Ethnographic Methods

ANTH 380

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Semester: Fall 2010

Location: Asbury Hall 206

Time: 2:20-3:50 Monday and Wednesday

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***I have a general idea about their life and some acquaintance with their language, and if I can somehow only “document” all this, I’ll have valuable material.***

Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*

*Yes, we go and talk to people. Some of these people even have the patience and kindness and generosity to talk to us. We try to listen well. We write fieldnotes about all the things we’ve misunderstood,…And then it is time to pack our suitcases and return home. And so begins our work, our hardest work—to bring the ethnographic moment back, to resurrect it, to communicate the distance, which too quickly starts to feel like an abyss, between what we saw and hear and our inability, finally, to do justice to it in our representations.*

Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer*

**COURSE INTRODUCTION:**

This class examines qualitative methods used in anthropology, focusing primarily on participant-observation, on asking questions, on writing fieldnotes, and on the transformation of these primary field data into written ethnographic documents. Ethnography is a fundamental part of anthropology. Ethnography “the writing of culture” is used in two contrasting senses, referring both to the method of qualitative research characterized by living and working among people through the process of participant observation and to the product of this research: the written account. This course will focus both on the process of producing, reading and interpreting written accounts of culture, and on the methodology required for ethnographic research. Readings on specific research methods will contribute to the formulation of a research proposal to be presented at the end of the semester. Recent literature on the theoretical and ethical aspects of these methods will also be considered in the context of these projects.

**COURSE GOALS:**

This course has several primary objectives. One goal is to familiarize you with the methodological debates concerning qualitative research. The second is to give you a number of practical, applied tools during the course of the semester with which you will use in ethnographic projects. The third objective is to allow you to practice and implement these tools. The fourth is to read and discuss work by anthropologists, especially focusing on the lessons they learned and the challenges they faced. The final goal is to help you understand how to move from project design, to project implementation, to data analysis and reporting.

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

* *Being Ethnographic: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Ethnography*, Raymond Madden, SAGE Publications, 2010.
* *Ethnographic Fieldwork*, Robben and Sluka, Blackwell Publishing, 2007
* *Righteous Dopefiend*, Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg, University of California Press, 2009
* *Translated Woman* (2nd ed), Ruth Behar, Beacon Press, 2003

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

1. Portfolio
   1. Mini-ethnographic assignments—Throughout the semester you’ll do assignments that are designed to give you practice using specific techniques or methods for data collection (4 assignments worth 12.5% each)
2. Research Proposal (15%). The course will culminate in a formal proposal or plan for future research. The proposal could be an early version of a senior thesis or grant proposal. It should include a discussion of your research question, the motivation and background for that question, a brief literature review, and a thorough defense of your choice of research methodology. You will need to justify your methods using the readings from the course.
   1. The written proposal should address key issues discussed throughout the semester as they connect with your own project proposal (10%)
   2. We will discuss each proposal in class. Be prepared to give a brief “defense” of your proposal and also be prepared to offer feedback on the proposals of your classmates (5%)
3. *Thoughtful* Participation (10%)---remember, this is a seminar-style course in which this portion of your grade is based on frequent quality participation where listening is just as important as speaking. This includes active listening, responding to your classmates in respectful and engaging ways; also making comments that connect with course readings and demonstrate that you have read and thought about the material for the day’s discussion. While there are assigned discussion leaders, you should be prepared to fulfill this role on any given day—this requires that you come to class having finished the reading and thought about possible questions and comments to share with the class.
4. Exams (10% each). Exam questions will require a thoughtful analysis of assigned readings, course discussions and lectures.

Your final grade for the course will be based on the following:

* Portfolio…..….…………….……………50%
* Research Proposal....…………………….15%
* Participation..…..………………………..10%
* Exams.…………………………………...20%

TOTAL 100%

**GRADING SCALE:**

A 94%+ A- 90-93%

B+ 87-89% B 84-86% B- 80-83%

C+ 77-79% C 74-76% C- 70-73%

D+ 67-69% D 64-66% D- 60-63%

F 59%-

A note on graded materials—you must wait at least 24 hours (but no more than 1 week) before coming to see me about a grade you received on any class material. I am available for consultation regarding any graded assignment only after you have taken sufficient time to read through both your original work and my comments. Keep in mind that reviewing graded material means a possible increase OR decrease in the original grade, so be sure to look over your work carefully before bringing it to my attention for a second time.

The following information will help you better understand the criteria for graded material:

A= exceptionally thought-provoking, original, creative in both content and manner of presentation, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials which are fully supported.

B= presents a solid understanding of the subject matter and an ability to handle the issues and materials encountered in the subject with only minor errors.

C= demonstrates an adequate understanding of the subject matter with central ideas present, but too general, repetitious and not clearly supported or integrated with evidence and details.

D= a minimally acceptable performance with a confusing central idea and lacking details. Parts of the assignment are missing and/or incomplete.

F= shows lack of effort and minimal comprehension of material with major mechanical errors, no thesis, and misuse of key concepts.

**Attendance:**

Regular attendance and active class participation is required. Late arrivals will not be tolerated. Class attendance will be taken at the beginning of the period, and it is your responsibility to make sure you receive credit for your attendance if you arrive after attendance is taken. Irregular attendance and repeated late arrivals will result in the lowering of the final course grade.

**Class Preparation:**

Your class preparation is essential to your required active participation in the course. You must complete assigned readings **before** the class period for which they are assigned. You must come to class with prepared questions and comments regarding the assigned readings (see participation in course requirements). This will help ensure your active participation in class.

Things to think about regarding the readings: What was the author’s main point/thesis? How does this relate to the class topic? What connection can you make between the reading and your own life?

