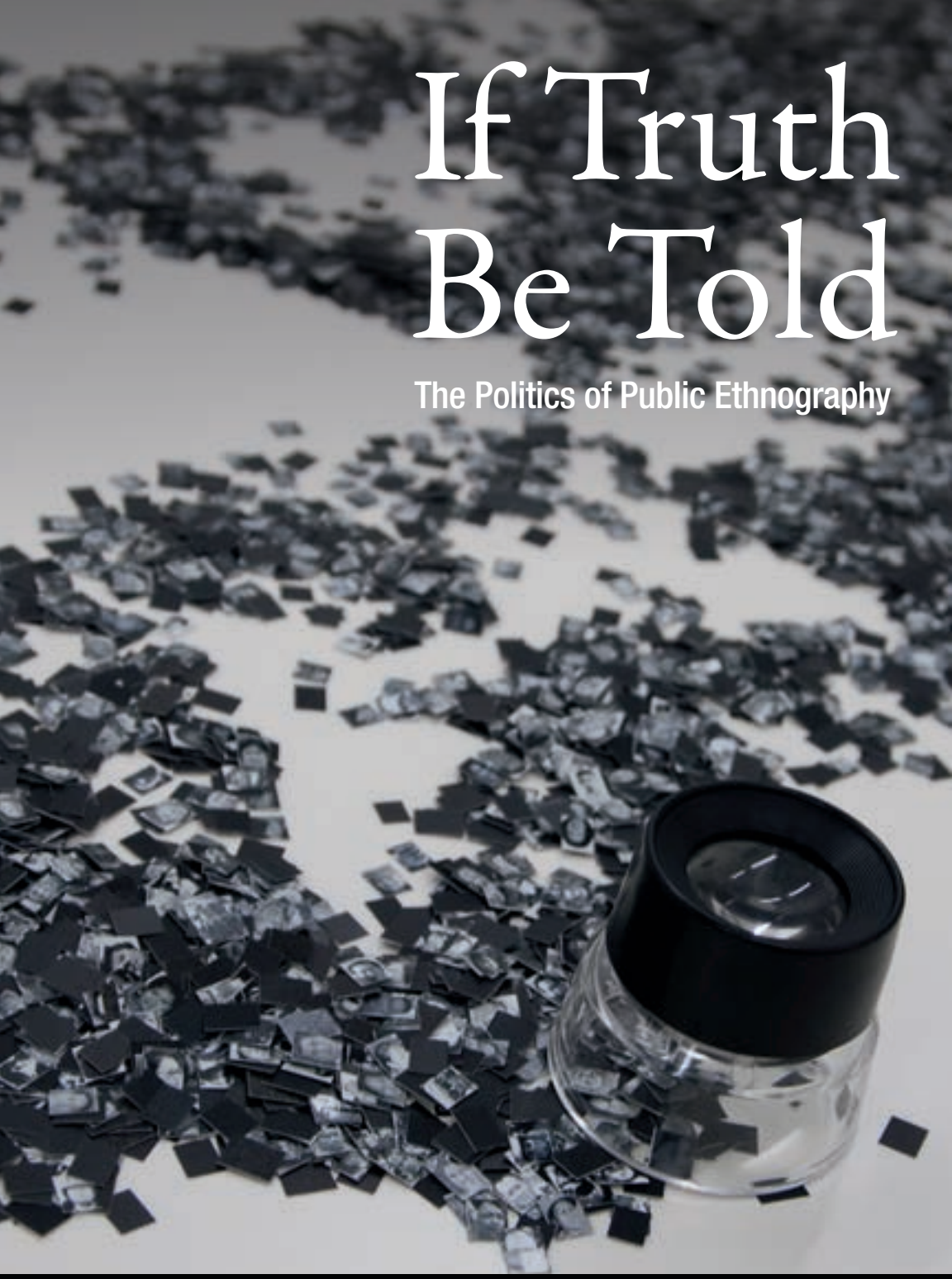

If Truth Be Told

The Politics of Public Ethnography

DIDIER FASSIN, EDITOR

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Cover art: Prapat Jiwarangsan, *Dust under Feet*, 2012, installation view. Photographs and magnifier, 120 × 150 cm. *Dust under Feet* is composed of some 3,000 tiny, thumbnail-size photographs of figures from Thailand's political history—including prime ministers, generals, protestors, democracy activists, and martyrs of massacres—and a magnifying glass, to prompt the viewer to scrutinize the tiny portraits up close.

