

In the Field: Fieldwork and Fieldwork Methods

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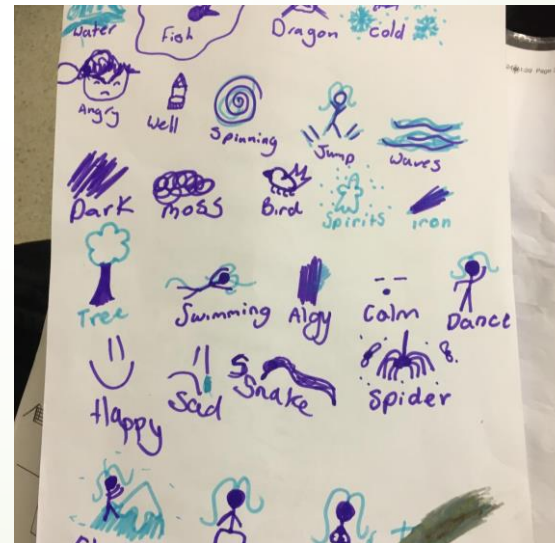


Why Fieldwork?

Traditionally, 'field' describes the region where the group being researched live. However, it may nowadays be the internet, a museum, a school, a library, a hospital, a lab, a market, an urban eating joint, a virtual space etc.

Fieldwork in anthropology is a piece of research where the researcher spends a lot of time in the place or space of investigation, receives first-hand experience and collects data.

Fieldwork is important across all branches of anthropology as the main source to gather data.





Overview of Fieldwork Methods

Anthropological fieldwork methods include...

- Observation - Participant & Non-participant Observation
- Comparative Methods
- Intersubjectivity
- Participatory Action
- Triangulation
- Ethnographic Method
- Reflexivity



Observation

- Non-invasive method where the anthropologist minimally integrates into or merges with the persons they are studying and gathers data through (non)verbal communication
- focuses on interaction, often through language and entailing open ended interviews with participants
- Interviews can take place individually or with focus groups within the community based on age, status, gender, and other factors that contribute to differences within the community.
- This type of research often strives to create an open dialogue, or dialectic, in which information flows back and forth between researcher and subject.



Participant Observation

- Participant observation is a method by which a closer relationship is formed between researcher and participants
- This method requires that an anthropologist participate in the activities of the Field.
- The goal of participant observation is to be involved in the Field similarly to that of its other inhabitants and participants
- This observation method may allow more insight than an etic engagement
- However, and as discussed in previous weeks, there is arguably always a positioning along an insider-outsider spectrum for any individual in any Field



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Non-Participant Observation

- non-participant observation is the anthropological method of collecting data by entering a Field but with limited interaction with the people within it.
- An etic 'fly on the wall' approach examining interactions and bodily behaviour without interacting
- A limitation to this is 'the observer effect'

Upper Image: <https://thebristolian.net/2021/03/22/top-ten-bristol-riots-the-official-list/>

Lower Image: Misan Harriman, Vogue, Sept. 2020.. 'about empathy'



The Comparative Method

- an arrangement of social or cultural conditions observed among existing peoples into a series taken to represent a process of evolution
- this method has perhaps been applied most commonly to search for origins of specific cultural items.
- a traditional way to allow systematic comparison of information and data from multiple sources, still quite prevalent in contemporary anthropological research
- common approach for testing multiple hypotheses on subjects including co-evolution of cultures, the adaptation of cultural practices to the environment, and kinship terms in local languages from around the world.
- use of this form of information gathering is intended to compare global data through a version of this method called multi-sited ethnography... participant observation gathered from many different social settings.
- Human Relations Area Files collects and organizes ethnographic texts from hundreds of peoples globally, covering topics found across them e.g. kinship terms
- See Mace (evolutionary ecology) and Pagel explore the comparative method of anthropological research in 'The Comparative Method in Anthropology' (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2744082?seq=1>) - explains how the comparative method is used by those interested in cultural evolution... 'cultures cannot be treated as independent for purposes of investigating cross culture trends'



