PART 2 – 2025

ETHNOGRAPHY AN ETHNOMAD FIELD HANDBOOK FOR UNDERSTANDING AND REFLECTION

BY ETHNOMAD

INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO

In Part One of this field guide, we laid the foundations of ethnography, immersive engagement, attentiveness, reflexivity, and respectful storytelling. Part Two builds on that groundwork, offering deeper insights, practical tools, and expanded awareness to help you navigate the complex ethical, cultural, and sensory landscapes of fieldwork.

Ethnography is not merely the act of observing or collecting data; it is a way of being. It demands presence, patience, and the humility to be changed by what we encounter. In this second volume, we expand your field toolkit with guidance on:

Section 1: The Responsibility of Looking
Ethics in ethnography as awareness, presence, and the moral weight of observation.
Introduction to Ethics in Practice

- Ethics in Fieldwork: Awareness, Choice, and Consequence
- Exploring how every decision in the field shapes both understanding and responsibility.
- The Power of Representation in a World Always Watching
- Reflecting on how the modern flood of images challenges truth, consent, and respect.

Case Studies

Case Study One: The Manganiyar Musicians of Jaisalmer
Representation and Responsibility
When cultural performance blurs the line between livelihood, art, and exploitation.
Case Study Two: Between Culture and Conscience – Anne's Dilemma in Bihar
When cultural understanding conflicts with moral duty and human rights.
Case Study Three: The Gatekeeper – Ethics and Trust in Post-War Bosnia
When trust, language, and power inside the team reshape what the field reveals.

Section 2: Stories & Tools Within

What Does “Research” Really Mean?
Re-examining research as relationship, reciprocity, and responsibility rather than data extraction.
Yarning: A Supplementary Methodological Insight
Introducing Yarning as an Indigenous-informed method for ethical dialogue.

- Yarning with Communities: In Yarning We Hear, See, and Feel Data
- Understanding conversation as co-created knowledge, not mere interview data.
- Trust, Reciprocity, and Story as Method
- Building genuine relationships that make ethical and meaningful research possible.

Section 3: Analysis: What Does the Data Say, and to Whom?

Ways of Analysing Ethnographic Data
Interpreting stories with context and care, listening beyond the words.
Exercises to Sharpen Analytical Practice
Practical activities for reflexive thinking and strengthening interpretive skills.

- Field Reflexivity Activities
- Recognising bias, emotion, and influence in one’s own field of presence.
- Guided Writing and Thematic Mapping
- Turning observation into a structured, ethical interpretation.

Echo and Dissonance: A Gendered Lens
Considering how gender shapes dialogue, access, and interpretation in the field.

Section 4: Community Mapping: Seeing the World Through the Lens of Those Who Live There

Community Mapping in Oral Traditional Societies
Capturing how communities visualise and share their own worlds through memory and story.

- How It Is Done in the Field
- Participatory approaches to mapping cultural and physical landscapes.
- Field Checklist
- Practical guidance for ethical and inclusive mapping sessions.

- Community Mapping in the Digital Age
- Integrating technology responsibly without losing community ownership of data.
- Key Principles of Community Mapping
- Respect, transparency, inclusion, and the right to review and consent.
- Community Mapping Template
- A step-by-step structure for documenting, illustrating, and archiving community maps.
- Policies & Frameworks Ensuring Communities Are Informed
- Guidelines and international frameworks that protect participants and uphold ethical standards.

Section 5: Ethnography Glossary
A concise reference of key concepts, terms, and ethical principles in ethnographic and participatory practice.

ETHICS IN PRACTICE: THREE ENCOUNTERS FROM THE FIELD

Three Ethical Encounters: Observing, Intervening, and Representing
Ethics in ethnographic fieldwork rarely falls into neat categories. It unfolds in the uncertainty of real situations, moments when decisions must be made without guidance, where understanding people's worlds collides with personal conscience, and where good intentions can have unintended consequences.

Today, this uncertainty extends beyond professional researchers. With the rise of smartphones and social media, everyone has become a documentarian. Every day, millions of people travel, photograph, and film every corner of the globe. Yet much of this is not guided by the desire to tell the story of others with understanding or respect, but by the pursuit of likes, shares, and subscribers. Communities, rituals, and even private lives are captured and circulated for attention rather than insight. The world's most intimate human moments are often turned into content, stripped of context, consent, and meaning.

This new reality makes the question of ethics more urgent than ever. The power to record and share demands self-awareness and restraint. Whether behind a camera, holding a notebook, or posting online, we must ask: Whose story is this to tell? and What are the consequences of telling it?

The three case studies that follow explore different dimensions of ethical challenge. In Jaisalmer, the Manganiyar musicians raise questions about representation, livelihood, and the blurred line between participation and exploitation. In North Bihar, a researcher must decide whether cultural respect outweighs the moral duty to prevent harm. And in post-war Bosnia, a team discovers how trust and translation can be manipulated from within.

Together, these stories reveal that ethics is not a checklist but a state of awareness, an ongoing negotiation between empathy, truth, and responsibility. They remind us that the ethnographer's role is not only to observe the world, but to consider how their presence, choices, and silence shape it.

CASE STUDY ONE: THE MANGANIYAR MUSICIANS OF JAISALMER

Each evening in Jaisalmer, a Manganiyar family brings their music to the courtyards of hotels, carrying centuries of oral tradition into the present as they sing for passing visitors. Their harmoniums, dholaks, and voices fill the warm desert air, performing songs that once belonged to royal courts and village gatherings, now sustaining family livelihoods through tourism.

To many visitors, it is a captivating scene, heritage alive, children learning the music of their ancestors beside their fathers. Yet behind the melodies lie quieter stories: the struggle to balance culture with survival, learning with labour, and tradition with change. The family depends on these nightly performances for income. The children, still of school age, perform late into the night, often too tired for morning classes. Some guests see the performance as a symbol of Rajasthan's rich culture; others see children working when they should be studying.

For the ethnographer or photographer, such a scene raises questions that are both aesthetic and ethical. Is documenting or sharing such images a celebration of cultural continuity, or does it risk reinforcing poverty as spectacle? Should the presence of children in traditional performances be interpreted as apprenticeship, family work, or child labour? Where does one draw the line between participation and exploitation, authenticity and necessity?

