

# **Priming for Ethnographic Fieldwork: A Selected Bibliography**

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**Introduction**

In recent years, a growing number of projects in International Relations have moved beyond traditional state-centric approaches to consider other sites of inquiry. In so doing, they have begun to legitimize the inclusion of hitherto marginalized voices and have thus occasioned the emergence of ethnographic research in the field. Though earlier research by International Relations scholars may often have included, for instance, interviews with officials of state, these persons were of interest largely for reason of the offices they held. Such representations of them as may have been made were, therefore, prefigured by the overriding assumptions of orthodox International Relations theory which reduced informants to conduits through which the researcher might gain a better understanding of the true object of study: the state. Accordingly, informants were regarded as primary sources without independent ontological significance in the study of international relations.

More recently, fieldwork has become more ethnographical in character and informants themselves have come to be of central interest to researchers. Activists, Indigenous people, migrant workers, and a host of others have been approached not only for reasons of what they know but also out of an interest in/appreciation for their often radically different ways of knowing. Critically-inclined International Relations scholars, in particular, have sought by these investigations to unsettle many of the ontological and epistemological commitments of the orthodoxy of the discipline and, frequently, to advance some emancipatory project in the process. These investigations have thus underwritten the epistemic enlargement of the field, making way, in turn, for ever more ethnographically-based projects.

However, International Relations, by itself, is ill-equipped to prepare scholars wishing to undertake ethnographic research in the field. Though the epistemological terrain of the discipline has expanded in recent years, the methodological dimension has not kept pace. Consequently, researchers are often left to guess at the elements of an appropriate methodology. Worse yet, the lack of emphasis on research methodologies in International Relations might give some researchers to believe that such considerations are unimportant and thereby to miss seeing the myriad ways that problematic methodologies could frustrate the objectives of their research, or worse: interpretive problems, ethical considerations, and the danger of ‘colonizing’ informants’ knowledges are but a few such pitfalls.

Though there have been a few formative moves toward addressing these sorts of issues within International Relations,<sup>1</sup> what has been published to date generally remains scattered with the result that it

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Sandra Whitworth, “The Practice, and Praxis, of Feminist Research in International Relations,” in Richard Wyn Jones, ed., *Critical Theory and World Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000). Another as yet unpublished manuscript also moves to problematize the ‘new’ fieldwork in International Relations: Tami Amanda Jacoby, “(Un)Doing Security: Reflections on the Question of Methods in Feminist IR Fieldwork,” to be included in Samantha Arnold and J. Marshall Beier, eds., *Toward the Supradisciplinary Study of Security*. Neither of these essays, however, is published as part of

might tend to seem rather idiosyncratic. Of course, it is important that scholars working in International Relations continue to think about the implications of the increasing prominence of ethnographic research projects in the field – indeed, much more in the way of such efforts is clearly needed. However, we should also work to acquaint ourselves with the extensive literatures that await our discovery in several other disciplines – notably Anthropology and Sociology – where lively and exhaustive debates have been underway on these issues for decades. The advices and caveats issuing from these engagements offer International Relations scholars a superb starting point for their own overdue discussions of research methodologies.

This selected bibliography is intended as a pointer to some of these literatures and debates. The works included have been chosen for their relevance to the new directions in International Relations fieldwork and address a range of issues related to ethnographic research projects in general, fieldwork methodologies in particular, and the ethical dilemmas inherent in researching and representing our Others and their knowledges. In the first section, a selection of full bibliographic references to these works is provided. Here will be found a range of approaches to the problems and prospects of ethnographic research. Most of these proceed from various critical orientations, though more orthodox treatments are also represented, most commonly as contributions to edited collections of essays. In order to aid in the selection of introductory readings, references have been arranged in three broad categories: edited collections, which tend to bring a variety of perspectives and approaches to bear on a particular set of issues or problematics; books by author(s), which generally provide in-depth engagements using a more or less consistent approach; and, journal articles, wherein more specific concerns are most often highlighted and addressed.

In the second section, a somewhat abbreviated survey of the literature on the sources and conditions of pre-Columbian warfare in the Americas is presented in a short annotated bibliography. Entries in this section are grouped together according to whether they can best be characterized as “orthodox accounts” or “critical rejoinders.” While it is not expected that the works enumerated in this section of the bibliography will be of direct interest to most students of International Relations, their illustrative value nonetheless warrants their inclusion. What the annotated entries in this section point up is the fundamental indeterminacy of ethnographic research. In particular, the orthodox accounts seem to presume a Hobbesian war of all against all as the defining feature of the aboriginal condition of life in the Americas. The more critical writings, by way of contrast, have in common that they all treat ethnography as a process of mediation so as to unsettle the pretensions of orthodox scholars to unproblematically interpret and represent their subjects – several also address questions of ethics as they pertain to the production of these knowledges and the texts that bear them. Deliberately juxtaposed to one another,

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a comprehensive project dealing with ethnographic research in International Relations – indeed, no such project has yet been undertaken.

these two brief bibliographic sets thus underscore the tremendous importance of confronting the methodological issues that are the foci of the works listed in the first section.

