



Yale Ethnography Hub

Celebrating a Year of Ethnographic Explorations:

End-of-Year Letter from Yale Ethnography Hub Directors

by **Eda Pepi and Kalindi Vora**

We hope this letter finds you well as we approach the end of the fiscal year. We wanted to take a moment to reflect on the incredible journey we have embarked on together in this inaugural year of the Hub. Above all, we want to express our gratitude for your support and participation. It has been our honor to guide this vibrant community and witness the transformative power of ethnographic inquiry and interdisciplinary collaboration.

For those who may not know us yet, we are Eda Pepi and Kalindi Vora, the inaugural Co-Directors of the Yale Ethnography Hub. Together, we have strived to foster a space where ethnographers at Yale can engage in critical, anti-racist, feminist, and queer epistemologies while embracing the potential of interdisciplinarity.

The collective's mission is to promote grounded, comparative, and transregional approaches to knowledge production and social commitments. We are proud to be unique among universities with our focus on interdisciplinarity as a key point of departure for the experimental, collaborative, and social justice potential of ethnographic inquiry.

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One highlight of the past year was the university-wide workshop in May 2023 that marked the official launch of the Ethnography Hub. The workshop, titled "Ethnographic Departures," delved into various forms of ethnographic exploration, including navigating crises during fieldwork, experimenting with methods and genres, and engaging with historical ethnography. These discussions exemplified our commitment to grounded, comparative, and transregional approaches to knowledge production and social engagements. The different co-organizers of these sessions have written up reports for this newsletter.

Over the past year and a half, our "soft-launching" phase, we have navigated both bureaucratic institutionalization and intellectual growth. We intentionally chose to establish the Hub as a floating, autonomous network unaffiliated with any specific department. This decision was made to avoid the congealing of intellectual and political tensions that can arise from rigid institutionalization. As part of this vision, the administrative center of the Hub shifts annually to reflect the affiliations of its directors. In our inaugural year, the Hub has been based in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program, but we are excited to announce that next year (2023-2024), the Hub will move to Ethnicity, Race, and Migration.

The Yale Ethnography Hub emerged from conversations among ethnographers at Yale driven by the growing interest in ethnography beyond the Department of Anthropology. Our collective, including scholars from various disciplines, recognized the need for an inclusive space to develop innovative approaches to ethnography. In the fall of 2021, these conversations coalesced around two primary objectives: to promote ethnographic and empirical literacy beyond the social sciences and to catalyze transformative change within disciplines like anthropology and sociology, centering anti-racist, feminist, and queer approaches. A university-wide conversation with ethnographers at Yale in December 2021 further confirmed the significant interest in establishing an interdisciplinary ethnography hub dedicated to advancing non-positivist research methodologies.

Our conviction that ethnographic praxis, theory and ethics would thrive as an interdisciplinary endeavor at Yale and beyond grew stronger in February 2022. During this time, the scandal at Harvard sparked widespread interdisciplinary debates regarding advising graduate students. These conversations prompted us to organize "A Conversation on Disciplinary Violence with Feminist and Queer Ethnographers at Yale." It became evident that such mentorship models required not only pedagogical and political shifts but also epistemological transformations. We recognized the need for an institutionalization process that would remain in a perpetual state of becoming, countering the tendency for collaborations to solidify into patronage networks. Additionally, we aimed to promote a teaching of ethnography that critically considers its historical and political underpinnings and engages with the political economies of knowledge.

Central to our approach is the multi-layered mentorship and pedagogy we offer. We bring together senior and junior faculty, along with graduate students, in co-directing and organizing a wide range of events. One such initiative is the Ethnography Hub Graduate Student Fellowship, which brings several graduate students each year to actively participate in Hub activities and provides support for their ethnographic fieldwork. We introduce our inaugural cohort of Graduate Student Fellows in this newsletter.

