had been asleep woke up. Those of us who had kept our mouths shut opened them to clear out the sand. Those of us who had gone into anthropology with the dream of writing, and gotten our wings clipped by male teachers in graduate school that chastized us for not being analytical enough, took hold of the pen with a new fervor that would never again permit us to stash our flashes of insight under our beds like Emily Dickinson did with her poetry. When feminist anthropologists stood up again, they came back with a series of critical readings and creative works that are unraveling the original project of writing culture and setting up an entirely new agenda for women's writing of, for, and against culture. And yet, will the project of *Women Writing Culture* attract anywhere near as much attention as did the original project based in the illusion of gender neutrality? Of course not. For it is, after all, identified with women. . . .

Feminist readings of Writing Culture

No two pages in the history of anthropological writing have ever raised as much ire among feminist readers as did James Clifford's statements justifying the absence of women anthropologists from the project of *Writing Culture*. Pushed to account for this gap by the criticism of a feminist reader who reviewed the book in manuscript, Clifford made the now infamous claim that women anthropologists were excluded because their writings failed to fit the requirement of being both feminist and textually innovative at the same time. On the one hand, those women who, like Jean Briggs in *Never in Anger*, had made textual innovations 'had not done so on feminist grounds', while, on the other hand, those women who, as

feminists, were 'actively rewriting the masculinist canon', had not 'produced either unconventional forms of writing or a developed reflection on ethnographic textuality as such' (1986: 21–22). In this vision, to be a woman writing culture is a contradiction in terms: women who write experimentally can't seem to be feminist enough, while women who write as feminists write in ignorance of the textual theory that underpins their own texts.

Most of the feminist criticism of *Writing Culture*, not surprisingly, latched on to these statements, brilliantly deconstructing their ambivalence about women's contributions to anthropology and their discomfort with feminism. For we should not forget that *Writing Culture* appeared at a moment when academic feminists in the United States were being forced to grapple with the backlash against feminism that was being staged by the media, the new right and revisionist feminists, threatening to undermine the political gains of the women's movement (Faludi, 1991). One initial response, offered by Deborah Gordon, then a graduate student of James Clifford in the History of Consciousness Program at Santa Cruz, was to read the essays in *Writing Culture* as emblematic of the 'ineffective management of men's negotiation of feminism'. Gordon proclaimed that it was a strength, not a weakness, of feminist anthropology to want to crack open the notion of ethnographic 'form' in order to make it inclusive of 'possibilities for connection among different women' (1988: 21).

In a complementary project, Kamala Visweswaran posed the question of why 'the classics most often cited are those ethnographies written by men'. Visweswaran suggested that it was necessary to expand the old canon to make room for women's ethnographic writings, which were often ahead of their time in the way they inscribed their cultural understandings within the disjunctures of the fieldwork experience. And she suggested that other forms of writing, 'like the novel, short story, diary or autobiography' be included as texts of expressive culture into the new canon (1988: 36–39). Visweswaran also made an early effort to try to define a future feminist ethnography that would bridge the gap between feminist commitment and textual innovation. Indeed, since the publication of *Writing Culture*, several creative works of feminist ethnography have appeared that seek to build this bridge without losing their focus on relationships between women across differences of race, class and privilege (Stacey, 1990; Kondo, 1990; Brown, 1991; Abu-Lughod, 1992; Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Behar, 1993).

Women ethnographers have found themselves needing to respond, not only to the male critique of feminist anthropology in *Writing Culture*, but to the critiques of Western feminism made by women of color, who have

made painfully obvious the ways in which first world women have unselfconsciously created a cultural other in their images of third world or 'minority' women (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983; Mohanty, 1991; di Leonardo, 1991). Difference, rather than sameness, the original glue of feminism, has become the operative term of feminist anthropology (Moore, 1988). This turn toward difference, inspired by the critiques of women of color, has shed light on yet another of the key absences in *Writing Culture*. Not only were women anthropologists excluded from the project, but so too were 'minority', 'indigenous', 'native' or 'halfie' anthropologists, for whom the boundary between self and other is not so clear cut (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Limón, 1991; Chabram, 1990). The African-American critic bell hooks suggested that the cover of *Writing Culture* hid 'the face of the brown/black woman' beneath its title, graphically representing the concealment that marks much of the information inside. Its authors could have searched for ways to 'include other voices', she notes, 'even if that meant reconceptualizing the work'. To open up theoretical terrains 'without opening the space of interrogation so that it is inclusive' makes the gesture of change represented by *Writing Culture* just a way for white male scholars to 'hold onto positions of power and authority in a manner that maintains structures of domination based on race, gender, and class' (1990: 130–131).