This bibliography has been compiled with two principal aims. First, it is intended to facilitate introduction not only to the literatures on ethnographic research but to the myriad practical and ethical considerations that attach to fieldwork endeavours as well. Secondly, it is hoped that some of these works might contribute to stimulating greater interest in these issues amongst International Relations scholars whose research interests lead them to (re)invest human subjects with ontological significance and to seek through their writing to represent them, their knowledges, and their ways of knowing. In service of these aims it is, to be sure, a most modest step, and should therefore be received more appropriately as a call for greater attention to the problems and promise of ethnographic International Relations scholarship than as anything more than a most prefatory gesture in that direction by itself.

Finally, I would like to thank the Centre for International and Security Studies for its interest in this project. Any errors are, of course, those of the compiler.

## **Indeterminacies of Interpretation and Representation: Issues**

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- Brettell, Caroline B., ed., *When They Read What We Write: The Politics of Ethnography* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1993).
- Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
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- \_\_\_\_\_, eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000).
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- Fonow, Mary Margaret and Judith A. Cook, eds., *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
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\_\_\_\_\_, *Understanding Ethnographic Texts* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992).

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## Indeterminacies of Interpretation and Representation: A Case

### War and Peace in the Aboriginal Condition, Orthodox Accounts

Bamforth, Douglas B., "Indigenous People, Indigenous Violence: Precontact Warfare on the North American Great Plains," *MAN*, 29:1 (1994).

Bamforth discusses evidence of warfare uncovered in the excavation of agriculturally-based pre-Columbian Native settlement sites in present-day North and South Dakota, with particular emphasis on one site at Crow Creek where a mass grave containing the skeletal remains of approximately 500 people was discovered in 1978. The condition of the remains indicated that the inhabitants of the town probably were the victims of a massacre, that they had suffered from malnutrition at various points in their lives, and that many of them were malnourished at the time the massacre. Suggesting that the town was likely overwhelmed by raiders seeking food during a famine, Bamforth compares this to the post-contact Larson site where a similar massacre took place centuries later, likely as a result of conflict caused by mass migrations set off by European colonialism. Finding the same sorts of osteological evidence of trauma at both sites, he arrives at the conclusion that large-scale warfare was a fact of life on the pre-Columbian Great Plains of North America. However, other accounts of the same data suggest that the archaeological evidence might not necessarily speak to us quite so unproblematically about war in the aboriginal condition (see Beier and Willey and Emerson).

Chagnon, Napoleon A., "Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population," *Science*, 239 (26 February 1988).

Building on the thesis of his now-canonical *Yanomamö: The Fierce People*, Chagnon finds biological determinants prominent among the sources of warfare among the Yanomami people of Amazonia. Central to his argument is the idea that Yanomami warfare, though sustained by a revenge complex, is motivated both by competition over scarce material resources and by a supposed biological imperative on the part of males in kinship-based groups to secure enhanced access to "reproductive resources" – i.e., women – by means of violence if necessary. Chagnon's account has been challenged by critical anthropologists (see Ferguson) who argue that ethnographers have no access to the aboriginal condition of Indigenous peoples; more recently, Chagnon has been accused of having used questionable and unethical research methods which, it is alleged, actually incited the very conflicts which he has claimed as characteristic of the Yanomami people (see Tierney).

Crawford, Neta C., "A Security Regime Among Democracies: Cooperation Among Iroquois Nations," *International Organization*, 48:3 (1994).

This is a ground-breaking attempt to bring Indigenous peoples into International Relations. Crawford convincingly argues for the validity of oral literatures as documentary sources, usefully highlighting the problematic bases for their exclusion (see Secoy). However, in treating the Great Law of Peace of the Iroquois Confederacy as the basis of a functioning security regime, she makes the common ethnographical mistake of reading Indigenous ideas and lifeways against decidedly Western referents (see Bedford and Workman). The result is an unduly circumscribed account of the Great Law of Peace which misses those of its unique aspects that cannot be accommodated within the rigid parameters of an *a priori* conceptual framework.

Ewers, John C., "Intertribal Warfare as the Precursor of Indian-White Warfare on the Northern Great Plains," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 6 (October 1975).