At the undergraduate level, we collaborate with various units across the university to administer the newly established Yale College Certificate in Ethnography. This certificate program has seen a notable increase in the number of undergraduate students completing senior essays that incorporate independent ethnographic research. In today's era of escalating misinformation, we are acting on our belief that ethnographic literacy has become a crucial skill.

Our commitment to pedagogy and engagement with the public has also led us to develop socially responsive programming. This year, we organized a symposia series on "Reproductive Justice in Ethnographic Perspective," our inaugural initiative that responded to the US Supreme Court's Dobbs decision in 2022, which invalidated abortion as a constitutional right. This newsletter features the faculty and graduate student events that brought together Pat Zavella, Siri Suh, Jade Sasser, Dana-Ain Davis, S. Løchalann Jain, Chris Hanssman, and Belkys Garcia in conversation with Ali Miler, Rene Almeling, Evren Savci, Eda Pepi, and Kalindi Vora.

We would like to highlight a remarkable example of the ethos of the Yale Ethnography Hub. Following the symposium on "Population Control, Welfare, Environmental Justice," our graduate student fellow, Marie-Fatima, connected with Dana-Ain Davis, Professor of Urban Studies and Anthropology at CUNY Graduate Center. Their collaboration resulted in a co-authored article titled "Community Support Persons and Mitigating Obstetric Racism During Childbirth," published in the *Annals of Family Medicine*. It is through such collaborative endeavors that we witness the power of our community.

Lastly, we want to express our heartfelt appreciation for each and every one of you who has contributed to the growth and success of the Yale Ethnography Hub. It is an immense privilege for us to have helped shape this vibrant community of scholars, students, and practitioners.

Please join us next year as incoming co-directors Madiha Tahir and Zareena Grewal organize programming on militarism and empire to mark the 20th anniversary of the Iraq War, the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War, and the 75th anniversary of partitions around the world, from India and Pakistan to Israel and Palestine.

Warm regards,
Eda Pepi and Kalindi Vora
Co-Directors, Yale Ethnography Hub

Eda is an Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Kalindi is a Professor of Ethnicity, Race, and Migration, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Reproductive Justice in Ethnographic Perspective

To meet this moment of great ambiguity in the regulation of reproduction – from the present juridico-political debacle on abortion in the US to the broader uneasiness about declining birthrates in the global north – the Yale Ethnography Hub organized a series of symposia that throw reproductive justice into sharp ethnographic relief.

The framework of reproductive justice, originally developed by Black feminist activists, expands beyond the choice to have or not have children to include the right to parent children in safe and sustainable communities. In the context of the series, this references how the politics of reproduction in countries in the global north also involves controlling the livelihoods of people in the global south by policing the circulation of migrants, babies, labor, vaccines, and so on.

Anti-racist, feminist and queer ethnographic perspectives that are interdisciplinary are particularly well-suited to inductively trace the tensions and contradictions in the necro/biopolitics of both ongoing oppression and the remedy:

sustained and organized social responsibility following the specific intimacies in the histories of the given community, the given oppression. Each event brought into conversation two ethnographers of reproductive justice, one working in the global north and the other on the global south, including those working across these geopolitical imaginaries.



The Yale Ethnography Hub and Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies presents
Reproductive Justice in Ethnographic Perspective

Reproductive Justice Across Borders

PAT ZAVELLA Professor Emerita, University of California, Santa Cruz

Patricia Zavella's research and teaching, which she considers forms of activism, focus on the movement for reproductive justice, family, poverty, sexuality, transnational migration by Mexicans, Chicana-Latina studies, feminism, and ethnographic research methods. She is the author of several essential publications, including *The Movement for Reproductive Justice: Empowering Women of Color Through Social Activism* (2020).



SIRI SUH Associate Professor, Brandeis University

Siri Suh is a medical sociologist with research interests in global maternal and reproductive health, population and development, and feminist and postcolonial studies of science, medicine, and technology. In *Dying to Count: Post-Abortion Care and Global Reproductive Health Politics in Senegal* (2021), Suh shows how health workers, health officials, and NGO workers strive to demonstrate the intervention's effectiveness in reducing maternal mortality despite a lack of rigorous statistical evidence.



