

# **Anthropology of Zones of Suffering:**

## **Ethics and Ethnography**

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## **Anthropology of Zones of Suffering: Ethics and Ethnography**

### ***A Woman Sings a Song for a Soldier Come Home***

*The wound kills that does not bleed.  
It has no nurse nor kin to know  
Nor kin to care.*

*And the man dies that does not fall.  
He walks and dies. Nothing survives  
Except what was,*

*Under the white clouds piled and piled  
Like gathered-up forgetfulness,  
In sleeping air.*

*The clouds are over the village, the town,  
To which the walker speaks  
And tells of his wound,*

*Without a word to the people, unless  
One person should come by chance,  
This man or that,*

*So much a part of the place, so little  
A person he knows, with whom he might  
Talk of the weather –*

*And let it go, with nothing lost,  
Just out of the village, at its edge,  
In the quiet there.*

*[-Wallace Stevens]*

This essay discusses attempts of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century anthropology to ‘sing’ suffering. Like the woman of the title of Wallace Stevens’ poem of unspeakable suffering, like the poet for whom she is a metaphor, contemporary anthropologists approach and ‘sing’ areas of human experience once limited to artistic communication. We suggest and describe reasons that have pushed contemporary anthropology to devote a

significant portion of its energies to addressing ‘suffering’, and consider whether anthropology has a language sufficient to articulate and contain this topos. As Clifford Geertz has noted, for such scholarship, ‘[t]here seems to be a genre missing’ (1995:120). The second part of this paper therefore focuses on the ethnography of suffering, the problematics of an emergent invented genre and its challenges, reflecting on ways that ethical problems in this field have created a respondent and correspondent poetics.

We claim here that one of the most salient trends in contemporary anthropology is a new determination of legitimate objects for inquiry, regions for research, and social facts worth investigation, a trend which we call ‘**the anthropology of zones of suffering**’.

We suggest ‘zones of suffering’ as a theoretical site of the type described by Willis and Trondman, one which ‘interfaces between social theory and ethnographic data ... casting the maximum illumination, including the formulation of open and energetic questions, on to a given topic of study’ (2000: 13). Post-colonial theory has challenged dominant narratives and values (including ethical narratives), thus making the binary division of modern-primitive useless for the anthropological enterprise and leaving suffering as a strategically rich speaking position. Yet anthropologists are still going places and doing ethnography. We argue here that in this trend the modern-primitive distinction has been replaced by one formed around suffering, creating zones of suffering as sites of anthropological interest and grounds for emerging truths. Choosing a site because no roads lead to it, because people walk half-naked, know no modern technologies and have their own arts and languages, is no longer possible. Such reasons for choice expose the ethnocentric stand of the researcher. Instead, the legitimating instance currently rests in the amount of suffering contained in the site. Anthropology still divides the globe into regions, and its worldview still remains black-and-white: once modern/primitive, then first/third worlds, now zones of suffering and home sites. The overlap is extensive.

Describing and analyzing human misery, injustice, power relations, etc., has always been a prominent part of the activity of social studies. Exposure and critique of suffering was part of that research. The novelty in the contemporary trend we are discussing is in choosing a fieldwork site in/as a zone of suffering, thus marking it a-priori, and defining the sufferer as the new object for the anthropological gaze. Our goal is not only to underline the priority of human suffering on the social studies

agenda, but also to assess the impact of this trend on anthropology as a discipline and on ethnography as a discursive genre.<sup>1</sup> To that end, we have organized our discussion thus: We first attempt to illuminate the status of the anthropologist and her ethnography in and around zones of suffering. We then characterize suffering as anthropological site, going on to consider the ethical and ethnographic implications of this anthropological trend. Since the vehicle of anthropology is ethnography, we concern ourselves with questions of genre and poetics in response to this changing anthropological geography. We then discuss the investigation and representation of suffering, focusing primarily on methodology, leading to a consideration of the resultant poetics and emergent self-reflexive genre. Additionally, we hope that this survey will indicate future directions of the discipline, including ways in which anthropology of this type will alter the conventions of scientific knowledge<sup>2</sup>.

### **Eye-witnessing and Truth-Telling: The Status of the Anthropologist and her Ethnography in and around Zones of Suffering**

Reading the texts that comprise the field of ‘anthropology of zones of suffering’ shows that all agree on a central system for bringing the researcher to the ‘truth’. This system offers an exclusive way of knowing, of producing empirically and ontologically valuable knowledge that is also of spiritual value. The bases of this epistemology are in the acts of witnessing and testifying, with the anthropologist as eyewitness and ethnographer as testimony writer. This of course brings to mind judicial procedures and the realities that they describe and create, whose anchors are testimony and objects found on site. These words and objects are the foundation of judicial truth, seeming to bear a quality of unmediated access to the originating event. The witness saw, perhaps heard or smelled or touched, the object -- spatial and temporal proximity thus offering truth potential.

Both eyewitness and physical evidence participate in events but do not take part. This act of participating without taking part determines both role and duty, that of telling, of giving testimony, of reconstructing the chain of events and representing them to those who were not ‘there’. When Ruth Behar’s Aunt Rebecca asks her: ‘What is Anthropology?’, Behar responds by describing anthropology as ‘the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing and necessary form of witnessing left to us at the end of the twentieth century’ (1996: 5). Later in the same book she declares that ‘bearing

testimony and witnessing offer the only, and still slippery, hold on truth' (p. 163). Nancy Scheper-Huges, another constitutive figure in the anthropology of zones of suffering, similarly describes the field in the prologue to her influential book Death Without Weeping. Replacing Behar's 'truth' with the term 'record of human lives', Scheper-Huges evokes the same fundamental actions: 'In the act of "writing Culture", what emerges is always a highly subjective, partial, and fragmentary – but also deeply felt and personal – record of human lives based on eyewitness and testimony' (Scheper-Huges 1992: xii).

Narrowing anthropological practice to that of eyewitness and testimony both reduces the anthropological enterprise to its originary sources and concomitantly opens it to new-old horizons. At the end of the twentieth century as at its beginning, anthropology stands beside and not within events, participating via observation, taking part by writing testimony. Extending the judicial metaphor, the anthropologist fulfills her civic duty by testifying as eyewitness, while seeking to redefine the act of taking the witness-stand. Contemporary anthropological witnessing no longer attempts to clear the static from the story and to remove, in Scheper-Huges' words, the 'subjective, partial, fragmentary and deeply felt'; or, in Behar's words, the 'bizarre and disturbing'. Truths are essentially slippery and subjective, and the anthropologist-witness makes no attempt to disguise this textural essence. 'The act of witnessing is what lends our work its moral (at times almost theological) character' (Scheper-Huges.1992 :xii). '...[I]t returns anthropology to the origins by reopening though in no way claiming to resolve – vexing questions of moral and ethical relativism...[:] if we can not think about cultural institutions and practices in moral or ethical terms, then anthropology strikes me as quite weak and useless' (Scheper-Huges 1992 :21).