Another critical approach emerged in feminist criticism of *Writing Culture* that, following the lead of Marilyn Strathern (1987), and to some extent of Clifford himself, focused instead on the irreconcilable awkwardness of the relationship between anthropology and feminism, or, as this relationship was later recast, between postmodernism and feminism (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen 1989; Nicholson, 1990; Wolf, 1992). In a case of fascinating serendipity, two American feminists, Lila Abu-Lughod, located on the East Coast, and Judith Stacey, located on the West Coast, published essays in the same year with the exact same title, 'Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?' For Stacey, a fully feminist ethnography can never be achieved, for feminist politics, rooted in a sensitivity to all contexts of domination, is incompatible with the basic premise of ethnography, which is that 'the research product is ultimately that of the researcher, however modified or influenced by informants' (1988: 22–23; cf. Patai, 1991).

Although Abu-Lughod is more optimistic about the possibility of a feminist ethnography, she fully accepts Clifford's assessment that feminist anthropologists who hold academic credentials have not often experimented with form. According to Abu-Lughod, the alternative 'women's tradition' of ethnographic writing, which is at once highly literary and

highly popular, is associated with the 'untrained' wives of anthropologists, from whom feminist anthropologists have needed to detach themselves in order to assert their professional status (cf. Firth, 1972). A sobering example is Margaret Mead, an anthropologist in her own right, whose reputation as a serious scholar has been damaged by her image in the discipline as a 'popularizer'.[3] Evans-Pritchard, a male contemporary who was an exemplar of the professional model of ethnographic writing, pejoratively branded Mead's writing as belonging to the 'rustling-of-the-wind-in-the-palm-trees School' (1951: 96). If the example of Mead illustrates how 'the desire to communicate to a popular audience . . . undermines professional stature', is it any wonder, as Abu-Lughod notes, that feminist anthropologists, feeling themselves on shaky ground in the profession, may have preferred 'to establish their credibility, gain acceptance, and further their intellectual and political aims' (1988: 18–19) rather than take the risk of experimenting with form? Indeed, the two pioneering anthologies that established feminist anthropology were written as straightforward, carefully argued, conventional social science texts that did not call attention to their style (Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974; Reiter, 1975). Curiously, the only text by a woman ethnographer that was discussed in any detail in *Writing Culture* was Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa* (1981), a life history written by the wife of an anthropologist involved in the Harvard Kalahari Project, whose highly personal account of fieldwork has secured it a favored place in introductory anthropology courses.

Returning now to Mead, there is a passing remark, a slip in Clifford's text, that most feminist critics have overlooked but which I find especially revealing of the ambiguous place women occupy as writers in the discipline of anthropology. In the first page of his introduction, Clifford discusses the cover photograph of the book, which shows a male ethnographer, who is also a contributor to the volume, at work on his writing under the gaze of a few local people, among them a woman cut off from our view in the far background. Clifford then notes: 'It is not the usual portrait of anthropological fieldwork. We are more accustomed to pictures of Margaret Mead exuberantly playing with children in Manus or questioning villagers in Bali' (1986: 1).

As I say, this is a slip. Anyone who knows the work of Margaret Mead knows that she was an incredibly prolific writer who outwrote her male colleagues and used her pen to explore genres ranging from ethnography to social criticism to autobiography. Between the years 1925 and 1975 Mead published over 1300 books, biographies, articles, and reviews. She also wrote short pieces for publications ranging from *The Nation* to *Redbook Magazine*, to which she contributed a monthly column. Mead was a public

intellectual immersed in the issues of her time; she appeared frequently on television talk shows, and when *Rap on Race* was published she insisted it keep the dialogical form out of which it had emerged in her conversations with James Baldwin.[4] The erasure of Mead as a writer and a public intellectual, the slip in Clifford's tongue, attests to the fact that it is the image of the woman anthropologist as the one who plays with the children and questions the villagers, not the one who writes the texts, that lives on, despite the mythic conception of American anthropology as a profession that is especially receptive to the contributions of women.