Reflection and Discussion

- Cultural heritage can both preserve and constrain. Economic pressures may force traditions into performance rather than practice.
- Children's participation in art and ritual is common in many societies but becomes ethically complex when linked to income generation.
- Researchers and photographers must consider how their work represents these realities—whether it empowers or objectifies.
- The context of livelihood, education, and dignity must inform every act of documentation.

Questions for Reflection

- When does participation in cultural heritage become exploitation?
- Should ethnographers intervene or observe when children are involved in economic performance?
- How might representation, through photography, film, or writing, affect how the outside world perceives such families?
- What responsibilities do we have when our work shapes those perceptions?

Teaching Summary

This case highlights the ethical challenges of representing living traditions in contexts of poverty and change. It invites reflection on the blurred boundaries between art, work, and education, as well as on the role of the ethnographer as both witness and storyteller. The Manganiyar musicians remind us that culture is not static; it survives through adaptation, often at a cost that outsiders rarely see.

CASE STUDY TWO: BETWEEN CULTURE AND CONSCIENCE — ANNE'S DILEMMA IN BIHAR

In the early 2010s, a friend of mine, Anne, was conducting field research on land ownership and use patterns in three villages in North Bihar, one of the poorest and most conservative areas of India. It had been difficult to gain the confidence of the villagers, but after several months, she succeeded in developing relationships of trust with a good number of families. She then became aware of preparations being made for the marriage of a daughter in one of the households, a girl of 16.

Child marriage, defined in India as a marriage in which the female has not completed her 18th year and/or the male his 21st, is common and deeply embedded in local culture for economic and social reasons. As an ethnographer trained to understand communities on their own terms, Anne did not initially consider it her role to intervene in any way. However, child marriage has been prohibited since 2006, and it is considered unacceptable under the purportedly universal Rights of the Child. Importantly for Anne, the girl was desperately unhappy about having to marry an older man who was not sympathetic to her and about having to leave school. Although Anne never witnessed her being mistreated, the girl seemed to be mostly confined to the family's shack.

After some soul-searching, which included considering that it might not be possible to conceal her role and that she would then lose the hard-earned trust she had gained in the village, Anne decided, about three weeks before the planned wedding, to contact one of several NGOs in the area working to prevent child marriage. She decided against contacting the government Child Marriage Prohibition Officers, as she believed that would create more trouble for the family and the girl.

NGO staff held several meetings with the girl's parents and the girl herself in an effort to convince the parents that it was in their and their daughter's best interest to cancel the marriage plans. They argued that bearing children at her age would permanently damage her health, that she would be a greater support to them if she finished her education, and that she would have a happier life. The parents eventually relented, and NGO staff accompanied them to meet the intended bridegroom to explain the situation, emphasising the legal consequences of marrying a minor.

Anne's role in what happened did become known, unsurprisingly, and although the girl's family continued to accept her as before, this was not the case with other families. She eventually had to restart her research in another village.

Reflection and Discussion

What can we learn from this case study?

- Ethical dilemmas are rarely clear-cut. Field researchers often face conflicts between respecting cultural practices and adhering to universal human rights principles. There is rarely a perfect course of action.
- Balancing empathy and responsibility. Understanding a community's traditions does not remove the moral weight of witnessing harm. Ethical ethnography requires reflection on when neutrality becomes complicity.
- Consequences of intervention. Even well-intentioned action can alter relationships and trust within the community, affecting both the researcher's safety and the integrity of the study.
- Partnership and discretion. Collaborating with local organisations can offer a culturally sensitive path to advocacy, but such involvement must be carefully weighed against potential repercussions.
- Researcher vulnerability. Ethnographers must recognise their position within a social web, both as observers and participants, and prepare for the personal and professional costs of ethical decisions.

Questions for Readers:

- Was Anne right to intervene, or should she have maintained her ethnographic neutrality?
- How can researchers define the limits of observation when they witness practices that violate human rights?
- What alternative actions might have protected both the girl and Anne's research relationships?
- How should researchers prepare for ethical decision-making in complex field situations?

CASE STUDY THREE: THE GATEKEEPER — ETHICS AND TRUST IN POST-WAR BOSNIA

After the Dayton Accords brought peace to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, aid for reconstruction and development started pouring into the country. Some of that aid was research-based, including ethnographic studies examining, for instance, local support networks and relations of trust that had survived the devastation. One such study focused on the dairy sector in remote areas. It was funded by a major donor and conducted by a small team consisting of a social researcher, a dairy expert, and a Bosnian consultant with experience in the area, who provided entry points, local knowledge, and interpretation.

The research was observation-based, complemented by interviews and group discussions. These discussions turned out to be invariably raucous and did not include any women, despite the researchers' insistence and the important role of women on the farms. Participants showed little interest in discussing local networks and relationships; instead, they demanded immediate assistance with constructing sheds, obtaining equipment, and forming associations.

The researchers were puzzled until a few interviews conducted with another interpreter revealed that the Bosnian consultant, well known in the area, had visited farmers before the start of the study and told them that the researchers had come to promise aid and that they should request specific types of support.

This revelation brought the study to an end. Some farmers later attempted to form associations on their own, expecting they would attract funding, but these efforts failed early on.

Reflection and Discussion

What can we learn from this case study?

- Gatekeepers can be within your own team. Ethical and methodological challenges do not always come from outside the research; they can arise from those who act as cultural intermediaries, translators, or local facilitators.

- The importance of language and interpretation. Miscommunication or translation manipulation can profoundly alter the meaning of research questions, participants' responses, and, ultimately, the study's outcomes.
- Trust and transparency. Building genuine trust with communities requires more than access—it demands clarity about purpose, openness about expectations, and careful selection of collaborators.
- Accountability in partnerships. When working with local consultants or organisations, researchers must ensure that all parties understand ethical standards, roles, and responsibilities.
- Reflexivity and vigilance. Field researchers must constantly question how relationships, hierarchies, and local politics shape data and understanding.

Questions:

- How could the research team have identified the problem earlier?
- What steps could you take to prevent similar situations in future fieldwork?
- How should researchers balance cultural sensitivity with accountability when local partners act unethically?

STORIES & TOOLS WITHIN

As in Part One, each chapter includes exercises and storytelling techniques designed to sharpen your skills and deepen your understanding. Our mission remains the same: to help you conduct ethical, attentive, and culturally grounded research that respects and amplifies the voices of those whose lives and traditions you witness.

The heart of ethnography is the story behind the story, the whispered truths, the laughter that breaks the silence, the gestures that speak louder than words. In this guide, you learn not only to capture these moments, but to honour them.