In 1996, Theory Culture and Society published a chapter of Pierre Bourdieu's book La Misere du Monde in English translation<sup>3</sup>. The book's title is in itself a declaration. Its translator Bridget Fowler, who prefaces her introductory pages by briefly mapping Bourdieu's book, draws attention to what she describes as the 'extraordinary claim' with which it ends: '[T]he attempt at genuine discovery of others' thought is a "spiritual exercise"' (Fowler 1996:2). While Bourdieu's claim originates in the social researcher, the reading experience extends this spiritual exercise in a refracted way.

The very same issue of TCS contains a section of four papers on ethics prefaced by Scott Lash, one of the journal editors. Lash refuses to recognize the shifts and re-orientations in social sciences as ‘trends’; rather, he identifies (and celebrates?) them as a ‘cultural turn’. ‘This steady growth of “cultural thinking” is, we think, neither short term nor trend. It is instead part and parcel of long term transformation.....from “material society” to the “cultural society”’ (Lash 1996: 75). Lash claims that ‘cultural thinking’ has been mainly concerned with esthetics and has paid insufficient attention to ethics, promising his readers to maintain an ongoing dialogue on ethics. Thus in Europe as in the United States (though with different and differing articulations, [Boltanski 1999]), several key researchers in the social sciences have marked this trend/transformation from material to cultural to ethical/spiritual.

If ‘the ethical is always prior to Culture because the ethical presupposes all sense and meaning and therefore makes culture possible’, as Scheper-Huges postulates (1992: 22), it follows that the focus of study, the site drawing the researcher’s attention and demanding witnessing and representation, is human suffering. Moreover, most contemporary social issues are sites of cultural dispute, open to relativist negotiation in the postmodernist mode. A hungry child, a dead baby, a murdered woman or a family expelled from its home transcend this relativist threshold (though not always easily).<sup>4</sup>

Adi Ophir, an Israeli researcher, has positioned himself on the boundaries of this ethical discourse about suffering and its amelioration (1996a), basing his approach on Jean Francois Lyotard’s brief philosophical essay ‘Le Differend’ (1983). ‘The differend is a condition in which one party to a dispute cannot activate appropriate rhetorical resources (because he has been deprived of them or others have been forced upon him) ... The victim that this condition creates remains unrecognized’ (p. 154). This rhetorical incapacity results in injustice and loss of the ability to claim damages; damage thus has no significance, no remedy, no proponent and no recipient.

Ophir also claims that it is the intellectual’s task to witness and testify to this absence. The language of testimony is universal, with two inherent risks. The first stems from the representation of injustice through dominant language modes, and the second from relinquishing the particular in exchange for a universal metalanguage (in which science participates). In order to overcome the violence of language used to

describe injustice, Ophir suggests speaking transiently, in a genre which refuses incorporation, within a discourse whose norms are self-reflexive and exposed.

Can anthropology speak from this silent and silenced place, creating meaning and significantly speaking subjects? Does ethnography contain a genre which can articulate this process while concomitantly exposing the regulatory norms of its discourse, or is there, as Geertz has noted, “a genre missing”?<sup>5</sup>

Cultural researcher Eva Illouz studies a different contemporary genre also speaking suffering. She analyzes Oprah Winfrey’s talk show, claiming its place in realizing the promise of the Enlightenment to eradicate unnecessary suffering. Liberalism maintains this promise, leading Illouz to claim that ‘the suffering self points to the sacred (and taboo) status that “pain” has assumed in the culture of liberalism’ (p.5, forthcoming). The suffering self is the subject of the ‘Oprah Winfrey Show’, and such subjects are presented by the therapeutic hegemony as undeveloped people with immature identities (or, in the old anthropological division, ‘primitives’). Yet Winfrey gives them the stage and sound to represent themselves and to speak their pain. In Ophir’s terms, Winfrey’s program concomitantly speaks and subverts universal-therapeutic language; this subversion is the source of the contempt of sophisticates for such programs.<sup>6</sup>

Focus on suffering and its amelioration necessitates a correspondent post-modernist ethics. On this point Ophir claims that ‘postmodernist ethics must show that moral judgment is possible in a world without transcendent values. This judgment relinquishes an a-priori unifying framework and confines itself to a general and perhaps tautological tack: Needless suffering is suffering that should be prevented. That *should* is all that remains of the universal pole used by the intellectual to critique contemporary order.’ (Ophir. 1996 :169).<sup>7</sup>

This pursuit is ‘not for the faint of heart’ (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 21), yet anything but this attention is weak or useless. As Behar notes at the close of her Vulnerable Observer: ‘Anthropology that does not break your heart just isn’t worth doing anymore’ (Behar 1996: 177).

Thus suffering, pain and loss mark those areas inviting/demanding intervention today. In the first half of the twentieth century, it was ‘primitive regions which invited/demanded anthropological acts; today zones of suffering are seen as more appropriate terrain. These early and late twentieth-century sites overlap to a large extent: Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, China, to which have been

added (in limited number) poor neighborhoods in Western nations. Some of the medical anthropologists researching suffering have also turned their gaze homeward and inward, though not deviating from the guiding principle that suffering determine the deserving object of anthropological study .

The social sciences have always had a mandate to investigate social injustice. But the current salience of its moral and spiritual aspects as decisively determinant of site-appropriateness, and as challenging the status of the eyewitness, of truth and responsibility for suffering, were definitely a trend at the end of the last century; it remains to be seen how the new century will meet this challenge. This is true too for topics deemed media-appropriate, those discussed on television and represented in the plastic arts and in literature. Sufferers now get air-time, museum space and internet sites.

Thus, after one hundred years of institutional academic work in the discipline of anthropology, some anthropologists mark their disciplinary destinations with spiritual terms. This body of work aims to create a new and marginal location where ‘passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life’ may be integrated (Behar 1996: 174). Yet even if human suffering as research site seems persuasive, we must investigate the nature of the suffering receiving this attention, and how it defines and critiques social activity.

