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Fieldwork in Cultural Anthropology: An Introduction

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Teitl: Ethnographic fieldwork : an anthropological reader

Enw’r Awdur: Robben, A. C. G. M and Sluka, J. A. (eds)

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Fieldwork in Cultural Anthropology: An Introduction

Jeffrey A. Sluka and Antonius C. G. M. Robben

To understand a strange society, the anthropologist has traditionally immersed himself in it, learning, as far as possible, to think, see, feel, and sometimes act as a member of its culture and at the same time as a trained anthropologist from another culture. This is the heart of the participant observation method – involvement and detachment. Its practice is both an art and a science. Involvement is necessary to understand the psychological realities of a culture, that is, its meanings for the indigenous members. Detachment is necessary to construct the abstract reality: a network of social relations, including the rules and how they function – not necessarily real to the people studied. Fieldwork is a deeply human as well as a scientific experience and a detailed knowledge of both aspects is an important source of data in itself, and necessary for any comparative study of methodology. (Powdermaker 1966:9)

For young graduate students preparing for their first field trip, fieldwork represents mystery, opportunity, and excitement. Fieldwork is also a trial through battle in a war for which the novice has little preparation. The student knows that this is a challenge he will have to face, a major rite of passage that will provide him with the opportunity to prove his ability, courage, and temperamental suitability for the profession. He knows that, in doing fieldwork and in working with the ethnographic data he will collect, a number of transformations will occur . . . Much like the rites of passage of many primitive societies, success in fieldwork is more a function of personal ability than of previous training in specific techniques. Success in fieldwork proclaims manhood and generates a major transformation: a student of culture becomes an anthropologist. (Freilich 1970:16)

Fieldwork *is* the central activity of anthropology. (Howell 1990:4)

One of the most enduring, perhaps *the* most enduring, metaphors, or "keywords" . . . in modern anthropology is "fieldwork" . . . "fieldwork" is – it goes without saying, and thus must be said – the *sine qua non* of modern anthropology, the ritual initiation experience in the discipline. (Berger 1993:174)

> The tradition of fieldwork, and a conceptual repertoire derived from deep immersion in local ways of life, has been the source of anthropology's strength. (Keesing and Strathern 1998:7)

These opening quotations, spanning the last half of the twentieth century, amply demonstrate the enduring central place of fieldwork in cultural anthropology. Every discipline has its own particularity in methods of gathering data. In cultural anthropology it is fieldwork based on participant observation, which hinges on the dynamic and contradictory synthesis of subjective insider and objective outsider. As an insider, the fieldworker learns what behavior means to the people themselves. As an outsider, the fieldworker observes, experiences, and makes comparisons in ways that insiders can or would not. Nearly every professional anthropologist has undertaken fieldwork, and it is still viewed as the characteristic rite of passage into professional status in the discipline. Anthropologists "pioneered" ethnographic fieldwork, and cultural or social anthropology remains the only social science that relies on fieldwork based on participant observation as its central method. One of the main developments in cultural anthropology since the 1970s has been an increasing readiness of anthropologists to talk candidly about their experiences in the field, their relationships with informants, and the contexts in which they gathered their material. While in the past some dismissed these reflections on fieldwork as self-indulgent "navel-gazing," it is now generally accepted that they have made an important contribution to the discipline because we can better understand and evaluate an ethnographic text if we know something about the writer, the experiences upon which the text is based, and the circumstances of its production. Furthermore, these reflections turn anthropologists into better fieldworkers by making them aware of their own practices, emotions, biases, and experiences.

Today, "the field" has broadened to include everywhere there are human beings, and every imaginable human group and context has become an actual or potential research site. Cultural anthropologists are conducting fieldwork in institutional and many other settings, with "little people" (dwarves), perpetrators and survivors of violence in war zones, elderly patients in hospices, HIV patients, firefighters, drug dealers, political militants, new religious movements, motor-home nomads, Olympic athletes, poker players, and modern Japanese geishas. Reports on fieldwork are a regular feature in *Anthropology News*, the newsletter of the American Anthropological Association. For example, the May 2005 issue highlighted the expanding "new venues" of fieldwork. Edward Bruner (2005) reported on fieldwork traveling with tourists and visiting tourist destinations, Linda Scarangella (2005) discussed fieldwork at the Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show attraction at EuroDisney, and Jonathan Marion (2005) described multi-sited fieldwork with ballroom dancers at their studios and competitions. And when we say that every *imaginable* human context can be a potential fieldwork site, we mean it literally, since there is already a speculative "space" or "extraterrestrial" anthropology preparing for future fieldwork on space stations, spacecraft, and proposed human settlements on the Moon, Mars, and beyond, including the possibility of fieldwork with intelligent nonhuman extraterrestrials (see Maruyama and Harkins 1975).

In the first decade of the new millennium, fieldwork has become even more central to the discipline, to the extent that there are claims that it is the *only* common ground that holds it together. While this would seem to be an exaggeration, since

fieldwork is only one of several key shared "paradigmatic" elements (described below) that have always distinguished the anthropological perspective, it again stresses the importance of fieldwork in the discipline today, and helps establish the *raison d'être* for this reader.

Today, there is a vast and ever-expanding literature on the practical experience of fieldwork, covering many disciplines and a wide range of field situations in most parts of the world. Learning how to conduct research based on participant observation has become a priority for scholars in an expanding number of disciplines beyond anthropology and sociology, including folklore, economics, psychology, geography, history, education, social work, nursing, and development studies, all of which have now published their own texts on fieldwork methods and edited volumes of fieldwork accounts (e.g., Jackson 1987, Delamont 2002, Scheyvens and Storey 2003, Devereux and Hoddinott 1992, Jackson and Ives 1996, Lareau and Shultz 1996). Along with dozens of books and edited volumes, there are hundreds if not thousands of articles on fieldwork in journals and other publications. Evidence of the emerging cross-disciplinary "trendiness" of fieldwork is the publication between 1999 and 2005 of five separate major multi-volume sets on ethnographic fieldwork, totaling 21 volumes (Pole 2005, Denzin and Lincoln 2001, Bryman 2001, Bryman and Burgess 1999, Schensul and LeCompte 1999).

Beginning in the 1960s, a steadily increasing flow of edited volumes of fieldwork accounts began to emerge, and in the 1970s so too did book-length monographs centering on a particular anthropologist's fieldwork experiences and edited volumes on anthropological fieldwork (see Appendices 2 and 3). In cultural anthropology there are now numerous publications on nearly every imaginable aspect of fieldwork, including *ethics and fieldwork* (e.g., Rynkiewich and Spradley 1976, Appell 1978, Fluehr-Lobban 2003, Caplan 2003), the *psychology of fieldwork* (e.g., Wengle 1988, Hunt 1989), *field notes* (Sanjek 1990, Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995), *women in the field* (e.g., Golde 1970, Roberts 1981, Cesara 1982, Altorki and El-Solh 1988, Marcus 1993, Yu 1997), *feminist issues in fieldwork* (e.g., Wolf 1996), *sex and gender in fieldwork* (e.g., Whitehead and Conaway 1986), *intimacy and erotic subjectivity in fieldwork* (e.g., Kulick and Willson 1995, Markowitz and Ashkenazi 1999, Wolcott 2002), *gay and lesbian anthropologists in the field* (e.g., Lewin and Leap 1996), *fieldwork and globalization* (e.g., Robbins and Bamford 1997), *occupational safety and health in fieldwork* (e.g., Howell 1990), *violence and fieldwork* (Lee 1995, Nordstrom and Robben 1995, Greenhouse, Mertz, and Warren 2002), *long-term fieldwork* (e.g., Foster, Scudder, Colson, and Kemper 1979, Kemper and Royce 2002), *fieldwork and friendship* (e.g., Chiñas 1993, Kumar 1992, Grindal and Salamone 1995, Ridler 1996, Powdermaker 1966), and *emotions and fieldwork* (e.g., Kleinman and Copp 1993). There are *humorous accounts of fieldwork* (e.g., Barley 1983, 1985, 1988, Borgerhoff Mulder and Logsdon 1996), and books and volumes on fieldwork in particular countries (e.g., for Japan see Hendry 1999, Bestor, Steinhoff, and Bestor 2003) and most regions of the world (e.g., for the Pacific see DeVita 1988). In fact, so much has been written about fieldwork since the 1970s that in 1988 Gravel and Ridinger published an annotated bibliography of just *anthropological* fieldwork that included 700 entries, and that number has probably doubled since then. Of particular value has been the publication of a large number of reflexive personal accounts of field experiences (see Appendices 2 and 3).