Fading Cultures
www.fadingcultures.org
BY ETHNOMAD

WHAT DOES "RESEARCH" REALLY MEAN?

The word research comes from the Old French recercher, meaning *"to seek out"* or *"to search closely."* It combines:
re-meaning *"again"*

cerchier meaning *"to search"* (from Latin circare, which comes from circus, meaning *"circle"*)

At its core, research means to search again; to return, to revisit, to look deeper.

This origin reminds us that research is not a straight line to the truth. It is a spiral of discovery. Especially in ethnographic work, knowledge does not arrive all at once. It emerges slowly through listening, observing, asking again, noticing what was missed, and returning with new understanding.

Ethnography honours this process. It is not just about collecting data, but about dwelling in the re-search again, listening again, feeling again. Each cycle deepens your understanding and reveals meaning not just in what is said, but in what is sensed.

> *"Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript... foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries."*

Clifford Geertz,
The Interpretation of Cultures (1973)

This quote captures the layered and interpretive nature of ethnographic research. What we find in the field is rarely complete or neat. It is partial, evolving, and must be read like a text, with patience, reflexivity, and repeated attention.

> *You do not finish fieldwork by reaching an answer. You finish when you know what questions to ask next.*

The curve of these bamboo fish traps is created with traditional knowledge passed down through generations, resulting in a unique length and shape.

The world is full of such stories, woven into techniques, stitched into garments, hidden in tools, sung in celebrations.

YARNING:

A SUPPLEMENTARY METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHT

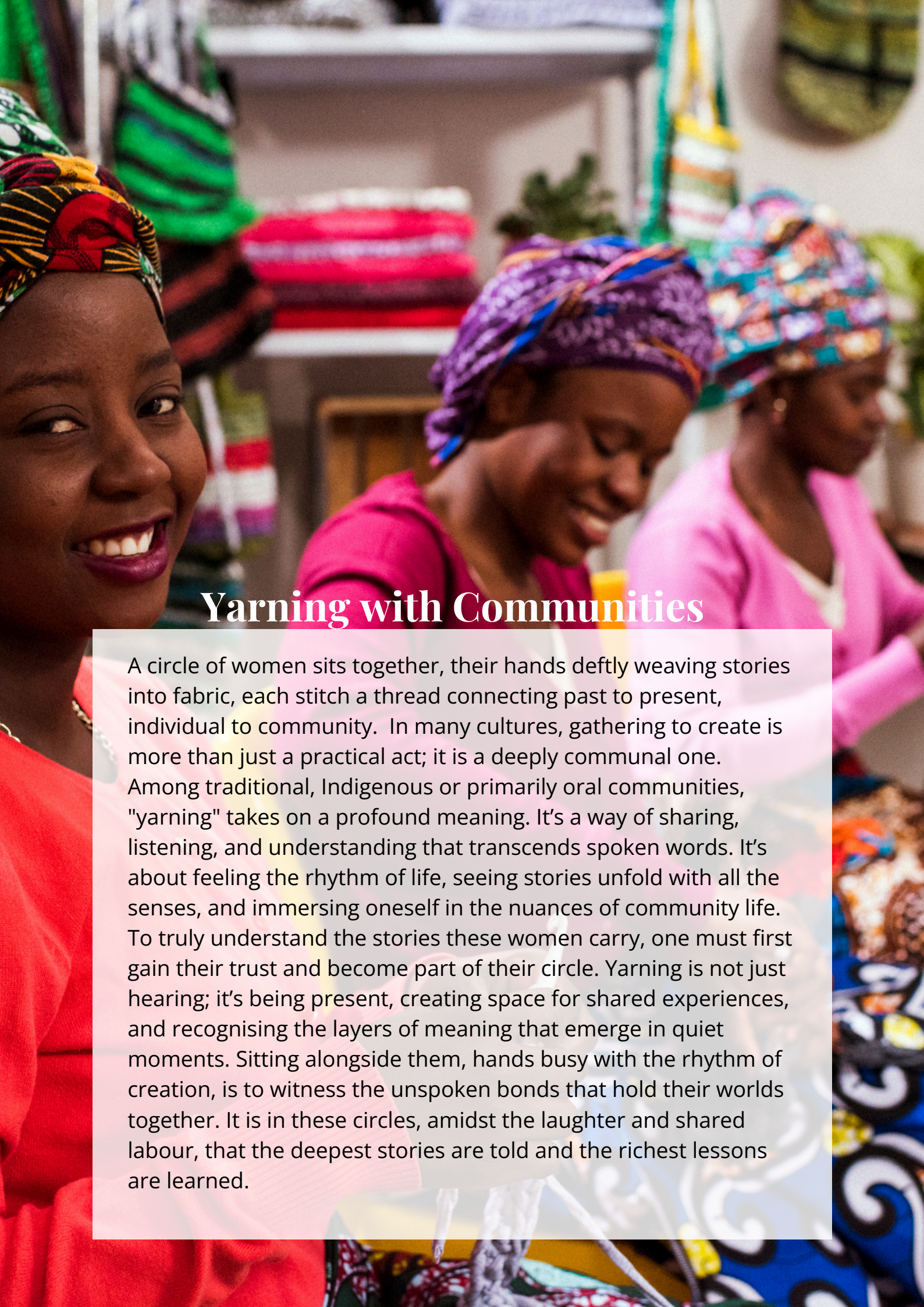
As a special addition to this volume, we introduce Yarning, an Indigenous Australian method of relational storytelling that blends conversation, cultural safety, and trust. Yarning complements the sections on Oral Traditions, Ethics, and Participatory Research. It is particularly relevant for those working in Indigenous, craft-based, or oral cultures.

ETHNOMAD has adapted and applied Yarning and Active Yarning in fieldwork across a wide variety of contexts, primarily with oral traditional communities from Australia and Bangladesh to Madagascar, Tanzania and beyond. This section offers a practical overview and links to the full academic paper for those seeking a deeper understanding of the method's origins, protocols, and applications.

🔗 [Read: Yarning as a Research Method – Academic Version (PDF)]

> *"We don't extract knowledge. We earn it, slowly, through trust. Yarning teaches us how to listen, not just for information, but for meaning."*

As with all tools in this guide, we encourage you to approach Yarning not as a technique to replicate, but as a philosophy of engagement, one rooted in humility, reciprocity, and respect for narrative sovereignty.