### **Ethical Considerations: Suffering as Social Experience**

The most urgent move necessary in the creation of anthropological zones of suffering is from the personal sphere to social and political experience. Suffering must be released from the exclusive domain of doctors and other therapists and attended by social, economic and political investigators. This shift has been achieved in exemplary manner by the anthropologist Arthur Kleinman who, together with other medical anthropologists, particularly those attached to prestigious medical schools in the United States, has repatriated human suffering. In their work, the patient ceases to be victim unable to cope and becomes instead a member of the congregation of social sufferers. ‘Suffering is a social experience .... social suffering results from what political, economic, and industrial power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence response to social problems.’ (Kleinman, Das & Lock 1997: ix).

Social suffering is never serendipitous; it is rooted in cultural life experience and mentality; it is always a consequence of action and of power relations. Social suffering touches primarily the sufferers themselves, yet also its perpetrators (Crapazano 1985) and observers (Behar 1996). Such suffering generates and/or legitimates further action.

‘Suffering has social use... slavery, the destruction of aboriginal communities, wars, genocide, imperialistic and post-imperialistic oppression – have present uses, for example, to authorize nationalism or class and ethnic resistance. Collective suffering is also a core component of the global political economy. There is a market for suffering: victimhood is commodified’ (Kleinman, Das & Lock 1997: xi). The authors collected by Kleinman et al in this 1997 anthology write in a complex, self-aware, sensitive and culturally cautious manner informed by political and social commitment. Their work has contributed to the notion of a field of ‘social suffering,’ and its quality has given the field recognition and scientific significance. They are now turning their attention to the dangers of their enterprise, concentrating on two points: a) the recycling of suffering and b) the difficulties of representing suffering (in writing, speech, photography, film, etc.). These points are connected, since striving against the commercialization of suffering necessitates systems of representation which prevent this commercialization.

‘[G]lobalization of suffering is one of the more troubling signs of the cultural transformations of the current era: troubling because experience is *being used as commodity*, and through this *cultural representation of suffering*, experience is being remade, thinned out, and distorted’ (Kleinman & Kleinman 1997: 2, our italics). Undoubtedly we must investigate whether researchers of social suffering contribute to the commercialization of suffering, and whether there are discursive strategies enabling the representation of suffering while avoiding its commodification.

### **Risks**

‘Watching and reading about suffering, especially suffering that exists somewhere else, has become a form of entertainment.’ (Kleinman & Kleinman 1997: 8)

Many of the risks we are about to discuss are apparent to those working in the field of anthropology of zones of suffering, self-aware and reflective as workers in this field must be. Some offer solutions which we analyze later in this essay. It is

worthwhile delineating these risks here, since marking them from within the suffering industry is somewhat tautological.

The first feeling of unease aroused by an anthropology of zones of suffering is in the act of marking. It may seem that there are experts in designating suffering who travel the world, lifting the lid off various life experiences until they find what they seek. This self-appointed expertise in suffering is disturbing and invites interrogation. Do they go anywhere and everywhere? Do they lift each and every lid? Or perhaps they head for previously marked locations, places where suffering as defined by Western eyes can be found, places which combine poverty, absence of technological progress, dense population, high illiteracy, etc. This suffering directly follows the trail of the historical white man; thus the Kleinmans' description of representations of Kenya, for example, notes the repetition of 'Joseph Conrad's depiction of Africa as the heart of darkness, the site of social horror' (Kleinman & Kleinman:6).

Thus in this narrative the native is always victim. Even if no longer victimized in the primary personal or medical sense, the native and his community remain social victims, victimized by the first world, by historical conflict, by cultural and economic subordination. They remain powerless, passive, inadequate, subaltern, waiting to be inscribed. Delineating suffering as "there" cleans the "home," while the world remains binary. The anthropology of suffering, despite its acute awareness of these risks, partially participates in their perpetuation through its territorial preoccupations. Even when this anthropological focus turns homeward, it often contemplates the third-world at home, sites of poverty, illness, immigration.<sup>8</sup>

The second feeling of unease in this pursuit originates in a romanticization of suffering. The potential for kitsch in the telling and for alienation in the listener can seem to propel anthropology back to the domain of the missionary. The anthropologist we met at the beginning of this essay, whose concerns are also spiritual, ethical and moral, evokes the popular image of the researcher/savior icon deeply rooted in American culture. As di Leonardo states:

'...[A]rchaeologists, biological and cultural anthropologists appear particularly in the American popular imagination as marked, in the linguistic sense, by the religious origins of their discipline. Fieldwork or dig – even life among "innocent" gorillas or chimps -- takes on the aura of religious

pilgrimage; the process of “culture shock” is framed as the rebirth of the soul. The returning anthropologist is often regarded, and may regard herself, as having gained charisma – and, like a prophetic figure, as having right, with or without furnishing empirical evidences, to proffer new behavioral commandments.’ (di Leonardo 1998: 31)

The hand holding the scales of justice, however sensitive, aware and self-reflective, is still a white hand extended from the West toward the rest of the world, guided by a Christian democratic conscience and consciousness.<sup>9</sup> The danger here is that, while suffering may cease to be an entertainment, it risks being a Christian spiritual experience of sin, salvation and redemption.

A third risk may arise from a loss of dispute.<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Spelman was surprised to find that there is no entry under ‘suffering’ in most books of philosophy. In her book Fruits of Sorrow, she traces the economy of attention to pain, sorrow and suffering, describing sufferers as tragic objects of compassion offered by spiritual bellhops. Her chapter on compassion seems most relevant to our discussion, particularly as Spelman relates to Hanna Arendt. Arendt, says Spelman, is worried ‘about what happens to the experience of suffering and the response to it when it becomes publicly discussed’ (Spelman 1997: 63). Relying on Arendt’s “On Revolution”, she goes on to claim that

‘for something to be in the public eye means it is part of the world we jointly inhabit and about which we therefore can and will have different perspectives. [... Treating suffering with compassion is] by definition not part of public, political life ... the perception of suffering that informs real compassion is too sure, too impervious to alteration, to be open to possible change of opinion, open to challenge its claim to truth, which for Arendt is constitutive of public and political life.’ (p. 66)

The positioning of the observer, eyewitness to pain, and her testimony worry Arendt as, ‘by making one’s feeling public, one offers proof of the depth of one’s connection with those who are in such great pain and thus the right to speak about them [...] to present oneself as suffering with them while not one of them become crucial evidence of one’s possessing virtue as well’ (p. 64). Thus according to Arendt, the very act of

touching on or representing human suffering positions one outside political-critical reach.

