

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODS

Anthropology 1610 / Fall 2015

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Class meets Mondays 10:00am to
noon in Tozzer 203.

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00am to
noon (please sign up in advance;
there is a sign-up sheet on my door)
or by appointment.

Extensive field research has defined social anthropology since the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite the long-lived centrality of field research to the discipline, anthropologists have continuously reexamined the accuracy, analytical relevance, and ethical implications of their methodological repertoire. Theoretical innovation in tandem with the historical transformations of the world's cultural systems prompted fieldworkers to rethink what makes ethnographic methods. The course begins by introducing students to some of the key theoretical questions that anthropologists have raised recently about the nature of "fieldwork" in the contemporary world. For example: How can ethnographic research capture the dynamics of globalization? Can multi-sited fieldwork denaturalize notions of static "culture" or reveal how the mobility of people and goods produce local social relations? Or, how can we explore the ways in which local, national and global cultural elements shape the lived experiences of our research interlocutors? The course introduces concrete ways of designing research projects, undertaking active participant observation, fieldnote-writing and interviewing, as well as genealogies, time surveys, space analysis, archival research and the collection of artifacts. These methods will also raise a set of ethical questions about the kinds of social rapport that anthropologists and their field informants might cultivate during research. We explore the myriad identities and subjectivities produced through the fieldwork encounter with a particular focus on race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. The last part of the course focuses on how anthropologists transform field data into ethnographic writing.

Course Requirements

Grades will reflect the student's level of engagement with the readings, lectures, and other assignments of the course as well as the extent to which the student acquires critical knowledge and skills throughout the year. During this course, students will develop their own field research projects in Boston/Cambridge. Research topics and sites must be chosen in conversation with the professor and/or the teaching fellows early in the semester. In order to perform well in this course, it is essential that you choose a research topic and a research site that fascinate you and that will motivate you to carry out individual fieldwork outside the classroom.

- ❑ *Attendance, Participation, and Review Questions (20%).* Students are expected to participate in class discussions by formulating questions, responses, and critiques relevant to the assigned readings. Attendance is mandatory. Please note that you will not earn any points for attending classes without participating. But you will lose points for absences. More than two absences will result in the loss of 5% from the final grade and more than four absences in the loss of 10%. To help you participate actively in class discussions, I would like you to write as you read. For each class, please prepare a short review question concerning one or more of the assigned readings.

A good review question should very briefly sum up a selected argument of the reading(s). Then, it should unpack the argument critically, either by treating it on its own terms or by comparing it to issues emerging in discussions, lectures, and other readings covered for this class. Every class, I will call on two students to begin discussion by reading their review questions. I might also ask that you submit all your review questions at the end of the semester.

- ❑ *Research proposal* (20%). Each student must submit a short proposal for a research project to be carried out individually throughout this course. The proposal should be one page, single-spaced. Include a general description of the phenomenon you wish to explore, a conceptual problem that this phenomenon raises, a main research question, and a list of methods that you hope to use. On a separate page, please include 10 relevant bibliographic references. Proposals are due *September 21*.
- ❑ *Participant observation report* (20%). For this exercise, each student will spend two hours in the chosen field site. During the first hour, you will observe interactions passively, without necessarily participating. During the second hour, you will also participate by asking questions or sharing specific tasks. Jot down what you observe. When you return to your desk, type up extensive field notes on your observations. Please submit three items: (i) photocopies of your field jottings, (ii) a printout of your expansive field notes, and (iii) a short 500-word report reflecting on the significance of this data for your project and on what you learned from this exercise. This report is due *October 5*.
- ❑ *Interviewing report* (20 %). For this exercise, each student will spend one hour interviewing a key informant in the chosen field site. The interview can focus on a specific topic, event, or experience or it may be a more general life-history interview. Audio-tape the interview and transcribe it. Please submit two items: (i) a printout of the interview transcript, and (ii) a short 500-word report reflecting on the context and relevance of the data you obtained through this interview and on what you learned from this exercise. This report is due *October 26*.
- ❑ *Artifact analysis* (20%). For this exercise, you must collect and photograph an artifact that is representative of the field site you chose to work in. Gather as much data as you can about this artifact from your informants. Please submit three items: (i) a large, clear photograph of your artifact, (ii) a short 100-word museum-like caption describing your artifact, and (iii) a 500-word report on the social and historical significance of this object, its relevance to your project, and on what you learned from this exercise. This report is due *November 9*.

Required Texts

The following texts are available for purchase at the Coop Bookstore and on a three-hour reserve at the Tozzer Library.

- ❑ Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ❑ West, Harry G. 2007. *Ethnographic Sorcery*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ❑ Taussig, Michael. *I Swear I Saw This: Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Weekly Schedule

WEEK 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

September 2

No readings

Film: “Savage Memory” (2011) by Zachary Stuart & Kelly Thomson [77 min]

WEEK 2 ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIELDWORK: SITE, SCALE, CONTEXT

September 14

- ❑ Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. Introduction: The Subject, Method and Scope. In Malinowski, B. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Pp. 1-26. London: Routledge.
- ❑ Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson. 1997. “Disciplines and Practices: ‘The Field’ as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology.” In Gupta A. and J. Ferguson (ed.) *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. Pp. 1-40.
- ❑ Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff. 2003. “Ethnography on an Awkward Scale: Postcolonial Anthropology and the Violence of Abstraction.” *Ethnography* 4(2): 147-179.
- ❑ Marcus, George E. 1998. “Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography.” In Marcus, G. *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*. Pp. 79-99. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