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Introduction

When Ethnography Goes Public

DIDIER FASSIN

Ethnography has long been regarded essentially as a method, which was characterized by the emblematic approach to fieldwork subsumed under the phrase "participant observation." *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* established its mythical foundation. Emphasis was later placed on ethnography as writing, which led to a reflexive stance on what was at stake in the translation of empirical material into a text that was supposed to represent it. *Writing Culture* disenchanted the positivist illusion of a transparent process. In parallel with this dual dimension, the existential aspect of ethnography, namely the experience of the ethnographer through interaction with his or her subjects and the related exercise of introspection, was given more salience, via diaries, memoirs, or even scientific works, when it became an object of inquiry in its own right. *Tristes tropiques* epitomizes the meditative contemplation on this journey. But whether considered from the perspective of method, writing, or experience, it seemed relatively self-evident that ethnography ended with ethnographers going home or, at best, correcting the final proofs of their manuscript. Most of the time what happened afterward was largely ignored, as if the only relevant production of knowledge concerned what went on in the field and how the collected data were organized and interpreted.

Yet once a book, an article, or a film is out, a new phase begins for the ethnographer: the encounter with a public or, better said, multiple encounters with various publics. Indeed, rare are the ethnographic works that escape the fate of becoming, at some point, public, whether it is a scholarly piece known to only a few colleagues or an acclaimed essay arousing wide interest. The very word "publication" clearly indicates the passage from a private to a

public space, and one certainly publishes texts in order to be read and discussed by others. However, authors grant little attention—or at least rarely admit they do—to the challenges and stakes related to the dissemination, promotion, reception, and utilization of their intellectual production. Their teaching, lecturing, debating with colleagues, intervening in the media, being solicited by policymakers or activist groups or professionals, and sometimes being questioned by those about whom they write or speak remain a blind spot, a sort of mundane after-sales service posing practical problems to be solved personally but of no relevance for the discipline.

Of course such a general statement should be tempered, and exceptions deserve to be mentioned. Among classical examples, one could cite the chapter "Ethical and Bureaucratic Implications of Community Research" that Arthur Vidich and Joseph Bensman added to the new edition, ten years later, of their 1958 *Small Town in Mass Society*, and the article "Ire in Ireland," written by Nancy Scheper-Hughes more than two decades after her 1977 *Saints, Scholars and Schizophrenics*; the collection *When They Read What We Write*, edited by Caroline Brettell and published in 1993, proposed a series of case studies about the mishaps experienced by anthropologists after the publication of their work; the lecture "When Natives Talk Back," delivered by Renato Rosaldo in 1985, offered a stimulating reflection on the problems posed by the way anthropologists reacted to the reactions to their writings of those they study. Most of these contributions shed light on the often controversial reception of ethnographies among the people who are the subjects of the research, but this is only one aspect of the interactions with publics. A broader analysis remains to be done of what we could call, paraphrasing Talal Asad, *ethnography and the public encounter*. The present volume is a collective endeavor to fill this gap by exploring in its diversity the public afterlife of ethnography.

As Thomas Hylland Eriksen has convincingly argued, the "public presence" of anthropology is anything but new, even if it has been subject to a long partial eclipse. Indeed from the early days of the discipline, with James Frazer, W. H. R. Rivers, and Bronislaw Malinowski in Britain, Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead in the United States, Marcel Mauss, Michel Leiris, and Alfred Métraux in France, anthropologists have intervened in the public sphere, generally as scholars, sometimes as engaged intellectuals, occasionally as novelists or poets. Such positioning was not limited to the Western world, and the boundaries between scientific work and public life were even more blurred in the case of pioneers such as Jean Price-Mars in