Yarning with Communities

A circle of women sits together, their hands deftly weaving stories into fabric, each stitch a thread connecting past to present, individual to community. In many cultures, gathering to create is more than just a practical act; it is a deeply communal one. Among traditional, Indigenous or primarily oral communities, "yarning" takes on a profound meaning. It's a way of sharing, listening, and understanding that transcends spoken words. It's about feeling the rhythm of life, seeing stories unfold with all the senses, and immersing oneself in the nuances of community life. To truly understand the stories these women carry, one must first gain their trust and become part of their circle. Yarning is not just hearing; it's being present, creating space for shared experiences, and recognising the layers of meaning that emerge in quiet moments. Sitting alongside them, hands busy with the rhythm of creation, is to witness the unspoken bonds that hold their worlds together. It is in these circles, amidst the laughter and shared labour, that the deepest stories are told and the richest lessons are learned.

We were not all born to write. While some people invest a lifetime of work into the written word, others pass on their ideas, knowledge, history, and heritage through oral interactions. Writing can sometimes be limiting, and many people choose to use alternative creative methods to convey what is happening in their community, culture, or personal experiences. There are approximately 7,000 languages in the world, and numerous ways exist to store, maintain, and pass on the knowledge and stories of those languages, including dance, poetry, tattoos, prose, crafts, songs, recordings, and more. Oral-based communities often centre their traditions around the language of mythology.

Mythologist Joseph Campbell explained as early as the 1970s that our ability to understand the language of myth is rapidly disappearing. Oral-based communities are far more numerous than we may assume. Thousands of traditional communities that utilise traditional methods of knowledge sharing exist worldwide. Many exist within literate societies. Traditional people who have not adopted or adapted to written ways of communication are not failed attempts at being modern, but rather richly diverse individuals with different ways of seeing the world and expressing their ideas.

In many cases, colonisers were desperate to display their superior knowledge and lacked attention to the value of local cultural communication. Helen Thomas, through a variety of cultural studies, revealed how dancing constitutes a culturally developed form of knowledge articulated through the 'bodily endeavours' of dancing subjects and not through the power of the word. Nietzsche proposed that the need for people to move in rhythm with others is even older than language itself, as he asks; Where are the books that teach us to understand the language of dance? He alludes to the fact that our reductionist focus on writing has led us to be unknown to ourselves.

> *"I talk of what I've seen with my own eyes; you talk of what's written on paper. How can your mind and mine ever get together?"*
>
> *Poet Kahbir*

The oral traditional poet, Kabir, describes his observations of life, caste prejudices, religious sectarianism, and hatred of the time. Still, he also discusses the mind and body through oral means, all the while urging people to wake up and cultivate consciousness.

In Yarning we hear, see and feel data

The slang word ‘Yarning’ is rooted in the seafarer storytelling traditions. From there, it made its way into the vocabulary of early Australian settlers as it became a way to describe the oral stories of Indigenous Australian peoples'. While Yarns were originally perceived as tall tales or fallacies, today, it is recognised that they contain a depth of traditional knowledge about the world that Indigenous and traditional people have occupied for generations and, at times, thousands of years. Unlike many academic forms of social science research, Yarns become a matter of learning as the researcher must avoid influencing, biasing or leading the story and thus disrupting the natural flow of the information.

Yet, academic research techniques rarely consist of discussions of friendship building, as researchers may tend to treat their participants as a number or statistic, a nameless face in a project. Yarning requires a deep sense of curiosity and trust. When turning Yarning into something understandable to the academic audience, it is often compared to a type of semi-structured interview, an informal and relaxed discussion through which both the researcher and participant journey together, visiting places and topics of interest, relevant or not to the researcher's topic. Yarning has been used most effectively in health-related research with oral traditional communities. However, it can also take place while physically sharing skills about crafts, artisanal methods, nature, food preparation, culture and heritage.

Traditional oral communities are connected through Yarns to the symbolic universe where people, the land, culture and "The Dreaming" are combined in an all-encompassing universe. Mary Terszack, in her book, 'Orphaned by the Colour of My Skin,' discussed how Yarning is a process of making meaning, communicating and passing on the knowledge of her culture.

Yarning as a way of sharing stories, knowledge and deep mythology extends to traditional communities beyond Australia. We can see how Yarning methods can be expanded to discuss myth motifs in traditional societies across the globe. For example, Indigenous communities in Bangladesh describe how their oral-traditional stories reflect their community's lived experiences. Likewise, the Brahui desert communities of Baluchistan use rich folklore to express the strength of character and cultural morals to the community. Yarning with oral-based communities should not be viewed as theatrical, nor should it be a search to find fact from fiction in the stories of others.

There are myriad ways that human societies are forced to make sense of the world. It is critical that engaging with oral-based communities is an active two-way process and a philosophical stance in the pursuit of understanding and equality.

"A Rohingya boy learns the traditional bamboo building skills from an older experienced craftsman. Yarning takes us beyond learning a craft to discuss the ethics and cultural norms, their "way of life," sharing stories of home and belonging.

ANALYSIS:

WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY AND TO WHOM?

Ethnography is storytelling with accountability. Once you return from the field with a notebook full of stories, scenes, observations, quotes, diagrams, and reflections, what do you do with it all? How do you begin to make sense of what you've gathered? How do you honour the people and places you've studied, while shaping insight that communicates meaning to others?

There are many forms of analysis. In the social sciences, a distinction is often made between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative analysis focuses on numbers, frequencies, and statistical relationships. Qualitative analysis, the focus of this guide, draws on meaning, context, and interpretation.

However, ethnographic research may also use mixed methods where field observations, interviews, and participatory experiences are combined with surveys, census data, or other numeric insights to provide a fuller picture. This triangulation drawing from multiple sources and perspectives strengthens the credibility and complexity of findings.

Example: A researcher studying traditional farming practices might combine:

- Interviews with elders about agricultural knowledge (qualitative)
- Observations of planting rituals and seasonal rhythms (qualitative)
- Meteorological data on rainfall patterns and crop yields over time (quantitative)

This mix of methods and perspectives allows for deeper insight into how climate change is experienced, narrated, and responded to locally.

A YOUNG FARMER IN INDIA PLANTS SAPLINGS WITH CARE. THE TIMING MUST BE PERFECT, TOO EARLY OR TOO LATE, AND UNPREDICTABLE RAINS DRIVEN BY CLIMATE CHANGE COULD WIPE OUT HER FAMILY'S HARVEST.