The articles in this collection have been selected from among this wealth of publications because they belong to the standard knowledge of most experienced fieldworkers in the discipline, and deserve to be passed on to a new generation. This reader is intended to help facilitate this goal by providing students with an historical, methodological, ethical, reflexive, and stylistic context to fieldwork, and is ideally suited to be read in conjunction with a text on formal research methods (see Appendix 4) and an ethnography which includes a reflexive account of the fieldwork on which it is based (see Appendix 3). These articles present qualitative, subjective, and reflexive perspectives on fieldwork, and serve to develop the reader's knowledge and appreciation of the perspectives, approaches, methods, problems, experiences, and ethics involved in anthropological fieldwork. This collection aims to provide readers with a good sense of classical and contemporary reflections on fieldwork, the tensions between self and other, the relationships between anthropologists and research participants, conflicts and ethical problems, various types of ethnographic research, and different styles of writing about fieldwork. It is about *fieldwork* in general rather than formal "fieldwork methods," because the intention is to not only highlight the central role of fieldwork in anthropology, but also to explore its wider significance to the discipline.

This introduction provides a basic introduction to fieldwork from the perspective of cultural anthropology, including how it fits in the disciplinary paradigm and has been defined. It includes, furthermore, an overview of the history of fieldwork, a review of fieldwork in the postmodern era, a discussion of culture shock and the taboo against "going native," a general literature review and many suggestions and references for further reading and exploration of this topic, and, finally, a description of the construction and structure of the reader itself.

Fieldwork in the Anthropological Paradigm

Fieldwork represents one of the fundamental or "paradigmatic" elements of anthropology as an academic discipline. Thomas Kuhn (1962) argued that a paradigm was a conceptual model of an academic discipline, the learning of which represented the socialization process through which students are prepared for membership in a scientific or academic discipline. The basic paradigm of anthropology, outlined below, shows where fieldwork "fits in" or integrates with the rest of the core elements that define the discipline:

1 **Culture**: The core concept of cultural anthropology.

2 **Fieldwork**: The primary method of cultural anthropology. Long-term *fieldwork* based on participant observation. A "field" as opposed to "laboratory" science.

3 **Cross-cultural comparative perspective**: A scientific approach in anthropology, looking for regularities, patterns, generalizations, "rules," or "laws" concerning human and social behavior. Macroanalysis. Generalizing.

4 **Ethnography**: A case-study approach. In-depth study of the culture of a people, group, or community. Microanalysis. Particularizing.

5 **Holistic perspective**: Looks at human beings from all perspectives, stresses the interrelationships between different aspects of life, and asserts that any culture has

to be understood not only in its local manifestation, but in relation to the wider global context in which it occurs.

6 **Eclectic approach**: Eclectic means "to pick and choose," in this case both topics and theories. There is a very wide variety of interests and no dominant theoretical model.

7 **Humanistic perspective**: "Humanism" focuses on people, with the applied aim of reducing suffering and improving the human condition. Referred to as "the Enlightenment vision." Includes anthropology as a form of cultural critique and advocacy.

8 **Scientific approach**: Empiricism and the scientific method. "Science" refers to the observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of natural phenomena. Based on direct experience and observation.

9 **Combined subjective/objective perspective**: Equally interested in the subjective, participant's, actor's, or "emic" perspective and the objective, observer's, anthropologist's, or "etic" perspective.

These nine elements are *interrelated* – for example, one can see how fieldwork is affected by each of the other eight elements – and one of the central characteristics of the anthropological paradigm is that it sets up, and is based upon, a series of conceptual and theoretical oppositions, including:

Ethnography (microanalysis)/Cross-cultural comparison (macroanalysis)
Differences (particularizing)/Similarities (generalizing)
Synchronic (the "ethnographic present")/Diachronic (long-term)
Humanism/Science
Participant (subjective)/Observer (objective)

Since the earliest days of the discipline, it has been a fundamental theoretical tenet that the dynamic tension created by these oppositions has been the wellspring or fundamental source of the "anthropological imagination," and produces a unique perspective and important insights distinct from any other social science perspective.

Humanistic and Scientific Approaches: Fieldwork as Both Art and Science

> Anthropology is the most humanistic of the sciences and the most scientific of the humanities.
>
> – Alfred L. Kroeber (1876–1960; date of quotation unknown)

Traditionally, the self-image of anthropologists has been that of humanists and scientists, and they did not see any necessary contradiction between the two approaches. Eric Wolf is famous for his assertion that anthropology is a "bridging" discipline between the sciences and humanities, and his observation, after Kroeber, that anthropology has been "a bond between subject matters . . . in part history, part literature; in part natural science, part social science; it strives to study men

from within and without . . . the most scientific of the humanities, the most humanist of the sciences" (1964:88). This conception of the dual nature of anthropology was described by Hortense Powdermaker in her classic fieldwork account, *Stranger and Friend*, in these terms: "There are some anthropologists who rather arbitrarily reserve the label 'scientific' for nonhumanistic studies. A scientific attitude ignores no level of understanding . . . If the dual nature of anthropology – an art and a science, a humanistic science – is accepted, there is no reason why each cannot be expanded. The inherent ambiguities of this approach are only a reflection of those which exist in life itself" (1966:306).

Humanities – Sciences Continuum in Anthropological Fieldwork

Humanities – Fieldwork as an Art Form	*Sciences – Fieldwork as a Scientific Method*
Humanistic	Scientific
Qualitative	Quantitative
Subjective	Objective
Participant (emic)	Observer (etic)
Postmodernism	Positivism/empiricism

This point is stressed here because, as stated above, this reader is about *fieldwork in its most general sense*, rather than formal "fieldwork methods," because the practice of fieldwork has proven to be as much an art as a science. If anthropologists are "scientific instruments" they are also human ones, and successful fieldwork requires both well-developed research skills and interpersonal relations skills. This has long been recognized in the discipline. For example, in the 1960s, Hortense Powdermaker observed that "In addition to a capacity for open involvements and for becoming detached from them, personal qualities such as kindness, patience, tact, endurance, and the ability to 'take' both loneliness and ambiguity are helpful. Other idiosyncratic characteristics may be useful in one field situation and not in another" (1969:420). Similarly, Charlotte Seymour-Smith (1986b:429) refers to "the imaginative leap involved in coming to terms with an alien culture or way of life." Can a formal methods approach teach or train aspiring fieldworkers qualitative cognitive and interpersonal skills – Powdermaker's "idiosyncratic characteristics" – such as how to be kind, tactful, and empathetic, how to be accepted and get along with people who are different from you, or how to make the "imaginative leaps" Seymour-Smith says are required for successful fieldwork? This is not to say that formal methods training is not useful, but only that it is incomplete.

Fieldwork Defined

A good way to introduce fieldwork is to begin by considering how it has generally been defined in the discipline. This can be done by reviewing some of the most popular definitions as presented in (1) the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, (2) a popular introductory anthropology text, and (3) a leading anthropology dictionary. These also show how the definition of fieldwork has gradually changed, with the inclusion of new concerns and ideas about ethics, politics, reflexivity, collaboration, and reciprocity.

"Fieldwork," from the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences *(1969)*

Hortense Powdermaker's entry provides a classic definition of fieldwork which draws upon her *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist* (1966), probably the most widely read book-length study of anthropological fieldwork which discusses the mistakes, successes, and complex emotions of conducting research in Melanesia, Northern Rhodesia, and the United States:

> Fieldwork is the study of people and of their culture in their natural habitat. Anthropological fieldwork has been characterized by the prolonged residence of the investigator, his participation in and observation of the society, and his attempt to understand the inside view of the native peoples and to achieve the holistic view of a social scientist . . . The publication of Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* in 1922 revealed the great potentialities of fieldwork. This study of Trobriand Islanders, among whom Malinowski had lived for almost three years, set new standards for fieldworkers which continue to operate. Fieldwork came to mean immersion in a tribal society – learning, as far as possible, to speak, think, see, feel, and act as a member of its culture and, at the same time, as a trained anthropologist from a different culture. (Powdermaker 1969:418)

Powdermaker went on to discuss preparation for and starting fieldwork; the advantages and disadvantages of solo, family, and team research; approval and cooperation of authorities; gaining the good will and consent of research participants; the first steps of the fieldwork process; participation in the culture; objectivity; and the influence of the theoretical orientation of the fieldworker.

Powdermaker concluded by identifying an emerging interest in "the fieldworker as an individual": "A quite new development, not yet strong enough to be called a trend, is the recognition that the fieldworker is himself an inherent part of the situation studied and that his personal as well as his scientific reactions are an important part of the research process" (Powdermaker 1969:422). She argued that anthropology has failed to grasp the scientific importance of the ethnographer's social role and personal characteristics, while giving short shrift to chance, mistakes, fieldwork's trial-and-error approach, and the interpersonal dynamic with the people under study. In the following decade, this "emerging interest" would evolve into the full-fledged "reflexive trend" – one of the most significant modern developments in the anthropological approach to fieldwork (see Béteille and Madan 1975, Rabinow 1977, Ruby 1982).

"Fieldwork," from Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective *(1998)*

In the third edition of their popular introductory cultural anthropology textbook, Roger Keesing and Andrew Strathern define fieldwork as follows:

> For most anthropologists, the immediate problems of understanding and the sources of data come from what has come to be known as **fieldwork**: intimate participation in a community and observation of modes of behavior and the organization of social life. The process of recording and interpreting another people's way of life is called **ethnography** . . .

