



AHAH 4005

Introduction to Fieldwork: Anthropology

**INTRODUCTION TO FIELDWORK:
ANTHROPOLOGY**

MODULE HANDBOOK

Module Convener: Dr Penny Dransart
& Lecturer: Dr Adrian Davis

**Mondays at 4 p.m.
Anthropology Lab**

PLUS: Fieldtrip February 22-23 February

This module introduces students to some of the field methodologies and ethical issues which lie at the core of anthropology. By experiencing and ‘doing’ a brief spell of fieldwork, you will be able to devise your own mini-research project and explore anthropological questions that interest you. Your responses to such questions will help you engage with relevant theoretical issues in anthropology. In preparation for doing fieldwork, we will examine some of the methodological approaches relating to anthropological research, and consider how anthropologists set their research questions. After we return from the field, we will reflect upon the nature of the data collected, the methodologies used, as well as examining some of the assumptions and limitations of such approaches. This module is not intended to give you a thorough grounding in field and research skills – we build on that next year – rather, it is to expose you to the experience of the field, other ways of life and what it means to be an anthropologist.



Class Schedule

1. Openings: what happens when anthropologists go into the field?

25 January (PD)

2. Openings: Discussion session based on Geertz (1972)

1 February (PD)

3. Preparation: preparing for practice in methods and ethics

8 February (PD)

4. Preparation for Skanda Vale

15 February (AD & PD)

**YOU MUST EMAIL A MINI-PROPOSAL TO ADRIAN AND PENNY BY
3 P.M., WEDNESDAY 17 FEBRUARY**

5. Reflection: preparing your reflexive field journal

29 February (AD)

6. Participation: engaging with people and keeping a record

7 March (AD)

7 Reflection: sharing a 'ritual sense'

14 March (PD)

8. Writing: Developing your Field Report

21 March (PD)

Assignments

Reflexive Field Journal (50%): 2,000 words

Deadline: 3 p.m., 28 March via turnitin

Research Field Report (50%): 2,000 words

Deadline: 3 p.m., 10 May via turnitin

Aims

The aim of this module is to enable you to devise, conduct and communicate your own piece of ethnographic research. We will have some initial preparatory discussions to provide you with a methodological, ethical and theoretical background to help you prepare and conduct your research, but importantly the module is designed to enable you to learn 'by doing', as you embark on fieldwork for the first time. Specifically the module aims are:

- To acquire an introduction to a reflexive understanding of field research
- To provide an introductory experience of some primary field methods
- To provide an introduction to concepts such as community, ritual, identity, place and space, gender.

Objectives

- To acquire an initial experience in the practice of field research
- To acquire first skills in the interpretation of research data
- To understand and apply data recording methodologies

Location of Field Activities

Skanda Vale (Community of the Many Names of God)

Readings

Essential:

www.skandavale.org (You **must** read the pilgrims' guide in advance of our visit, as well as other parts of the website)

ASA Ethics Guidelines <http://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml>

Amit, V. (ed.) 2000 *Constructing the field: ethnographic fieldwork in the contemporary world*. London: Routledge (ebook available through the LRC catalogue)

American Anthropological Association. [2007] 'Code of Ethics', in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*: Antonius Robben & Jeffrey Sluka (eds), chapter 23, 325-330, Oxford: Blackwell Press. Or visit the AAA website

Coffey, Amanda 1999 *The ethnographic self: fieldwork and the representation of identity*. London: Sage.

Davies, Charlotte Aull 1999. *Reflexive ethnography: a guide to researching selves and others*. London: Routledge.

Emerson, Robert M., Fretz, Rachel I. and Shaw, Linda L. 1995. *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Feuchtwang, Stephan 2007 'On religious ritual as deference and communicative excess', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(1): 57-72. Available through JSTOR

Geaves, R. 2007 *Saivism in the diaspora: contemporary forms of Skanda worship*. London and Oakville, CT: Equinox.

Geertz, Clifford 1972 'Deep play: notes on the Balinese cockfight', *Daedalus* 101(1): 1-37. Available through JSTOR.

Marcus, George E. 1999 'The uses of complicity in the changing mise-en-scène of anthropological fieldwork', in Sherry B. Ortner (ed.) *The fate of 'culture': Geertz and beyond*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp 86-109.

Okely, Judith 2012 *Anthropological practice: fieldwork and the ethnographic method*. London and New York: Berg.

Malinowski, Bronislaw 2012 [1922] 'Method and scope of anthropological fieldwork', *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Chapters 1 & 18). Also in *ethnographic fieldwork: an anthropological reader*, Antonius Robben & Jeffrey Sluka (eds), chapter 3, pp 69-81, Oxford: Blackwell Press.