Unlike statistical or software-based forms of analysis, ethnographic analysis is an interpretive, iterative process. It is not a matter of "coding and counting," but a disciplined art of reading and re-reading; of dwelling within the material; of recognising that meaning does not live only in what is said, but also in what is avoided, repeated, performed, or embodied.
Good analysis respects the slowness of the work. It avoids the temptation to rush to conclusions. Instead, it lingers in ambiguity, contradiction, silence, and texture. It asks: What are people really saying, and who gets to decide what that means?

Ethnographers do not simply *"extract"* data; they become part of a shared experience. As such, the analysis is shaped by the relationships, context, and positionality of the researcher as much as by the content of the fieldnotes themselves.
It is important to remember: analysis is not something done only at the end. The word *"research"* itself hints at its true nature, re-search: to search, and search again. Ethnographic fieldwork is a cyclical process. You analyse as you go. You listen, interpret, return, ask again, and reshape your understanding. Each conversation reshapes your questions. Each surprise challenges your assumptions. Analysis is discovery in motion.

"RESEARCH" IS TO RE-SEARCH: TO SEARCH, AND SEARCH AGAIN"

WAYS OF ANALYSING ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Pattern Recognition (Themes, Motifs, Contrasts)

- Begin with a slow, careful read-through of your fieldnotes. Don't jump to highlight what seems "important" right away.
- Look for recurring themes, repeated words, cultural metaphors, tensions, or inconsistencies. These may not be obvious at first glance.
- Pay attention to how different people speak about the same issue; gender, age, status, or worldview may shape distinct narratives.
- Use simple tools: colour-coded pens, sticky notes, and marginal notes to map emergent patterns.

2. Thick Description

- Build rich contextual narratives that go beyond the "what" to the "how" and "why."
- Describe settings, gestures, tone, atmosphere, and sensory detail, what Geertz called ***"thick description."***
- Ask yourself: What was the meaning of this moment to those who lived it? How did space, history, and social roles shape it?
- Description is not separate from analysis; it is how culture reveals itself.

3. Triangulation Without Technology

- Use cross-checking as a narrative tool. Contrast what different people say about the same event.
- Compare verbal accounts with behaviour, and with what you yourself observed.
- Contradictions are not errors; they often reveal power structures, divergent memories, or social tensions.
- Return to participants if needed: ask clarifying questions in later conversations to test your interpretations.

4. Field Reflection & Positionality

- Analyse your own reactions. When did you feel tension? When did you feel trusted? Misunderstood? Out of place?
- These moments often point to cultural thresholds, misalignments of worldview, or indicators of insider/outsider dynamics.
- Positionality is not a footnote; it is a lens through which all data is filtered.

5. Voice and Silences

- Consider who speaks and who does not. Who dominates the conversation? Who is avoided, marginalised, or left out of your notes?
- Look at what topics were skirted around, changed, or cut off.
- Silence can be protective, powerful, strategic, or imposed. What does it mean in context?

6. Cultural Logic

- Rather than judge actions by external standards, try to understand their internal coherence.
- What values, beliefs, or spiritual principles make a certain practice "make sense" within this culture?
- This is the difference between observation and interpretation from within.

7. Story as Analysis

- A well-chosen story, crafted carefully, can be the most powerful form of analysis.
- Stories show complexity, contradiction, emotion, and change. They resist reduction.
- Composite stories or anonymised narratives can honour both ethical protection and emotional truth.
- In some cases, narrative is the analysis, especially when working with oral cultures or visual traditions.

These four Burundian women in Nduta refugee camp speak of life before displacement, the journey that brought them here, and the everyday hopes that carry them forward. Their voices weave together memory and resilience, naming not just what was lost, but what is needed now to build safety, dignity, and a sense of home in exile.

EXERCISES TO SHARPEN ANALYTICAL PRACTICE

1. Scene Mapping

Choose a moment from your fieldnotes that felt confusing, emotional, or layered. Create a visual map:

- Who was present?
- What was the setting?
- What unfolded?
- Where was everyone located? Add annotations: What emotions were present? What power dynamics? What was not said? What changed?

2. Code With Colour

Return to the pages of notes. Use different colours to mark:

- BLUE for repeated ideas or phrases
- GREEN for surprises or contradictions
- ORANGE for emotional expressions or tone
- YELLOW for metaphors, idioms, or cultural references.
- Write a reflection on how these codes help you see emerging patterns.

3. Write the Story, Then Reflect

Choose one event and write it as a story (300–500 words) rich in voice, emotion, and detail. Then write a second piece (150–200 words) as a "research memo" explaining what this moment reveals about local values, relationships, or beliefs. What insights came through the story that are lost in the summary?

4. Trace the Change

Find two moments from the same participant or setting, one from early fieldwork, one from later. What changed? What stayed consistent? What do those changes tell you about trust, adaptation, or evolving dynamics?

5. Ask: Who Is This For?

Take one insight or story and try explaining it three ways:

- To a member of the community
- To a policymaker or funder
- To an academic peer, what changes in your language, tone, focus, or assumptions? What responsibilities come with each audience?

6. Construct a Cultural Logic Chart

Choose a behaviour or ritual you did not understand at first. In two columns, write:

- Column A: What you saw or heard
- Column B: What cultural logic or belief might explain it? Use this as a way to move from confusion to comprehension.
- (If possible), You can validate your interpretation by consulting with community members or cross-checking it with other sources.

7. Reflection Prompts

- How did your interpretation shift from “strange” to “understandable”?
- Did you find yourself judging at first? What helped you suspend that judgment?
- What might this chart reveal about your own cultural assumptions?

ECHO AND DISSONANCE: A GENDERED LENS

Objective:
To explore how gender shapes voice, perspective, power, and silence in ethnographic narratives.
Instructions:

1. Select two interviews or conversations from your fieldnotes involving individuals of different genders discussing the same theme: e.g., education, marriage, work, festivals, land use, spirituality, or roles in decision-making.

