

SO338-15 Ethnography and the Anthropological Tradition

20/21

Department

Sociology

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Alexander Smith

Credit value

15

Module duration

9 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

Ethnography, or 'participant observation' as it is sometimes glossed, has proven a valuable approach for sociologists seeking to apprehend a world in flux. However, it is often mischaracterised as a method rather than a theoretical tradition in its own right. This module addresses the key ethical, practical and theoretical debates in which ethnography is grounded, for sociology and other cognate disciplines like social anthropology. The module explores the historical development of ethnography, particularly in terms of its deployment by early twentieth century anthropologists like Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski, as well as innovations pioneered by the early 'Chicago school' sociologists, the Mass Observation movement in Britain and then, after the Second World War, the development of the Manchester School of Anthropology by Max Gluckman, and the emergence of 'community studies' in Britain. The module also engages with contemporary scholarly debates, beginning with the so-called 'crisis' in ethnographic writing, provoked by the 'reflexive turn' of the 1980s. It will consider arguments for collaborative ethnography and multi-sited fieldwork, as well problems of ethnographic authority and representation. We will conclude the module with a reassessment of ethnography as theory, (rather than method, or mere 'description'), in order to consider the potential and promise of ethnography for a globally-orientated sociology of twenty-first century life.

Module aims

The aim of this optional module is to enable students to:

Develop an understanding of an important methodological approach - that of ethnography - in sociology, social anthropology and the social sciences more generally and to understand its contemporary application within the discipline

Develop an understanding and critical awareness of the main ethical, practical and theoretical debates that ethnography provokes in both disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts

Apply their knowledge of historical and contemporary innovations in ethnographic approaches to current issues and topics within the field of sociology

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Ethnography, or 'participant observation' as it is sometimes glossed, has proven a valuable approach for sociologists seeking to apprehend a world in flux. However, it is often mischaracterised as a method rather than a theoretical tradition in its own right. This module addresses the key ethical, practical and theoretical debates in which ethnography is grounded, for sociology and other cognate disciplines like social anthropology. The first part of the module explores the historical development of ethnography, particularly in terms of its deployment by early twentieth century anthropologists like Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski as well as innovations pioneered by the early 'Chicago school' sociologists, the 'mass observation' movement in Britain and then, after the Second World War, the development of the Manchester School of Anthropology by Max Gluckman and the emergence of 'community studies' in Britain. The second part of the module engages with contemporary scholarly debates, beginning with the so-called 'crisis' in ethnographic writing provoked by the 'reflexive turn' of the 1980s. It considers arguments for collaborative ethnography and multi-sited fieldwork, particularly in relation to Michael Burawoy's recent calls for public sociology, as well as the literature on so-called 'new' ethnographic objects. The module concludes with a reassessment of ethnography as theory (rather than method, or mere 'description') in order to consider the potential and promise of ethnography for a globally-orientated sociology of twenty-first century life.

TOPICS BY WEEK:

1. Introduction to the module: ethnography, sociology and the anthropological tradition
Ethnography: its historical development
2. Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski and Edmund Leach: the origins of anthropology
3. John Dewey and the 'Chicago School': the case study approach in sociology
4. Participant observation and everyday life: the legacy of the Mass Observation Archive
5. Post-WWII innovation: community studies and the 'Manchester School' of anthropology
Ethnography: contemporary debates
6. Writing Culture and the reflexive turn: the postcolonial critique of ethnographic authority
7. Michael Burawoy and public sociology: multi-sited fieldwork and the extended case study
8. Democracy, neoliberalism and biotechnology: 'new' ethnographic objects in a post-Cold War world

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- 1. Demonstrate an understanding of the role of ethnography in the development of sociology and social anthropology, as well as the social sciences more generally, and understand its contemporary application within the discipline
- 2. Compare, contrast and critically assess the main ethical, practical and theoretical debates that ethnography generates for sociology, social anthropology and the social sciences
- 3. Critically apply their knowledge of historical and contemporary innovations in ethnography to current issues and topics within the field