In a manner suggestive of life in a Hobbesian state of nature, Ewers attributes war on the pre-Columbian Northern Great Plains of North America to the selfish motives of individuals. Following from this, he argues that warfare in the region was already widespread at the time of first contact with Euroamericans. While he acknowledges the dearth of evidence suggestive of large-scale battles, he does cite an 1866 battle between the Piegan, Crow, and Gros Ventres which is reputed to have wrought casualties numbering in the hundreds – the possibility that this might be in any way related to the influences of Euroamerican encroachment is, however, left unexplored. Going even further, Ewers proposes the possibility that many more Native people of the region were killed in wars amongst one another than died at the hands of Euroamericans. And, reinforcing the account of endemic warfare, he suggests that "[h]ad each of the tribes of this region continued to stand alone, fighting all neighboring tribes, it is probable that many of the smaller tribes either would have been exterminated, or their few survivors would have been adopted into the larger tribes, thereby increasing the latter's military potential" (p.402).

Keegan, John, "Warfare on the Plains," *The Yale Review*, 84:1 (1996).

Characterizing Native peoples' lifeways as "rigorously masculine and individualistic" (p.15), Keegan follows Ewers in his assertion of individualized motives for war on the Northern Great Plains of North America. Keegan's primary emphasis, however, is on the battles between the Plains peoples and the forces of the advancing Euroamerican state during the mid- to late-nineteenth century. In this regard he seems to rely to a considerable degree upon the accounts of soldiers dispatched from the East to subdue the Cheyenne, Lakota, and others. In reducing the voluntary suffering endured by participants in a central spiritual practice to an egoistic contest of endurance, for example, Keegan describes it as an opportunity for individuals to demonstrate "qualities of physical hardness, contempt for pain and privation, and disregard of danger to life that both disgusted and awed the white soldiers who fought them" (p.15). Similarly, while he has the famed US General George Armstrong Custer and his 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry "wiped away in an outburst of native American ferocity," the Lakota and Cheyenne defenders of the encampment that the unfortunate soldiers had descended upon are described as having been motivated less by the pressing need to defend themselves and their families than by their own "ferocious emotions" (p.41).

Keeley, Lawrence H., *War Before Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Keeley cites the Crow Creek Massacre in response to critical anthropologists like Ferguson. (see section below). Lacking a reflexive sense of the ambiguity of the archaeological evidence he cites, his is also perhaps the most direct example of a Hobbesian-inspired perspective on the aboriginal condition of Indigenous peoples. Concerned at what he regards as "pacified" renditions of the human past, Keeley's purpose is to discredit what is, in his view, their underlying "theoretical stance that amounts to a Rousseauian declaration of universal prehistoric peace" (p.20). Accordingly, he appeals directly to Hobbes in support of his argument that, "[i]f anything, peace was a scarcer commodity for members of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms than for the average citizen of a civilized state" (p.39).

Secoy, Frank Raymond, *Changing Military Patterns on the Great Plains: 17<sup>th</sup> Century Through Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966).

Although this account is generally much more meticulous than many in its marshalling of evidence, Secoy goes in with the orthodoxy in claiming large-scale warfare as an occasional feature of life on the pre-Columbian Plains and, problematically, cites neither source nor data to substantiate this claim. In bemoaning the lack of reliable documentary sources for the period prior to the arrival of Euroamerican observers, he also implicitly discounts the validity of *autoethnographic* sources as borne by oral literatures – significantly, no case is advanced to justify this exclusion.

Zimmerman, Larry J. and Lawrence E. Bradley, “The Crow Creek Massacre: Initial Coalescent Warfare and Speculations About the Genesis of Extended Coalescent,” *Plains Anthropologist*, 38:145 (1993).

Like Bamforth’s, this piece inquires into the significance of the archaeological evidence uncovered at Crow Creek. Though the treatment is similar to Bamforth’s in most regards, one interesting point that is better developed by Zimmerman and Bradley is the evidence of periods of malnutrition suffered by the pre-Columbian townspeople at various points in their lives before the massacre. What is significant about this is that it seems to suggest that warfare on the Great Plains was not an endemic feature of the aboriginal condition of the Indigenous peoples of the region inasmuch as earlier incidences of famine did not also result in catastrophic conflict.

### **War and Peace in the Aboriginal Condition, Critical Rejoinders**

Bedford, David and Thom Workman, “The Great Law of Peace: Alternative Inter-Nation(al) Practices and the Iroquoian Confederacy,” *Alternatives*, 22:1 (1997).

In this response to Crawford, Bedford and Workman dispute the reading of the Iroquois Confederacy as a security regime. In particular, they argue that the Great Law is not reducible to a treatise on security since it is actually a much more holistic guide to living well. As peace is here equated with a state of being reasonable, Bedford and Workman show how this is fundamentally incompatible with a Realist account of inter-national relations, the imposition of which must necessarily result in distortions.

