

Ruth Behar Event Wrap-Up April 6, 2016

Thank you for your support of the event with Ruth Behar on April 6, 2016. We had a great turnout for the Ethnographic Writing Workshop in the morning, and for the talk, "Between Two Cubas," in the evening. I write with a short recap of the event, and with photos. If you would like to post these photos on your department or program website, that would be great. Please also include a link back to Blackbird Arts & Research's webpage (<http://blackbirdarts.org/projects>) – where there is a slide show of the photos. A video of Ruth Behar's talk is forthcoming, and will also be posted on Blackbird's website!



Ethnographic Writing Workshop – 9:30 – 11:30AM in the Center for British and Irish Studies.

The workshop included an interdisciplinary group of around 35 people, from departments and programs including Anthropology, English, Geography, Writing and Rhetoric, Art and Art History, Spanish and Portuguese, and History. All participants submitted a form expressing their interest and experience with ethnographic writing – ranging from beginning to more experienced. The group included students at the undergraduate and graduate level as well as faculty. Whole Foods catered the workshop for breakfast.

Behar led the group through a workshop that included reviewing the history of ethnographic writing, from Malinowski to Hurston. Then, she linked our contemporary writing and ethnographic practices in both academia and in broader literatures. One of the liveliest parts of the workshop was when Behar delivered her “Writing Tips.” These included practical tips for making the time to write and finding people to share your writing with, as well as more personal tips including speaking to our ancestors before beginning. Participants then completed a writing exercise on the topic of a difficult situation. The exercise prompt encouraged participants to experiment with form – such as varying sentence length, and to follow the direction of their writing – even if this took them to unexpected places. At the end, a few participants shared their writing examples and their experiences in the process of writing.

Ruth Behar’s Visit with Grad Seminar in Anthropology

Following the workshop, Behar visited the Graduate Seminar in Anthropology with Carole McGranahan. Students had read Behar’s work for this week, and asked questions about her work then and now.

“Between Two Cubas,” Talk by Ruth Behar, 5PM in the Center for British and Irish Studies

The attendance for the talk was approximately 130 people. Whole Foods catered the event. The library provided video recording of the event, which will be posted online soon. (<http://blackbirdarts.org/projects>)

Carole McGranahan introduced Ruth Behar. McGranahan discussed Behar’s significant role in Anthropology. Drawing from her book, *The Vulnerable Observer*, McGranahan highlighted the importance not only of anthropology, but “anthropology that breaks your heart.” Anthropology that means something and that touches our emotions as well as our intellect. McGranahan reflected on how Behar’s voice and theory in anthropology has played a central role in the discipline – including the formation of feminist ethnography and re-canonization of anthropological texts. McGranahan also reflected on her time as a graduate student at the University of Michigan, where Ruth Behar is a Professor. She explains how she did not take Behar’s class, “Ethnographic Writing,” because she had been encouraged not to think of anthropology as having anything to do with writing. However, she found the syllabus and did all of the work anyway! Now as a Professor in the Anthropology Department, she works with students (many of whom were at the morning workshop) and facilitates engagement with a full range of anthropological theories and texts.

Behar began her talk by adding the subtitle, “notes of a native daughter,” which signaled the tension between the anthropological and the personal. Through the talk, Behar discussed the history of Cuba and its relationship with the United States. She tied in stories of her own childhood in Cuba, and of her family’s departure. She told us the story of how as a young anthropologist she had wanted to go to Cuba for research, but how instead, she focused her dissertation research on a village in Spain. Later, Behar did return to Cuba and began a path toward reckoning her professional role as anthropologist with the personal

roles, especially as a daughter of parents who have long said they will never return to Cuba. In telling the history of Cuba, Behar highlighted tensions between the fantasy of Cuba, upheld in much of the American imagination, and of the lived realities. She drew on a vast archive of photographs and posters to show how this happened on a broad scale. Then, she told us more about her own family and friends, and their lives and histories. A particularly poignant moment was when she introduced us to her former neighbors in the apartment building in Vedado, an area near Havana proper. In many ways, she explained, this family was the mirror of her own family. Perhaps what her life might have been like if she had stayed in Cuba. The multigenerational family lives in one apartment – common in Cuba with its shortage of housing. They rent another to foreigners in order to make enough income to live somewhat comfortably. Behar visits her former neighbors regularly, and in the talk she reflected how it is through these visits that she has come to understand more about herself and Cuba. Behar also highlighted the work of artists, including Rolando Esteves, and how their work reflects their experiences and their hopes for the future. The talk concluded with time for questions and answers, and Behar shared her thoughts on current change in Cuba.

Thank you to our sponsors!

I would like to thank all of our sponsors! I appreciate your enthusiasm for the event, and for your financial contributions, which made the event possible.

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