One final risk concerns the definition of suffering. What can be considered suffering? Is the line drawn by Ophir, in which suffering is that which can be prevented, one to adopt? Multiculturalism, an approach which has marked suffering as the sole ground for an ethics of critique and intervention, is quick to mark suffering as that occurring under oppressive regimes, discriminatory economics, military conquest, racism, exploitation of foreign workers, etc., yet it hesitates to address less visible suffering found within a community, a religion, a class, with gender or ethnic bases. A striking example of this reticence is the embarrassment around female genital mutilation. Western feminism does not know how to relate to the suffering caused by female genital mutilation, fearing to appear imperialist and ethnocentric. This shame is accompanied by laundering language, as evident in Christine Wally's essay on the matter, which she titled "Searching for Voices: Feminism, Anthropology and the Global Debate over Female *Genital Operations*" [our emphasis]. The choice of the term 'genital operations' is explained as deriving from the need to include various types of female genital mutilation, yet it is clearly and primarily a medical term, seemingly free of cultural connotations.

To conclude this section, focussing anthropological attention on social suffering potentially revises global binarism, yet is limited by the narrow positioning of these current cartographers (strong and active Westerners); those thus marked and mapped are disenfranchised. Their suffering has a potentially tranquilizing effect for the West in the form of entertainment or an apolitical spiritual experience. Anthropological participation in their suffering may well result in Arendt's feared attribution of (apolitical, non-remedial) virtue.

## **Resources**

Clearly anthropology will continue to wrestle with issues of cultural relativism and power relations into the next century and millenium, now mediated by various reflexive and reflective elements enriching its greatest asset, ethnography. These components, in relation to each other and to new elements, will redefine anthropology, what it considers scientific fact, and the ways it deals with these facts and the social realities they construct. The anthropology of zones of suffering, as one

of the dominant millennial trends, will affect this future anthropology in several positive ways.

The anthropology of zones of suffering locates the person at its center, studying the suffering person and the systems creating and maintaining that suffering. It begins with a person, looking, listening and trying to understand. This anthropology locates the discipline closer to the humanities. It has no intention of relinquishing a critical social and political analysis, as the suffering at its focus is always social suffering; not personal or private, not sought or taken for granted. This approach brackets power relations; it does not respond automatically with mantras of hegemony, domination and material gain. It does not erase people in favor of systems, as did the reductive sociology (mainly of the 70s and 80s) which viewed complex human and cultural interactions solely in terms of power relations.

While the social sciences are preoccupied with power relations, the anthropology of suffering is not determined exclusively by that focus. Within its work, however, there is potential for profound understanding of power relations. This potential is grounded in attention to causes of suffering and motivations of its perpetrators (without assuming a-priori desires for dominance, but rather seeking their resources, history, and current domain), and in bold and open attention to the perpetrators themselves (Crapanzano 1985). This includes attending to unpopular regions, to enemy others and not only to others who are unfortunate (Ginsburg 1989; El-Or: 1992, 1998), and to decoding and problematizing the apparent simplicity of power relations and consequent suffering.

Relief of suffering, textually and theoretically, may necessitate and invite reassessment of values which may not accord with those of the dominant powers. Touching on suffering, deciphering it and creating relationships between researchers and anthropological subjects offers the anthropologist encounters with cultural relativity, opportunities for engagement without fear or intellectual cravenness. When Bourdieu states that ‘the Real is Relational, and not Rational as Hegel claimed’, we note that he uses the term ‘relational’ and not ‘relativistic’. This might be the reason that Fowler claims in the prologue to her translation of the methodological chapter of La Misere du Monde (1996) that reflexive sociology is the refuge from the scourge of relativism.

Fowler's words move us towards our next and final section, asking and answering questions of 'how to'. How can the positive potential of the trend of anthropology of zones of suffering be realized, its obstacles avoided?

Like Fowler, we will focus on matters of methodology. This is appropriate both to the nature of the question 'how' and to the discipline of anthropology, which has always found in methodology one of its salient characteristics. We will begin with some general methodological comments and continue with a literary critique of some contemporary ethnographies of suffering.

### **The How of the Representation of Social Suffering**

'We extend or withhold [recognition of social suffering] depending largely on whether the sufferer falls within our moral community.' (Morris 1997: 40)

'Our thinking of one another as possible subjects of the same kinds of experiences can be an important piece of our thinking of one another as members of the same human community' (Spelman 1997: 121)

The similarity of these conclusions by Morris and Spelman indicate underlying assumptions about attribution. In the act of comparing my suffering to yours, I posit a present, past or future similarity between them which has the potential to flatten the suffering of the other, to erase its uniqueness and to decontextualize it. Yet this potentially destructive comparison is an essential condition for the creation of identification, empathy, and personal or political responsibility. This is of course the classic paradox of all human endeavor, one which pulls anthropology ceaselessly between comparison (of similarities) and contrast (of differences). Anthropological solutions to this paradox, which we apply to work focusing on social suffering, are of general relevance here:

1. A first suggestion is to apply affirmative action to work at the home site, to encourage work nearby, at home, within familiar walls, to rummage the attic for the histories of the home, to broach its wings, its basements, its immediate exterior. Working in proximity of the home helps negotiate the minefields of ethnocentricity, dominance, arrogance, and the binary opposition of home site to zone of suffering (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; El-Or 2002; Lavie and

Swedenberg 1995). Work at home facilitates participation in a common moral community.

For example, when I [T.E.] read the essay marking the suffering of Rayna Batya (Seeman: 1996), a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish woman wrestling with the limitations her culture imposed on her gender, I learned about women whom I studied in the 1990s (El Or 2002). The suffering of this lone religious woman was communicated to me by a religious Jewish male anthropologist. The fact that the text traverses temporal, cultural and spatial elements common to the three of us (Rayna Batya, Seeman, and me) and to those women that I was then studying gave me a certain freedom, along with responsibility and commitment. I spoke of our home, the moral field we share and to which we belong, a place we are responsible for and towards. It was easy to feel the personal-social suffering deriving from belonging to the same moral and social community. It was imperative to decipher this suffering in such a way as to encourage critique and social change. Neither the unease of the postmodernist researcher at intervention nor pressing thoughts on social change affected us. We dealt, in some way or another, with ourselves.

It is, however, important to us to caution against losing interest in the ‘distant other’, or to be mistakenly understood as legitimizing exclusive engagement with those similar to ourselves. Self-centered-censorship of this type would doom the entire anthropological enterprise.

Struggle over a responsible empathy for others has and remains at the heart of feminist enterprises. Much has been written about the crisis of sisterhood in light of post-colonialist theories and the collapse of the meta-narrative. Some feminists have sought a return to solidarity and commitment during the 1990s<sup>11</sup>. Touching on our focus here, and in response to Arendt’s fears, Spelman claims that feminism offers the possibility of engaging with the suffering of others without ignoring their specificity and without evading the consequent political debate. She focuses on caretaking as a practice linked to women, and offers it as an appropriate approach to the treatment of the suffering of others. ‘If thinking about the rhetoric of tragedy means thinking about over whom we grieve, and why, thinking about the rhetoric of care means thinking about for whom we care, and how’ (Spelman 1997: 112). Compassion for the ‘other’ can represent suffering as political using a rhetoric of care; Spelman believes in the social power of compassion.