**Assignment Policy:**

It is important that students pay close attention to the details on assignments, which will be provided in handouts. Hard copy assignments must be turned in **NUMBERED AND STAPLED** (electronic copies must also have page numbers—also it is the students responsibility to make sure their assignment is properly attached to the email). All assignments are due at the beginning of the class session, unless otherwise noted. Late assignments will not be accepted without a medical excuse or otherwise documented emergency. The instructor retains the right to lower the grade on any late assignment accepted. If you must miss class on the day an assignment is due, it is your responsibility to turn the assignment in early.

**Academic Dishonesty:**

All work must be **your own**. You must give credit to **any** information and/or ideas that you use that are not your own by citing it in your work. Failing to do so will be perceived as plagiarism resulting in a zero on the assignment and possible additional penalties to be decided by the instructor. If you are unfamiliar with proper citation procedures, you should consult the W center and/or Diana Hacker’s *A Pocket Style Manual*.

**Questions???**

I encourage all of my students to take advantage of my office hours, either for questions, concerns, or just “drop-in” discussions. Please feel free to stop by Asbury Hall 219, and if the “official” hours are not convenient or you would like to ensure yourself a specific block of time, we can set up an appointment (office phone x4372 or email acastaneda@depauw.edu).

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

The course schedule is designed to alternate weeks, bridging larger themes on theory/practice with active learning assignments. Both readings and activities build upon one another and lead up to the final project proposal.

**WEEK 1:** Beginning and History: What is ethnography? What makes ethnographic research unique?

August 25th

Course introductions and expectations.

**WEEK 2:** Ethnography and Ethics—the ethical responsibilities of ethnographers and the process of informed consent.

August 30th

READ: Robben and Sluka PART 1 pgs. 29-58 and PART VI pgs. 271-330; Madden ch. 1

September 1st

READ: Behar preface(s), intro and chapter 1; Madden ch. 2

DISCUSSION LEADERS

**WEEK 3:** Space and Place: making maps

September 6th

READ: Madden ch. 3

ASSIGNMENT:

* Construct a basic map or chart that you could later use in conducting a field study. It must be a real place with real people, and the assignment must take you into “the field.” Use the map as a way to investigate the interactions of people who live there and also how our society or some subsociety uses space (the use of furniture/obstacles to keep people apart or draw them together…).

September 8th

READ: Behar chapters 2 and 3

DISCUSSION LEADERS

**WEEK 4:** Fieldwork Identity: negotiating insider/outsider

September 13th

READ: Robben and Sluka PART II pgs. 59-120; Madden ch. 4

September 15th

READ: Behar chapters 4-6

DISCUSSION LEADERS

**WEEK 5:** Entering Dialogue

September 20th

READ: Madden ch. 5

ASSIGNMENT:

* Select a specialist who will agree to be your key consultant in sharing with you their talent, and in discussing with you the social and cultural implications of that talent. This exercise will sharpen your observation skills and train you to ask increasingly precise questions about your subject. It will also require that you pay close attention to various forms of communication (verbal and body language) as well as the use of new specialized vocabulary.

September 22nd

READ: Behar chapters 7-11

DISCUSSION LEADERS

**WEEK 6:** Fieldwork relations and rapport

September 27th

READ: Robben and Sluka PART III pgs. 121-176; Madden ch. 6

September 29th

READ: Behar chapters 12-14; Madden ch. 7

DISCUSSION LEADERS

**WEEK 7:** Participant observation and ritual

October 4th

READ: Madden ch. 8

ASSIGNMENT:

* You are to record a ritual event from the perspective of a participant observer. Use the skills you learned from the earlier two assignments (maps and language) to play close attention to the space and forms of communication.

October 6th

READ: Behar chapters 15-17

**WEEK 8:** Talking Back

October 11th

READ: Robben and Sluka PART IV pgs. 177-216

October 13th

Exam

**WEEK 9 FALL BREAK (start reading *Righteous Dopefiend*)**

**WEEK 10:** Fieldwork Hazards

October 25th

READ: Robben and Sluka PART V pgs. 217-270

October 27th

READ: *Righteous Dopefiend* Intro, chapters 1-3, and 5

DISCUSSION LEADERS

**WEEK 11:** Ethnographic Documentation

November 1st

ASSIGNMENT:

* Take a photograph from your fieldsite of each of the nine categories—be sure to record the date of each captured image: a home interior, a street scene, small group interaction, portraits (2), a building, artifacts (2), stop action. Students will present their work as a powerpoint.
  + MEET IN ROY O WEST MEDIA CLASSROOM (basement)

November 3rd

READ: *Righteous Dopefiend* chapters 7-9 and conclusion

DISCUSSION LEADERS

**WEEK 12:** Multi-sited fieldwork—expanding ethnography

November 8th

READ: Robben and Sluka PART VII pgs. 331-384 (NOTE: DELETE Gupta/Ferguson and Zabusky articles)

November 10th

READ: Madden ch. 9

**WEEK 13:** Expressions of ethnography—fiction and reflexivity in fieldwork

November 15th

READ: Robben and Sluka PART IX pgs. 443-492 (NOTE: DELETE Favret-Saada and Clifford articles) AND Robben and Sluka PART X pgs. 493-520

November 17th

NO CLASS—review for exam

**WEEK 14:** Exam

November 22nd

EXAM

November 24th

NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK

**WEEK 15:** Proposal Presentations

November 29th

* PRESENTATIONS

December 1st

* PRESENTATIONS

**WEEK 16:** Moving forward—from methods to senior seminar

December 6th

* PRESENTATIONS

December 8th

* **Proposals Due**

NOTE: The instructor retains the right to change the syllabus for this class as necessary.