Haiti, Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, Gilberto Freyre in Brazil, and Nirmal Kumar Bose in India, who were all deeply involved in the politics of their country. With the professionalization and institutionalization of their discipline, however, anthropologists tended to refocus their activity within the academic realm. There were exceptions to this trend, with works destined for large audiences and sometimes provoking public controversies, most notably Oscar Lewis's *La Vida*, Napoleon Chagnon's *Yanomamö: The Fierce People*, and Colin Turnbull's *The Mountain People*. In recent years public anthropologies have taken a critical turn, addressing contemporary issues such as epidemics with Paul Farmer's *AIDS and Accusation*, drugs with Philippe Bourgois's *In Search of Respect*, and immigration with Seth Holmes's *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*. But today, for the most part, at a global level, anthropology seems increasingly confined within the perimeter of the scholarly world, and anthropological works have almost disappeared from the shelves of bookstores, where what is presented under the corresponding section is popular essays by evolutionary biologists like Jared Diamond and Richard Dawkins. Interestingly there exist national variations in this transformation of the public presence of the discipline, the most remarkable case being that of Norway, where anthropologists have maintained a form of intellectual activism for the past half-century; as Signe Howell argues, the reasons for this rarity are multiple, including the general interest in social issues, the high level of education within the population, the links between the academic and political worlds, the relatively easy access scholars have to the media, and the presence of respected figures such as Fredrik Barth, who in the 1970s had a very popular television series, *Their Lives and Our Own*, which certainly familiarized people with different cultures and worlds. The decline of the public life of ethnography thus may not be ineluctable—unless one deems this outlier as the remnant of the discipline's past glory.

At this point a clarification may be necessary. In the past decade much has been written and debated regarding public social science. On the one hand, Michael Burawoy's famous presidential address at the 2004 American Sociological Association meeting calling for a "public sociology" has given rise to discussions, objections, and rejoinders. According to its promoter, public sociology is distinct from "professional," "critical," and "policy" approaches to sociology, which are involved, respectively, in comforting established knowledge, questioning foundational issues, and responding to political demands for expertise. It encompasses a "traditional" dimension, through popular publications, media interventions, and teaching, and an "organic" dimension,

through a personal engagement with local associations, social movements, labor unions, or human rights organizations. On the other hand, Rob Borofsky's launching of a book series on "public anthropology" at the University of California Press signaled a renewed interest to "engage issues and audiences beyond today's self-imposed disciplinary boundaries" and "address broad critical concerns in ways that others beyond the discipline are able to understand." This public anthropology dissociates itself from "specialized anthropology," which corresponds to the dominant "narrow" approach in the field but "dances an ambiguous minuet with applied anthropology," the less legitimate branch of the discipline. Although public sociology has benefited from a more developed conceptualization than public anthropology, they have many features in common, in terms of both their external distancing (notably from academic norms and habits) and their internal differentiation (whether addressing general audiences or working with specific groups). But above all those who use these formulations share the same normative commitment: to speak of public sociology or public anthropology implies simultaneously contesting a certain intellectual order criticized for its scholarly enclosure and advocating for an engaged practice open to the world and its problems.

Although most, if not all, of the authors in the present volume would adhere to the project of a public sociology or a public anthropology—certainly with variations—our collective enterprise is of a distinct nature. It does not consist in affirming that the social sciences should have a public presence but rather in analyzing what difficulties, complications, and contradictions, as well as dares, expectations, and imaginations this public presence involves. Ours is definitely a move from the prescriptive to the descriptive. When using the phrase "public ethnography" we do not intend to coin a new creed or a novel realm; we propose it for two main reasons. First, we are specifically interested in the fact that what is made public is ethnography, in other words not any form of practice of social sciences but one defined by its method, its writing, and its experience. What difference does ethnography make when the findings, the style, and the world of the ethnographer are transported into the public domain? This is the first question that underlies our analysis. Second, we are particularly keen on producing a form of ethnography of the very scenes where the social sciences are rendered public by recounting the events that take place and dissecting the issues that are at play with some detail. What happens in the encounter between the ethnographers and their publics? This is the second point we address. Public ethnography thus refers to what is

publicized and how such a process can be apprehended: *it is simultaneously an ethnography made public and the ethnography of this publicization*.