‘Compassion, like so many of our other complex emotions, has a heady political life. Invoking compassion is an important means of trying to direct social, political and economic resources.... Existing inequalities between persons may be exacerbated rather than reduced through the expression of compassion. Interpretive battles over the significance of a person’s or a group’s suffering reflect larger political battles over the right to legislate meaning.’ (Spelman 1997: 88; see also Nussbaum 1999: 13-14)

2. When listening to the other, near or far, it is worth attending to this second suggestion deriving from Pierre Bourdieu’s project La Misere du Monde. Bourdieu established a methodological system employing a network of fieldworkers close to their subjects so that the ethnographer of suffering would not merely witness a site. This facilitates a narrowing of the distance between those bearing witness and those inscribing that witnessing. This mode of rewriting and rereading of texts of suffering reflects awareness of both the potential for emotional simplification of encounters with an other and the partial nature of any representation of that emotion. It also helps the researcher avoid narrative kitsch or reader alienation sometimes generated or provoked by texts overflowing with unrefined empathy.

Bourdieu thus seems to leave us ‘at home’, since his subjects are fellow Parisians and his fieldworkers know them almost personally. Yet his general strategy is valid for research both home and away, and its essence is twofold: a) a reflexive-reflective sociology and b) ethnography as literature. While neither of these directions is new, the anthropology of zones of suffering infuses them with new significance and helps us begin to discern the face of anthropology in the next century.

### **Ethnographic Implications: Reflexive-Reflective Sociology/Anthropology**

The participant observer is differently vulnerable from her predecessors (Behar 1996), though the struggle to position the personal in the professional is being experienced in all fields today. What shifts self-referentiality to self-reflexivity is the positioning of the speaking voice and its representation, an awareness and exposure of narrative point of view, ‘a point of view on a point of view’ (Bourdieu 1996: 34). ‘Wittgenstein compares undisciplined thought to a fly trapped in a bottle. The philosopher shows it the way out. So do the economist and the psychologist. Literary

texts tell us what it's like to be the trapped fly' (Bercovitch 1996: 251). This is also the move that ethnography has made, from outside to inside the bottle. Moving inside is also a strategy for avoiding 'casting the social sciences in the image of the natural sciences, and [...] general schemes which explain too much' (Geertz 1995: 127). It is a strategy for 'raising doubts [...] about all the preconstructions and all the presuppositions, both of the researchers and the respondent' (Bourdieu 1996: 29), a dubiousness which is reflected in both the methodologies of research and its representation.

The critical empathy of the participant observer (what Bourdieu calls 'mentally putting herself in their place', 'situat[ing] herself at the point in social space from which the respondent views that space', pp. 22, 33) is given written expression in the self-reflexive writing of this ethnography, and 'ordinary people's speech [is given] the same skilled attention elsewhere revealed in interpretative struggles to understand Shakespeare or the Bible' (Fowler 1996:14). The literary-critical skills of attending to texts, listening to textual voices and silences, determining the registers of speech and the point of view of the speaker, are some of the elements of this essential 'skilled attention'. It is an anthropologist imagined in a literary critical mode (rather than a scientific one) who can interpret the 'hesitations, repetitions, sentences interrupted and prolonged by gestures, looks, sighs or exclamations, [...] laborious digressions, ambiguities [...], references to concrete situations, [and] events' (Bourdieu 1996:31), and tell their story. We thus proceed to look at ethnography and the discursive styles that have emerged from the representational struggles of the anthropology of zones of suffering.

### **Ethnography as Literature**

‘Literature clearly plays a significant role in orchestrating the language that validates or invalidates certain experiences as suffering.’ (Morris 1997: 40)

‘The question for cultural studies is not to be or not to be, but how to be, disciplinary. The answer, I think, is to use disciplinarity against itself, and my proposal to that end is to see cultural “texts” in literary “context”.’ (Bercovitch 1996: 248)

As ethnography struggles to create discursive styles to represent contemporary anthropological sites, it has moved generically closer to literature, consequently inviting anthropologists to acquire skills previously primarily employed in literary studies. The interdisciplinary nature of a thematic unity of focus (such as that on suffering) creates what Kleinman calls the ethnography of experience, a genre that necessarily generates new strategies of seeing and telling. ‘[T]he materials required to understand suffering are of such a different order that we believe research approaches to it must deal directly with an experiential domain that heretofore [...] has been the grounds of art’ (Kleinman 1995: 118). Pursuing this insight, the field of literary study can then provide essential tools for this ethnography, since it is ‘more transparently *constructed* than any other textually based body of knowledge [...] and] it highlights the constructedness of all disciplines’ (Bercovitch 1996: 248).

Exposure to and training in literary studies, rhetorical analysis, narratology, critical discourse analysis and related fields offer tools to study text and context with rigorous and systematic attention. The ability to create a textual work of art, disciplined by science and anthropology while concomitantly remolding and rewriting them both, seems the most persuasive method to encompass and accommodate the challenges of representation of the anthropology of zones of suffering, to capture something of ‘the perplexing multiplicity and inexpediency of experience’ (Kleinman 1999: 74) through a narrative multiplicity which includes, but is not limited to, authorial perspectives. As Geertz asserts in his 1988 essay: ‘It is not clear just what [...] imaginative writing about real people in real places at real times exactly comes to beyond a clever coinage; but anthropology is going to have to find out if it is to continue as an intellectual force in contemporary culture’ (p. 141). It is this emerging genre that we proceed to examine in the discursive strategies of four contemporary ethnographers: Vincent Crapanzano in Waiting; The Whites of South Africa (1985);

Renato Rosaldo in Culture & Truth; the Remaking of Social Analysis (1989); Ruth Behar in The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart (1996); and Nancy Scheper-Hughes in Death Without Weeping; The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil (1992).

### **Discursive Strategies of the Emerging Genre**

Ethnography has increasingly evolved from positioning itself as an apparently transparent gaze to a now audible voice that not only acknowledges but often insists upon itself as a continuously felt authorial presence. This move has frequently been labeled 'reflexive', and it is on the baggy nature of this reflexivity in contemporary ethnography that we focus here<sup>12</sup>. Reflexivity has great potential for self-reflection, yet risks remaining merely self-referential. Reflexivity as reflection enhances the intersubjectivity of the ethnographic relationship, while self-referentiality merely replaces the seeming transparency of early ethnographies with a subjectivity strikingly limited in its engagement of the other. The various strategies discussed below aim to maneuver this reflexive potential toward reflection and away from the merely self-referring speaking voice.