*Monday, October 17, 2-4pm
 WLH Room 309, 100 Wall St.*

with support from the Edward J. and Dorothy Clarke Kempf Fund at Yale University, Solomon Law Center for Health & Policy, & the Yale Department of Anthropology

"Reproductive Justice Across Borders"

In this October symposium, Pat Zavella presented a comprehensive overview of Latina activism in the Americas, highlighting their resistance against reproductive governance. Siri Suh, on the other hand, explored post-abortion care in Senegal and the global circulation of reproductive technologies. The symposium also featured Ali Miller from Yale Law, on the Dobbs decision in the US, and Eda Pepi, who drew upon research on Palestinian statelessness in Jordan to reflect on US empire and the outsourcing of border policing to the global south. The symposium aimed to complicate the framing of immigration and abortion in current political discourse, particularly in the context of the 2022 US elections.

The Yale Ethnography Hub and Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies presents
Reproductive Justice in Ethnographic Perspective

Population Control, Welfare, Environmental Justice

JADE SASSER Associate Professor, Univ of California, Riverside

Jade Sasser is Associate Professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies at UC. Her research and teaching explore the relationships between large scale environmental problems—such as climate change—and women's bodies, health, and activism. Sasser's award-winning 2018 book, *On Infertile Ground: Population Control and Women's Rights in the Era of Climate Change*, analyzes the shifting role of environmentalists in shaping activism and international policy advocacy focused on population, reproductive rights, and reproductive justice. She is currently working on a new project that investigates the impacts of climate change, racial, injustice, and other existential threats, on reproductive decisions.



DANA-AIN DAVIS Professor, Queens College, CUNY

Dana-Ain Davis is Professor of Urban Studies and Anthropology at CUNY Graduate Center. In the last decade, she has focused her attention on reproduction, race and the technologies that assist in reproduction. Davis is the author of *Reproductive Injustice: Racism, Pregnancy, and Premature Birth* (2019, NYU Press). She shows that race confounds the perception that class is root of adverse birth outcomes and lifts up the role that birth workers—midwives, doulas, and birth advocates—play in addressing Black women's birth outcomes. Davis has been engaged in social justice, particularly reproductive justice over the last 30 years. She has worked with a number of national reproductive justice organizations, the New York City Department of Health's Sexual and Reproductive Justice initiative, and Scholars for Social Justice.



*Friday, January 27, 2-4pm
 WLH Room 309, 100 Wall St.*

with support from the Edward J. and Dorothy Clarke Kempf Fund at Yale University, the Yale Department of Anthropology, and Yale RITM



"Population Control, Welfare, Environmental Justice"

In the January symposium, Jade Sasser shed light on the intersection of population control and environmental politics, emphasizing the link to white supremacist eco-fascist violence in the US. Dana-Ain Davis questioned the stability of the global north by examining "uneven reproductive development" within this category. Rene Almeling intervened to highlight the erasure of male bodies as reproductive bodies. Whereas Kalindi Vora discussed surrogacy and visual technologies in India, offering a transnational perspective.

The Yale Ethnography Hub and Women's,
Gender, & Sexuality Studies presents

Reproductive Justice in Ethnographic Perspective

*Reproduction & Bodily Autonomy:
Approaches from Queer & Trans Studies*

CHRIS HANSSMANN Assistant Professor, UC Davis

Chris Hanssmann is an Assistant Professor in Women and Gender Studies at UC Davis. He studies the politics of health, science and medicine, focusing on relationships between biomedicine and social movements. Chris' research training is in sociology and public health. He is currently writing a book called *Care Without Pathology* about the transnational emergence of transgender health care as an institutionalizing field and a public good. He works collaboratively with researchers and activists in feminist, queer, and trans* feminist health and justice and teaches WGS classes on social movements, feminist studies of science, health and the environment; and transgender health.



