

# Doing Cultural Anthropology

FIELDWORK



# ETHNOGRAPHY

- THE GATHERING AND INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATION BASED ON INTENSIVE FIRST HAND STUDY OF A PARTICULAR CULTURE
- WRITTEN REPORT OF THIS STUDY

# ETHICAL RESEARCH

- CREATING SIMULATED LABORATORY SITUATIONS IS TECHNICALLY AND ETHICALLY LIMITING
- HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION
- ASK PERMISSION TO STUDY CULTURAL GROUP
- TODAY IT IS IMPORTANT TO OBTAIN GOVERNMENT APPROVAL

# FIELDWORK

- THE FIRSTHAND SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION OF A SOCIETY,
- Stay in the “Field”/with cultural group at least 1 year
- Masters/Doctoral Research is first field work
- Altogether fieldwork should be between 18 months and 2 years



# Participant Observation

- Fieldwork technique
- Involves gathering cultural data by observing people's behavior and participating in their lives
- Like a child—learning the rules of another culture
- Learning what things mean
- Ask: What is really going on here?

# Doing Participant Observation

- Goal is to gather as much information as possible about a particular culture
- Anthropologist observe, listen to and ask questions of the natives they study
- Spend a year or two with people being a continuous part of their lives
- Answers to questions are “common sense” “natural” to members of another culture

# Purpose of Participant Observation

- Facilitates an understanding of the difference between what people say and what they actually do
- Aware of own cultural assumptions and cultural knowledge
- Must put them aside
- Cultural relativism



# Advantages of Participant Observation

- Data outside of research situation
- Data not otherwise available
- Ability to see culture from inside
- Helps to establish rapport and trust
- Life Changing Experience
- Thrice Born Cultural Anthropologist

# Disadvantages of Participant Observation

- People do not trust you and therefore will not talk to you
- You work with a small number of consultants
- People lie to you
- Not all life changing experiences are good

# Critical Importance

- Establish rapport and therefore trust
- Without trust, fieldwork will not go forward
- Can't fake rapport
- Must be genuine
- Must be yourself
- Can handle difficult people in positive ways



# Techniques of Fieldwork

- Interviewing both standard, i.e., with questionnaire and conversational style
- Photography and Filming
- Genealogies
- Life Histories
- Census
- Using historical archives and other relevant records



# Holistic Perspective

- See Chapter 1/Slides Introduction for definition of holistic
- Culture is seen as system of interrelated patterns.
- Example: Ways people make a living shapes marriage patterns
- Ex. Enculturation—What sort of person is the child socialized to be and Why



# Malinowski and Boas

- Set out to grasp native's point of view objectively and without bias
- Goal based on positivism—a philosophical system concerned with positive facts and phenomena excluding speculation on origins or ultimate causes

# Empirical Science

- Objective reality was also based on empirical science an approach to understanding phenomena based on the attempts to observe and record a presumed objective reality
- What is objective reality?

# Changing Directions in Ethnography

- Discovering an objective reality has become the subject of intense reflection and debate about the goals of anthropology
- Postmodernism—a theoretical perspective focusing on issues of power and voice.
- Suggests that anthropological accounts are partial truths reflecting on the background, training and social position of their authors

# Results of Postmodernism

- Ethnographers to day are more sensitive to how their own status, personality, and cultural background can affect their interpretations and representations of a culture
- Ethnographies are “stories” and the ethnographer’s voice should be included with many other possible representations

# Fieldwork and Postmodernism

- Fieldwork is viewed more as a dialogue, a co-production between the ethnographer and the native informant
- Unreflective, simplistic and ethnocentric view of a culture draws attention from the reality of these cultures and may lead to neglecting other areas of study

# Theoretical Perspectives

- Depending on their theoretical persuasions, anthropologists have different views of postmodernism
- Some see it as a threat to anthropology's status as a science or passing fad
- Some see it as an important contribution to making cultural representation a more accurate reflection of personal and collective experience



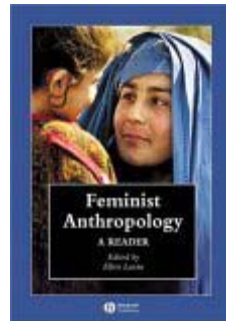
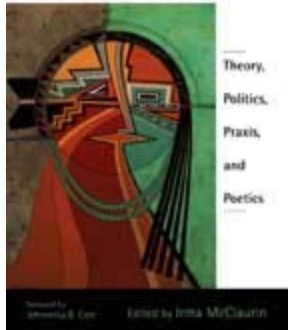
# Influences of Feminist Anthropology

- Questioning the power of gender bias in both ethnography and cultural theory
- Historically, men who had limited access to women's lives performed much of the fieldwork
- Traditionally assumed that men performed the most important cultural activities
- Malinowski's work in the Trobriand Island almost ignores women's gift exchange

# Andocentric Bias

- By only representing the male view, culture appears to be more homogeneous than it really is and may perpetuate the oppression of women by ignoring their own perspectives
- Andocentric Bias—the distortion in anthropological theory and ethnography focusing primarily on male activities or male perceptions of female activities.

# BLACK FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY



# Ethics of Fieldwork

- AAA Code of Ethics
- Protect People We Study, Respect Their Privacy & Dignity, Obtain Informal Consent
- Act as Advocates
- Report Human Rights Violation
- Cause no harm
- Do not disrupt the culture
- Gift Giving to Consultants

# Key Consultant

- Accurate data is derived from human beings
- Consultant—a person through whom anthropologists gather cultural data
- Key Consultant—a person particularly knowledgeable about his or her own culture who is a major source of the anthropologist's information



# Consultant Information

- Informant will give information to construct a genealogy—a family history; a kinship chart
- Interpreter
- Teach Cultural Anthropologist the language
- Checks with key informant what other people tell cultural anthropologist





# New Role For Ethnographer

- Contrary to situation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, anthropology is well-understood in many of the societies that anthropologist study
- Members of these societies are attending universities and some are becoming anthropologists
- Some members of studied societies resent anthropological representation of themselves
- Some cases ethnographic data are viewed as useful, serving as a basis for a resurgence of cultural identity and revitalization of traditional culture