Reflexive ethnographic writing can perhaps be measured as a move away from Geertz's observation that 'so much of it [ethnography] consists in incorrigible assertion' (1988: 5). This 'incorrigible assertion' is common to both the guise of transparency of classical anthropology and the merely seemingly reflexive anthropology that is actually inordinately or primarily self-referential. Another way of distinguishing the self-reflective from the self-referential in reflexive anthropology is by an eye-witnessing which is not merely I-witnessing, but rather polyphonic testimony which reconceptualizes the Foucaultian author-function (Foucault 1980) as shared. This maximally plurivocal testimony may help to alleviate what Geertz describes as the heavier burden of authorship (1988: 138) of contemporary ethnographic texts, resolving the clash he notes between 'author-saturated texts and those of author-evacuated ones' (p. 9) in a shared authority textually represented. This matter of textual representation of intersubjective authority is essential. It is not enough to answer the methodological problems of fieldwork; as Geertz observes, 'no matter how delicate a matter facing the other might be it is not the same sort of thing as facing the page' (p. 10).

In addition to a move away from assertion and toward polyphony, reflexive ethnography makes new demands on its readers. Responding to ‘a sort of epistemological hypochondria’ (Geertz 1988: 71), narrative polyphony demands greater hermeneutic participation by readers in texts not necessarily epistemologically unified. In Geertz’s felicitous definition, this ethnography is ‘a rendering of the actual, a vitality phrased’ (p. 143), ‘enabling conversation across societal lines – of ethnicity, religion, class, gender, language, race – that have grown progressively more nuanced, more immediate, and more irregular [...] in a world where, tumbled as [people] are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other’s way’ (1988: 147). Arthur Kleinman extends the imperatives of reflexive ethnography to include a kind of ethnographic teleology, a ‘working out what to do in terms ... potentially generalizable’ rather than mere ‘ideological positioning’ (1999: 80, 85). Kleinman’s insistence on ‘not only comparison and evaluation but also action’ (p. 70) offers an ethical articulation particularly acute for the ethnography of suffering, a witnessing that aims ‘to be of use’ (p.88) both in a local sense of action and in a translocal sense of generalizability.

Contemporary anthropologists both participate in and theorize about this emergent genre. Focusing on perpetrators of suffering and illustrating the mechanisms of dominance ensnaring both dominant and dominated, Vincent Crapanzano (1985) writes reflexively in a theoretically self-conscious mode, explicitly evoking Bakhtinian heteroglossia and dialogism (see Bakhtin 1981, esp. pp. 324, 411). In *Waiting*, his study of whites in South Africa, Crapanzano uses the direct speech of his dramatis personae together with his first-person framing narrative. These multiple first-person narratives are his solution to the complicated power relations of informant-ethnographer, while his articulation of this solution reveals how intractable this problem is. Crapanzano tells us that: ‘Insofar as possible, I have allowed the white South Africans with whom I lived and worked as an anthropologist to tell their own stories’ (p. xiii). The dominance dilemma inherent in ethnographic writing is vividly conveyed by the verb ‘allowed’, in contrast with the expressed desire that informants ‘tell their own stories’. More subtly, he writes in a double-voiced first-person narration that expresses his dual positioning as fieldworker/witness and anthropological-theorist. It is the combination and amalgamation of these speaking voices that represents and enacts Crapanzano’s belief in an inner freedom which is expressed by a kind of vitality of interpersonal

engagement (pp. 20-21) in an exemplary integration of literary form and conceptual framework.

Stylistically, Crapanzano manipulates syntax and pronouns to emphasize complexities of positioning. He uses a plethora of 'I'-led sentences which serve a dual purpose, a self-reflexivity that serves both as a signal to the reader of positioning and a caveat of limited perspective. Often these 'I'-led sentences repeat syntactically in a single paragraph, rhetorically opposed by 'They'-led sentences in the same paragraph (see, for example, pp. 23-24). This first-person repetition and third-person opposition make implicit second-person demands (on the reader), insisting thereby on the partiality of the narrative report and thus on the hermeneutic responsibilities of the engaged reader. These demands and responsibilities are particularly acute in the study of a racist society where language-use inevitably implicates the speaker (pp. 28, 35), but Crapanzano's consequent heightened sensitivity to language-use is richly applicable to all social study.

Hennie, one of Crapanzano's informants, interestingly enacts the dual blindness and insight that Crapanzano insistently reminds us is a feature of all perception. Attesting to his struggle with the Dutch Reformed Church of his Afrikaaner background (which he ultimately abandoned in favor of his 'English' wife's Anglicanism), Hennie describes the struggle for control reflected in the tension between figurative and literal interpretations of the biblical texts so essential to Afrikaaner self-definition and identity. His church forced him 'to accept the fact that the world and everything in it was made in six days, [... not allowing for] an idea of gradual evolution, even though there was plenty of evidence around me for it' (p. 94). Yet, as his first-person testimony reveals, Hennie himself is often limited in his ability to apply what he has learned about the relationship between language, dogma and 'evidence around'. Stylistically, Crapanzano is using the problematic reliability of the first-person narrator to highlight (and not resolve) epistemological questions for his reader.

The relationship between fieldworker, informant and reader is cast somewhat differently in Renato Rosaldo's seminal work in the genre, Culture & Truth (1989). Rosaldo's triangle echoes that of Shakespeare's Lear-Gloucester-audience, a generous synaesthetic exchange where Gloucester's 'seeing feelingly' leads to Lear's offer: 'If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes'. Viewing thought and feeling as a constitutive whole (pp. 106-7) and professional imperative (p. 173), Rosaldo

describes how his personal experience of the rage in grief changed and enhanced his understanding both of his fieldwork and of his writing, how his experience of rage in his grief over his wife's accidental death illuminated the practice of headhunting among the Ilongots (perpetrators of suffering within the framework of this discussion) that had previously been unfathomable. As both fieldworker and ethnographer, he reconceptualizes 'the positioned (and repositioned) subject', 'prepared to know certain things and not others' (pp. 7-8). Rosaldo describes an epistemological obstacle overcome through a central life experience, his subjectivity enhancing his intersubjective understanding. Signaled by an initial 'Thus' (p. 8), Rosaldo describes this process of personal and professional interrelated insight. Extending this relationship to his reader, Rosaldo explains his 'use of personal experience [...] as a vehicle for making the quality and intensity of the rage in Ilongot grief more readily accessible to readers' (p. 11), who 'should be as informed as possible about what the observer was in a position to know and not to know' (p. 69 and see also p. 184). Mary Louise Pratt, a literary scholar looking cross-disciplinarily at ethnography, maps this move somewhat more formally: 'Personal narrative mediates this contradiction between the engagement called for in fieldwork and the self-effacement called for in formal ethnographic description, or at least mitigates some of its anguish, by inserting into the ethnographic text the authority of the personal experience out of which the ethnography is made' (1986:33).

