Book Review


David Jacobson is an American anthropologist and Emeritus Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Brandeis University. One of his works, "Reading Ethnography," was published by the State University of New York Press in 1991. "Reading Ethnography" presents a model for analyzing and evaluating ethnographic arguments. Through this book, David Jacobson examines the relationship between anthropologists' claims about human behavior and the data they use to substantiate those claims. Jacobson analyzes the textual organization of ethnography, focusing on how issues, interpretations, and data are integrated. He provides a detailed examination of several well-known ethnographic cases, selected to illustrate the underlying theoretical framework and analytical mode. By advancing a method for assessing ethnographic accounts, the book contributes to the understanding of the role of rhetoric and reflexivity in anthropology.

In this book, David Jacobson divides it into six sections. The first section focuses on the reading and evaluation of ethnography, highlighting the changes in ethnographic analysis. In the second chapter, Jacobson introduces structural ethnography, using Evans-Pritchard's classic work on The Nuer as an illustrative example. The third chapter explores symbolic or interpretive ethnography, employing contemporary ethnographies such as Clifford Geertz's study on cockfighting in Bali and Sherry B. Ortner's research on Sherpa rituals. The fourth section presents the model of organizational ethnography, drawing on Leach's Political Systems of Highland Burma (1954) and Fredrik Barth's Political Leadership among Swat Pathans (1959). The fifth chapter analyzes the cases and contexts of several ethnographies, while the sixth chapter concludes the book.

The objective of this book is to present diverse methods and approaches for reading ethnography. This endeavor is significant due to prevalent misconceptions surrounding ethnographic studies. By examining various approaches and emphasizing the subtleties of ethnographic analysis, the book seeks to enhance readers' comprehension of the intricacies and value of ethnographic research.
Ethnography is commonly perceived as a "direct" description of a nation, easily conducted without any filters. However, ethnography possesses scientific approaches and characteristics that require accountability. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, as mentioned in Reading Ethnography by Jacobson, ethnography is the scientific description of nations. Furthermore, Jacobson reveals that ethnographers serve as research instruments, even the most significant ones.

Anthropologists generally define ethnography as the description of behavior within a particular culture, typically obtained through fieldwork. Ethnography is often written in essay form, published as articles in scientific journals, and can take the form of monographs or scientific reports on specific cultural aspects or multiple aspects of a particular nation. Ethnography was extensively published between 1920 and 1960.

The history of ethnographic writing demonstrates a pattern where there has been a shift in emphasis across different levels of analysis. Ethnography from the past seventy years can be categorized into five overlapping phases.

1) *Functional* ethnography, written by Malinowski and his students from the early 1920s to the mid-1930s, emphasized the actual behavior of individuals.

2) "*Structural*" ethnography, originating from the works of Radcliffe-Brown in the early 1930s to the early 1950s, focused on ways of thinking and particularly on social roles and norms.

3) "*Processual*" ethnography (mid-1950s to mid-1960s), also known as "conflict" anthropology or "transactional" anthropology, was a reaction to the emphasis on normative rules in structural studies. It focused on issues of "social organization," individual action, and particularly on how individuals choose alternative courses of action.

4) "*Cultural*" analysis (1960s to late 1970s). This model falls within the realm of transactional ethnography and concentrates on questions of "meaning." The goal of this ethnography was to analyze how "social structure gives meaning to behavior."

5) Ethnography in the 1970s emphasized the analysis of non-normative factors that shape people's behavior. The focus was on modes of action, with an emphasis on "practice," also referred to as "praxis, action, interaction, activity, experience, or performance."

**Interpretation and Analysis.** Ethnography involves the researcher's interpretation of what they observe and hear. Ethnography is not just a description but presents the anthropologist's interpretation of the reality of
human actions. In this regard, ethnography interprets the meaning of behavior by referring to cultural categories in which the behavior takes place, is perceived, and is interpreted. Thus, it requires the depiction of a "complex conceptual structure," which includes understanding the various contexts in which people behave in a certain way and what aspects of behavior can be understood.

Anthropology also engages in analysis as part of ethnographic activities. Analysis is distinct from descriptive activities. Jacobson states that in description, the focus is on documenting observations of actual events in chronological order, with a focus on activities or actions. On the other hand, analysis involves breaking down the empirical sequence into customary and social relationships within the community. Anthropologists analyze behaviors and relationships among individuals in a given activity, including analyzing the development of activities, the progress of each stage, the changing relationships over time, cultural expectations, social sanctions, and patterns of interaction.