> Whether the setting is city, town, village, or jungle hamlet, the mode of anthropological research is in many important respects the same. Most essentially, it entails a deep immersion into the life of a people. Instead of studying large samples of people, the anthropologist enters as fully as possible into the everyday life of a community, neighborhood, or group . . . One learns by participant observation, by living as well as viewing the new patterns of life. Successful fieldwork is seldom possible in a period much shorter than a year, especially where a new language and culture must be learned. Ideally, the researcher stays a good deal longer, sometimes on several successive field trips. The value of fieldwork sustained over a long period is beginning to come clearly into view. Sustained and deep research yields insights into a culture, and into the processes of continuity and change, scarcely attainable any other way. (Keesing and Strathern 1998:7–9)

In their definition, Keesing and Strathern stress that fieldwork is a two-sided encounter between research participants and ethical researchers:

> Consider the encounter from the other side. A people's lives are interrupted by a strange foreigner, often with a family, who moves into the community . . . This person seldom fits the types of foreigners the people have learned to deal with previously – missionaries, traders, government officers, politicians, or whatever. The newcomer is insatiably curious about things private, sacred, and personal, for reasons and motives that are incomprehensible. The person must be accorded a role of some sort; clumsy efforts to speak, bad manners, and intrusions into daily life must be tolerated. All this attention may be flattering, but it may breed suspicion, hostility, and jealousy. In a less isolated and more sophisticated community, "being studied" may smack of condescension and may offend pride, not arouse it.
>
> On the anthropologist's side, ethical problems loom large. Should one try to protect the identity of the community and its people by disguising names and places? Can one intervene in matters of custom and health? Can one betray the confidence of one's informants in some grave violation of the law? (Keesing and Strathern 1998:8–9)

Finally, Keesing and Strathern draw attention to the gap between the data described in field notes and the lived experiences, sounds, smells, and scenes that cannot be captured in writing but are sedimented in the unconscious. Their use of the term "unconscious" is somewhat misleading because it suggests that the fieldworker is unaware of these impressions, but Keesing and Strathern are right in arguing that the anthropologist draws upon an unpronounced background understanding that is larger than the field notes, and gives the ethnography a richness which could not have been obtained any other way than through an extended immersion in the field.

Keesing and Strathern conclude their brief introductory discussion of fieldwork by observing that anthropology has retained its "humanistic vision" because it remains based on the fundamental intimacy of face-to-face research (1998:10).

"Fieldwork," *from the* Dictionary of Anthropology *(1986)*

Charlotte Seymour-Smith defines fieldwork in this way:

> **fieldwork.** Research undertaken by the anthropologist or ethnologist in a given ethnographic area or community. Such an ethnographic area in modern anthropology is not

> necessarily limited to the traditional tribal or peasant community, and may embrace studies of urban, industrial or other settings which the anthropologist selects for the purposes of intensive research. The anthropological perspective has similarly been employed in the study of subcultures and in institutional research within modern industrial society. So, while it was once true to say that anthropology was the study of people considered to be primitive, of exotic and little-known tribal cultures, and of peasant communities, modern anthropological research can no longer be defined by this criterion and must be defined instead by the application of its distinctive methods of fieldwork and analysis. In many cases, however, disciplinary boundaries become blurred in the study of modern industrial and urban society, due to the emergence of novel theoretical and methodological syntheses resulting from interdisciplinary collaboration and interchange. (Seymour-Smith 1986a:117)

Seymour-Smith then focuses on ethical and political issues in fieldwork, and suggests that anthropologists might offer "to perform some useful or valued service in return for the collaboration he or she requires" (1986a:117). This call for *reciprocity* as an ethical requirement of fieldwork is a modern one, and Seymour-Smith notes that anthropologists are increasingly asked to legitimate their research before the communities under study, national politicians, administrators, and intellectuals, while being summoned to share the results and produce tangible benefits.

Seymour-Smith's discussion incorporates the emergence of the "reflexive trend" in cultural anthropology, and recognizes the beginnings of new forms of fieldwork with built-in reciprocity then emerging as a response to the ethical issues and criticisms of anthropology raised by research participants – the ethnographic "other" – that exploded in the discipline during the 1960s and 1970s. Reflexive anthropology turns the fieldworker's ongoing negotiation of his or her professional role into an object of study, analyzes the power relations involved, and questions the nature of participant observation.

Seymour-Smith also discusses the issue of neutrality, observing that "he or she may not always be able to conserve neutrality or may under certain circumstances feel that neutrality is not an ethically acceptable position" (1986a:118), and addresses the emerging politics of modern fieldwork:

> In many Third World nations, intellectuals and representatives of indigenous peoples and other oppressed or subordinate groups share the general view of western anthropology either as a form of espionage or an account of "folklore" and exotic customs perpetuating a totally false image of their national reality and the real problems of their minority groups. Anthropologists also enjoy a poor reputation for ethical behavior, and have been criticized principally for their lack of commitment to the welfare of the people they study, and the failure to share the results of their research . . . It is natural enough for people who observe the anthropologist, comparatively wealthy by local standards and apparently free to pursue the line of research he or she chooses, to resent what they regard as the exploitation of the local community for the purposes of advancing his or her own career at home, placing the goals of his or her individual research project over and above any commitment to the aspirations and basic needs of the local population. And it is only to be expected that communities and peoples of the Third World will come more and more to reject this type of investigation and demand that the anthropologist contribute something in return for his or her presence. (Seymour-Smith 1986a:118)

Thus, by the time this article was written in the mid-1980s, the trends in concern for ethics, criticism by research participants, neutrality, and reflexivity in cultural anthropology, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, were continuing, and there were new concerns with collaboration, reciprocity, and the politics of fieldwork.

An Historical Outline of Fieldwork

> The way to do fieldwork is never to come up for air until it is all over.
> – Margaret Mead (1901–78; source unknown)

In *Doing Fieldwork: Warnings and Advice* (1971:21–41), Rosalie Wax provided an excellent thumbnail sketch of the history of fieldwork. The following historical outline of the evolution of fieldwork is an elaborated and updated synopsis of Wax's history (see Urry 1984 for another useful history of fieldwork).

Wax began by observing that "Descriptive reporting of the customs, inclinations, and accomplishments of foreign peoples is almost as old as writing itself" (1971:21). Herodotus wrote accounts of the Persians and Scythians for the Greeks, and the Romans continued this practice. With the rise of the Islamic empires, they too began to write descriptions of the foreign peoples they encountered. The first Europeans to collect and record ethnographic data about foreign peoples were Catholic missionaries and frontier merchants. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the rapid growth and spread of European and American colonialism and imperialism produced an explosion of ethnographic "fieldwork" and descriptive accounts of the new peoples and cultures encountered during this process. This resulted from the fact that "a good many literate and reasonably well-educated men – governmental officials, administrators, missionaries, and political exiles – were obliged to spend many years and sometimes most of their lives living and working with an alien or 'backward' people" (Wax 1971:23). Many of them learned to speak the native languages and produced excellent field descriptions. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, social research involving the direct observation of groups of people in the researcher's *own* society began to be practiced in Britain and France (the roots of "sociological" fieldwork as opposed to "anthropological" fieldwork with other cultures or peoples).

Wax (1971:28) notes that among the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers identified as the "pioneers" or "fathers" of anthropology, sociology, and ethnography – such as Saint-Simon, de Tocqueville, Hume, Veniaminov, Smith, Maine, Bachofen, McLennan, Tylor, and Morgan – only Morgan did what could be called genuine fieldwork. Instead, the others relied on secondhand reports and sources. When, in the late 1890s and early 1900s, some British anthropologists – Haddon, Seligman, Rivers, and Radcliffe-Brown – broke with the earlier academic tradition of working only from derived sources and went into the field to obtain data at first hand, they seem to have carried on their investigations more like natural scientists than the fieldworking officials or missionaries from whom the historical theorists had obtained their data. Their funds were meager, their time short, and they were in a hurry. Consequently, they made surveys, looked for and collected interesting or relevant specimens, observed native ceremonies, and questioned native informants as best they could. They were unable to reside near or with an alien

people for any length of time to observe or participate in the ongoing cultural and social events, even had this method of doing fieldwork occurred to them. And when Boas and his first students and research assistants began their fieldwork among the Indians of North America, they usually proceeded in much the same fashion (Wax 1971:30).

Boas' influence and the American fieldwork tradition

Franz Boas is renowned as a fieldworker, and considered the "father" of fieldwork in American cultural anthropology. However:

> The fact is that Boas and his students did not customarily spend a great deal of their time in the field learning the native language and observing and taking part in native life. The kind of data they desired did not require this, and, besides, their funds rarely permitted them a field trip of more than a few weeks or, at most, a few [usually the summer] months. What most of them did was try to locate as rapidly as possible a competent informant who was fluent in English and the native language, knew the old stories and customs, and was willing to dictate and translate texts . . . It is not surprising that the two hardships about which they complain most frequently in their letters are (1) wasting valuable time trying to find or keep a good informant or interpreter and (2) writer's cramp. They were, of course, interested in observing and recording traditional ceremonies and in watching traditional craftsmen at their work. But most of them did not really try to do fieldwork in the style in which it was subsequently done by the British social anthropologists, and they did not, except for rare exceptions, become even moderately fluent in the native language. (Wax 1971:32)

Wax mentions further that Boas made 13 field trips during his lifetime, many of them less than two months long, to 40 different sites along the Northwest Coast. Boas complained in his letters home about the discomforts of fieldwork and the reluctant cooperation of the Indians, yet kept returning to the field because he believed in the utmost importance of collecting firsthand data. Only a few of his students or those who worked in his tradition wrote anything about how they did their fieldwork. Lowie's 1959 autobiography, written just before but published after his death, disclosed the serious difficulties of his first field trip, while a posthumously published collection of Ruth Benedict's articles and letters contains some material on her fieldwork (Mead 1959). They and their generation were reluctant to report openly on any fieldwork problems, afraid to tarnish the reputation of this young science.