1. Create a comparative table using the following format on a large piece of A1 paper:

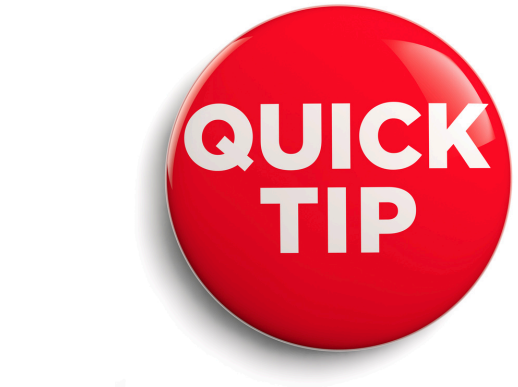
Theme/Prompt	Voice A (e.g., Woman)	Voice B (e.g., Man)	Your Reflection
Language or Metaphors Used			
Concerns or Priorities			
Role Described or Enacted			
Silences or Avoidance			
Cultural Assumptions			
Power/Agency Indicators			

Analyse the contrast:

- What are the differences in language, priorities, or emotional tone?
- Where do perspectives align or diverge?
- What might be culturally expected, and what seems to push against those expectations?
- Write a short reflection (150–200 words) on:

What this exercise revealed about gendered experiences in the field site.

- How your own gender and presence may have shaped these conversations.
- What ethical considerations arise in representing gendered voices?



This exercise can also be adapted for other axes of identity, age, caste, ethnicity, occupation, or spiritual role. The goal is not to draw binaries but to explore complexity and positionality.

COMMUNITY MAPPING
SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH THE LENS OF THOSE WHO LIVE THERE

Overview

Community mapping is a participatory technique used to understand how people perceive, use, and value space. Unlike official maps, which focus on scale, accuracy, and geography, community maps reflect lived experience, priorities, and meaning. They reveal how men and women, elders and children, farmers and herders, hunters and gatherers each "see" the land differently. In Madagascar, for example, community maps helped us understand land use, customary boundaries, sacred forests, and disputed areas. These maps tell us not only where things are but why they matter.

Community mapping allows researchers to:

- Visualise how resources (water, land, forests, markets, schools) are accessed and valued.
- Reveal power dynamics (who controls which areas, who is excluded, who decides).
- Compare different perspectives (men vs. women, adults vs. children, insiders vs. outsiders).
- Uncover hidden meanings, such as sacred spaces, taboo areas, or seasonal movement patterns.

Community Mapping in Oral Traditional Societies

In oral communities, maps are more than diagrams; they are living stories. A river may be remembered through the songs sung when crossing it, a rock through a myth, or a tree through ancestral memory. When facilitating mapping:

- Encourage narration: Ask participants to explain features through stories, proverbs, or songs.
- Capture time as well as space: Places are often remembered by events (harvests, rituals, migrations) rather than static features.
- Respect hidden knowledge: Sacred or gender-restricted spaces may not appear on maps. Their absence carries meaning — don't press for disclosure.
- Allow performance: Mapping may take place through walking, chanting, or dancing routes. Recording these (with consent) can enrich your understanding beyond the paper map.

How it is Done in the Field

1. Introduce the activity: Explain that the map is not about “accuracy” but about how participants see and understand their environment.
Encourage creativity: drawings on paper, sand, or the ground are all valid forms of expression.

2. Gather participants: Groups can be mixed or divided (men/women, adults/children) to highlight differences. In some communities, it is most effective to let each group map separately and then compare the results.

3. Provide materials: Paper, markers, sticks, or natural objects (stones, leaves) can all be used. The medium is less important than the meaning.

4. Facilitate, don’t lead: Let participants choose what to include and how to represent it. Ask open-ended questions:

- What is important in your community?
- Where do people gather?
- Which areas are safe/dangerous, fertile/barren, open/restricted?

5. Discuss the map: Once drawn, ask participants to “walk” you through the map, explaining symbols, priorities, and stories. Listen for meaning, not just locations.

6. Document respectfully: Photograph the map, take notes, but clarify ownership. Some communities may not want the map kept or shared.

7. Reflect together: Ask what the map reveals about daily life, challenges, and aspirations. Compare different maps to identify contrasts or conflicts.

Community Mapping in the Digital Age

While community maps often begin with drawings in the sand or sketches on paper, modern technology allows us to extend these conversations into digital platforms. Tools like Google Maps, Google Earth, and open-source GIS can help communities record, store, and share their knowledge in ways that reach far beyond the village. But this approach needs to be done with great caution:

- Accessibility: Smartphones and tablets can now display satellite imagery even in remote areas. Participants can trace landmarks, rivers, and paths they recognise, adding their own names and meanings.

- Layering Knowledge: Digital maps allow different layers to be added: for example, one layer for women's routes to collect water, another for children's play areas, and another for seasonal grazing grounds.

- Resource Management: Communities can use these maps to indicate the location of resources (wells, markets, health posts), areas where conflict arises (land boundaries, grazing rights), or areas where conservation is necessary (sacred forests, degraded fields).

- Visibility and Advocacy: Once digitised, maps can be shared with local authorities, NGOs, or international agencies. This can give communities a stronger voice in negotiations about land rights, development, or conservation.

Cautions

- Data Ownership: Once community knowledge is digitised, questions of who controls and shares the information become critical. Sensitive locations (sacred sites, disputed lands) may need to remain off the public record.

- Digital Divide: Not every community has reliable internet access or the skills to navigate online mapping tools. Capacity building is essential.

- Privacy and Security: Some mapping projects have unintentionally exposed vulnerable groups to conservation agencies, mining companies, and other entities seeking to exploit precious resources. Please always discuss consent and potential consequences before sharing maps.

- Digital tools (Google Maps, GPS) can be useful, but they may flatten meaning. A sacred grove may appear as just a patch of green on a satellite image.

- You can always combine digital with oral explanation to avoid losing cultural context.

Field Tip:
A simple mixed exercise is to print out a large Google Earth image of the village or region, tape it to a wall, and let participants annotate it with markers or sticky notes. This blends the familiarity of the land as they know it with the precision of modern imagery.

"Gurjar leaders map their boundaries inside Sariska Tiger Reserve, a landscape where conservation policies and cultural traditions collide."

"Rohingya women take part in a participatory mapping session with UNHCR site planners. Their input is vital in shaping safe, culturally appropriate spaces for the movement of women and girls as camp services are designed and redesigned."

Field Checklist: Key Principles of Community Mapping

✅ Reflexivity – Remember: maps show perceptions, not "the truth." Notice what is emphasised or left out.

✅ Inclusion – Who is drawing the map? Run sessions with women, men, elders, youth, and minorities. Compare perspectives.

✅ Symbolism – Pay attention to scale, colour, and symbols. A small hut or a large tree may hold deeper meaning than a road.

✅ Boundaries & Conflict – Expect contested spaces. Listen carefully, do not force agreement.