One almost wishes Clifford was the only scholar who has failed to recognize women's major theoretical and literary contributions to anthropology. Sadly, recent feminist criticism shows that the problem of sexism is rampant, and that it is unwittingly practiced even by women against themselves. In her study of citation practices in anthropology, Catherine Lutz (1990) underscored how both female and male authors tend to cite more often the presumably 'theoretical' writing of men, while women's writing, which often focuses on gender issues, is cited less frequently and in very circumscribed contexts.[5] In much the same way that the traces of women's labor go unseen in the larger society, Lutz suggests that women's labor in anthropology is quietly erased by the maintenance of a prestige hierarchy within the discipline that has fixed a (male) canon of what counts as important knowledge.

The question of the canon, or will Alice Walker replace Shakespeare and Evans-Pritchard?

In the United States, we have grown accustomed to hearing of debates about the 'canon' in departments of English. In recent years, Stanford and Columbia, among other major universities, have been making an effort to revise the traditional curriculum to make it more inclusive of writings by women and minorities, the two 'groups' who are being called upon to diversify the standard white male reading list of 'great books' (Rosaldo, 1989; Pratt, 1990). Even the media jumped into the debate by offering gloomy science fiction visions of a world where the treasures of high Western culture, perennials dusted and passed on through the generations and the centuries, have been replaced by the faddish writings of black women and 'ethnic' writers, taught by their intolerant and radical supporters in the academy.[6]

One abbreviation for the perceived threat posed by the canon wars was the media's claim (which is totally bogus) that books by Alice Walker are now assigned more frequently than Shakespeare in English departments

(Carby, 1989: 36). As a hysterical article in *Time* put it, 'Imagine a literature class that equates Shakespeare and the novelist Alice Walker, not as artists but as fragments of sociology. Shakespeare is deemed to represent the outlook of a racist, sexist and classist 16th century England, while Walker allegedly embodies a better but still oppressive 20th century America. . . . Where is this upside-down world?. . . . It is to be found on many U.S. college campuses' (Henry, 1991: 66).

In fact, a key conclusion of the debate has been the need not simply to add the work of excluded writers to standardized reading lists, but to examine how the process of marginalization has shaped the works produced within the dominant culture. As Toni Morrison has put it, 'Looking at the scope of American literature, I can't help thinking that the question should never have been "Why am I, an Afro-American, absent from it?" It is not a particularly interesting query anyway. The spectacularly interesting question is "What intellectual feats had to be performed by the author or his critic to erase me from a society seething with my presence, and what effect has that performance had on the work?"' (1989: 11–12). Hazel Carby, commenting on Morrison's text, adds, 'Preserving a gendered analysis for texts by women or about women and an analysis of racial domination for texts by or directly about black people will not by itself transform our understanding of dominant cultural forms' (1989: 40).

Strangely, anthropologists stayed silent at a time when these debates about the literary canon, which were really a debate about negotiating the meaning of American culture, were a part of everyday public discourse in the United States. Yet anthropologists have much to learn from these debates. Although the debates have been reduced, by their detractors, to a battle about the relative merits of the work of Shakespeare and Alice Walker, the key question at stake is what kind of writing will live on in the minds of the coming generation of readers and writers, and what kind of writing will perish from neglect and thereby lose its chance to shape and transform the world. Lamenting 'the race for theory' that has overtaken the academic literary world, the African-American critic Barbara Christian has astutely remarked, 'I know, from literary history, that writing disappears unless there is a response to it' (1988: 78).

For many anthropologists, who enter the profession out of a desire to engage with real people in real (and usually forgotten) places no one else cares about, the literary critic, with 'his' reading list of the great books of Western civilization, is a symbolic antithesis. At least in its classical form, anthropology was a discipline that was 'rough and ready'(Geertz, 1988: 137). Even today, we go into anthropology because we want to find

something more than venerated books or dusty truths of timeless value; we don't totally believe in books and archives, we believe somehow (still!) in the redemptive possibilities of displacement, of travel. We go in search of life experience, the stuff that, in a profound way, makes books disturbingly ridiculous. Yet ultimately we do make books out of the things we didn't think we could find in books. We end up, as the poet Marianne Moore would say, planting real people and places in the imaginary gardens of our books.