Intersubjectivity

- Intersubjectivity is the realisation that knowledge about other people emerges out of people's relationships with and perceptions of each other.
- The phenomenologist Edmund Husserl introduced it as a theoretical frame for thinking about the ways in which humans interpret, organise, and reproduce forms of social life and cognition
- Intersubjectivity is defined by five key principles.
 1. not limited to matching own mental state with another's mental state - not a one-way transaction, rather a type of mutual understanding
 2. founded on the principle that we all share the same world, so that if two individuals were to 'trade places', it would be present itself in the same way - human beings achieve *Platzwechsel*, through empathetic insight, a term used in chess to mean 'place exchange'
 3. it creates a synthesis of worldviews through empathy – whatever perspectives present in the relationship, the collective world is assumed to be the same through the bilateral insight of shared knowledge
 4. Intersubjectivity precedes meaningful interaction - intersubjectivity is not the result of communication, instead it is the condition required for it
 5. intersubjectivity is a lens to create an account of a group of people – through developing relationships with others and founding perceptions on experience



Participatory Action

- A method about a community commitment to change, occurring in five steps:
 - 1. Education on the Process or Creating a Dialogue**
 - 2. Collective Investigation**
 - 3. Collective Interpretation**
 - 4. Collective Action**
 - 5. Transformation: Self-Determination and Empowerment**
- usually conducted by people with close ties or membership of a community - applicable to situations in the community
- an analysis of the community's behaviour by the community's members
- dynamic attributes of the process allow constant re-evaluation and change
- cyclic or regularly repeated tendencies can then develop into healthy adaptation patterns in the community without outside contributions or aid

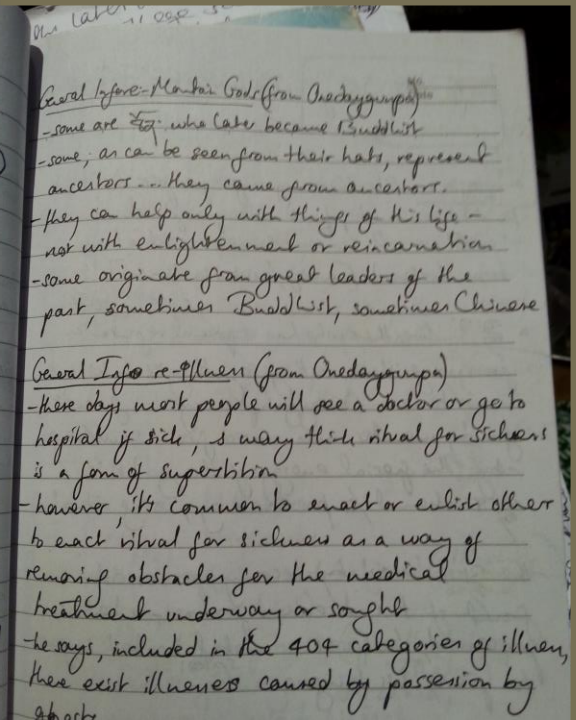


Triangulation

- the combination of methodologies in studying the same phenomenon
- used to investigate a single topic through individual perspectives or multiple methodologies
- combining methods - qualitative and quantitative practices
- cross-validation when two or more distinct methods are congruent with comparable data
- Triangulation aims to prevent bias by giving the researcher the opportunity to participate in individual, self-reported and observational methods

Ethnographic Method

- Combines two major research techniques: participant observation and key informant interviewing
- After the formative research, the researcher may arrange more formal interviews - questions related to research hypotheses and specialised topics
- Usually, a few key informants are selected for in-depth sessions - investigation of cultural phenomena often calls for lengthy and repeated open-ended interviews
- Selection of a small number does not allow for strict assurance of a representative sample in a quantitative way, but a picture can be generated
- Key informant selection is known as judgment sampling and is particularly important for the kind of qualitative research that characterises ethnography
- Anthropologists may combine this with quantitative research – questionnaires etc.
- Aside from written observation and records, ethnographic research brings in other fieldwork methods...





Overview of Ethnographic Methods in Fieldwork

- General ethnographic methods include participant observation; visual methods; ethics and anthropological 'codes of ethics'; interviews; written ethnography, ethnographic knowledge, and problems of representation; critical approaches to existing ethnographic texts; place, multi-sited ethnography, the local and the global; research into family, kinship and the genealogical method; field notes and the organisation of data; archives and how to use documentary material; fieldwork methodology and the research proposal.