Rosaldo's theorizing on ethnography is founded on an understanding that 'no mode of composition is a neutral medium' (p. 49). Extending Bakhtinian intratextual polyphony to anthropology as a discipline, he envisions a kind of cross-disciplinary intertextual polyphony consisting of 'diverse legitimate rhetorical forms [which] will allow for any particular text to be read against other possible versions', enabling anthropology 'to approximate people's lives from a number of angles of vision' (p. 62) which 'cannot necessarily be added together into a unified summation' (p. 93). This polyphonic intertextuality would include the 'distanced normalized description' of classical anthropology (with its 'ethnographic present') but would deny its exclusivity (p. 184), emphasizing the need for narrative multiplicity in cultural representation. Rosaldo thus offers us not only a view of an emergent genre but also of the changed discipline that this implies, one that includes 'narrative as a form of knowledge' (p. 130), an expanded anthropological epistemology that necessitates an anthropological toolbox similarly expanded to encompass narrative analysis. The

methodological anchors of critical discourse analysis, focusing on representation and rhetoric where ‘there is not necessarily any true reality that can be unveiled by critical practice’ (Fowler 1996: 4), offer textual anchoring to the qualitative researcher. Thus trained, the social analyst can better achieve Rosaldo’s ideal of imaginative positional exchange enhanced by professional collaboration (p. 189).

In The Vulnerable Observer (1996), Ruth Behar walks through the door opened by Rosaldo and expands the opening. Daring to push the limits of the genre, Behar inevitably pushes against them in an interesting example of this ethnography, a self-consciously reflexive text that offers us a close look at both the resources and the risks of the genre. In a single paragraph of the introductory essay which gives its title to her book, Behar exposes both poles of the reflexive potential. Recognizing that the ethnographer’s personal narrative ‘is only interesting if one is able to draw deeper connections between one’s personal experience and the subject under study’, Behar asserts a prerequisite ‘keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied’ (p. 13). Yet this insightful articulation of the necessary frame for reflexivity is preceded in that same paragraph by the complaint that ‘[i]t is far from easy to think up interesting ways to locate oneself in one’s own text.’ These authorial actions – distinguishing significant and connecting filters as opposed to imaginatively imposing one’s textual presence – can help us distinguish between the self-reflective and the self-referential in reflexive ethnography. The distinction which Behar makes between ‘essential to the argument’ and ‘decorative flourish’ (p. 14) is one she occasionally loses, creating an apparent polyphony of a many-in-me, citing ‘the ethnographer in me’, the ‘feminist in me’, the ‘novelist in me (p. 20), rather than a plurivocal many and me (which includes the multiple identities comprised in that ‘me’). This apparent polyphony leads towards self-referentiality, the destructive impulse not one of pace (as Behar worries on p. 18) or thematic focus (p. 84), but rather in the originating impulse, defined by Behar as ‘a desire to embed a diary of my life within the accounts of the lives of others that I was being required to produce as an anthropologist’ (p. 19).

This potential generic vulnerability, exposed in the theoretical section of her book, is also manifest in its ethnographic sections. Looking at nature and finding in it living metaphors for her grief at the death of her grandfather, Behar incidentally offers us a metaphor for the seductive breaking-point of I-witnessing. Describing the final

days of fieldwork on ‘death and memory’ in northern Spain, she describes a melancholy walk in the countryside on an unseasonably cold and windy July day, ‘looking for mirrors of my sorrow’ (1988: 71). This tendentious mirroring, expressed theoretically as ‘a desire to embed a diary of my life in the accounts of the lives of others’, leads the reflexive away from reflectivity and closer to referentiality. Behar evokes Kafka’s metaphor for successful writing (‘A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us’) in a scaled-down version of her own (‘at least an ice pick’, p. 86). The ice-pick metaphor is illuminating in its retention of classical anthropology’s power relations, expressed in this objectification of the reader as one whose responsiveness must be released by the agency of the ice-pick-wielding author. It is this slippage between self-reference and reflectivity that may account for what Behar experienced as ‘the surprisingly ruthless criticism of the humanists’ (p. 164) in response to her work, and which can serve us to map at least the parameters of the emergent reflexive anthropological writing.

The work of Nancy Scheper-Hughes (who, like Behar, looks reflexively at victims and suffering) offers us additional insights into the forging of a challenging and critically engaged social science. Offering ‘an anthropology-with-one’s-feet-on-the ground’ (1992: 4) (in interesting contrast to Behar’s ‘anthropology that breaks your heart’), Scheper-Hughes’ anthropologist is *both* vulnerable *and* politically engaged, while reflecting and refracting the postmodern reluctance to evoke colonialist implications of intervention, raising therein a core issue in the ethics of ethnography. Her fieldwork, and most directly, her informants, demanded an exchange of goods, insisting that they would oblige the ‘antropologa’ that she had become only if she would resume work as the ‘companheira’ she had been years previously when working as a Peace Corps volunteer (pp. 15-18). In responding to the demands of her informants for advocacy and constituency, Scheper-Hughes attempts to evolve a professional perch that continually confronts, though doesn’t pretend to resolve, ‘vexing questions of moral and ethical relativism’, offering ‘the beginnings of a moral and an ethical reflection on cultural practices that takes into account but does not privilege our own cultural presuppositions’ (pp. 21-22). Yet Scheper-Hughes’ work has been criticized for stumbling precisely at this point of authorial privileging. In her recent response to criticism of her study of familial and communal dynamics in rural Ireland of the mid-1970s, Scheper-Hughes offers an alternative narrative to the one she initially published (2000: 129-132). After an

evasive prefatory attribution of the hostile local reception of her book to difficulties ‘any writer’ (p. 120) on Irish subjectivity would experience, she tells the story as she ‘might have said’ it, conceding that she ‘may have misread important aspects of social life’ (p. 129). Recognizing the problematics of authorial selection, she attempts to recover other perspectives in the story retold, framed by ‘while I told the anecdote about ..., I failed to tell the anecdote about ...’ (p. 131). In this alternative narrative, not superseding the original but juxtaposed with it, Scheper-Hughes demonstrates the quality theorized by Willis and Trondman as exemplary ethnography, ‘the showing of relations of indeterminacy embedded within the social,’ a representation expressive of ‘a critical and dialogical consciousness’ (Willis and Trondman 2000: 9).