But as academic anthropologists we don't simply write books, we teach books, just like our colleagues do in departments of English. If our fieldwork goes well, if our dissertation gets approved, eventually most of us end up – or at least hope to – in the classroom, teaching neophytes what anthropology is all about. We may tell a few anecdotes, but it is our reading lists that communicate to students what constitutes legitimate and worthwhile anthropological knowledge. Anthropologists have belatedly begun to realize that we, too, have a canon, a set of 'great books' that we continue to teach to our students, as dutifully as they were once taught to us in graduate school. That these books 'just so happen' to be the writings of white men is an idea that can never be brought up. It seems somehow impolite given anthropology's virtue as the first academic discipline to even give a damn about all those other cultures. So we habitually assign the writing of Evans-Pritchard because his work on the Azande and the Nuer has been enshrined as part of our 'core' reading list. Yet we rarely ask students to engage with the writing of Alice Walker, even though, as Faye Harrison persuasively shows in her essay for this volume, she has long seen herself as an active interlocutor with anthropology. The professional management of anthropology exercises power not just by fixing the value of certain texts in an ahistorical, acultural realm of the classics, but by determining which emerging ethnographic writings will be inscribed into the discipline and which will be written off. As Nencel and Pels state, 'To be taken seriously in the academy, we also have to write ourselves *in* the history of the discipline and, consequently, write *off* rival academic currents' (1992: 17).

Recently, American anthropologists have bemoaned the fact that their colleagues in literature leave them out of their discussions about the canon and the possibilities of multicultural teaching in the university (Weiner, 1992).[7] Yet the continued lack of critical reflection about our own canon suggests that anthropology has yet to carry out the radical kind of self-examination that would truly bring its multicultural quest home. We assume that because we have always studied 'the other', we have somehow, in the animist fashion we used to attribute to primitive

mentality, incorporated the insights of multiculturalism into the academic settings in which we work. American anthropology made an early contribution to undermining racism and to bringing to the national consciousness an awareness of the destruction heaped upon Native Americans, but resting on these laurels does nothing to build an anthropology of the present. Our anthropology department faculties and student bodies have a long way to go before they become ethnically diverse, while in our teaching we continue to reproduce the theoretical knowledge of white males.

Why is it that the legacy of what counts as social theory is traced back to Morgan, Maine, Marx, Durkheim and Weber? Would it not be possible to create an alternative genealogy taking off from the turn-of-the-century work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who wrote a major treatise on 'Women and Economics' as well as *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1982), a brilliant allegory about the madness of a woman who was prevented from reading and writing? Why is it that the culture concept in anthropology is traced through Sir Edward Tylor to Franz Boas to Bronislaw Malinowski? Could the idea of writing culture not be traced, as the essays in this volume suggest, through Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Gladys Reichard, Jean Briggs and Alice Walker, right down to the contemporary oral history and literacy work being done by Rina Benmayor and other Hunter College researchers involved in the El Barrio Project with Puerto Rican women living in Harlem? How is it that anthropology – the discipline whose legitimacy is so wrapped up in the multiplicity of languages and worlds – can still be conceived of in such resolutely patrilineal and Eurocentric terms?

It is high time for a debate about our canon. As Faye Harrison has noted, anthropology has tended to relegate the contributions of 'minorities' and women

> to the status of special interest trivia . . . the authorized curricular menu of expendable 'add and stir' electives. . . . A socially responsible and genuinely critical anthropology should challenge this iniquitous reaction, and, furthermore, set a positive example by promoting cultural diversity where it counts, at its very core. (1991: 6–7)

The essays in this volume offer one entrance into that debate, helping us to envision other ways of telling the story of American anthropology that can begin to imagine what Alice Walker might have to say to Evans-Pritchard.

Women writing culture

This collection of essays is about responding to the writing of women ethnographers so that it won't disappear. Its most ambitious aim is to offer

another way of telling the story of American anthropology so that the writing of women will be placed center stage in the current debates about how, for whom, and to what end ethnographies should be written. Our project is intended not so much for professors, who remain fixed in their ideas about what constitutes the 'core' of anthropological knowledge, but for those students, including male students, who are seriously wondering whether, 'to a large degree, our canon and its valuations might be a big hoax' (Dubois, 1993: 39).