Skanda Vale n.d. The pilgrim's guide, <http://www.skandavale.org/the-pilgrims-guide/>

Sluka, Jeffrey and Antonius Robben. 2012 'Fieldwork in cultural anthropology: an introduction' in *Ethnographic fieldwork: an anthropological reader*, Antonius Robben & Jeffrey Sluka (eds), pp 1-35, Oxford: Blackwell Press.

Warrier, M. 2010 'The temple bull controversy at Skanda Vale and the construction of Hindu identity in Britain', *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 13(3): 261-78. Available through library catalogue.



Other Helpful Readings.

The following books are just a small selection of those that address anthropological research methodologies and ethics. In addition, you are also expected to read around, and research, the subject of your mini-research project.

- Atkinson, P. 2001 *Handbook of ethnography*, London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Aunger, R. 1995 On ethnography: storytelling or science? *Current Anthropology* 36(1): 97-130.
- Bell, D. Caplan, P. and Karim, W. (eds.) 1993 *Gendered fields: women, men and ethnography*. London: Routledge.
- Bernard, H.R. 1994 *Research methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Bickman, L., & Rog, D.J. 1998 *Handbook of applied social research methods*, Thousand Oaks. CA: Sage.
- Bryman, A. 2004 *Social research methods*. Oxford: OUP.
- Caplan, P. 2003 *The ethics of anthropology: debates and dilemmas*. London: Routledge.
- Creswell, J.W. 2003 *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Davies, C.A. 1999 *Reflexive ethnography: a Guide to Researching Selves and Others*. London: Routledge.
- Denscombe, M. 1998, *The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. 2005 *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ellen, R.F., 1984 *Ethnographic research: a guide to general conduct*. London: Academic Press.
- Faubion, J.D., & Marcus, G.E. 2009 *Fieldwork is not what it used to be: learning anthropology's method in a time of transition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- Fetterman, D.M. 1989, *Ethnography: step by step*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Gash, S., 1989, *Effective literature searching for students*. Aldershot, Hants, England and Brookfield, VT: Gower Pub. Co.
- Jackson, A. (ed.) 1987. *Anthropology at Home*. London: Tavistock. See, especially, chapters by Hastrup and by Strathern.
- Rose, D. 1990 *Living the ethnographic life*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Ryang, S. 2000 'Ethnography or self-cultural anthropology? Reflections on writing about ourselves', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 25 (3-4): 297-320.
- Shaffir, W. & Stebbins, R.A., 1991 *Experiencing fieldwork: an inside view of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Silverman, D. 2006 *Interpreting qualitative data: methods for analyzing talk, text, and interaction*. London: Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Silverman, D. 2000 *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strathern, M. 1985 'Not a field diary "Anthropology at home" – with the Association of Social Anthropologists', *Anthropology Today* 1(3): 25- 26.
- Taussig, M.T. 2011, *I swear I saw this: drawings in fieldwork notebooks, namely my own*. London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Warren, C.A.B. 1988 *Gender issues in field research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Wolcott, H.F. 1995 *The art of fieldwork*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

Useful Web Resources

- Association of Social Anthropologists. These are the ethical guidelines issued at an Extraordinary AGM held in Lampeter
<http://www.theasa.org/ethics.shtml>
- National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (part of American Anthropological Association)
<http://www.practicinganthropology.org>
- Handbook on Ethical Issues in Anthropology
<http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/toc.htm>
- The Society for Applied Anthropology
<http://www.sfaa.net>

Assignment Details: Assessment criteria will be posted on Moodle

Reflexive Journal (50%, 2000 words). Due 3 p.m., 28 March via turnitin

The reflexive journal should be started early in the module, and added to as you plan your research and undertake fieldwork. The final report should not,

however, take the form of a diary but rather be a coherent account of your experiences, in which you evaluate your own subject position, assumptions, and the limitations and advantages of your approach. It is important that you do not just describe your emotions and experiences, but evaluate how they may have informed the way you have understood the people you met in the field, their practices and their beliefs, as well as how they have shaped both data you have collected and the way you have interpreted it.

You should include background reading – both topical and methodological – as evidence of your research into your project and wider avenues of thought. Ensure this is correctly referenced.

Research Report (50%, 2000 words). Due 3 p.m., 10 May via turnitin

The findings of your research should be written up as a report, taking the form of a mini-ethnography. In other words, you will use this as an opportunity to write up what you have learnt in the way that mirrors that of professional anthropologists. As this is the first time you will be writing an ethnographic report, **you will be required to submit a mini-proposal by 3pm, Wednesday 18 February (via email to Adrian, a.davis@uwtsd.ac.uk and Penny p.dransart@uwtsd.ac.uk)**. This only needs to be one A4 page and should include:

- The title of your project
- The aims and objectives of your project (your research question)
- A discussion of how you chose this topic and why you think it is relevant to Skanda Vale.
- A consideration of the data you intend to collect and the methods you will be using.
- A summary of your research methods (who you need to speak to and why)
- An overview of any ethical or other concerns you have
- A brief bibliography of the relevant topical literature

This mini-proposal is not assessed, but is a requirement of the module.