S. LOCHLANN JAIN Professor, Stanford University

S. Lochlann Jain is Professor of Anthropology at Stanford University, Visiting Chair of Global Health and Social Medicine at King's College London, and a Research Affiliate at VIAI, University of Johannesburg. Their work aims to unsettle deeply held assumptions about objectivity that underlie the history of medical research. Jain is the author of *Injury* (Princeton UP, 2006) and *Malignant: How Cancer Becomes Us* (UC Press, 2013). They are currently working on two books. "The Lung is a Bird and a Fish" offers an analysis in prose and drawing of the history of the discovery of air and its relation to respiration. The other develops the concept of The WebNet, which refers to fluid bonding among humans and animals in ways that create pathways for the transmission of pathogens. Specifically, mid-century bioscientific practices such as blood harvesting and transfusion, and vaccine development and testing involved exchanges in human and animal effluvia, the risks of which have largely been disavowed.



Monday, April 3, 2-4pm
WLH Room 309, 100 Wall St.

with support from the Edward J. and Dorothy
Clarke Kempf Fund at Yale University, the Yale
Department of Anthropology, and Yale RITM



"Reproduction and Bodily Autonomy: Approaches from Queer & Trans Studies"

The final symposium begun with Chris Hanssmann exploration of trans health activism in Argentina in light of the concept of "reproductive justice" as a transformative political paradigm. Belkys Garcia supplemented the discussion by sharing the legal and political struggle for Medicaid coverage of hormone therapy for transgender teens in New York State. Lochlann Jain presented research on the history of the Hepatitis B vaccine and its testing on gay male subjects in the 1970s. Ultimately, Evren Savci connected issues of insurance, trans health activism, and the classification of the vaccine to the dynamics of global capitalism and the reproduction of "surplus life."

Graduate Students Build a Reproductive Justice Community: Our Brown Bag Series

Marie-Fatima Hyacinthe and Chloe Sariego

The Reproductive Justice in Ethnographic Perspective speaker series attracted graduate students from across the graduate school of arts and sciences, in addition to the school of public health, the law school, the medical school, and the school of the environment. For many students, it provided a unique opportunity to think about issues of reproductive justice, research methods, and career options across disciplinary boundaries.

The lunches also provided an opportunity to receive professional advice from people at various stages in their own careers. The first graduate student lunch was before Siri Suh and Pat Zavella gave their talk about Reproductive Justice Across Borders, where they were in conversation with Professor Ali Miller and Dr. Eda Pepi. These scholars work in different geographies, and are at different points in their professional lives: Dr. Zavella just became professor emerita, while Dr. Suh had recently published her first book.



The brown bag lunch allowed students to get a full picture of an impactful academic career through the experiences of these two researchers. We asked frank questions about navigating academia and building relationships with community partners in their research, especially when there might be conflicting needs from each of those spheres. Both scholars were extremely generous with their time and advice, contextualizing their academic work so that we could fully understand how they made certain choices.

The second graduate student lunch was before Jade Sasser and Dana-Ain Davis gave their respective talks on the theme Population Control, Welfare, and Environmental Justice, with Dr. Rene Almeling and Dr. Kalindi Vora. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Dr. Sasser could not join us in person but the graduate lunch proceeded with Dr. Davis which allowed for an intimate conversation regarding her landmark work on reproductive justice, racism, and premature births.

This allowed several graduate students to meet Dr. Davis and inquire about her research process after having read and used her work in their own research and classrooms for many years. Dr. Davis provided a candid balance of advice about ethnographic research as well as an intimate glimpse into her own experience of handling difficult research in reproductive justice contexts.

In the third and final graduate student lunch, we were joined by Christoph Hanssmann, S. Lochlann Jain, and Belkys Garcia before their presentations on Reproduction and Bodily Autonomy: Approaches from Queer and Trans Studies with Dr. Evren Savci as the discussant. What followed was a lively and engaged discussion about contemporary trans politics, reproductive justice as practiced on the ground vs. theoretically, and a conversation around what “health” means for reproductive justice.