The intellectual engagement that derives from this characterization of public ethnography is consequently more on the side of the "specific intellectuals" in Foucault's terms than of the "universal intellectuals" embodied by Sartre. The relevance and legitimacy claimed by public ethnography stem from the sort of work conducted and knowledge produced. Adopting this perspective one does not comment on any topic or speak about any issue but limits oneself to one's domain of competence acquired through exacting work—which does not prevent one from drawing general conclusions. The scientific authority invoked is circumscribed—which does not mean, of course, that it should not be questioned. Public ethnographers are thus modest intellectuals, confident in their findings but cautious not to exceed their limits. Moreover, as specific intellectuals, they recognize that, although they take full responsibility for their analyses and statements, they owe much of their understanding to the people they study and work with. They are both *independent* and *indebted*. In this sense the practice of public ethnography can be regarded as a democratic exercise on two counts: because the intellectual production of social scientists is open to public discussion and because the social intelligence of the public is acknowledged.

If we therefore call publicization the process in which ethnographic works encounter various publics, we can distinguish two dimensions to this process: popularization and politicization. *Popularization*, which has been analyzed by Jeremy MacClancy, consists of two complementary aspects: making ethnography accessible to and likeable by the public. This dual endeavor precedes publicization. It is involved in the choice of the topic of research and, even more, in the way to present it. It includes the refusal of scientific jargon and more generally of scholarly customs and rules whose function is to affirm one's belonging to the group of learned peers and bar laypersons from this exclusive circle. Willingly resorting to literary forms, it is attentive to the style, privileges, narratives, and descriptions, integrates theory within the stories and scenes rather than treating them as separate textual blocks. All these decisions are taken before rendering the work public precisely in anticipation of its potentially wider reception. Because of the cost of such strategies in terms of academic career, popularization has often taken the form, notably among French anthropologists, of what Vincent Debaene has called a "second book," written for large audiences in parallel with a more technical publication

destined for one's scientific community. *Politicization*, as can be derived from C. Wright Mills, also consists of two possible operations, which can be connected or not: contributing to debate and action. Indeed the idea of politicizing should be understood here in the sense of the Greek polis, a public space where individuals exercise their rights as citizens for the realization of the common good. In the case of public ethnography, the first operation—debate—entails, on the side of the ethnographer, the translation and dissemination of knowledge and, on the side of the public, its appropriation and contestation, while the second operation—action—involves the transformation of the knowledge thus discussed into practical orientations and decisions, which can be taken by institutions or individuals. Politicization therefore has affinities with the public sphere and communicative action analyzed by Habermas, although it does not preclude conflicts.

The two dimensions of publicization are often associated, but they do not need to be. Ethnographers may want to popularize their work without a particular intention of politicizing it: when Jean Malaurie launched his new series "Terre humaine" in 1955 with the publication of his ethnography of the Inuit society poetically titled *Les Derniers rois de Thulé*, his project, which became one of the most successful in the editorial history of the social sciences, was primarily to render anthropology accessible and likeable. Conversely ethnographers may try to politicize their work but not be preoccupied by the idea of popularizing it; whereas Pierre Clastres has been influential among leftist intellectuals for his description and analysis of stateless societies based on his work with the Guayaki, one would not argue that *La Société contre l'État*, published in 1974, is characterized by a specific effort of legibility. Finally, some may consider popularization instrumental to the success of politicization, as is the case, for instance, with David Graeber's *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. An interesting model is the strategy developed by certain economists who publish their serious and impenetrable scientific work in the top journals of their discipline and write easy-to-read books for wide audiences. This strategy does not account, however, for the international success of Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, which is not exactly a page-turner.