For Scheper-Hughes, ethical responsiveness is characterized by ‘compassion toward the others’ accompanied by ‘[a]ccountability, answerability to “the other”’ (1992: 22-23). Always inherently partial, anthropological understanding emerges out of a hermeneutic imperative shared by ethnographer-informant-reader but belonging to none. Conceived by Scheper-Hughes as ‘the working out of an ethical orientation to the other-than-oneself’, this anthropology seeks to ameliorate suffering (p. 26) while refraining from colonizing sufferers, ‘an ethical and a radical project [...] transformative of the self but not (and here is the rub) transformative of the other’ (p. 24). This parenthetically voiced awareness of the central difficulty in realizing this professional ideal is underscored by the single non-negotiable element of the anthropological work described by Scheper-Hughes: ‘[W]hat may never be compromised are our personal accountability and answerability to the other’ (p. 24). Professional responsibility includes both telling tales and keeping counsel in textual silences mapped and emphasized by Scheper-Hughes, inviting interpretation without ‘blowing the cover’ of her informants (p. 508). On this point too, Scheper-Hughes interestingly interrogates her earlier self, suggesting today that ‘the time-honored practice of bestowing anonymity on “our” communities and informants fools few and protects no one,’ while promoting an illusory and dangerous authorial license (2000: 128).

Using the personal to make and enhance the ‘connections’ which are both the subtitle of her prologue and the motif of her prose is Scheper-Hughes’ discursive strategy in her 1992 study, rhetorically emphasizing what James Clifford calls ‘the message of partiality’ (1986: 8). She creates a metaphor of ethnographer as artist (1992: xi-xii) and tells (almost as epiphany) of a childhood neighbor, an artist whose

paintings defamiliarized the home site, showing ‘what *we* never thought to see’ (p. xi, original italics). Bakhtinian dialogism provides a narrative model for Scheper-Huges (p. 25) as it does for Crapanzano, along with consequently engaged and implicated readers (pp. xii, 25, 30) who participate in a reading act which ‘make[s] them party to the act of witnessing’ (p. xii), vulnerable observers creating correspondingly vulnerable readers.

Yet, as Kleinman instructs us, this expanded vulnerability is not enough. As he points out in his discussion of Scheper-Hughes, the ethical imperative of the ethnographer is in the ‘effort at working out what to do in terms ... potentially generalizable, ... out of which will emerge an agenda for practical action’ (1999: 80, 92). This trend in anthropology continues to teach us that the informant-ethnographer-reader triangle must be one of vital exchange. Ruth Behar, responding to her readers’ responses to her ethnographic persona, understands that ‘when readers take the voyage through anthropology’s tunnel it is themselves they must be able to see in the observer who is serving as their guide’ (1996: 16). Taking up Hamlet’s dying charge to Horatio, the contemporary ethnological imperative of zones of suffering ‘in this harsh world [is to] draw thy breath in pain,/To tell my story’, recognizing Hamlet’s story in Horatio’s and thereby in our own, singing thus (to return to our opening metaphor) *for* another.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>We are aware of the great differences in the political and philosophical attitudes among researchers in this field, and we occasionally refer to these differences. Yet at this early juncture we would like to note that we do not view ourselves as experts in medical anthropology or the anthropology of suffering. As outsiders to these fields, we have noted their expanding presence in recent years, and query the sources of this expansion and its impact. This query has necessitated some broad generalization, putting many and varied research under a single interrogatory roof for the purposes of this paper, in a conscious exchange in the hope of gaining insight into a shared phenomenon.

<sup>2</sup>On the battle to change the limits of scientific knowledge, see Fujimura 1998.

<sup>3</sup>Subsequently the full version of the book was published in English as *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (1999).

<sup>4</sup>Toward the end of a very favorable review by V. Adams of *Social Suffering* (Kleinman et al), Adams wonders ‘why ... *only* suffering [is] so representable in the discipline these day’ and goes on to offer an answer: ‘[A]t a time when anthropological analyses of the problematics of power are characterized as tending toward a troubling solipsism and self-absorbed reflexivity that threatens the authority and relevance of the discipline, those who speak for the suffering become irreproachable’ (Adams, p. 1064).

<sup>5</sup>Aware of the problematic under discussion here, Arthur Kleinman nevertheless insists on the potential real-world utility and applicability of an ethnography (Kleinman 1999). See above, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup>On the meaning of suffering in our time Illuz notes: ‘Suffering is to us, postmoderns, what sex was to Victorians: a “scandal”, which fascinates and repels us’ (p.26, forthcoming)

<sup>7</sup>For further discussion of these issues, see Nicholas H. Smith 1996.

<sup>8</sup>See Loic Wacquant, on the Chicago project in : Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992. Wacquant claims that we tend to treat poor neighborhoods in the Western world as third world societies lacking their traditional *nomos*.

<sup>9</sup>Veena Das, an Indian anthropologist, is well aware of this danger. Her extensive work in low-income countries offers a different description of suffering and a critical

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stance toward bio-ethical discourse in the West, as opposed to the discourse of human rights and dignity in 'the rest of the world' (Das 1999).

<sup>10</sup>In our consciousness, the Holocaust debate is most salient in its focus on the right to speak about suffering, from positions of the victims themselves, victims' families, perpetrators, or interested parties. This is undoubtedly a rare test case, and it is thus not surprising that Spelman discusses Arendt as one of the significant voices in this debate on debate. In the context of this essay we will not relate directly to the Holocaust in order not to digress.

<sup>11</sup> Tracing the vagaries of the fate of the subject in light of the politics of identity and postmodernist theories, the philosopher Seyla Benhabib concludes with a feminist suggestion. Her approach, similar to that of Spelman, seeks to derive the securest possible platform for humanist relations in a multicultural and globalized age from the feminist experience. 'I detect a renewed respect for the moral and political legacy of universalism out of which the women's movements first grew' (Benhabib 1999: 355-356). She describes the feminist theorist at present as 'one of the brokers in this complex renegotiation of sexual difference and new collective identities'(Benhabib1999: 357).

<sup>12</sup>Anthropology of the 1980s and 1990s has dealt extensively and fruitfully with reflexivity. As that is not our primary focus, we have decided simply to follow Clifford Geertz here, the most salient and seminal figure in the link between anthropology and literature.