PART I UNDERTAKING ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK

WEEK 3 DESIGNING PROJECTS: METHOD AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

September 21

- ❑ Locke, Lawrence F. 2000. “Preparation of Proposals for Qualitative Research.” In L. Locke *Proposals that Work: A Guide for Planning Dissertations and Grant Proposals*. Pp. 91-117. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- ❑ American Anthropological Association. 2002. “Code of Ethics.” In A. Robben and J. Sluka (eds) *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*. Pp. 359-364, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- ❑ Bourgois, Phillipe. 2012. “Confronting the Ethnics of Ethnography: Lessons From Fieldwork in Central America.” In A. Robben and J. Sluka (eds) *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, Pp. 318-330, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Research Proposal Due

WEEK 4
September 28

PARTICIPATING, OBSERVING, AND WRITING FIELDNOTES

- ❑ Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In C. Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Pp. 1-30. New York: Basic Books.
- ❑ Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Read Chapters 2 & 3]

WEEK 5
October 5

INTERVIEWING, LIFE STORIES, GENEALOGIES

- ❑ Bourdieu, Pierre. 1987. "The Biographical Illusion." Working Papers and Proceedings of the Center for Psychological Studies. Chicago.
- ❑ O'Rielly, Karen. 2005. "Interviews: Asking Questions of Individuals and Groups." In K. O'Rielly *Ethnographic Methods*. Pp. 112-138. New York: Routledge.
- ❑ Barnes, John. 1978 [1967]. "Genealogies." In A. L. Epstein (ed.) *The Craft of Social Anthropology*. Pp. 107-127. New Brunswick: Transaction.
- ❑ Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Read Chapters 5]

Participant Observation Exercise Due

WEEK 6
October 19

CRAFTING ARCHIVES: TEXTS, ARTIFACTS & PHOTOGRAPHS

- ❑ Benjamin, Walter. 2008. "Little History of Photography." In W. Benjamin *The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*. Pp. 274-298. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- ❑ O'Rielly, Karen. 2005. "Visual Data and Other Things." In O'Rielly, K. *Ethnographic Methods*. Pp. 157-174. New York: Routledge.
- ❑ Schensul, Jean J. and Margaret D. LeCompte. 2013. "Defining, Collecting, Cataloging, and Analyzing Artifacts." In J. J. Schensul and M. D. LeCompte (eds), *Specialized Ethnographic Methods: A Mixed Methods Approach*. Pp. 1-49. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

WEEK 7
October 26

SPACE, TIME, AND NETWORKS

- ❑ Gross, Daniel. 1984. "Time Allocation." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13: 519-558.
- ❑ Kusenbach, Margarethe. 2003. "Street Phenomenology: The Go-Along as Ethnographic Research Tool." *Ethnography* 4: 454-485.
- ❑ Bestor, Theodor. 2003. "Inquisitive Observation: Following Networks in Urban Fieldwork" In T. C. Bestor, P. G. Steinhoff, and V. L. Bestor (eds) *Doing Fieldwork in Japan*. Pp. 317-334. University of Hawaii Press.

Interview Exercise Due

PART II THE INTERSUBJECTIVE DYNAMICS OF FIELDWORK

WEEK 8
November 2

BODY, AFFECT & LANGUAGE IN THE FIELD

- ❑ Mauss, Marcel. 1973 (1935). "Techniques of the Body." *Economy and Society* 2: 70-88.
- ❑ Herzfeld, Michael. 2009. "The Cultural Politics of Gesture Reflections on the Embodiment of Ethnographic Practice." *Ethnography* 10(2): 131-152.
- ❑ Csordas, Thomas J. 2012. "Transmutation of Sensibilities: Empathy, Intuition, Revelation." In A. Robben and J. Sluka, *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*. Pp. 540-546. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

WEEK 9
November 9

RACE, SEX AND GENDER IN THE FIELD

- ❑ Walters, Delores. 1996. "Cast among Outcastes: Interpreting Sexual Orientation, Racial, and Gender Identity in the Yemen Arab Republic." In E. Lewin and W. L. Leep (eds) *Out in the Field: Reflections of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists*. Pp. 58-69. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- ❑ Newton, Esther. 2000. "My Best Informant's Dress: The Erotic Equation in Fieldwork." In E. Newton *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay: Personal Essays, Public Ideas*. Pp. 243-257. Durham: Duke University Press.
- ❑ Killick, Andrew P. 1995. "The Penetrating Intellect: On Being White, Male, and Straight in Korea." In D. Kulick and M. Wilson (eds) *Taboo: Sex, Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*. Pp. 76-106. New York: Routledge.

Artifact Analysis Exercise Due

- WEEK 10 WHOSE REALITY? KNOWLEDGE AND “TRUTH” IN THE FIELD
November 16
- ❑ West, Harry G. 2007. *Ethnographic Sorcery*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

PART III MEMORY, WRITING, AND THE TENSES OF ETHNOGRAPHY

- WEEK 11 FROM FIELDNOTES TO “ETHNOGRAPHY”
November 23
- ❑ Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Read Chapters 6 and 7]
 - ❑ Boellstorff, Tom. 2010. “Queer Techne: Two Theses on Methodology and Queer Studies.” In K. Brown and C. Nash (eds) *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. Pp. 215-230. Farnham: Ashgate.
- WEEK 12 RECALLING EXPERIENCE: ETHNOGRAPHY AS TIME-TRAVELLING
November 30
- ❑ Taussig, Michael. *I Swear I Saw This: Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.