Malinowski's influence and the British fieldwork tradition

Bronislaw Malinowski was the first professional anthropologist to describe what intensive fieldwork was really like, and how he obtained his data by living among the Trobriand people to observe their daily lives. His description, published in 1922 as the Introduction to his classic ethnography *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, is one of the earliest, most widely read, and most influential accounts of fieldwork in anthropology, and is included in this reader. Malinowski suggested that all ethnographic studies should include an account of the research methods and conditions "so that at a glance the reader could estimate with precision the degree of the writer's

personal acquaintance with the facts which he describes, and form an idea under what conditions information had been obtained from the natives" (Malinowski 1922:3).

Malinowski is renowned for identifying what he termed "the proper conditions" or "secrets" of effective ethnographic fieldwork. He advocated living among the people under study and remaining far from Westerners. He emphasized the need for clear scientific objectives, a thorough methodology to obtain results, and the use of special data-gathering methods. Finally, he stressed that a fieldworker should stick his nose into all ongoing affairs, even at the risk of offending local etiquette, to discover how the people thought, behaved, and saw the world. Malinowski hoped thus to "grasp the native's point of view" as complementary to the more objective observer's perspective (Malinowski 1922:25).

Inspired by Malinowski's enthusiasm for this "new method," some of his and Radcliffe-Brown's students went into the field and followed this procedure. They and the students they trained produced many of the most valuable and influential ethnographies that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century. However, once again, only a few of these highly trained and experienced fieldworkers wrote anything about their experiences or methods. The most notable are the writings of Evans-Pritchard, Bohannan, and Powdermaker (see Appendix 5 on early and classic accounts of fieldwork). In 1940, Evans-Pritchard published a short but excellent description of the difficulties he experienced doing fieldwork among the Nuer in the early 1930s. In 1954, Laura Bohannan, under the pseudonym Elenore Smith Bowen, published a fictionalized account of fieldwork in Africa which was a pastiche composed of the stories of several people and numerous field trips. And in 1966, Hortense Powdermaker, who had studied with Malinowski in the 1920s, published her detailed account of her fieldwork in four locations. In assessing what she had learned, Powdermaker (1966:287) concluded that the most important conditions for good communication between research participants and fieldworkers are physical proximity of the fieldworker to the people studied, sound knowledge of their language, and a high degree of psychological and emotional involvement. Powdermaker identified the ability to become totally involved and yet to observe with complete detachment, continually to "step in and out" of other cultures, as the key to successful fieldwork. She achieved this ideal to varying degrees in the societies in which she worked (Ellen 1984:97).

The influence of the "Chicago School"

During the 1920s and 1930s, sociologists at the University of Chicago, primarily influenced by the work of social psychologist George Herbert Mead, exerted a considerable influence on the development of sociology and anthropology. Led by Herbert Blumer, William Thomas, Robert Park, Albion Small, Charles Horton Cooley, Florian Znaniecki, and Louis Wirth, they came to be known as the "Chicago School" and represented the first major attempt to conduct systematic ethnographic fieldwork – particularly "community studies" – in urban environments, beginning with Chicago and then spreading to other cities. The sociologists of the Chicago School produced ethnographic monographs about things like Jewish ghettos, taxi-dance halls, professional thieves, hobos, boys' gangs, and the like. They encouraged their students to do fieldwork, and reconceptualized their methodology around

"participant observation." By focusing on participant observation, the Chicago sociologists "emphasized their linkage to the tradition of ethnographic fieldwork from Malinowski onward . . . Like Malinowski, they wish[ed] to pitch their tents among the dwellings of the natives (even if these be drug addicts, mental patients, medical students, or rabbis)" (Wax 1971:40).

Common Subjective Aspects of Fieldwork

In its broader conception, fieldwork in cultural anthropology is characterized by a number of typical subjective or personal experiences. These are usually elided in formal methods texts, but are explored more fully in many reflexive accounts of fieldwork, and frequently arise as topics of discussion in anthropology methods courses. As several of the "pithy quotes" which open this introduction suggest, fieldwork is frequently described as "the professional ethnographer's necessary initiation – variously referred to as a puberty rite, ritual ordeal, or *rite de passage*" (Tedlock 1991:70).

Going native

Barbara Tedlock has observed that the "gone native" fieldworker is one of the archetypes of "the mythic history of anthropology" (1991:69), and Katherine Ewing has noted that:

> The idea of "GOING NATIVE" is one of the few taboos remaining within anthropology. Considered antithetical to the social scientist's stance of objectivity and standing as a professional, *going native* has traditionally been a term of derision among anthropologists. Despite an array of challenges to notions of objectivity, the taboo remains in place and continues to carry a heavy affective load. (Ewing 1994:571)

Powdermaker included a section on "Going Native" in *Stranger and Friend* (1966:115–19), and Barfield states:

> the lore about "going native," that quintessentially anthropological occupational hazard (albeit almost apocryphal), illustrates the advantages and perils of fieldwork. Participating too much results in one's going native; participating too little turns one into a superficial, ethnocentric, survey-wielding, number-crunching social scientist with, some say, zero insight into the people studied. (Barfield 1997:190)

"Going native" is such a central idea in the anthropological tradition of fieldwork that it is not surprising that writer Susanna Kaysen includes it in her novel about an anthropology graduate student doing PhD fieldwork in the Faroe Islands:

> Going bush. Like many anthropological ideas, this one had been born in jungles and savannahs and gave off a tropical scent. Some old-timers called it "troppo," an occupational hazard that began with lassitude and ended by destroying your objectivity. Stories that went, "when we got there, two years later, he was living in a hut with three wives." The trouble was, anthropologists were supposed to be living in huts. The three wives were optional but not exceptional. The line between observer and participant is so fine as to defy detection much of the time. It started easily enough. When members

> of "your" tribe are going on a journey or planning to get married, they slaughter a chicken and read the blood for omens. They offer to read omens for you before your trip back down the river for supplies. What harm can it do? It will certainly give you a better sense of their worldview, and it might give you a little useful information. Pretty soon you have recourse to chicken slaughter every time you have to make a decision. (Kaysen 1990:192–3)

While only a very small number of anthropologists have actually "gone native" in the sense of giving up anthropology altogether to fully join the people they study, the *idea* has a much larger significance in the culture of fieldwork. Perhaps the most widely read example of an anthropologist accused of being at least a borderline case of going native is the experience of Kenneth Good, the author of *Into the Heart: An Amazonian Love Story* (1991). The subtitle of the American edition – *One Man's Pursuit of Love and Knowledge Among the Yanomama* – gives even more emphasis to the impression that there is more to fieldwork than just the fact that it is a scientific method of gathering data. Good first contacted the Yanomama in 1975 while doing fieldwork for his doctorate. He was supposed to stay with them for 15 months, but ended up living with them for more than 6 years, spread over a 15-year period. Eventually, the tribe offered him a wife, Yarima, whom he married. He later took her back with him to New Jersey, where she lived as a "housewife" for 4 years and had three children. But, eventually, Yarima found she could not live in New Jersey; she divorced Good, and left her children there to return to the forest, in what has been described by reviewers (see Amazon.com) as "a fantastic love story."

Good reflected that "in my wildest dreams it had never occurred to me to marry an Indian woman in the Amazon jungle. I was from suburban Philadelphia. I had no intention of going native" (1991:122). Nonetheless:

> Down deep, all I really did want was to find some way to make a living and to get back into the jungle. Not only to study the Indians – I already had enough data for three books – but to live with them. More especially, to live with Yarima. That was what I had come to, after all these years of struggling to fit into the Yanomama world, to speak their language fluently, to grasp their way of life from the inside. My original purpose – to observe and analyze this people as an anthropological researcher – had slowly merged with something far more personal. (Good 1991:145)

In the postmodern era, reflection on the meaning of "going native" has evolved and generated new debates and insights. Where in the past it was a criticism to say an anthropologist had "gone native," today an increasing number of anthropologists, having taken on board the postmodern critique of empiricism and objectivity, advocate rather than criticize the breaking down of the traditional barriers that separate the observer from the observed, and many – including "native anthropologists" – do fieldwork "at home" in their own culture (see Pink 2000). Tedlock suggests that:

> What seems to lie behind the belief that "going native" poses a serious danger to the fieldworker is the logical construction of the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, between scientist and native, between Self and Other, as an unbridgeable opposition. The implication is that a subject's way of knowing is incompatible with the scientist's way of knowing and that the domain of objectivity is the sole property of

the outsider. Several fieldworkers have rejected this sharp analytical distinction between Self and Other. (Tedlock 1991:71)

This gives a new and interesting twist: Are anthropologists who are "natives" of the culture they study immune from or even more at risk of the danger of "going native," or do they have an advantage because of their deeper level of participation? Ewing suggests that the taboo against going native is a result of the adoption of the scientific model's commitment to objectivity, but also represents a hegemonic Western practice aimed at control or domination, which has a deleterious effect, because in order to preserve a stance of what they imagine to be scientific objectivity and detachment, ethnographers "may place the act of observing and recording between himself or herself and others" (Ewing 1994:571).

