

Elliott, Denielle and Matthew J. Wolf-Meyer (eds.). 2024. *Naked fieldnotes: A rough guide to ethnographic writing*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. 368 pp. Pb.: \$27.00. ISBN: 9781517916145.

Book review by

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As a soon-to-be minted PhD, I wish I had the chance to read and review *Naked Fieldnotes: A Rough Guide to Ethnographic Writing* years ago. I am certain the book would have advanced my ethnographic and methodological thinking, insights, and approaches throughout my doctoral studies. I am grateful for editors Denielle Elliot and Matthew J. Wolf-Meyer as well as the 38 contributing authors for their vulnerability, wisdom, and the questions they pose to their readers.

Naked Fieldnotes opens with an explicit goal from Elliot and Wolf-Meyer, “this collection of fieldnotes is intended to dispel the myths about the charismatic nature of fieldnotes and ethnographers by providing readers with a diversity of techniques, generic experiments, and objects and processes of ethnographic investigation so as to show how research and writing are always shaped by the sensibilities of researchers and the shapes of the ethnographic projects they are conducting” (p. xi). Said simply, this book aims to lift the curtain on the varied approaches to ethnographic notetaking and writing while avoiding value-based judgments on whether any specific method or approach is “best.” In doing so, the editors created a resource that they wished their novice-selves could have relied on in their early training as ethnographers. As an early-career ethnographer myself, I am grateful that this book now exists—it’s exactly the kind of guidance needed.

The first four introductory chapters from the editors and curator (Michelle Charette) offer a bird’s-eye-view of their goals, highlighting perspectives from decolonial frameworks by offering that the editors are “less interested in what makes a qualitatively ‘good’ or ‘bad’ fieldnote than we [they] are in the feelings that ethnographers have

about their fieldnotes and how we [they] might become less dogmatic and more inclusive about what fieldnotes can be and the kinds of subjectivities that a more expansive conception of fieldnotes might provide for ethnographic researchers" (p. xii). Then the authors introduce the "charismatic" (pp. ix, xi), nature of fieldnotes—the ways in which the notes are intimate, vulnerable and open to interpretation. In an introductory section, "Fieldnote Confessions" (pp. xxiii–xxxvii), Elliot and Wolf-Meyer reveal the conversations that led to this edited volume.

Following the introductory sections and "Reading Strategies" (pp. xlv–xlvii), which detail how readers can engage with the content thematically, geographically, and/or methodologically, *Naked Fieldnotes* outlines that "each chapter rather than carrying a typical title—lists the place, the topic, motivating key words or themes, and the approach the author took" (p. xlv). While I found the chapter titles' locations helpful, I did not find the "approach the author took" particularly useful for understanding the distinct and creative methods each author utilized. That said, as evidenced throughout the edited volume, each chapter is organized in a consistent manner, providing readers with a clear and coherent structure to follow.

Each chapter has two clear parts: an introduction to the contributing author's project and ethnographic approaches followed by an excerpt from the author's "naked" fieldnotes. While reviewing, I appreciated the way each corresponding author introduced their projects and ethnographic approaches. Some embraced the vulnerability and questioned and reflected on old fieldnotes and processes, while others presented their work as polished, akin to how they might discuss it at a leading academic conference. This varied style was a throughline of the entire edited volume.

The diversity of projects and geographic regions are mirrored by the range of ethnographic notetaking. Some chapters included raw fieldnotes that resembled field reports or narratives expected in a second draft of a peer-reviewed publication (Michael Cepek pp. 51–57; Natalia Gutkowski pp. 137–141; Yana Stainova pp. 283–290), while others included sections that resembled diary entries (Saida Hodzic pp. 151–163; Mathangi Krishnamurthy pp. 183–189) or bullet point lists of ideas, themes, or evolving questions (Elsa Fan pp. 85–91; Susan Frohlick pp. 109–116). Other chapters included creative, innovative, and boundary-pushing tactics for ethnographic fieldnotes, offering glimpses to art-based methods like drawings and renderings (Letizia Bonanno pp. 39–42; Danielle Gendron pp. 121–124; Margaret MacDonald pp. 191–196; Chiara Pussetti pp. 249–264), or photographs and videos (Stacy Leigh Pigg and Shyam Kunwar pp. 231–244; Jason Pine pp. 245–248). Still others included the use of multiple languages to capture particular

regional insights or concepts (Alexandrine Bourdreult-Fournier pp. 43–51; K.G. Hutchins pp.165–170). The assortment of ethnographic geographies, orientations, techniques, and analytical moves capture the larger purpose of this edited volume: there is no clear easy-to-follow guide or recipe for fieldnotes, but rather, as this volume offers, a multimodal diverse approach to ethnographic fieldnotes. As the editors, Elliot and Wolf-Meyer assert, “we have aimed to provide a breadth of possibilities that decenter writing as the primary ethnographic form” (pp. xviii).

This edited volume, whether through the written word or snapshots of spiraled notebooks and photos of fieldwork, capture the essence of ethnographic fieldnotes—that it’s personal, a process of discovery, and experimental. This book showcases traditional, innovative, and creative approaches to the task of ethnography and the multimodal approaches encourage a multidisciplinary use case for the book. As an educator and ethnographer, this book deepened my understanding of ethnography in ways that my qualitative methods courses in graduate school came up a little short.

Naked Fieldnotes: A Rough Guide to Ethnographic Writing is critical reading for novice or established ethnographers or those in-between. Given the diverse range of contributing authors and content, this book should not be limited to anthropology departments or courses. Instead, it could be included any qualitative or ethnographic methods course interested in expanding the scope of what *fieldnotes* can encompass.