✅ Process Over Product – The stories and debates during mapping are as valuable as the final map.

✅ Ethics & Stewardship – Ask: Who owns this map? Can it be shared? Protect sensitive sites.

✅ Reciprocity – Give back: display maps locally, use them in workshops, or ensure they inform community decisions.

Community Mapping Template

Location: _____
Date: _____
Facilitator(s): _____

Participants (age, gender, role):
1. Materials Used
□ Paper □ Ground drawing □ Natural objects □ Printed satellite image □ Other: _____

2. Purpose of Mapping
□ General community layout
□ Land and resource use
□ Safe/unsafe spaces
□ Seasonal patterns
□ Conflict/boundaries
□ Other: _____

3. Features Included
(Record key items that participants chose to draw)

-
-
-

4. Observations During Mapping
- Who led the drawing?
- Who stayed quiet?
- Were there disagreements?
- What stories or symbols were emphasised?

Notes:
_____
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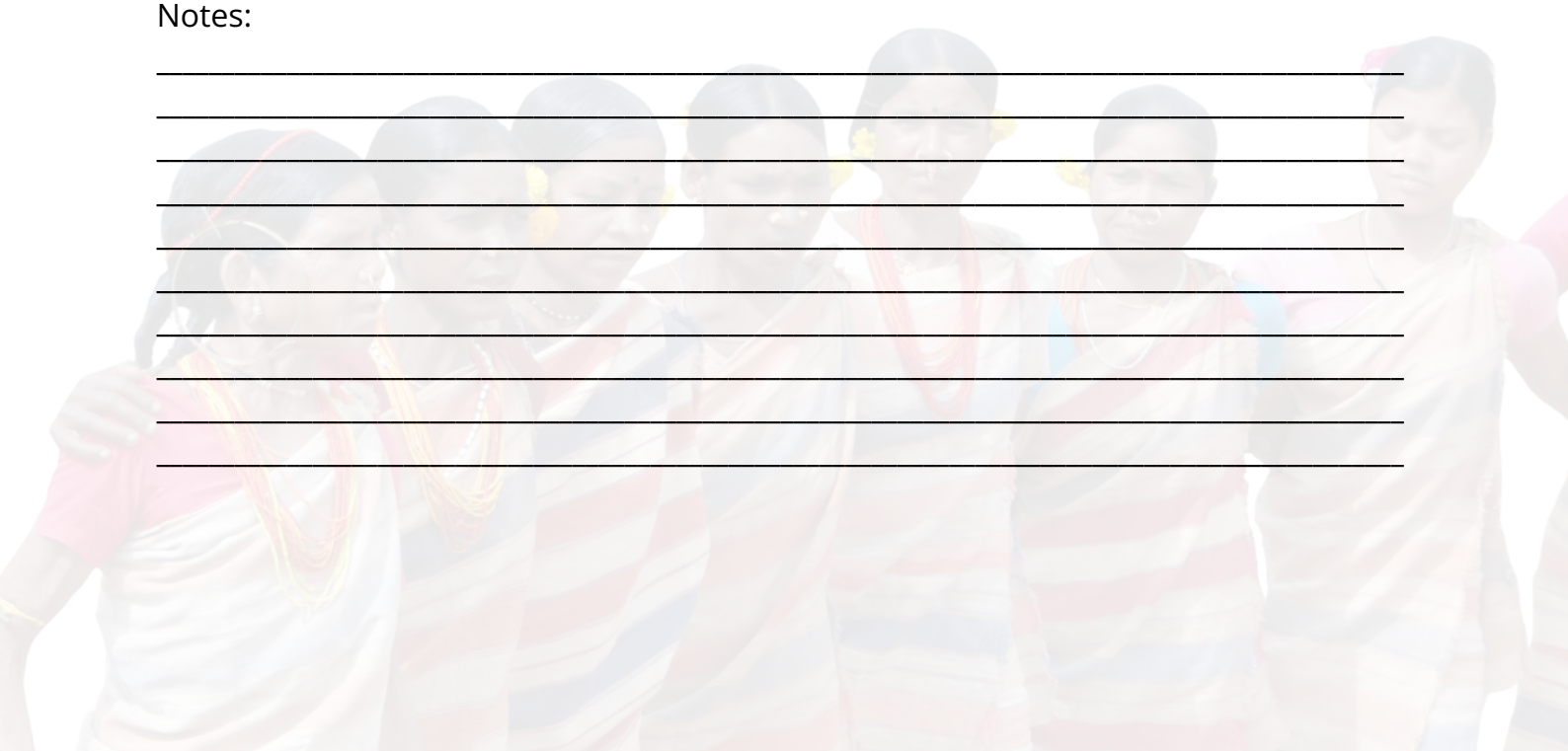

5. Reflections

- What does this map tell us about daily life, priorities, and challenges?
- What might be missing?
- How do different groups' maps compare?

6. Follow-Up

- Where will this map be kept/shared?
- What benefits will the community gain?
- Next steps :

Remember:
The conversation is as important as the map itself: Document both..

Policies & Frameworks Ensuring Communities Are Informed

There are numerous policies and frameworks, local, national, and international, that support communities' right to be informed and consulted about activities in their area. These standards apply to conservation agencies, governments, and development actors, and they provide important leverage for communities engaged in mapping. By knowing the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and related conventions, ethnographers and facilitators can help ensure that mapping is not only participatory but also rights-based.

1. Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

- Recognised in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007).
- Requires that communities be consulted before any project (e.g., conservation, extractives, development) that may affect their lands, resources, or cultural heritage.
- "Free" = without coercion, "Prior" = before decisions are made, "Informed" = with full information, "Consent" = communities have the right to say yes or no.

2. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

- Article 8(j) specifically calls for respecting, preserving, and maintaining traditional knowledge, with approval and involvement of Indigenous and local communities.
- The Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (Kunming-Montreal, 2022)also emphasise inclusive conservation with Indigenous participation.

3. ILO Convention 169 (1989)

- The only binding international treaty specifically addressing Indigenous peoples' rights.
- Requires states to consult Indigenous peoples on any legislative or administrative measures that affect them, including conservation.

4. UNESCO World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage Conventions

- Insist on community participation in identifying, nominating, and managing heritage sites.
- Communities must be informed and involved, not just treated as "stakeholders."