While participation in the culture under study is encouraged, researchers in the field are usually considered to have gone too far – "gone native" – if it comes to constitute a threat to their professional identity. Ewing has explored her experience with this anthropological taboo, describing her deep participation during fieldwork to the point of "belief" or "going native." She recounts how, during her fieldwork in Pakistan, she was the recipient of a dream sent by a Sufi saint, who had earlier told her that he would come to her while she was sleeping. Her initial reaction was rejection of the veracity of the experience, which she attributed to her "internalization of the anthropological taboo against going native, a reaction that I suspect is shared by many anthropologists under similar circumstances and that shapes the ethnographic project" (Ewing 1994:574). She "marveled aloud about the power of suggestion," but finally, before the end of her fieldwork, she chose to visit a Sufi saint "and, for once, to approach the whole encounter as a personal experience rather than as anthropological research" (Ewing 1994:574–5).

Other anthropologists have also pushed the limits of "going native." For example:

> Ethnographers who have learned not only the language but also appropriate behavior (including nonverbal communication codes) have been transformed, sometimes quite radically, by their fieldwork experience . . . David Hayano . . . became so immersed in the subculture of California poker players that "within several years I had virtually become one of the people I wanted to study!" Liza Crihfield Dalby not only took on the social role of a geisha during her fieldwork in Japan, but she also claims to have *become* one in both body and spirit. Her assertion that she learned to think and behave as a geisha suggests the "gone native" archetype of the anthropological imagination. (Tedlock 1991:70)

Similarly, Edie Turner (1999) has recounted her extraordinary experience while observing a ritual practiced by the Ndembu in Zambia. She reported that a "medicine man" named Singleton and his supporters were making a collective effort to draw out an afflicting spirit or *ihamba* from a woman named Meru:

> I felt the spiritual motion, a tangible feeling of breakthrough going through the whole group. Then it was that Meru fell – the spirit event first and the action afterwards. I was clapping and singing with the others like one possessed, while the drums bellowed, and Singleton pressed Meru's back . . . Meru's face in a grin of tranced passion, her back quivering rapidly. Suddenly Meru raised her arm, stretched it in liberation, and I saw with my own eyes a large thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. This thing was a big gray blob about 6 inches across, a gray opaque plasma-like object appear-

> ing as a sphere. I was amazed – delighted. I still laugh with glee at the realization of having seen it, the *ihamba*, and so big! We were all one in triumph. The gray thing was actually out there, visible and you could see Singleton's hands working and scrubbing on Meru's back – and then the thing was there no more. Singleton had it in his pouch, pressing it in his other hand as well. The receiving can was ready; he transferred whatever it was into the can and capped a castor oil leaf and bark lid over it. It was done. (Turner 1999:46)

Did she "go native," hallucinate, or actually experience what she believes she did? These anthropologists did not really "go native" because they never abandoned their anthropological identities. But they were prepared to break the traditional taboo against "going native," and in doing so pushed the boundaries of the self/other dichotomy in anthropological fieldwork.

Culture shock

The common experience of culture shock as a consequence of fieldwork in a foreign culture or context is one of the oldest themes in cultural anthropology. Virtually all fieldworkers have experienced culture shock in varying degrees. This shared subjective experience provides one of the most fundamental bonds that unite anthropologists and the discipline, and it is probably the emotional experience of culture shock that in the main leads to the characterization of fieldwork as a rite of passage. Somewhat surprisingly, in her entry for "fieldwork" in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Powdermaker dismissed culture shock on entering the field but warned of it on *returning home* from the field:

> Despite its reputation, the so-called culture shock is not often one of the problems of a trained anthropologist [because] he arrives with a general knowledge of the people and their culture through having immersed himself in the literature . . . Culture shock is more likely to be experienced when he returns to his own modern urban society after an extended period in a tribal one. (Powdermaker 1969:420–1)

But in the entry for "fieldwork" in her *Dictionary of Anthropology*, Seymour-Smith identifies culture shock as a characteristic difficulty of fieldwork, commenting that "This state of disorientation is perhaps necessary, and is in the long term a productive one, since like a rite of passage it prepares the ethnographer for the imaginative leap involved in coming to terms with an alien culture or way of life" (Seymour-Smith 1986a:117). In many reflexive accounts of fieldwork, cultural anthropologists have commented on their experience of culture shock and adjustment, and it emerges that one very common or shared response to culture shock in the early phase of fieldwork is withdrawal from contact with the locals and escapism into reading novels, and the like.

In the late 1950s, culture shock was first defined by anthropologist Kalervo Oberg as "the anxiety that results from losing familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (1960:177). In a comprehensive analysis, he argued that culture shock was a natural part of the process of adjustment to a new culture which leads eventually to cultural awareness. Oberg identified the signs of culture shock as homesickness, withdrawal, chauvinistic excesses, the stereotyping of locals, the need for excessive amounts of sleep, marital stress, the loss of ability to work effectively, compulsive

eating or drinking, unexplainable fits of weeping, irritability, psychosomatic illness, boredom, exaggerated cleanliness, and family tension and conflict. From these observations, Oberg (1974) developed a normative six-month model of the process of cultural adjustment, and made practical recommendations for dealing with culture shock, including learning more about the place and its people, refraining from criticizing the host culture, finding a friend, keeping a sense of humor, avoiding self-pity, getting enough rest, maintaining a healthy diet, getting enough exercise, keeping a sense of adventure, using friends and family for support, asking for help when needed, keeping involved with others and avoiding withdrawal, developing new interests and skills, and recording experiences, insights, and frustrations in a journal.

Postmodernism and Fieldwork

> All variants of fieldwork have been thoroughly scrutinized and criticized since the mid-1970s. Hyper-positivist fieldwork methods are under fire from postmodernism . . . Another source of critique is postcolonial studies, which deconstruct how a hegemonic Western social science such as anthropology fashions its particular alterity . . . *Some anthropologists have found traditional anthropological fieldwork so problematic that they advocate cultural history approaches.* (Barfield 1997:190; emphasis added)

The 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of postmodern perspectives and increasing debate and eclecticism in cultural anthropology. A heightened awareness of the relationship between power and the construction of knowledge produced a new concern with reflexivity – a "reflexive trend" – and new forms of fieldwork relations and ethnographic writing emerged. There was an increasing trend toward doing fieldwork "at home"; the emergence of interpretive or hermeneutic approaches; the development of feminist anthropology; a growing engagement with indigenous scholars; the emergence of autoethnography, narrative ethnography, indigenous anthropology, and new life-history approaches such as "*testimonio*"; and new practices of writing, communicating, and reading ethnographic accounts as "texts." This last development included a literary turn:

> Declared to be fictions "in the sense of something made or fashioned" (Clifford 1986:6), ethnographies, according to those who advocate this position, are partial or selective truths. They should be approached as texts whose style, rhetoric, and narrative structure can be subjected to the same kind of criticisms to which other works of literature are subjected. Writing about culture raises questions about modes of representation, about objectivity and accountability, relativism and ethnocentrism, science and truth. Textualists urge ethnographers to experiment with new forms of writing that are dialectical, dialogic, or polyphonic rather than analytic, authoritative, and univocal. Indeed, the omniscient "I know because I was there" voice of the post-Malinowskian participant observer is perceived as a trope that is no longer acceptable in a postcolonial world. (Brettell 1993:2)

At a more general level, these trends reinvigorated debate and controversy between protagonists of the universal and relativist, objectivist and subjectivist, scientific and humanistic positions, and were mainly a response to two key develop-

ments in the 1960s – the theoretical critique of "neutrality," "objectivity," "truth," and "reality" in empiricism, and the political critique of the discipline's historical relationship with Western imperialism and colonialism. These developments included processes of "decolonization" (Harrison 1991) and the "reinvention" (Hymes 1969) of anthropology, and addressed the politics of the discipline, including such critical issues as the relationship between anthropology and imperialism, academic colonialism, sexism, and issues involved in applied, action, and partisan research (Huizer and Mannheim 1979). One aspect of reflexive postmodern anthropology was a renewed and invigorated interest in the process by which data are gathered – the fieldwork experience.