The essays in this special issue emerged from a conference I organized at the University of Michigan in October of 1991, which included nine women graduate students and four invited women professors. The conference, in turn, grew out of a graduate seminar I taught earlier that year on 'Women Writing Culture: Twentieth-Century American Women Ethnographers'.[8] In this seminar, I and a group of seventeen women graduate students with diverse interests in anthropology explored a range of themes in the writings of both classical and contemporary women ethnographers working in the United States. The course generated tremendous excitement and our discussions in class were rich with ideas about the particular challenges that ethnographic writing has posed for women authors. For the anthropology students in the group, there was a sense that the course filled an important lacuna and, moreover, served as a challenge to the core course program, a year-long exploration of the history and theory of the discipline that in the year I was teaching included only Ruth Benedict as the sole woman author on the reading list. For me, teaching for the first time in my career a course with the word 'Women' in the title, I learned first-hand what it meant to teach a course so dangerous that no men dared sign up for it. Had I called the course simply 'Writing Culture,' I am certain the enrollment pattern would have been different.

Teaching a course on 'Women Writing Culture' to a vibrant group of women graduate students, it became clear to me that, in order not to erase myself as a woman professor of anthropology, I needed to rethink and refigure the canon of what constitutes the core of anthropological knowledge as it is defined and passed on from one generation to the next in the academy. I needed to look for models in the texts of those women ethnographers who came before us, in the sense described by Alice Walker in the first epigraph to this essay. Possibly, in that search, my hand would be blistered by the sacred wax of 'pure theory', as Adrienne Rich puts it in her poem, but I would need to forge ahead in order to learn how I, as a woman, am scripted into the discipline that gives me permission to script others into my writings.

Never again will I train anthropology students as though there were no

tradition of women's theoretical and creative ethnographic writing. This special issue of *Critique of Anthropology* is thus very rooted in pedagogical concerns, which are also fundamentally political concerns. For, as I learned, virtually all of the women predecessors whose work we read didn't have academic power and so they didn't have graduate students to whom to pass on their words. The women from whom we can learn the most about how women write culture have not held chairs of anthropology; they have only had their writing on which to stand or fall. That is why their writing has its own sources of resilience.

In my seminar we read not only Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, and Gladys Reichard's *Spider Woman*, but also Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* and Ella Deloria's *Waterlily*. Like Benedict, Reichard and Mead, both Hurston and Deloria were student-daughters of Franz Boas, the 'father' of American cultural anthropology. Yet Hurston, an African-American woman, and Deloria, a Native American woman, were often treated more as 'native informants' than as scholars in their own right (cf. Obbo, 1990). Neither attained academic positions nor, until recently, had much of an impact on anthropology. Their white sisters fared better in getting their foot in the door of the academy, but unlike their male colleagues they did not go on to found departments of anthropology and create schools of thought in their name. Ruth Benedict was denied the Chair in Anthropology at Columbia University, only becoming full professor the year that she died, Gladys Reichard ended up teaching at an undergraduate college, and Margaret Mead was shunted off to the American Museum of Natural History (Lamphere, 1989: 525).

What all these women shared was an impatience with the flat impersonal voice that was becoming the norm in professional ethnographic accounts by the 1930s and a burning desire to reach a popular audience with their own creatively storied writings. Since that time, as Kirin Narayan (1993) has noted, there have emerged two poles to anthropological writing: on the one hand, we have 'accessible ethnographies laden with stories' (that are assigned to introductory anthropology students to whet their appetites) and, on the other, 'refereed journal articles, dense with theoretical analyses' (that are assigned to graduate students and privileged in core courses). But Narayan asks, 'Need the two categories, compelling narrative and rigorous analysis, be impermeable?' (pp. 28–29). As she suggests, they are seeping into each other in the increasingly hybrid texts that anthropologists are writing. A key contribution of the essays in this special issue is to reveal how women in the history of American cultural anthropology have fruitfully resolved the tension between these two poles

of writing, for which they have too often paid the price of being marginalized. Accompanying the essays is a beautiful set of photocollages by Lisa Pope, combined with textual quotes selected by Amy Heffernan, that offers another view of the vision and the voices of these women.