5. National Environmental & Conservation Laws

- Many countries have Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) laws that require community consultation before protected areas, reserves, or large-scale projects are approved.
- Example: India's Forest Rights Act (2006) recognises the rights of forest-dwelling communities to be consulted before conservation measures are imposed.
- Example: The EU's Aarhus Convention (1998) gives communities the right to access information, participate in decision-making, and access justice on environmental matters.

6. Agency-Level Safeguards

- IUCN: Its 2016 Policy on Biodiversity Conservation and Indigenous Peoples' Rights explicitly supports FPIC and co-management of protected areas.
- World Bank: Has environmental and social safeguards (ESS7) that require consultation with Indigenous peoples in projects it funds.
- UNDP, FAO, UNHCR: All have social and environmental safeguards that include information-sharing and community participation as minimum standards.

Key Points to Remember

- Communities have the right to know about conservation activities that affect their land, resources, and culture.

- Consultation is not optional: under international law (UNDRIP, ILO 169, CBD), conservation agencies must provide clear, accessible, culturally appropriate information.

- Consent matters: in principle, communities should not only be informed but also have the right to accept or reject activities (FPIC).

- Information should be reciprocal: mapping, meetings, and workshops are not just for gathering data from communities but to ensure they understand the plans affecting them.

In practice, many conservation and development projects still fail to fully inform or consult communities, leading to what critics call *"fortress conservation."* Community mapping exercises can become a way to "push back" making visible what communities value, and asserting their right to be heard.

ETHNOGRAPHY GLOSSARY

Term	Meaning
Yarning	An Indigenous Australian method of sharing knowledge through open conversation; circular, respectful, and relational rather than interrogative.
Oral Traditionalist	A person who carries and transmits knowledge, history, and identity through spoken word, song, or performance rather than writing.
Participant Observation	Immersing in community life to both observe and take part in daily practices for deeper understanding.
Fieldnotes	Written records of observations, conversations, and reflections from fieldwork; the raw material of analysis.
Thick Description	Rich, layered accounts that capture both actions and the meanings behind them (Clifford Geertz).
Reflexivity	Recognising how your own identity, bias, and presence shape the research process and outcomes.
Emic Perspective	Understanding culture from the insider's view, how members interpret and explain their own practices.
Etic Perspective	An outsider's analytical lens for interpreting cultural practices, often comparative or theoretical.
Key Informant	A trusted community member who offers guidance, insights, and access to cultural knowledge.
Cultural Broker	A person who mediates between two cultural worlds, helping each side understand the other.
Storywork	Using stories as both method and knowledge, recognising them as carriers of teaching, ethics, and memory.

Positionality	Awareness of how one's background (gender, class, race, education, etc.) shapes interactions and interpretations.
Situated Knowledge	The idea that knowledge always comes from a specific social/cultural position, never fully objective.
Life History	Documenting an individual's personal story to illuminate wider cultural or historical contexts.
Ritual	A repeated symbolic act that encodes meaning, belief, and identity in cultural life.
Embodied Knowledge	Knowledge carried in the body and its practices (dance, craft, ritual) rather than text alone.
Ethnographic Authority	The balance between interpreting a culture and allowing people to speak for themselves.
Interlocutor	A person with whom the ethnographer engages in dialogue to gather perspectives.
Autoethnography	Ethnography that draws on the researcher's own personal experiences as cultural data.
Polyvocality	Including multiple voices and perspectives instead of presenting a single, authoritative account.
Agency	The capacity of individuals or groups to act independently and make their own choices, even within structures of power.
Social Construct	An idea or practice created and maintained by society, not a natural fact (e.g., race, gender roles).
Power Dynamics	The ways authority, influence, and inequality shape relationships in the field and in cultural practices.
Gatekeeper	A person who controls access to a community, group, or resource; often the first step in negotiating entry for fieldwork.

Informed Consent	Ethical requirement to ensure participants understand and agree to the research and its potential uses.
Ethnographic Present	The problematic tendency to describe cultures as timeless or unchanging, without recognising history and change.
Othering	Viewing or portraying people as fundamentally different or alien often reinforces stereotypes or inequality.
Habitus	Deeply ingrained habits, skills, and ways of thinking shaped by culture and social position (Pierre Bourdieu).
Symbolic Interaction	Everyday social exchanges that carry meaning and reinforce cultural norms.
Reciprocity	The obligation to give something back (time, respect, benefit) to the communities being studied.
Interpretive Anthropology	A perspective that sees culture as a system of symbols and meanings (Geertz).
Ethnoscience / Folk Taxonomy	How communities categorise and classify the world (plants, animals, kinship, illness, etc.) according to their own systems of knowledge.
Grounded Theory	Building theory from the bottom up, directly from field data, rather than applying pre-set frameworks.
Triangulation	Using multiple sources or methods (interviews, observation, documents) to cross-check findings and strengthen validity.
Liminality	The in-between state during rituals or transitions, when normal structures are suspended (Victor Turner).
Gift Economy	An exchange system based on giving and obligation rather than market trade; important in many ethnographic contexts.

Fortress Conservation	A model of conservation that seeks to protect nature by excluding people, often through evictions, fenced reserves, and militarised enforcement. Popularised by Dan Brockington (2002), the term critiques top-down approaches that treat communities as threats rather than partners, ignoring Indigenous rights and traditional stewardship.
Inclusive Conservation	An approach to conservation that recognises Indigenous and local communities as partners and custodians of biodiversity. It is guided by principles such as Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), co-management of protected areas, and respect for customary rights and traditional knowledge. Rather than excluding people, inclusive conservation supports livelihoods, cultural practices, and community-led stewardship as essential to protecting ecosystems.
Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM)	A conservation model where communities manage local resources (forests, wildlife, fisheries) with legal recognition and decision-making power. Originating in Southern Africa in the 1980s–90s, it links conservation with livelihood benefits.
Nature-Based Solutions (NbS)	A current global policy term (IUCN, UN) promoting the use of ecosystems to address climate and development challenges. Criticised if used to justify land grabs without FPIC, but potentially empowering when communities lead.
Green Grabbing	A critical term describing the appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends (carbon markets, eco-tourism, conservation areas) often at the expense of local people. Seen as the “green” version of historical land grabs.
30x30	A global biodiversity target (protect 30% of Earth’s land and sea by 2030). Ambitious, but controversial: without safeguards, it risks fueling exclusionary conservation and large-scale displacement.

Part Three: The Future of Ethnographic Story Telling

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Fading Cultures

Bringing Heritage Stories to Life

Through the people who live them