Until now the *public* of public ethnography has been assumed to be implicitly self-evident, even in its plural form. But who composes this public, and what do we know about it? As Michael Warner writes, "it is an obscure question," and although "publics have become an essential fact of the social

landscape, it would tax our understanding to say exactly what they are." They can be the audience of a talk or a film, the readership of a book or an article, the students attending a class, or the scholars at a conference; the policymakers in search of practical solutions to their problems or the journalists expecting short answers to their questions; the people with whom the ethnographer has worked and the broader social or professional group to which they belong—and many others. Attention can therefore vary considerably as well as expectation and comprehension. Yet what is perhaps the most constant fact about this public is that we know very little about who it is and how it has received or will use the ethnography. Only a few voices, which surely do not form a representative sample, will express themselves in reviews or blogs, in private conversations or public debates, but the great majority of those who have been exposed to the work will remain silent and anonymous, unknown to the author. Even this exposition cannot be ascertained, as it can rely on direct as well as indirect access to the work, through commentaries or comments read in the newspapers, heard on the radio, or simply caught in a conversation. The information most people have regarding the work of a social scientist is filtered through these mediations, and their opinion is based on the latter more than the former. Needless to say this unpredictable journey of public ethnography may give rise to surprising reactions that have only a very distant relation with its content, when criticisms or praises are based on what people say rather than on what the author wrote. In the end ethnographers have not only little knowledge of but also little hold on what becomes of their work in their direct or indirect encounters with publics. One can think of the publicization of one's work as a form of dispossession or, better expressed, alienation. This does not imply, however, that one should renounce the project of inquiring about these publics, not least to critique the common view of their self-evidence.

But *ethnography* in the phrase "public ethnography" does not deserve less consideration. The point is to discuss not what it is but what public impact it has as such. What does ethnography do that other modes of apprehending social worlds may not do or may do in a different way? It is possible to distinguish four specific and linked effects produced by ethnography. The first one is an effect of veridiction: the presence of the ethnographer in the field is assumed to attest to the veracity of his or her account of facts and events. The second is a symmetrical effect of reflexivity: the personal involvement of the researcher and author with his or her work and the people who inhabit it calls

for a critical take on the deceptive transparency of what is related. The third is an effect of realism: description and narration generate more concrete, suggestive, and lively knowledge than other rhetorical forms do. The fourth is a connected effect of proximity: readers or auditors find themselves immersed in the scenes and circumstances depicted. Each of these effects can definitely be discussed or contested—the recent controversy regarding Alice Goffman's ethnography of poor neighborhoods in Philadelphia has revived debates about the reliability of this approach—but their combination gives ethnography a form of intellectual authority that has resisted rather well its questioning by the natives and by the textualist turn.

What is therefore at stake in the project of a public ethnography is the sort of truth that is produced, established, and, in the end, told.

Beyond the general features that have been analyzed thus far, ethnography's encounters with its publics may take multiple forms and raise diverse issues. The present volume reflects this multiplicity and this diversity.

Ethnographers are engaged with a wide range of publics, including journalists for Gabriella Coleman and Unni Wikan, policymakers for Manuela Ivone Cunha and Vincent Dubois, political actors for Ghassan Hage and João Biehl, legal experts for Kelly Gillespie and Jonathan Benthall, local populations for Federico Neiburg and Lucas Bessire, and even scholars for Nadia Abu El-Haj and Sherine Hamdy—although most of them deal at some point with other social agents. Their role varies from intervening as experts for Benthall and Dubois, to serving as mediators and translators in the case of Coleman and Neiburg, proposing intellectual companionship for Hage and Bessire, reframing interpretations of social phenomena in the case of Gillespie and Cunha, shedding light on controversial topics for Wikan and Hamdy, and even responding to tense confrontations in the case of Biehl and violent attacks in the case of Abu El-Haj—although for each of them the form of engagement changes with time as problems are redefined and places are renegotiated. Finally, the relationships and interactions that the authors have with the national communities to which the publics belong differ: they can be a member of this community, like Coleman, Gillespie, and Dubois; present themselves as a sympathetic foreigner, in the case of Hage, Neiburg, and Bessire; occupy intermediate positions, like Benthall, Abu El-Haj, and Sherine Hamdy; or even move from one context to another, like Cunha, Wikan, and Biehl. Each of these positions is uncertain and changeable, with

important consequences in terms of the legitimacy and efficacy of the public presence.