As Janet Finn points out in her essay, Ella Deloria was uncomfortable with the distancing forms of fieldwork and writing recommended by her mentor. Deloria told Boas in a letter that 'to go at it like a white man, for me, an Indian, is to throw up an immediate barrier between myself and the people'. Unable to earn wages in academic arenas, Deloria's labor for Boas and other scholars as a research assistant and informant was the anthropological equivalent of piece work. The patronage of white scholars was crucial for Deloria, as it was for another contemporary Native American writer, Mourning Dove, whose novels explored the pressures of being a half-blood Indian woman. Deloria herself, eager to find another way of representing a Sioux woman's life that did not use typifications, wrote a novel, *Waterlily*, which she dedicated to Benedict, who encouraged her efforts. But the work, which today reads like a model of how to skillfully blur ethnography and fiction, was rejected in Deloria's lifetime by publishers who 'feared the reading public for such a book would not be large enough to warrant their publishing it' (DeMallie, 1988: 241).

By undertaking a nuanced reading of Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, Graciela Hernández reveals how the multiple voices of Hurston as ethnographer, writer and community member are subtly mediated by the use of a storytelling style that gives power to the spoken words of her informants over the written words of her own text. Hurston's return to her home community in Eatonville, Florida with the 'spy glass of anthropology' she had obtained in Morningside Heights forced her to have to negotiate the relationship between ethnographic authority and personal authenticity. Out of that negotiation came a text about African-American folk culture that was postmodern before its time in showing how as anthropologists 'we do not speak from a position outside', and in enacting an exemplary hybridity that was 'bi-cultural in terms of belonging simultaneously to the world of engaged scholarship and the world of everyday life' (Narayan, 1993: 20). As bell hooks has noted, 'An essay on Hurston would have been a valuable addition to the collection *Writing Culture*. . . . In many ways Hurston was at the cutting edge of a new movement in ethnography and anthropology that has only recently been actualized' (1990: 143).

As 'native anthropologists' writing at a moment when the border between self and other was sharply demarcated, Deloria and Hurston were put in the position of needing to rethink what it means to be an insider to a

culture. But Lessie Frazier's essay on Gladys Reichard, like Susan Walton's essay on Jean Briggs, show that 'non-native anthropologists' who undertake long-term fieldwork may become partial insiders in the communities they arrive at as outsiders. In *Spider Woman* and *Never in Anger*, Reichard and Briggs soften the edges of the boundary line between 'native' and 'non-native' anthropology. Kirin Narayan has recently suggested that, instead of this distinction,

> what we should focus on is the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized Other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views, and dilemmas – people to whom we are bonded through ties of reciprocity and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise? (1993: 19–20)

Indeed, both Reichard and Briggs have written texts in which their relationships to the people they worked with play a central role in simultaneously constructing and deconstructing their own projects as anthropologists.

Paying close attention to the way Reichard inscribes weaving as a practice, a theme and a metaphor in her writing, Lessie Frazier explores the layers of ethnographic craft in *Spider Woman*. Frazier praises Reichard for highlighting the interactive, honest, even self-deprecating way in which she depicts herself learning to weave in the course of her fieldwork relationships with Navajo weavers. Similarly, Susan Walton's essay focuses on *Never in Anger* as an ethnography of experience and commends Jean Briggs for using the analysis of her own emotions as a central part of her research strategy. In daring to expose her anger and the way in which this caused her to be ostracized by her hosts, Jean Briggs made herself vulnerable in her text, thereby undermining the fable of rapport so often held by male anthropologists and casting into relief her doubts about her own ethnographic authority. Both Reichard and Briggs, like Deloria and Hurston, wrote deeply self-reflexive texts long before it was fashionable, pushing in new directions the connections so many of us are now exploring between ethnography and autobiography (Okely and Callaway, 1992).

As Faye Harrison proclaims in her essay, if ethnography is often a kind of fiction, then the converse, that fiction is often a kind of ethnography, is also true. Certainly, this is the case with Alice Walker, who, as Harrison shows in her groundbreaking essay, has long written fiction that is in dialogue with anthropology. It is Alice Walker who, in writing about her own own search for Zora in the 1970s, restored Hurston to anthropology, which had cast her into oblivion, revitalizing interest in her work not just as

a fiction writer but as an anthropologist and folklorist (Walker, 1983). Aware that Hurston's precarious position in anthropology has as much to do with her being black as it has to do with her writing in creative ways that go against the grain of conventional anthropological reporting, Walker has chosen to stay out of academic anthropology and to enact a corpus of fictional works that embody and expand upon anthropological concerns. Harrison's thoughtful reading of Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* convincingly demonstrates how this text offers a complement and critique to such globalizing works of anthropological theorizing as Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People Without History* that omit gender and race perspectives. Yet Harrison also wisely points out that Alice Walker is only one among many black women and 'minority' intellectuals whose work ought to occupy a central place in the anthropological discussion of the poetics and politics of writing culture.