**Ethnography as an Argument.** Ethnography not only analyzes the reality of human actions but also strives to provide a coherent representation of that reality. Representation is a conclusion drawn from interpretive insights and descriptive facts derived from fieldwork, serving as evidence that supports ethnography. Thus, the presentation of an ethnography is the result of analysis and interpretation, rather than a mere record of observations made during fieldwork. An ethnographic argument consists of claims (conclusions, statements, propositions, explanations, interpretations) about the behavior of a society (or its culture or community) and data (reasons, facts) that serve as evidence for those claims. Therefore, reading ethnography involves identifying the ethnographic claims and evaluating them by referring to the presented data.

**Levels of Analysis.** There are differences among ethnographers in analyzing a subject. These differences arise from varying perspectives on field concepts, the study of different "domains of social reality," and variations in the level of analysis. The level of analysis can influence the use of concepts, which often confuses readers of ethnography. There are often different concepts used to refer to the same thing, and conversely, the same term is used to describe different analyses. For example, some anthropologists use the term "structure" to refer to an ideational system, while others use it to refer to a system of actions.

**Claims and Data.** Jacobson presents ways to read and evaluate ethnographic works. First, comparing ethnographic materials from
geographically, culturally, and organizationally similar societies provides a framework for evaluating interpretations. This allows readers to test the validity of the ethnography. Second, comparing ethnography with reports on the same society conducted by different researchers. Third, evaluating internal interpretations. From this perspective, readers assess the congruence between the ethnographer’s interpretations and the evidence presented in the ethnography.

For Jacobson, evidence plays a crucial role in ethnography. There are two essential types of evidence that should be present in an ethnographic study: oral accounts from the community and observed behavior. Anthropologists commonly utilize verbal data to make claims about ways of thinking, while nonverbal data is employed to understand actions. Therefore, interpretations of ideational systems are often based on observations of verbal communication, whereas interpretations of action systems rely on observations of actual behavior.

1) Ways of Thinking and Linguistic Evidence
When interpreting the thinking processes of a society, anthropologists heavily rely on linguistic data, which can be partially or exclusively linguistic. This linguistic data includes quotations of the native language used by informants, referred to by Jacobson as the native language. Presenting native language terms as evidence supports claims about how people conceptualize the world, providing insights into their ways of thinking. In addition to linguistic data, other symbols are also utilized for the same purpose.

2) Ways of Acting and Behavioral Evidence
Untuk mendukung klaim tentang apa yang orang lakukan, antropolog menggunakan survei, statistik, kasus yang menggambarkan tindakan orang-orang dengan frekuensi dan distribusi. Namun menggambarkan apa yang dilakukan seseorang tidak hanya melihat dari gerakan fisik yang individu, melainkan analisis makna dari setiap gerakan.

3) Other Forms of Evidence
Ethnography often includes additional forms of evidence, such as data on the environment, ecology, and visual materials like photographs and images.

1. Structural Approach (Structural Ethnography)

Structural ethnography is considered one of the classical forms of ethnography. One prominent example of structural ethnography is "The Nuer" by Evans-Pritchard, published in 1940. In this work, Evans-Pritchard portrays the societal situation of the Nuer people, with the unit of analysis being the structure of their community life. The term "structure" or "structural" in Evans-Pritchard's work can be understood as referring to the rules and norms that govern the society. Structural analysis, as an approach to understanding "The Nuer," involves observing various aspects of life. These aspects include socio-economic, socio-political, kinship, normative concepts, status, interactions, and external relationships. Therefore, the study of structure can be seen as an examination of "almost all aspects of life" within the researched society or culture. Elements of life serve as valuable sources of information and entry points for conducting ethnographic research.

2. Symbolic Approach (Symbolic Ethnography)

This ethnography, commonly referred to as interpretive ethnography, characterizes contemporary ethnography. In some ways, symbolic ethnography resembles structural studies, such as its focus on the meaning of behavior and its heavy reliance on verbal data to support interpretations. However, it would not be accurate to simply describe symbolic ethnography as neo-structural. This type of ethnography places emphasis on ways of thinking and symbolic meanings. Jacobson provides two examples of symbolic ethnography: "Deep Play" by Clifford Geertz (1973) and "Sherpa Through Their Rituals" by Ortner (1978), to illustrate the symbolic approach in ethnographic writing.