Yet whatever the configuration of this presence, the contributors to this volume all strive with the same objective of communicating a certain truth, or perhaps better said, *a conception of the truth* grounded in their empirical and theoretical work against prejudices, interests, powers, and sometimes simply common sense. They acknowledge that there is no absolute and definitive truth and that their approach is not the only one possible—their version of the truth could be and needed to be discussed and even disputed—but they are convinced that something essential is at stake in both the production of an ethnographic understanding of the world and its public dissemination. For Coleman this means correcting the simplified representation of hackers such as Anonymous; for Hage, resisting the trivialization and instrumentalization of the idea of resistance among Palestinian leaders; for Gillespie, acknowledging the moral sense of popular justice among poor South Africans; for Cunha, revealing the targeting of the poor and the downgrading of judicial practices underlying incarceration in Portugal; for Neiburg, identifying the legitimate expectations rather than mere violence of residents in the marginal neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince; for Bessire, denouncing the complicity of anthropologists and nongovernmental organizations in their construction of a culturalist and primitivist image of Ayoreo people. Similarly Benthall argues that Islamic charities and intellectuals are unjustly discredited by experts and lobbies; Dubois shows that the alleged aggressiveness of people confronting the welfare bureaucracy is to be understood as a response to the social violence they are subjected to; Abu El-Haj unveils the ideological and political stakes at the heart of the constitution of archaeology as an academic discipline in Israel; Wikan challenges the dominant discourse of successful Norwegian multiculturalism in light of growing inequality and discrimination affecting immigrants; Biehl demonstrates that the judicialization of health cases in Brazil is not a manipulation of the system by the wealthy but a demand for treatment access and state accountability on the part of the underprivileged; and Hamdy analyzes the environmental and economic conditions of the dramatic increase in kidney failures in Egypt. In each case the ethnographer goes against the grain, contesting accepted evidence, disturbing established assertions, defending both a different truth and a different way of accessing it—via critical inquiry, empirical research, and fieldwork presence.

In doing so the contributors are obviously *taking a risk*. Speaking truth to power, as the motto goes—whether this power is academic or political—is a

perilous exercise. It implies being ready "to raise embarrassing questions" and "to confront orthodoxy and dogma," as Edward Said says of intellectuals. It may lead to unpleasant moments when those who feel threatened try to delegitimize the social scientist, discredit his or her work, block his or her career, prosecute him or her, or prevent the continuation of his or her program, especially when it is conducted in a foreign country. But the risks of going public often take more subtle and ambivalent forms. They reside in the compromises accepted, sometimes not very honorable ones, when the researcher becomes the official expert for public authorities or private corporations. They lie in the difficulties of translating complex issues into simple, and potentially simplistic, ideas as the ethnographer interacts with the media or even general audiences. They ultimately originate in the suspicion existing within the scholarly domain toward both popularization and politicization of scientific work. This wide range of risks—some of them stemming from external forces, others coming from the social scientists themselves and their professional community—frequently results in a form of intellectual prudence that amounts to renunciation. Self-censorship is probably more common than censorship, at least in democratic contexts. The courage of truth, as Foucault phrases it, is primarily a struggle against one's own reluctance to go public for fear of being attacked or, perhaps more often, of losing some of one's legitimacy or authority. There is a cost to publicization, and one has to decide whether one is ready to pay it. But there is also a value to it—of which the present essays bear witness.

The first part of this book illustrates some of the more or less successful *strategies* deployed by the authors in their interactions with various publics. Coleman describes herself alternatively as a translator, gopher, and trickster as she responds to solicitations by journalists. Studying a secretive network of hackers rendered both her knowledge and her mediation particularly coveted. Her public contribution mainly consisted in explaining as well as rehabilitating Anonymous and its members since they aroused a combination of curiosity and suspicion. This investment had double returns: she gained recognition among the hackers, and she used the journalists to transform the image of the activist network. Interestingly, in time her relation with the media seemed to gain serenity and mutual trust. Hage recounts how he was asked to deliver a lecture at a Palestinian university and discusses the tensions he experienced as he was preparing his intervention. Whereas he perceived that the role of the intellectual in such circumstances is less to affirm new ideas than to confirm what his or her audience already knows, thus manifest-