The postmodern critique of fieldwork

During the postmodern turn in cultural anthropology, some anthropologists, sensitized by the poststructuralist writings of Michel Foucault on power and knowledge, harshly criticized anthropological fieldwork as a kind of invasive, disciplinary "panopticon" – a type of prison building designed by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham in 1791 to allow a guard to observe all prisoners without them being able to tell if they were being observed or not, thus conveying a "sentiment of an invisible omniscience." The anthropological interview was criticized as being similar to the medieval inquisitional confession through which church examiners extracted "truth" from their native and "heretical" peasant parishioners. Finally, they criticized anthropological observation as a hostile act that reduces our subjects to mere "objects" of our scientific gaze. Consequently, some postmodern anthropologists gave up fieldwork and the practice of descriptive ethnography altogether.

As a result of this at times ruthless critique and autocritique of anthropology from historical, political, gender, and postmodern perspectives, even the basic conceptions of the "field" and "fieldwork" – perhaps the most fundamental bases of the anthropological approach – were and are still now being critiqued and contested. An example of the most radical form of postmodern critique is Roger Berger's article "From Text to (Field)work and Back Again: Theorizing a Post(modern)-Ethnography" (1993), in which he argues that

> The "field" is not just produced by the discipline. The ethnographic "field" is also a cultural construct, a disciplinary epiphenomenon, a discursive effect, part of the discursive formation that is anthropology. Without anthropology there is no "field," no "object" of study, *and* without the power to create "fields" there is no anthropology. Indeed, the "field" is a fundamental part of what Foucault terms "the production of truth through power." It is not just the "theoretical framework" that produces ethnographic facts but disciplinary power that enables the production of a "field" in which a conceptual framework can produce "facts." Our normative sense of the "field" functions to hide the power that produces the "field." To put it another way, the "field" is the hidden configuration of western hegemonic power. (1993:178)

The conclusion is that, since "fieldwork" is fundamentally an act of domination and control, and the "field" represents "the dominated bodies of the colonized" (Berger 1993:176), the decolonization of the discipline requires that these be abandoned and new approaches developed.

The postmodern turn

While few cultural anthropologists have abandoned fieldwork, this autocriticism stimulated an experimental era, which continues today, in which new conceptions and ways of doing fieldwork have developed. For example, some postmodern anthropologists see themselves as *artisans* fashioning ethnographies by forming communities and making conversations (Gudeman and Rivera 1995). In *The Art of Fieldwork* (2005), Harry Wolcott advocates approaching fieldwork as an art method; in *Person to Person: Fieldwork, Dialogue, and the Hermeneutic Method* (1996), Barry Michrina and CherylAnne Richards present a "step-by-step" guide for a "dialogical hermeneutic" approach to fieldwork; and volumes such as *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology* (1996), edited by Michael Jackson, *Shifting Contexts: Transformations in Anthropological Knowledge* (1995), edited by Marilyn Strathern, and *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in the Contemporary World* (2000), edited by Vered Amit, present a wide range of "experimental" articles exploring new ways of approaching ethnographic research.

The "new ethnography" that has emerged in the last few decades incorporates three interlocking concerns. First, an increased awareness of "multivocality" (multiple voices representing multiple interests or "realities"), which has raised issues of signature, authority, and advocacy. Second, a growing number of works concerned with the ethnographic encounter, with cross-cultural communication, and with making explicit the ways in which fieldwork is conducted and research participants are incorporated into the account. Third, an increased regard for the context and praxis of writing and reading ethnographic "texts." For example, one aspect of the postmodern turn is the "revolution" in readership; today, the ethnographic "other" is nearly always literate and can read and respond to – particularly criticize – what anthropologists write about them. As Driessen has observed, "The traditional dichotomy of the ethnographer who looks, listens, writes and reads, versus the native who talks and tries to figure out what the behavior and questions of the anthropologist mean, has largely collapsed" (1993:3). Thus, the elements of contemporary ethnography include experimental form and method, reflexivity on the part of the ethnographer, collaboration and multiple authorship, and the details of fieldwork dialogue and experience.

Narrative ethnography

Modern ethnographers have sought to increase the voice of the "other" through more active involvement of research participants in the co-production of ethnographic accounts, narratives, or texts. This is done by extensive direct quotations, co-authorship, and collaboration with research participants. As Tedlock has observed, beginning in the 1970s, "there was a shift in emphasis from participant observation to the observation of participation" (1991:78), entailing "a representational transformation" in which both the fieldworker and "other" are "presented together within a single narrative ethnography, focused on the character and process of the ethnographic dialogue" (Tedlock 1991:69). Narrative ethnography became a creative intermingling of lived experiences, field data, methodological reflections, and cultural analysis by a situated and self-conscious narrator. Tedlock argues that the development of this new "narrative ethnography" is driven by

> a new breed of ethnographer who is passionately interested in the co-production of ethnographic knowledge, created and represented in the only way it can be, within an interactive Self/Other [epistemological] dialogue. These new ethnographers – many of whom are themselves subaltern because of their class, gender, or ethnicity – cannot be neatly tucked away or pigeonholed within any of the four historical archetypes [of] the amateur observer, the armchair anthropologist, the professional ethnographer, or the "gone native" fieldworker. Rather they, or we, combine elements from all four of these categories. Thus, for example we embrace the designation "amateur," since it derives from the Latin *amatus*, the past participle of *amare*, "to love," and we are passionately engaged with our endeavor. We accept the "armchair" designation because we have a serious concern with both reading and critiquing the work of other ethnographers in order to try to change past colonialist practices. We insist that we are "professional," because of the seriousness of our field preparation and engagement, and also because of our attention to issues of representation in our own work. Finally, to the extent that fieldwork is not simply a union card but the center of our intellectual and emotional lives, we are, if not "gone native," at least becoming bicultural. (Tedlock 1991:82)

Testimonio

One of the most important forms of narrative ethnography is the emergence of "*testimonio*" or testimonial narrative – a first-person account of a real situation that involves repression, marginalization, and violence, intended to function as a narrative that bears witness to and denounces human rights abuses. Such narratives, most coming out of Latin America since the mid-1970s, have been intended as a way to give voice to the voiceless. The most widely known example is the autobiographical *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984), which begins with this paragraph:

> My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I'm twenty-three years old. This is my testimony. I didn't learn it from a book and I didn't learn it alone. I'd like to stress that it's not only *my* life, it's also the testimony of my people. It's hard for me to remember everything that's happened to me in my life since there have been many bad times but, yes, moments of joy as well. The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people. (Menchú, with Burgos-Debray 1984:1)

John Beverley has defined *testimonio* and elaborated on its various approaches:

> By *testimonio* I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also a real protagonist or witness of the event he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a "life" or a significant life experience. *Testimonio* may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novella-testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or "factographic" literature . . . This situation of narration in *testimonio* has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on. (1996:24–5)

In the context of Latin America, *testimonio* developed as an important medium through which subalterns finally found a literary voice of their own. First and foremost, it is considered to be a tactic for empowerment and survival, in which the subaltern brings the existence of oppressive and repressive conditions to the attention of the world to bring about social and political change. Thus, for the work that has been publicized through her *testimonio*, Rigoberta Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992. *Testimonio* represents a (to some) controversial (see Stoll 1999), form of experimental ethnography, based on a new approach to fieldwork and a new relationship between the anthropologist and the "other" (Beverley 2004).

Reciprocity, collaboration, and partnership

Another development in postmodern fieldwork, or another approach to the "new ethnography," is an increased commitment to reciprocity and collaborative research. The traditional purpose of fieldwork was to collect ethnographic data, and in the 1960s this position was summarized by Powdermaker when she asserted that "The anthropologist is not primarily interested in helping his informants, although he may do so inadvertently. His motivation is to secure data" (1966:296). However, as noted above, by the mid-1980s there was an increasing commitment to *reciprocity* – to providing something useful back to research participants for their collaboration – as an ethical requirement of fieldwork. Reciprocity became more than an effective practical strategy to please informants and establish a good rapport, and acquired a moral dimension. This led to the emergence of a new type of applied anthropology, in which serving the local community and collecting ethnographic data are equally important, and "the researchers are concerned with conducting research in a team effort that benefits the local people as well as themselves" (Kuhlmann 1992:275). In particular, this has been evidenced in the development of new approaches to ethnographic fieldwork such as collaborative research and research partnerships (see Clifford 1980 and Kennedy 1995) in work with both groups (e.g., Kuhlmann 1992) and individuals (e.g., Marcus and Mascarenhas 2005).

In an article on collaborative research she conducted with members of the Kickapoo tribe of Oklahoma, Annette Kuhlmann states that "the goals of this approach include community participation, collaboration of the participants on all aspects of the project, reciprocal learning processes, and respect for the community's sense of tribal privacy in regard to publications" (1992:274). Kuhlmann worked with tribal members to develop books on Kickapoo history for classroom use. Traditionally, the Kickapoo related their past by passing on stories about events that happened to individuals and the tribe. Through interviews conducted by trained tribal members, these detailed and sometimes humorous life histories and stories were recorded from elders and put into history texts in a way that reflected this tradition.

