

Ethnography vs New Ethnography

Writing ethnography is a research methodology developed under anthropology in the colonial period by western scholars for empirical study of human societies based on long term fieldwork. Initially this had produced monographs on many aboriginal groups. Socio-cultural anthropology was enriched with ethnographic fieldwork and research output in the form of descriptive accounts on various ethnic groups. Some renowned ethnographies are *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) by Bronislaw Malinowski, *Ethnologische Excursion in Johore* (1875) by Nicholas Miklouho-Maclay, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) by Margaret Mead, *The Nuer* (1940) by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Naven* (1936, 1958) by Gregory Bateson, and "*The Lele of the Kasai*" (1963) by Mary Douglas.



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Etymologically, ethnography is combination of two Greek words *ethnos* meaning 'folk, people, nation' and *grapho* meaning 'I write'. Hence, 'Ethnography' literally means 'to write about culture and society'. It is a systematic study, investigation and description about a group of people and their culture. Therefore, sometimes also called as case studies of particular group or communities. An ethnography is a specific kind of written observational science which provides an account of a particular culture, society, or community. Ethnographers collect first-hand information establishing good rapport and sometimes learning local language for better understanding of emic view. They employ multiple qualitative methods such as participant observation, field-notes, interviews, focused group discussions and surveys for data collection.

Colonial ethnographers studied undeveloped communities of remote locations. They developed long-term intense connection with the subject people while fieldwork and writing descriptive accounts based on participant observations and key informants to get indepth knowledge about the society, people, beliefs, customs, behaviour, traditional knowledge, social interactions and other aspects of particular culture. In this process, they tried to be unbiased, scientific and objective. Later, it was realised that they have adopted positivist approach in their writings. The ethnographer covers up the truth and does not narrate the actual and real situations. It also somewhat reflects their prejudice, ethnocentrism and sense of superiority.

Around mid-1950s, few confessional accounts or real-life stories (can be called as bio-confessional ethnographies) of anthropologists were published that made public the actual scenario of their field work experience including personal views, dilemmas, discoveries, pleasant and unpleasant encounters. One of such most criticized publications is the publication of field diaries of renowned founder ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski in 1967 in the form of a book. Similar confessional tales gave rise to much discussions and newer forms of writing cultural ethnographies. At this time, an American school of thought gradually emerged that called itself 'cognitive anthropology' or 'ethnoscience' or 'new ethnography', which emerged as a critic to traditional ethnography and its methodology. Influenced by the Boasian interest in cultural knowledge, the new ethnography tried to develop a more serious rigorous ethnographic method than the rather spontaneous, experiential approach of the Malinowskian tradition. In 1980s and after that new forms of ethnographic writing with more emphasis on emic perspective emerged, including narrative ethnography, testimonio (autobiographical ethnography), and ethnographic fiction. This started gradual development of new ethnography with variants like reflexivity, autoethnography, feminist ethnography, critical ethnography, political ethnography, team ethnography, dialogical ethnography, collaborative ethnography, etc.

There is clear distension in the writings style and approach of old ethnographies and new ethnographies. Traditional ethnographies (based on empirical data as source of true facts) were biased with positivist approach in comparison to the new ethnographies written with the understating that there are multiple views and voices in the study of people. Old ethnographic writings were mostly written by colonial anthropologists and administrators on the distantly located communities of non-western countries which were considered primitive and undeveloped by them. Whereas new ethnographies were comparatively written by the researchers on the communities of their own area. Many autoethnographies are written by

the native researchers on their own communities. Trained minority and foreign anthropologists started doing ethnography in their home territories. Today, autoethnography refers much more than native ethnography, *i.e.*, ethnography written by native scholars. There are various types of autoethnographies, such as, native ethnography, ethnic autobiography, autobiographical ethnography, evocative or emotional autoethnography, analytic autoethnography and critical autoethnography. Traditional ethnography stressed on objectivity in its approach based on data collection and facts. whereas, newer forms of ethnographic writings also include subjective writing by putting forward researcher's view. Old ethnographies were mostly in third person textual form with imbedded quotations of the informants, where as new ethnographies are includes multiple forms, such as, dialogues, poems, songs, narratives, etc. Multispecies ethnography in particular focuses on both nonhuman and human participants within a group or culture, as opposed to just human participants in traditional ethnography. A multispecies ethnography, in comparison to other forms of ethnography, studies species that are connected to people and our social lives.

In 1986, two important volumes were published which focused on different forms of new ethnography and supported reflexivity in writing using unconventional strategies such as dialogue, pastiche, and memoir – James Clifford and George Marcus's *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* and Michael Fisher and George Marcus's *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*. 'Writing Culture' helped bring changes to both anthropology and ethnography often described in terms of being 'postmodern,' 'reflexive,' 'literary,' 'deconstructive,' or 'post-structural' in nature.

New platforms and forms of providing knowledge in twenty first century given rise to visual anthropology, visual ethnography (mix of text with more in-situ photographs) and digital ethnography also known as virtual ethnography. Ethnographic information is provided in the form of digital files uploaded on social media platforms, blogs and contents on different websites which provides cultural knowledge in more impactful form with a mix of text and audio-visual material. Moreover, social media platforms can be used to get public reaction which can be further studied.