Beier, J. Marshall, “Beyond Hegemonic State(ment)s of Nature: Indigenous Knowledge and Non-State Possibilities in International Relations,” in Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair, eds., *Power in a Postcolonial World: Race, Gender and Class in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2001).

Written for an International Relations audience, this essay considers the enduring influence of the travelogues of the first Europeans in the Americas in social contractarian thought. Accordingly, it is argued that the travelogues are rightly treated as foundational texts of the social sciences. Proceeding from this, the essay challenges orthodox anthropological accounts of the sources and context of pre-Columbian warfare between the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, demonstrating their indeterminacy with particular reference to the traditional cosmological commitments of the Lakota people of the North American Great Plains. To the extent that it lacks a reflexive sense of its own deeper commitments, ethnographic fidelity to ‘reality’ is thus called into question.

Blick, Jeffrey P., "Genocidal Warfare in Tribal Societies as a Result of European-Induced Culture Conflict," *MAN*, 23:4 (1988).

Blick challenges the idea that the observations of even early Euroamerican ethnographers could ever have captured the aboriginal condition of the peoples of the Northern Great Plains. In particular, he notes that the gun-toting mounted warriors of the Plains owed their reputation as a warlike people largely to the historical accident of having been situated at the point at which the lines of trade in firearms supplied by the French in the northeast of the continent first intersected with the diffusion of horses introduced by the Spanish in the southwest. Additionally, he notes that tensions generated by migratory flows of refugees fleeing the advancing frontiers of the Euroamerican state(s) also resulted in violent conflict between Indigenous peoples.

Ferguson, R. Brian, "Blood of the Leviathan: Western Contact and Warfare in Amazonia," *American Ethnologist*, 17:2 (1990).

Responding directly to Chagnon's account of the Yanomami as well as to orthodox ethnographers of Indigenous peoples more generally, Ferguson, like Blick, argues that the influences of European colonialism dramatically altered Indigenous peoples' lifeways even before most of them ever encountered Euroamericans directly. The advent of the slave trade, refugee flows, epidemics, and the diffusion of Western manufactures, according to Ferguson, all played a role in fomenting warfare between Indigenous peoples, leading him to conclude that the arrival of Hobbes' Leviathan in the Americas was actually an important cause of war rather than its remedy. Arguing that "ethnology is built upon a paradox," Ferguson proposes that "[t]he specter haunting anthropology is that culture patterns taken to be pristine may actually have been transformed by Western contact" (p.238).

Lizot, Jacques, "On Warfare: An Answer to N.A. Chagnon," *American Ethnologist*, 21:4 (1994).

In this response to Chagnon, Lizot draws attention to the serious consequences which may arise from attempts by ethnographers to interpret Indigenous peoples' cultures against Euroamerican referents. Noting that Chagnon translates the Yanomami word *waitheri* as "fierce," Lizot counters that such a simple and direct rendering of meaning is not possible. He argues that the word is not simply descriptive of a state of being for the Yanomami, but signifies a highly nuanced concept with a broad spectrum of meaning which includes, simultaneously, courage, gallantry, recklessness, and stoicism. 'Fierce,' according to Lizot, is only the extreme end of this spectrum. For his own part, Lizot has himself been accused of grossly unethical conduct while working in the field (see Tierney).

Tierney, Patrick, *Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).

An investigative journalist, Tierney attracted wide media attention as well as that of the American Anthropological Association for this indictment of anthropologists working in the Amazon. Alleging serious ethical – even criminal – transgressions, Tierney describes Chagnon's work with the late anthropologist James Neel, suggesting that Neel might have deliberately incited a 1968 measles epidemic which, besides killing hundreds or perhaps thousands of Yanomami, also seemed to fit neatly with the research agendas of both Neel and Chagnon. Moreover, Tierney accuses Chagnon of using research methods that resulted in conflict between Yanomami groups as well as otherwise fomenting the very warfare that he ascribed to their natural condition.

*Darkness in El Dorado* also raises grave allegations of serious sexual misconduct by both Chagnon and French anthropologist Jacques Lizot – whose critique of Chagnon’s work is cited above – while in Yanomami communities.

Willey, P. and Thomas E. Emerson, “The Osteology and Archaeology of the Crow Creek Massacre,” *Plains Anthropologist*, 38:145 (1993).

This is a further discussion of the same archaeological evidence considered by Bamforth and by Zimmerman and Bradley. Significant in this treatment is the revelation that apparent defensive constructions around the village at the Crow Creek site show evidence of having been allowed to fall into a state of considerable neglect for long periods of time. Additionally, the village grew beyond the confines of the ditches and palisades that encircled it. Both of these observations suggest that warfare was not endemic, defensive measures only having been undertaken at particular junctures and not as a matter of course.