Dr. Jain shared some of their contemporary ethnographic research experience, Dr. Hanssmann spoke openly about his work with trans health politics and the contradictions that come with geographically specific qualitative work, and Belkys Garcia, a staff attorney at legal aid who works in trans health policy in New York, shared valuable insight from her work in policy and harm prevention as an active participant in expanding trans healthcare coverage. This inspired several subsequent conversations regarding the future of reproductive justice when trans politics are one of the central lenses- along with the way such politics intersect with race, class, and nationality.

Overall, the graduate student lunches served several roles. They provided an invaluable opportunity for graduate students to gain insight into the research and careers of scholars at different stages of their careers and provided the rare opportunity for students of reproductive justice to convene over their shared interest and political goals with the guidance, advice, and insight of scholars with more experience. They acted as a hub of ideas, a space for mentorship, and often- just a fun time!

Marie-Fatima Hyacinthe is a PhD student in the Social and Behavioral Sciences program and a student in the Graduate Certificate Program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Chloe Sario is a dual-degree Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Multi-Layered Pedagogies

Through a set of humanistic and social scientific qualitative research methods, the Yale Ethnography Hub promotes long-term, comparative, experimental, and situated ethnographic research through a multi-layered model of mentorship and pedagogy aimed at both graduate and undergraduate student at Yale.

Undergraduate Certificate in Ethnography

The Yale College Certificate in Ethnography promotes empirical, qualitative literacy that presents ethnography at two levels: (1) as a set of qualitative research methods employed in the humanities and social sciences, and (2) a mode of presenting that research—in books and articles, in film and video, in embodied performance, and, increasingly, in digital formats and multiple media.

In our globalized world, cross-cultural understanding has become increasingly important – making ethnographic skills useful for undergraduate students interested in industry and government as well as those planning to pursue academic careers. Ethnographic proficiency promotes critical thinking by requiring students to critically analyze and interpret qualitative and quantitative information and data from a variety of sources. During a time of newly intensifying misinformation, this has become an essential skill. As a set of qualitative research methods, ethnography provides students with an opportunity to develop research skills such as designing a research project, collecting and analyzing data, and interpreting results. As a mode of presenting research, the interdisciplinary nature of ethnography means that it draws on knowledge and toolkits from many different areas of study. This can be especially valuable for undergraduates who are still exploring different fields and majors.

Graduate Student Fellowship

The Ethnography Hub Graduate Student Fellowship brings in several graduate students a year to actively participate in the activities of the Hub and provides modest support for ethnographic fieldwork that graduate student fellows undertake at the end of their fellowship year. As a strong faculty-graduate student mentoring agenda is a cornerstone of our ethnographic collaborative, we co-organize workshops and brown bags to provide guidance in all stages of ethnographic research.

Marie-Fatima Hyacinthe



Marie-Fatima is a PhD student in the Social and Behavioral Sciences program and a student in the Graduate Certificate Program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She takes a justice-oriented approach to public health, and is interested in melding frameworks of critical race theory and Black feminist theory with her public health research. The fellowship is funding a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews with people engaged in the sex trades, working towards understanding police violence against this community.

Maurice Rippel



Maurice is a PhD student in the joint African-American studies and Sociocultural Anthropology program. He is currently exploring issues of education inequality, masculinity studies, and citizenship across the African Diaspora, with focuses in the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States. The fellowship is funding participant observation research at Franklin Field in Philadelphia, USA to explore the relationship between sports governing bodies and organization culture within high school and collegiate track and field.

Chloe Sariego



Chloe is a dual-degree Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Chloe's research interests focus on the cultural, social, and historical processes through which bodies, nations, and their borders take shape in the U.S. The fellowship will fund an ethnographic study of state control and narratives of transgender reproduction through individual interviews with lawyers, policymakers, and advocates and through observation of the legal processes that impact trans families in New York family courts and institutions that support LGBTQIA+ legal rights.