It seems very appropriate for this special issue about women writing culture to end with Deborah Gordon's essay about feminist ethnography as social action. For Gordon shows that the connection between feminist commitment and innovative textual experimentation, which Clifford saw as being a contradiction in terms, is in fact being achieved in works like Peggy Sanday's study of fraternity rape on the university campus where she teaches, or the El Barrio Project of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College. Yearning for an anthropology that will be written not just by and for other academics, Gordon takes a close look at how new kinds of collaborative texts can be created when ethnographic research takes place within community agendas. Sharing privilege, sharing literacy, sharing information – which in our world is power – is one way for feminist relationships in postcolonial conditions of inequality to bridge the gaps between women in the academy and women in ethnic communities that are being destroyed by late twentieth-century capitalism. The El Barrio Project, with its focus on oral history work as a way to empower women to revise the scripts of their lives while teaching them the writing skills they need, offers a model, as Gordon argues, for taking the focus on writing culture beyond the purely aesthetic dimensions of the individual text to a truer opening of the doors of anthropological writing to all who wish to enter.

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NOTES

1. A decade earlier, Hayden White's *Metahistory* (1973), which called attention to the literariness of historical writing, was greeted with similar mixtures of surprise and irritation by historians. Hayden White and James Clifford, who are colleagues at the University of California, Santa Cruz, have interesting parallel agendas for history and anthropology.
2. I recognize that in this capsule summary I am offering an image of *Writing Culture* as a monolithic text. As many readers have pointed out, there were key differences among the authors in the book. For example, Talal Asad's essay does not concern textual theory; Michael Fischer's essay focuses on ethnic autobiography rather than on ethnography; and Paul Rabinow's essay criticizes the preoccupation with textual form and also seeks an uneasy alliance between anthropology and feminism that stands in opposition to James Clifford's stance. Yet, despite these differences, the book has been read not as a collection of essays that are in conversation with each other but, indeed, as a programmatic treatise calling for anthropologists to be more aware of the literary foundations of what they do. The book continues to be read through the filter of Clifford's Introduction, which emphasizes textual form and theory, and so, in reader response fashion, this is the perspective I too emphasize.
3. Mead's standing in the discipline as a popularizer was not helped, either, by the mean-spirited critique of Derek Freeman (1985), who downplayed his own popularizing by presenting himself as the rational male scientist correcting the 'major errors' of an important, but romantic, female predecessor.
4. I am indebted to Nancy Lutkehaus for these insights about Margaret Mead's work which form part of her forthcoming essay for the book-length version of 'Women Writing Culture'.
5. It would be worthwhile to expand Lutz's analysis to see to what extent the contributions of anthropologists of color are likewise, or perhaps more irrevocably, erased through standard citation patterns.
6. The American media, for the most part, represented the debate as being about 'The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct', as one *New York Times* article was titled (Bernstein, 1990). A huge outpouring of articles and reviews on the subject appeared during 1990–1991.
7. In response, the 1992 annual meetings of the American Anthropological

Association made multiculturalism their central theme, but the relevance of the canon debates to anthropology tended to be ignored.

8. In my seminar, as in this collection of essays, I decided to keep the focus on the role of women in American cultural anthropology to maintain historical continuity. While this perspective may seem limited, there is still much missing here about women's contributions just to American cultural anthropology. I am currently editing a book-length anthology on the subject with Deborah Gordon that will be published late 1994. Clearly, it would be worthwhile to expand this feminist reading of the history of women in anthropology to other national traditions, and eventually to develop an international perspective. Within the British tradition, for example, one might ask why Edmund Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma* was hailed as a groundbreaking departure from classical functionalism while Audrey Richards's *Chisungu* was not (Peter Pels, personal communication). On women in British social anthropology, see Lutkehaus (1986).

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