Discussion Questions—Nancy Scheper-Hughes

1. Why do you think that Scheper-Hughes begins her book Death without Weeping (from which I excerpted your e-reserve) with a highly reflexive/confessional/personalized account in which she herself is a central figure? Is her goal the same as that of Clifford Geertz in his article on the Balinese cockfight?
2. Discuss why Scheper-Hughes does not embrace Boas’s notion of cultural relativism (which she sometimes refers to as “anthropological relativism”). Why, in addition, does she oppose the approach of the structural-functionalists? Find parts of the text in which she critiques (sometimes in a veiled way) these two anthropological approaches. Do you agree that an anthropology focused on cultural relativism and structural-functionalism has, up to now, been driven by “largely androcentric concerns” (Scheper-Hughes 1992:21)? Would you agree that “a more ‘womanly’ anthropology” is in order (Scheper-Hughes 1992:21)?
3. How is S-H’s activism different from the activism of earlier American anthropologists like Mead, Boas, or Benedict?
4. What are Nancy Scheper-Hughes’s views of post-modernism?
5. In the exegesis assigned for Scheper-Hughes, Susan Trencher finds fault with S-H’s, who took her “woman-centered anthropology” to South Africa. Discuss her critique of S-H’s militant and engaged anthropology.