Ethnographic Departures Workshop



The Yale Ethnography Hub marked its official launch on May 2nd, 2023 with a spring workshop, *Ethnographic Departures*, that expanded outwards to include other ethnographers on campus, including faculty in other disciplines and graduate students. The workshop was structured around three concurrent sessions that showcased ethnographic research by Yale faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students framed by issues of ethnographic crises, experimental ethnography, and historical ethnography. A group roundtable discussion moderated by Eda Pepi (WGSS) contextualized these ethnographic tensions as different forms of interdisciplinary departures, from the field, disciplines, canons, and genres.

“Ethnographic Crises: War, Political Evacuations and Deportations, Pandemics”

Madiha Tahir and Douglas Rogers

Our workshop session “Ethnographic Crises: War, Political Evacuations and Deportations, Pandemics” asked participants to reflect on the practice of ethnography in the context of crises. We asked: What are the perils and possibilities of such moments? What do ethnographic crises mean for ethnographers and their interlocutors, for interdisciplinary and disciplinary understandings, and for our understanding of what ethnography is or might be?

Crisis as a framework took two broad shapes during our discussion. For some, crisis connoted biopolitical eruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, war and violence, protests and other events that interrupted ethnography and even produced a new normal. These crises delayed and remade fieldwork and demanded the imagining of innovative new practices such as building new relationships, working through archival material ethnographically, or conceptualizing precarity and contingency as central to fieldwork. Participants also cautioned researchers not to confuse or conflate their own sense of crises with those of their interlocutors, for whom a variety of crises may be a condition of living. Others noted that emergency is also only one form of crisis. The banality of everyday waiting for displaced and refugee communities constitutes another kind of ongoing, low frequency crisis.

The second form that crisis took involved more intimate engagements that put ethnographic practice, and the assumptions that underpin it as a particular kind of process, in crisis. Participants noted stories of sexual assault, racial conflict, as well as attachments and complex positionalities in the field. These situations exposed the racialized and masculinist expectations that still underwrite ethnographic practice and produce disciplinary violence for racialized and gendered ethnographers who may not be ‘outsiders’ to the communities they study but hold ongoing relations, commitments, and obligations.

These conceptualizations of crisis led the workshop discussion to consider two related questions: Are crises useful to research? And, is research useful to crises? Ethnography, we observed, tends to divide crises into “good” and “bad” on the basis of whether they can be assimilated under gendered and racialized assumptions about ethnographic practice. For instance, as one participant observed, the fact that a researcher’s sexual assault would be considered a “bad” ethnographic crisis while “political” violence such as war, deportation, or detention might be considered a “good” ethnographic crisis generating research insights is inextricable from ongoing masculinist assumptions about ethnography.

And finally, workshop participants discussed the not uncommon requests by interlocutors to *urgently* intervene into crisis situations. These calls sit uneasily within the long temporal arc of publishing and the specialized nature of academic work. The session thus concluded by asking old questions in new ways: What obligations do we hold to the communities we study? How do we and should we engage such appeals for politically viable and materially impactful work?

Madiha Tahir is an Assistant Professor of American Studies, and Douglas Rogers is a Professor and Chair of Anthropology.

Experimental Ethnography

Evren Savci and Kalindi Vora

The experimental ethnography workshop was extremely popular. With roughly twenty people in attendance, we opened each half of the session with 2-3 ethnographic excerpts. These were circulated by volunteers in advance, so that we could read them at leisure as seeds for a discussion.

The organizing question for the session was: What makes a text ethnographic? For example, ethnography relies on personal experience, and therefore flirts with genres of creative writing including autotheory, autofiction, and memoir. Are the struggles around what makes something credibly ethnographic specific to Euro-American "Western" cultural norms? Do we need to relativize anthropology and ethnography themselves?