Visual Methods

- Visual anthropology studies, ethnographic photography, film and new media
- Most anthropologists do produce visual representations in the course of their work (often photographs, but also video footage, maps, drawings and diagrams)
- All societies make visible aspects of their lives, understandings and worldviews - visual methods are concerned with understanding the production and consumption of all these forms



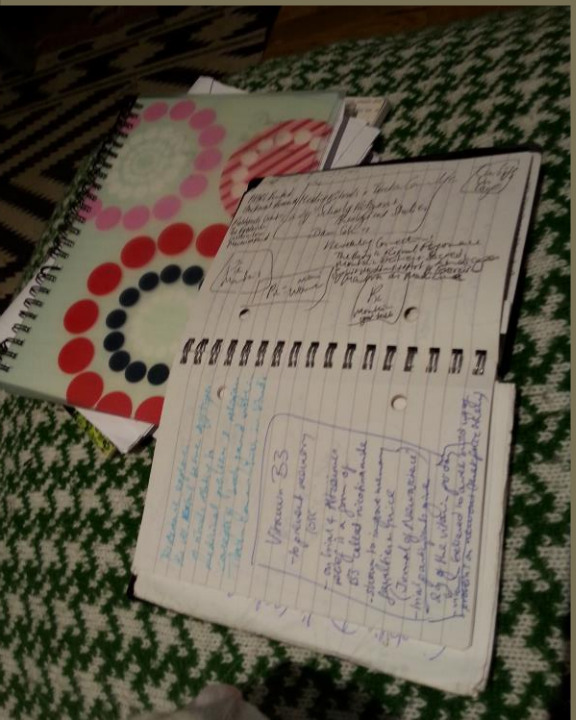
Research into families, kinship and the Genealogical Method

- The genealogical (kinship) method has a long tradition in ethnography - anthropological research to document the family systems of tribal groups
- still used today to discover connections of kinship, descent, marriage, and social system
- technique used to collect data on important relationships that form the foundation of the society and to trace social relationships across communities
- Anthropologists traditionally sometimes use symbols and diagrams to document relationships
- Kinship charts are drawn from the perspective of the experiencer – the person who experiences them is at the centre and all of the relationships in the chart are based on how the others are related to that centre