ing support for their cause, he nevertheless took the opportunity of this public presence to challenge the conventional topic of resistance and assert that empowerment is not an end but a means. To the heroic discourse, which masks games of power and reproduces the attitude of the oppressor, he opposed the everyday practices of resilience. Gillespie analyzes the conditions under which her testimony was requested at a commission investigating police brutality in the South African township of Khayelitsha. While she was expected to confirm the commonsense idea according to which the development of vigilantism in poor neighborhoods was a response to the inefficacy of law enforcement agencies, she used her ethnographic work to complicate the picture, showing that violence had broader grounds in postapartheid society, that popular anxieties regarding insecurity had multiple causes, and that demands for social justice were not limited to the single issue of policing. Yet in the end she realized that her discourse was instrumentalized to validate the commission's ready-made arguments. Cunha compares two experiences in which her ethnography, although not policy-driven, became relevant for policies. After her research on a Portuguese correctional facility, she had a hearing before the national commission in charge of prison reform, to which she was able to explain the flaws in the justice system, especially those related to the application of the drug laws that had led to a dramatic increase of the incarcerated population; this analysis later served to inform changes in legislation and judicial illicit drug control. By contrast the study conducted on vaccine acceptability, which underlined the complexity of dissenting processes, did not benefit from such privileged circumstances, but it was also able to contribute to modifying the scientific framing predefined by the epidemiologists and public health experts who had initiated the program. Elements intrinsic to ethnography may therefore have weighed more heavily than extrinsic elements to account for the receptiveness of policy-oriented publics in both cases.

The second part of the volume discusses the various forms of *engagements* more or less sought from ethnographers by their publics. For Neiburg the involvement was direct with the people he was working with in Haiti, as his assistance was requested to help solve conflicts in the urban area where he was carrying out his research. Responding positively was both an ethical necessity and a pragmatic attitude to be able to pursue the research safely. It generated new openings for the ethnography as well as criticisms from outsiders and frustrations among insiders. But on the whole, albeit unexpected and unprepared, this observant participation in a process of local pacification enriched

and deepened the understanding of the logics of war and peace on an island that is chronically subjected to political as well as everyday violence. Bessire's long-term presence among the Ayoreo Indians, who are regarded as one of the most recently contacted ethnic groups and who live in dire conditions on the border between Bolivia and Paraguay, put him in the delicate position of intermediary between this population and the local nongovernmental organizations representing it before international agencies. Conflictive relationships developed between native leaders and their self-proclaimed advocates, and the question soon became one of legitimacy and relevance when multiple discourses, including those of missionaries, ranchers, government officials, and indigenous peoples themselves, expressed the supposed needs and will of the latter. More specifically a tension arose between two public ethnographies: one, tactical, which consisted in using ethnographic authority to impose the paradigm of a traditional society to be defended; the other, reflexive, which critically analyzed such authority and proposed instead an indigenized version attentive to the voices of those directly concerned. In his role of expert witness Benthall was confronted with a radical impasse of public ethnography. Having studied Islamic charities in the West Bank for years, he was called to testify in a court case in which the defendant was accused of using humanitarian assistance for terrorist activities. Not only was his testimony obsessively scrutinized in the hope of discrediting it, but the whole case fell under an absolute prescription of confidentiality. In other words, his ethnography was treated with suspicion and prevented from any publicization. Instead of this impossible account, two related cases, which take place in the United States, are presented: one in which the anthropologist produced an expert affidavit in a lawsuit in favor of Tariq Ramadan, whose visa had been denied allegedly because of his small donations to a Swiss charity funding Palestinian aid committees; the other a trial in which a distinguished judge and part-time political blogger seems to have prejudged an important issue. Linking the two instances the author discusses the assumptions of a popular book on Hamas written by a counterterrorist expert who has been instrumental in trials leading to heavy prison sentences for charity organizers in the United States. It is a less tense situation that Dubois faces with his essay on the bureaucracy of welfare in France. The national context of the social sciences is important to take into consideration insofar as it is characterized by the public funding of most scientific programs, with institutions defining issues but guaranteeing the autonomy of the researcher, and by a certain porosity between the academic domain and the public sphere, with scholars

commonly writing opinion articles for newspapers. The interactions developed with the agents of the organizations were therefore based on a certain mutual acknowledgment of the expectations and limits of the collaboration. Yet it would be a mistake to subsume policy ethnography under the category of applied social science and oppose it to critical approaches, as is often assumed. In reference to Pierre Bourdieu's analogy of sociology with a contact sport, the author argues that, like the practitioner of martial arts, the ethnographer studying policies can use his or her knowledge and skill to manipulate the force of those in power rather than directly confronting them.