Kuhlmann identifies the basic elements of participatory research. One approach is to look to enhance research people may already be doing themselves. The orientation of this collaborative research

> entails an attitude on the part of the outside professionals that their work and their relationships with the local members are governed by a commitment to the people, to work *with* them, i.e., not for them and not about them . . . This emphasis distinguishes collaborative research from other applied approaches in which the academic works *for*

> a specific employer, such as the federal government, another organization, or the tribe. Employer–employee relationships imply a hierarchy that the collaborative researchers strive to replace with reciprocity in learning in the context of mutually designed projects. (1992:277)

In collaborative research, the participants attempt to work together as equals, and this teamwork includes every aspect of the project – planning, implementation, problem solving, and evaluation.

Similarly, new approaches to fieldwork based on reciprocity and collaboration have emerged that emphasize *partnership*. This approach has been particularly developed by feminist anthropologists, and an increasing number of fieldworkers are choosing to enter into explicit research partnerships with individuals and groups. Research partnerships between anthropologists and the people with whom they work have already taken a variety of forms (e.g., see Shostak 1981), but generally it involves "partnerships between trained researchers and community members who are not trained in social research but who are interested in doing research into their own community" (Park 1992:581).

One of the best examples that has revealed some of the basic elements of partnership-based research is a project on the place of alcohol in the lives of New Zealand women, based on partnerships between anthropologists and Samoan, Cook Islands, Maori, and lesbian women (Park 1992:581). Julie Park observes that, as in business, research partnerships are negotiated relationships; the partnership does not necessarily have to be equal, but is one of joint engagement based on negotiation (1992:582). Park argues that in order to be nonexploitative, research relationships not only have to be open to people's experiences and voices, but have to return to the participants appropriate and accessible research-based information as part of an empowering process (1992:583). Skills and resources should be shared, and just as in other forms of participatory research, in partnership-based fieldwork it is essential to work in close cooperation with members of the group, including seeking their active involvement in planning, research, and analysis of the project.

Contemporary Fieldwork in Cultural Anthropology

> Without the continued grounding in the empirical that scientific aspects of our tradition provide, our interpretive efforts may float off into literary criticism and into particularistic forms of history. Without the interpretive tradition, the scientific tradition that grounds us will never get off the ground. (Rappaport 1994:76)

The compassionate turn

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, after more than three decades of intense postmodernist critique, cultural anthropology is passing through another shift in its relation to fieldwork. In the mid-1990s, there arose a growing opposition to the destructive cynicism and negativism of the most extreme forms of postmodern critique, because few anthropologists accepted the radical proposition that fieldwork is inherently a form of imperialism, oppression, and control, which must be abandoned altogether. If modernism (empiricism) represented anthropology's original

thesis characterized by a preoccupation with how to analyze and represent cultures, and the "postmodern turn" was its antithesis with an emphasis on the reflexive ethnographer, then lately we are seeing a synthesis of these perspectives in the reassessment of the relation between anthropologists and the peoples they study. The discipline is in the middle of a period of soul-searching about the morality of fieldwork relations and the ethico-political implications of ethnography. One of the best examples of this critical stance toward a self-absorbed anthropology is the work of Nancy Scheper-Hughes, who has written:

> I am weary of these postmodernist critiques, and, given the perilous times in which we and our subjects live, I am inclined toward compromise, the practice of a "good enough" ethnography. While the anthropologist is always a necessarily flawed and biased instrument of cultural translation, like every other craftsperson we can do the best we can with the limited resources we have at hand: our ability to listen and to observe carefully and with empathy and compassion. (1995:417–18)

Most anthropologists today would agree with Scheper-Hughes' conviction that, rather than a "hostile gaze," anthropological fieldwork can be "an opportunity for self-expression. Seeing, listening, touching, recording can be, if done with care and sensitivity, acts of solidarity. Above all, they are the work of recognition. Not to look, not to touch, not to record can be the hostile act, an act of indifference and of turning away" (1995:418). In the unfolding "compassionate turn," there is a growing acknowledgment that – like all academic disciplines – cultural anthropology was, is, and will always be flawed or imperfect, and that vigorous internal debate and criticism are "normal" and beneficial. While recognizing that at any given time we are limited by the current state of knowledge and theory, we remain committed to fieldwork as our primary method, and still aspire to the production or creation of "good enough" or approximately right ethnography capable of presenting "adequate explanations" of human and social behavior which are "adequate to the times we live in" (Becker 1993).

An awareness of the moral and ethico-political dimensions of fieldwork has drawn anthropologists to the study of violence, genocide, suffering, trauma, resilience, healing, and reconstruction (e.g., Daniel 1996, Das 1995, Farmer 2003, Hinton 2005, Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997, Mahmood 1996, Nordstrom 1997, Robben 2005, Sanford 2003, Scheper-Hughes 1993, Sluka 2000). The opening phrases of the influential collection *Social Suffering* (1997) address several major dimensions of this "compassionate turn":

> Social suffering . . . brings into a single space an assemblage of human problems that have their origins and consequences in the devastating injuries that social forces can inflict on human experience. Social suffering results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems. Included under the category of social suffering are conditions that are usually divided among separate fields, conditions that simultaneously involve health, welfare, legal, moral, and religious issues. They destabilize established categories. For example, the trauma, pain, and disorders to which atrocity gives rise are health conditions; yet they are also political and cultural matters. (Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997:ix)

The shift from a solipsistic postmodern anthropology to the study of the real suffering of real people carries multiple consequences for fieldwork. The multilayered and multidimensional complexity of research themes such as genocide, social suffering, cultural trauma, and social reconstruction requires a holistic approach that, after a long detour, reconnects fieldwork to the tradition of Boas and Malinowski. Yet, unlike these founding fathers, contemporary anthropologists have acquired enough academic confidence to draw freely on other disciplines. The "compassionate turn" makes anthropologists also reemphasize the importance of empathy, not empathy as a methodological technique to adopt the "native point of view" but as an epistemological approach. Compassionate empathy makes the fieldworker and the research participant share a subjective space, implicating them in each other's lives and in the production of ethnographic knowledge. This approach carries a political responsibility, which is not a return to the action anthropology of the 1970s but rather a form of social advocacy delivered mostly from the steps of the academy and only rarely engaged directly in the field. Robert Borofsky's agenda for an anthropological outreach to the world is the public face of this compassionate fieldwork:

> Public anthropology demonstrates the ability of anthropology and anthropologists to effectively address problems beyond the discipline – illuminating the larger social issues of our times as well as encouraging broad, public conversations about them with the explicit goal of fostering social change. It affirms our responsibility, as scholars and citizens, to meaningfully contribute to communities beyond the academy – both local and global – that make the study of anthropology possible. (www.publicanthropology.org)

Public anthropology sees ethnographers as witnesses, instead of dispassionate observers or political activists, who connect their readers to the world's trouble spots and sensitize them to the suffering and struggles of underprivileged human beings. It wants to generate public discussion, influence opinion, and engage politicians and policy makers critically to achieve genuine social change without, however, becoming involved in its realization.

"Being there"

The postmodern critique of fieldwork and its compassionate reaction have stimulated new conceptions of what constitutes "the field" and ethnography. This process continues today. People like James Fernandez (1985:19) argued two decades ago that fieldwork is mainly what anthropology is all about, and that the essential characteristic of fieldwork is "being there." This is particularly reflected in two recent books on fieldwork – *Being There: The Necessity of Fieldwork* (Bradburd 1998) and *Being There: Fieldwork in Anthropology* (Watson 1999). But the very "what, where, and when" of fieldwork has shifted. For example, Deborah D'Amico-Samuels (1991:69) has questioned both the geographical and temporal construction of the traditional division between "home" being here and "the field" being there, between where we write and publish and where we do our fieldwork, and explored "where does the field begin and end, if ever?" Does fieldwork end when we "leave the field," and what does "leave the field" mean in a high-tech, postmodern, and globalized world where even research participants in the remotest areas are accessible by telephone? D'Amico-Samuels argues that the notion of being "back from

the field" implies an artificial separation in the ethnographic process, with unfortunate consequences. She concludes that today "the field is everywhere," and there is no division between home and the field because both exist in the same holistic context of globalized power relations (D'Amico-Samuels 1991:83).

Traditionally, fieldwork ended when one returned from the field to analyze and write up the research results. However, in contemporary cultural anthropology, when researchers more frequently conduct *long-term* or diachronic fieldwork in the same location over many years and several field trips, and where the physical distance between "home" and "the field" is largely ameliorated by instantaneous means of electronic mass communication, this simple dichotomy between being "in the field" and then leaving no longer holds sway. Today, many anthropologists consider that, in a sense, they never really leave the field entirely and thus their fieldwork never really ends. For example, in 1994 one of Jeffrey Sluka's key research participants in Belfast, the leader of a nationalist paramilitary group, was killed. Within a few hours of his death he received a telephone call from other research participants, and they spoke for nearly two hours about what had happened. This discussion was predicated on fieldwork-based relations, was the same as a research interview, and the notes he wrote were indistinguishable from "field notes." But there was an immense physical distance between them: he was at "home" and they were "in the field." But while he was on the telephone, was he not essentially "in the field" and was this not a form of attenuated "fieldwork"? (See Sunderland 1999 for a discussion of "fieldwork and the phone.")