One prominent practitioner of symbolic ethnography is Clifford Geertz. In his concept of "thick description" and the theory of interpretive culture, he argues that the goal of anthropology is to interpret the meanings of behavior and explain perplexing actions and attitudes. Geertz describes "culture" as a system of significance, interpretive frames, or social structures comprised of meanings, by examining actions and interactions through interpretation of behavior. For Geertz, cockfighting serves as a symbolic event that provides a "window" into Balinese culture.
He interprets events as forms of cultural "texts." In other words, cockfighting, as a cultural text and a form of art, works by shaping the thoughts of the people who experience it. Thus, cockfighting, as a symbolic event, is not just a window into Balinese culture (for both Balinese and others aspiring to understand them), but it also reproduces that culture.

"Sherpa Through Their Rituals" by Ortner (1978) is also an example of the symbolic ethnographic analysis style. Its aim is to understand the nature of Sherpa society through the analysis of specific ritual meanings within Sherpa culture. Ortner focuses on rituals, claiming that rituals are events that dramatize Sherpa social life and make it understandable. Like Geertz, Ortner argues that in the actions, operations, and movements of rituals, participants' consciousness is manipulated. Ortner hypothesizes that the ritual process serves to address conflicts and contradictions arising from social experiences and the cultural meanings encoded and evoked by ritual symbolism. Rituals provide answers to problems in social life, in the sense that through rituals, people have the opportunity to examine (and reexamine) themselves based on their held beliefs. In this way, social life shapes the attitudes and actions of the Sherpa.

Thus, studying an action (whether religious, artistic, or otherwise) can serve as an entry point to understanding a particular culture. Through these two works, we are led to understand that the symbolic approach is a form of ethnography that interprets behavior or actions to derive meaning from the observed behavior and actions.

3. Organizational Ethnography

Organizational ethnography is a contemporary form of ethnography that focuses on individual behavior. A prominent figure in this field is R. Firth. Firth examines the role of individuals in decision-making, including their behavior in selecting alternatives and the social consequences of those decisions. The concept of social organization (Firth) does not refer to "structural principles," but rather focuses on what people actually do. This organizational perspective extends its attention from the normative rules of society to individuals who choose and comply with rules or norms.
For Firth, the analysis of social organization follows the analysis of structure. He argues that structural analysis should precede the understanding of organizational patterns, and he also pays attention to behavioral principles. These principles reflect the interaction between behavior and organizational factors, which Firth refers to as "organizational principles." Organizational principles reflect individual adjustments when facing organizational issues. The significance of Firth's approach lies in the shift of emphasis in anthropological inquiries and ethnographic presentations. This approach was employed and further developed in the ethnography of "action," which emerged in the late 1950s.

This approach can be found in Leach's ethnography, "Political Systems of Highland Burma" (1954). In this ethnography, Leach focuses on the role of processes in the organization of social life. Leach extends ethnography from the normative foundations of the system to what needs to be done for analyzing the potential behaviors they can undertake. The significance of this change is evident in the ways ethnographers deal with issues of "plasticity" and "flexibility."

Fredrik Barth's ethnography, "Political Leadership among Swat Pathans" (1959), is another example of an organizational perspective that marks a significant shift in constructing ethnographic portrayals. Its focus is on the possibilities of alternative actions available to individuals and the basis for choosing among those alternative actions. This ethnography embodies Barth's suggested perspective of studying decision-making processes and viable actions. Specifically, Barth examines the opportunities and constraints that shape individuals' responses.

Thus, we can conclude that organizational ethnography is an approach that views individual actions as members of a society or organization. Within organizations, there are normative rules used as guiding principles for members' actions. However, in many cases, not all individual actions or organizational members' actions align with these rules. Please note that some of the concepts and details in the text may require further clarification or elaboration based on the original sources.
Conclusion. The book "Reading Ethnography" provides a guide on how to read ethnographies. It assists the general public or those interested in reading ethnographic works. Several things can be observed from an ethnography, including the claims made by the ethnographer and the data presented as evidence for those claims. Thus, readers of ethnographies can evaluate the validity of an ethnography. Therefore, it is crucial for ethnographers to ensure that their claims are supported by accurate data. The presence of an ethnographer within the community being studied does not guarantee the accuracy of the ethnography; therefore, providing evidence is essential. The three approaches to ethnography used by David Jacobson in the structure of "Reading Ethnography" (Structural, Symbolic, and Organizational) can serve as models for writing an ethnography. These three approaches can be used together or separately. However, even though these three ethnographic approaches can be used simultaneously, they are distinct and cannot be equated or substituted for one another. These three approaches can be employed to analyze the lives of communities and cultures of indigenous tribes in Indonesia. Please note that the information provided is a paraphrased summary of the original text and may require further clarification or expansion based on the specific content and context of the original sources.

REFERENCES


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