The session also engaged with the details of method and methodological instincts. We workshopped possibilities for how we can import non-ethnographic approaches into ethnographic writing, for example, analysis of visual materials that add to the overall understanding of an ethnographic scene. Finally, we investigated the boundaries of what ethnography cannot hold: what to do with things that need to be said but cannot be included in an ethnography? Speculative fiction, poetics, and literary approaches were discussed as ways to hold experience and identity that escape the disciplinary bounds of even interdisciplinary ethnography. We wondered what genres of ethnographic writing are still waiting to be born.

Evren Savci is an Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Kalindi Vora is a Professor of Ethnicity, Race, and Migration, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Historical Ethnography

Nana Quarshie and Zareena Grewal

The prompt for this session under the theme of historical anthropology was: Reflecting on the field of anthropology's turn toward examining archival data in the 80s and 90s, Ann Stoler wrote 21 years ago that "scholars need to move from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject. We needed to shift from a focus on the historical content contained within archives to ethnographic examinations of their "peculiar placement and form" within a given political order as institutions of knowledge production. How has the now well-known insight to conceptualize the archive-as-subject impacted the development of your research questions? What of the inverse, the consideration of our human interlocutors as subjects-as-archives?'

Nana Quarshie is an Assistant Professor of History, and Zareena Grewal is an Associate Professor of American Studies, and Ethnicity, Race, & Migration, and Religious Studies.

Ethnographic Departures Roundtable Discussion

Maurice Rippel

After the break-out sessions that delved into experimental ethnography, historical ethnography, and ethnographic crises, the Ethnographic Departures workshop, organized by the Yale Ethnography Hub on May 2nd, progressed into a Roundtable Discussion moderated by Eda Pepi. This dynamic gathering, consisting of approximately 50 participants, saw both graduate students and faculty vocalizing their explicit recognition of the pressing need for an interdisciplinary space, a need that had been evident throughout the planning process, particularly to me as the graduate student organizer.

The Ethnography Roundtable Discussion began with reports from each of the breakout workshops. The summations from each group provided generative insights into their discussions setting the foundation for our broader group conversation. The organizing question posed for this session was: *What would you like this space to do in the future?*

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Several themes emerged from the provocation. Faculty expressed a desire for the space to be experimental and for participants to show up in-progress. Both junior and senior scholars expressed the hope that one could bring up intellectual questions, to not be wedded to any idea, but be encouraged to put it out within a space to receive feedback and generative critique. The hub's interdisciplinarity can hold space that may not always exist within folk's departmental affiliations.

A general consensus emerged amongst graduate student participants to have collaborative space as folks enter into various stages in their ethnographic practices. Others expressed a particular hope for support through the fieldwork stage, or for a writing group where the focus and critique could be on the craft of writing.

I felt moved to share my desire for such a space to hold stories of ethnographies that changed folks' lives, calling works like Aimee Meredith Cox's *Shapeshifters* and John L. Jackson's *Harlemworld* in to the space. What I mean(t) by that is, academic environments can feel isolating to scholars who work from any kind of margins, be that race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender expression, ability, etc. As graduate students, training can often feel like learning to perpetuate the tearing down of others' work, looking for an author's flaws or failures, rather than affirm what they do well.

Schooling may often mean internalizing a panopticonic voice where one sidelines projects in the name of tenure or a job market; the result can be the death of analysis through paralysis. I'm inspired though about the possibilities of another university through the politic of care practiced in the roundtable's discussion, and for the solidarity that is formed by bringing together scholars who center the life of the mind through the work of the body, the heart, and spirit.

At the time of this writing, it has only been a month, but I feel that the lessons learned in that circle will fuel me for a long time. I'm in Philadelphia for the first phase of my fieldwork journey, watching tomorrow's NCAA and professional champions at the New Balance Nationals Outdoor Track and Field Meet at Franklin Field. Through generous funding as an Ethnography Hub Fellow, I was able to attend several days of events which allowed me to connect with coaches and scouts, and friends old and new. It gave me new questions at the intersections of sports, race, and masculinity that I look forward to bringing back to the space.

Maurice Rippel is a PhD student in the joint African American Studies and Sociocultural Anthropology program.

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