Today, cultural anthropologists are increasingly exploring the implications for long-term fieldwork marked by the presence of the ethnographer at discreet periods over their life history and intellectual thought. For example, Anthony Cohen, who conducted fieldwork over 19 years on the island of Whalsay, in Shetland, has observed that during this time there was "continuous change: in the field; in the discipline; to the author himself; and in his view of the discipline, the field, and his earlier analysis of his data" (1992:339). He referred to "that mental notebook which is never closed and which certainly does not recognize the geographical and cultural limits and specificities of our putative fields" (1992:339), called attention to "anthropologists' compulsion to carry 'their' field with them mentally, long after they have left it physically" (1992:344), and introduced the idea of "post-fieldwork fieldwork":

> We bring to the analysis of our fieldnotes [and headnotes] continuously accumulating experience extraneous to the circumstances in which they were written. "In this sense," says Ottenberg, "the field experience does not stop. Things that I once read in my fieldnotes in one way, I now read in another." Hastrup makes a similar point: "The past is not past in anthropology." It is precisely this process of rereading that I refer to by the phrase, "post-fieldwork fieldwork." (1992:345)

Today, a common pattern of fieldwork for cultural anthropologists is one year of PhD fieldwork followed by a series of shorter trips, frequently lasting for three months (over a summer break) or sometimes six months (a semester sabbatical), over the course of an academic career. Some do considerably more fieldwork, but some do considerably less. It is increasingly difficult for graduate students to get funding for a year's fieldwork, and for faculty to take that much time off as research leave.

That is, economics often dictates the kind of fieldwork anthropologists do, and the tendency has been toward the development of more cost-efficient (i.e., cheaper) alternatives to long-term fieldwork. One result is that today much fieldwork resembles more the Boasian/American tradition than the Malinowskian/British one – namely, shorter periods working with one or a few key "research participants," rather than extended participant observation of a whole community for one or two years.

In cultural anthropology, the process of critiquing, refining, and redefining ethnography and fieldwork continues. Today, the "best practice" of fieldwork is *ethically grounded*, with the free and informed consent of research participants. It is *participatory*, shaped with the active *collaboration* of research "participants" rather than "subjects," and conducted with their needs in mind. That is, *reciprocity* – giving something back to the community which they deem to be of use to them – is built into it by design. The new research orientations in fieldwork that emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s, such as *narrative ethnography* and *testimonio*, and the compassionate ones in the process of emerging today, are examples of the application of these themes.

The Construction and Organization of the Reader

> That charming and intelligent Austrian-American anthropologist Paul Radin has said that no one quite knows how one goes about fieldwork. Perhaps we should leave the question with that sort of answer. But when I was a serious young student in London I thought I would try to get a few tips from experienced fieldworkers before setting out for Central Africa. I first sought advice from Westermarck. All I got from him was "don't converse with an informant for more than twenty minutes because if you aren't bored by that time he will be." Very good advice, even if somewhat inadequate. I sought instruction from Haddon, a man foremost in field-research. He told me that it was really all quite simple; one should always behave as a gentleman. Also very good advice. My teacher, Seligman, told me to take ten grains of quinine every night and to keep off women. The famous Egyptologist, Sir Flinders Petrie, just told me not to bother about drinking dirty water as one soon became immune to it. Finally, I asked Malinowski and was told not to be a bloody fool. So there is no clear answer, much will depend on the man, on the society he is to study, and the conditions in which he is to make it. (Evans-Pritchard 1973:1)

So why this reader about fieldwork rather than methods? Should we not just improve our data-collection techniques and leave all talk of fieldwork to after-dinner conversations or one-liners to reassure anxious students? In fact, our mentor Gerald Berreman told us when we were close to embarking on our doctoral fieldwork that what we had to do was "hang out" in cafés and on street corners. Yet, there is more here than meets the eye. Beneath the seemingly common-sense remarks by Berreman and Evans-Pritchard's teachers, there are hints at the complexities of fieldwork relations and rapport (don't talk too long with an informant; keep off women; hang out), ethics (behave like a gentleman), conflicts, hazards, and dangers in fieldwork (take quinine; don't worry about dirty water), and fieldwork identity (don't be a fool).

We therefore believe that the technicalities of field interviews or organizing field notes are not the problem, to mention two common concerns among students, but

what goes on in the relation between ethnographer and research participants, and how to interpret field notes. Insight in the interview experience and the epistemology of fieldnotes, rather than the technique, leads to better interviewers and better data. There are no recipes for gathering ethnographic data, just as there are no formulas for designing a groundbreaking experiment in nuclear physics. Instead, a better understanding of the experience of conducting fieldwork will heighten the anthropologist's sensitivity to the research process and enhance access to rewarding data rather than relying solely on trodden paths led by a singular concern with methods. This is not to say that anthropologists should not train themselves thoroughly in fieldwork methods – we have added an appendix with extensive bibliographic references to ethnographic data-gathering techniques for the interested reader (see Appendix 1) – but we are convinced that a sophisticated understanding of the fieldwork experience will make better fieldworkers and yield more profound and groundbreaking ethnographies.

Given the great many books and articles available on ethnographic fieldwork, several choices had to be made for this reader. One, the selection concentrates on those texts which we believe to have continued relevance in the discipline and should be part of the background knowledge of every undergraduate and graduate student in cultural anthropology. Two, the selection aims to provide readers with a good sense of the breadth, variation, and complexity of the fieldwork experience. We have therefore not restricted this anthology to discussions of data gathering proper, but extended into issues of professional identity, fieldwork relations, ethics, and the practice of ethnographic writing. Three, since much has been written about a great number of topics, we have been forced to choose from several equally superb articles on the same subject. Style, accessibility, imagination, innovation, and personal preference were considered in selecting one text over another.

The reader is divided into ten parts, each representing a major subfield or theme in **ethnographic fieldwork** in cultural anthropology:

I **Beginnings:** Ethnographic fieldwork had been carried out in various guises and forms at the turn of the nineteenth century, but Bronislaw Malinowski is generally considered the "founding father" of extended, first-hand fieldwork in anthropology.

II **Fieldwork Identity:** Self-reflection on research experiences has been more prominent in anthropology than in any other scholarly discipline. The long-term immersion in other societies and cultures, the status as foreigners and "others," the interactive research methods, and the nature of fieldwork as a professional rite of passage with often far-reaching effects on the self, have made fieldwork identity of great concern, and some authors argue that the anthropologist's identity has a decisive influence on the data gathered.

III **Fieldwork Relations and Rapport:** The success of ethnographic fieldwork is in large measure determined by the ability to establish good rapport and develop meaningful relations with research participants. These relations range from friendship to hostility, and may be influenced by ethnicity, religion, class, gender, and age.

IV **The "Other" Talks Back:** Access to schooling and the dissemination of anthropological writings have turned once illiterate "informants" into avid critics of their ethnographers. Such "talking back" has made anthropologists aware of their

conduct as researchers, led to soul-searching about their writings, and enhanced the quality of ethnographic research.

V **Fieldwork Conflicts, Hazards, and Dangers:** Fieldwork is not free of tensions, dilemmas, conflicts, hazards, and dangers, and even lethal hostility. Awareness of such risks is of life-saving importance to students embarking on their first fieldwork experience, and research troubles, even failures, are a source of ethnographic knowledge in themselves.

VI **Fieldwork Ethics:** The relational nature of fieldwork addressed in Part III, the conflicts described in Part IV, and the changing relation between anthropologists and their research participants referred to in Part V, have made contemporary fieldwork morally and ethically more complex. A grasp of the ethical implications of fieldwork is indispensable before students can develop their first research design.

VII **Multi-Sited Fieldwork:** Long-term, face-to-face, empirical research in a small community has been the enduring hallmark of anthropological fieldwork. However, in the last decade, there has been an increase in multi-sited fieldwork because of a growing interdisciplinary interest among anthropologists and forces of globalization which impinge on even the remotest community. Multi-sited fieldwork is not only concerned with different locales and migrants but also involves widely varying topics such as bodies, imaginary beings, the internet, and the scientific enterprise itself.

VIII **Sensorial Fieldwork:** Fieldwork is mostly based on verbal exchanges and generally yields a written narrative of research results. However, attention to sight, sound, smell, and taste have also produced fascinating interpretations of culture.

IX **Reflexive Ethnography:** The ethnographic turn of the 1970s heightened anthropology's awareness of the epistemology of the fieldwork encounter. The ethnographer's crucial role in dialogic data collection gave her or him a central place in anthropological writings. Reflexivity has enriched fieldwork by making ethnographers pay much closer attention to the interactional processes through which knowledge is acquired, learned, and transmitted.

X **Fictive Fieldwork and Fieldwork Novels:** Some anthropologists have been exploring literary styles to transmit their fieldwork experiences, thus blurring the boundaries between experience, impression, and emotion. Others have turned to poetry, experimental writing, and fiction to make readers share in the ethnographic encounter which makes fieldwork such a singular experience.

With this introduction and structure in mind, welcome to the reader, and best wishes for success in fieldwork.