The third part of this collection analyzes cases in which *tensions* more or less provoked occurred in the course of the publicization of ethnography, often threatening the researcher himself or herself. The attacks to which Abu El-Haj was subjected show how far the menace can go. After the publication of her book on the political significance of Israeli archaeological practices in Palestine, Zionist scholars and networks campaigned to deny her tenure and attempted to discredit her empirical work as methodologically flawed and her theoretical approach as ideologically biased. Beyond her research, it was ethnography itself that was at stake as epistemological questions were raised about the protection of her sources and the generalization of her findings. While these questions must certainly be, and actually are, addressed by ethnographers, it is remarkable that they would be brought up only when ethnographers uncover uncomfortable truths about sensitive issues. Abu El-Haj had touched on the most shielded topic in Western societies, the one that has been euphemized under the official call for civility and on which censorship and self-censorship have become extreme in recent years. Although the subject Wikan deals with is not quite as dangerous, it too exposes those who study it to difficult ordeals: the relationships between Muslim migrants and their host national communities in Europe. She experienced this peril with two of her books, which generated fierce criticisms; one contested the widely celebrated success of multiculturalism in Norway, and the other accounted for an honor killing in a migrant family from Kurdistan. In such cases of polarized moral passions, the efforts to render the complexity of the situation and maintain a critical stance are met with suspicious or even hostile reactions from all sides. Yet it should be noted that Norwegian anthropologists have been particularly successful in their endeavor to produce public debates on contemporary social and cultural issues, as mentioned earlier. But the objects arousing emotional responses also vary across countries, as Biehl realized when he carried out his collective project on the judicialization of health in

Brazil. While the country was praised worldwide for its management of the HIV epidemic, the multiplication of lawsuits by patients suffering from a wide range of health conditions and unable to access treatment amid precarious infrastructure raised concerns among public authorities. By contesting, on the basis of their empirical data, the official discourse that discredited those who used this alternate path to access medicine, the anthropologist uncovered simultaneously the failure of the state to fulfill its obligations and the falsehood of its arguments against those who tried to unveil it. In response he was confronted with the criticisms of his Brazilian collaborators regarding the validity of his findings and the reliability of his method. It is a comparable form of nationalism that Hamdy faced when she presented the results of her research on medicine, religion, and health in Egypt at a conference on Islamic bioethics in Qatar. Because her analysis was critical of health inequalities, especially in the domain of organ transplantation, it was virulently dismissed by Egyptian scholars, their reaction generating in turn protests from North American participants who interpreted it as religious instead of political. As is almost always the case, the positions of both critics and critics of critics were largely determined by historical background, cultural prejudice, and power structure. But this scene becomes the starting point of a meditation on the quandary of doing anthropology in the Middle East with the singular tensions between hope and cynicism, cheerfulness and negativity that undermine political debates.

The epilogue proposes a broad discussion regarding the public afterlife of ethnography, which is based on my experience of research conducted in South Africa and France on topics as different as the AIDS epidemic, urban policing, and the prison system; in contexts as diverse as classrooms, conference amphitheaters, radio broadcasts, television programs, newspaper interviews, online interactions, court cases, and art exhibitions; and with audiences as distinct as students, scholars, journalists, policymakers, members of nongovernmental organizations, agents from the areas and institutions I studied, and lay persons politically motivated by or simply interested in the subject I treated. This final account can be viewed as an illustration of the variety of ethnography's public encounters and of the multiplicity of issues raised on each occasion. It can also be read as a reflection on the responsibility that ethnographers have toward their publics. Etymologically the word *responsibility* stems from Latin *respondere*, which means both "to make a reply" and "to promise in return." By going public ethnographers thus repay society for the knowledge and understanding they have acquired while answering ques-

tions that may have been explicitly formulated or are merely superficial. The settlement of this intellectual debt is, if truth be told, their ultimate political and ethical commitment.

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