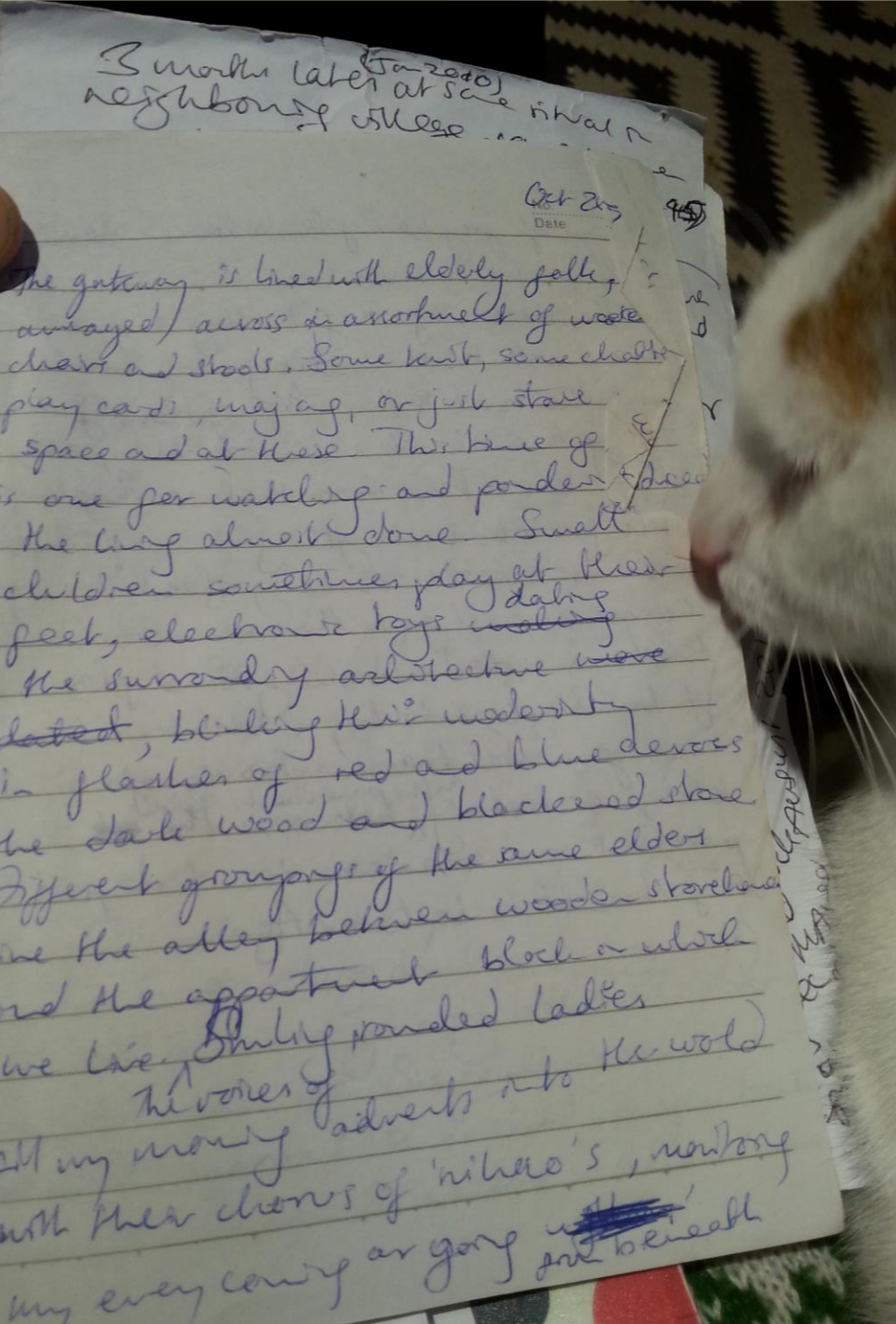
Reflexivity

- the awareness of the researcher of the effect they may be having on the research
- constant awareness and assessment of the researcher's own contribution to and influence on the researcher's participants and findings
- Fieldwork in cultural anthropology is a reflexive experience. Anthropologists must constantly be aware that the information they are gathering will be affected by their ethics, political standings, cultural background etc.
- An anthropologists' presence in that culture can affect the results they receive.
- Reflexive fieldwork retains respect for detailed, accurate information gathering while also paying precise attention to the ethical and political context of research, the background of the researchers, and the full cooperation of informants



Fieldnotes and the Organisation of Data

- Field notes are indispensable, if time consuming
- Ethnographers' notes can be broadly bracketed in 2 categories: field notes and field reflections/journals
- Field notes are detailed descriptions of everything the ethnographer observes and experiences, recording specific details, sensory impressions, specific language used, the content of conversations the researcher had or overheard
- personal reflections or journal style notes can be expanded on
- Notes of both kinds may be organised for later reference



Fieldnotes and the Organisation of Data - Journals

- Alongside reflections on field notes, the researcher may also keep a personal journal or diary that may include information about their emotions and personal experiences during research
- Since everything in the field is filtered through the experimenter's personal life experiences, it makes sense to include these
- Journals provide reflexive insight, sometimes retrospectively, which can turn out to be a useful source for understanding and enrichment of field notes



An approach to Fieldwork Methods: doubts and anxieties as enabling

‘Long-term participant observation enables the learning practice at the heart of anthropological enquiry. Unsurprisingly, such a task brings its own doubts and anxieties. If such anxieties are recognised when they occur they may be used as an enabling aspect of the field experience rather than something that inhibits research. In this chapter I put forward the argument that consciously viewing doubt or anxiety as a part of fieldwork can enable further learning while also ameliorating some of the anxiety of the novice anthropologist. Rather than reducing emotion to an unfortunate impediment, such an approach allows the anthropologist to understand her field experiences in ways that provide insight into the conditions of the field. The application of local interpretive models to the anthropologist’s own interiority may provide the anthropologist with a crucial source for learning culture that is not limited to previously internalised directives or pre-defined modes of understanding. My aim is to show that considering methodology as open-ended and incomplete may enable the researcher to explore local understandings of self and emotion.’



A Case Study on the use of Journals and emotions as enabling fieldwork

The work of anthropologist Renato Rosaldo provides an example of how anthropologists can use emotional responses to fieldwork situations to enable and inform research.

Through using his journal and accounts there of his own emotionally devastating experience, Rosaldo became able to understand the emic perspective of the headhunters.

‘Only a week before completing the initial draft of an earlier version of this introduction, I rediscovered my journal entry, written some six weeks after Michelle’s death, in which I made a vow to myself about how I would return to writing anthropology, if I ever did so, by writing Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage . . . My journal went on to reflect more broadly on death, rage, and headhunting by speaking of my wish for the Ilongot solution; they are much more in touch with reality than Christians. So, I need a place to carry my anger – and can we say a solution of the imagination is better than theirs? And can we condemn them when we napalm villages? Is our rationale so much sounder than theirs? All this was written in despair and rage.’

In your research project, you need to explain why you have employed the type(s) of fieldwork you have—what kind of fieldwork methods did you use and why? How will you position yourself in relation to your fieldwork?

- Observation - Participant & Non-participant Observation
- Comparative Methods
- Intersubjectivity
- Participatory Action
- Triangulation
- Ethnographic Methods (visual, genealogical etc.)
- Reflexivity



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