Fieldtrip Preparations

Clothing:

Please ensure that you wear appropriate clothing and footwear for the trip to Skanda Vale. Failure to come appropriately dressed may mean you get left behind. Appropriate footwear and clothing means warm, modest, safe and weather-proof. The community at Skanda Vale has certain expectations, and our aim is to fit in and be respectful: we need to dress the part. There are also safety considerations too; for example, wearing high heels or shoes without adequate grip can be dangerous around livestock and on uneven ground.



It is essential that you do not take leather jackets, belts or handbags into the temples.

Accommodation:

You will be spending the night in very basic pilgrim's accommodation, consisting of either wooden chalets or caravans. Skanda Vale will kindly provide beds, mattresses and heating; you are expected to bring all your required bedding (sleeping bags, pillows, sheets and/or duvet). You will also need £1 coins for heating – the monks and nuns will not be able to change money. You will also find an alarm clock and a torch useful.

Skanda Vale accommodates sexes separately, but you will be expected to share with each other. The number of beds per room is between 2 and 6. You will not share accommodation with any other pilgrims.

Food:

Skanda Vale are kindly providing us with breakfast, lunch and dinner. The food will be simple and consist of rice, lentil dahl and curried vegetables. You must inform Penny *in advance* if you have any dietary requirements; this is your responsibility.

Skanda Vale ask that you do '**not consume any meat, poultry, fish, alcohol or illegal drugs for at least three days before**' you arrive. You are expected to respect this request. Remember that we are anthropological 'pilgrims' and it is important that we both respect and reflect upon the wishes and practices of our host community. Students who do not respect this request will not be able to fully participate in all the activities.

You must not bring any of these prohibited items to the site.



During our time at Skanda Vale:

We will first take a guided walk (approx. half an hour) around the site and have time to settle into our accommodation. Please inform Penny if you will find this walk difficult and/or have mobility issues.

Much of our time will be structured around compulsory pujas, mealtimes and other activities, but you will also be free to spend some of the time as you see fit.

Pujas:

We will be attending three compulsory pujas, and you will have the opportunity to attend more if you wish. Pujas involve worship offered in the form of chants, prayers and bhajans (devotional songs): this devotional worship is called Bhakti Yoga.

We will attend all the pujas in the Murugan Temple. These take place at **1.30 p.m., 9 p.m. and 5 a.m.**

Optional pujas are at 6.30am and 6pm (Maha Shakti Temple) and Tuesday 9.30am (Sri Ranganatha Temple).

The Shakti and Murugan Temples are only open for pujas: the Sri Ranganatha Temple is open at all times.

You are free to sing and chant, but do not talk during pujas.

Women must sit on the terrace of the Shakti Temple, or sit at the back of the Murugan Temple, if they are menstruating.

If you have consumed meat, poultry or fish, smoked or taken illegal substances within three days of our arrival at the ashram, you can still attend the compulsory pujas in the Murugan Temple, but you **MUST** sit at the back. You can also enter the Sri Ranganatha Temple. You will not, however, be able to enter the Shakti Temple.

Seva:

We hope that you will have the opportunity to offer Seva; that is voluntarily given work within the ashram. Seva forms a central part of the spiritual tradition of the Skanda Vale community, and pilgrims are often given the

opportunity to experience this aspect through a series of supervised activities. We hope that a programme of work will be offered on Wednesday afternoon.

Q & A:

At some point during our stay one of the swamis will be happy to talk to us and will address any questions you have. (A swami is an ascetic or a senior religious teacher.) You may want to prepare some questions in advance as part of your preparation and research design.

Offerings:

You may want to make an offering – either (vegetarian) food, money or other items – while at the temple, and you are welcome to do so. Any offering should be made anonymously. Food offerings should be arranged on trays, and placed on the tables outside any of the three main temples before puja. Remove any unnecessary packaging and wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly. Money offerings should be placed in the red metal donations boxes outside of the temples.

Other Behaviour:

Mobile phones and tablets are not allowed anywhere in the ashram

No cameras are allowed anywhere in Skanda Vale

Smoking is not permitted anywhere in Skanda Vale

Men and women sit separately

Please respect **other pilgrims** and members of the community

The grounds are sacred. Do not pick any flowers or drop any rubbish.

REMEMBER: You do not have to like these rules, but as an anthropologist you may want to consider why they are in place, as well as their consequences within the community. You may also want to reflect on your own response to these rules and your experience of ‘living’ them, in addition to thinking about how they can be used analytically to enhance our understanding of the community.

N.B. The picture on the front cover is of the Goddess Bhadrakali worshipped by the Gods, from a tantric Devi series c. 1660-70. It is now in Freer Gallery of Art. The picture is in the Public Domain (http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.php?q=fsg_F1984.42)