Indicative reading list

- Benson, Michaela (2011) *The British in Rural France: lifestyle migration and the ongoing quest for a better way of life*. Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Burawoy, Michael (2009) *The Extended Case Method: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations, and One Theoretical Tradition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press
- Burawoy, Michael, et al. (2000) *Global Ethnography: forces, connections and imaginations in a postmodern world*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Burawoy, Michael, et al. (1991) *Ethnography Unbound: power and resistance in the modern metropolis*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Candea, Matei (2007) 'Arbitrary locations: in defense of the bounded field-site', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13 (1): 167-184
- Clifford, James (1988) *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, eds. (1986) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press
- Das, Veena (1997) *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Edwards, Jeanette (2000) *Born and Bred: Idioms of Kinship and New Reproductive Technologies in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Graeber, David (2009) *Direct Action: An Ethnography*. Oakland, CA: AK Press
- Greenhouse, Carol J., ed. (2009) *Ethnographies of Neoliberalism*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Greenhouse, Carol J. (2011) *The Paradox of Relevance: Ethnography and Citizenship in the United States*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Hubble, Nick (2010) *Mass Observation and Everyday Life: culture, history, theory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Jackson, Brian and Dennis Marsden (1962) *Education and the Working Class*. London: Routledge
- Malinowski, Bronislaw (2010) *Argonauts of the western Pacific: an account of native enterprise and adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. Oxford: Benediction Classics
- Marcus, George E. (1998) *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton

University Press

Murphy, Fiona and Mark Maguire (2012) *Integration in Ireland: the everyday lives of African migrants*. Manchester: Manchester University Press

Nader, Laura (2011) 'Ethnography as Theory', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 1 (1): 211-219

Pearson, Geoff (2012) *An Ethnography of English Football Fans*. Manchester: Manchester University Press

Riles, Annelise (2001) *The Network Inside Out*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press

Riles, Annelise (2006) *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press

Sampson, Helen (2012) *International seafarers and transnationalism in the twenty-first century*. Manchester: Manchester University Press

Savage, Mike (2010) *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Smith, Alexander (2011) *Devolution and the Scottish Conservatives: banal activism, electioneering and the politics of irrelevance*. Manchester: Manchester University Press

Interdisciplinary

The module draws on a range of academic disciplines, including sociology, social anthropology, history, English literature and cultural studies.

International

The ethnographic texts and case studies the module explores are drawn from around the world.

Subject specific skills

Students will demonstrate:

A systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline

An ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline and a conceptual understanding that enables the student to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and

techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline

An ability to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline

An appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge

The ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline)

Transferable skills

Students will be able to:

Apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects

Critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem

Communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.

They will have the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

The exercise of initiative and personal responsibility

Decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts

The learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	9 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Private study	72 hours (48%)
Assessment	60 hours (40%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Reading for seminars.

Preparation for seminars

Preparation of presentations

Preparation and writing of formative work

Preparation and writing of summative work

Other work related to assessment

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A2

Weighting**Study time****Eligible for self-certification****Assessment component**

Assessed Essay

100%

60 hours

Yes (extension)

A summative essay in response to a choice of set questions covering topics from each week of the module.

Reassessment component is the same

Feedback on assessment

Marking is via the Tabula system and students receive written, electronic feedback through the system.

Availability**Courses**

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 3 of ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology

This module is Optional for:

- Year 3 of USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
- Year 4 of USOA-L306 BA in Sociology (with Intercalated Year)
- Year 3 of USOA-L314 Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology

This module is Unusual option for:

- Year 3 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics

This module is Option list A for:

- ULAA-ML34 BA in Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
 - Year 3 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
 - Year 4 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
- Year 5 of ULAA-ML35 BA in Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree) (with Intercalated year)
- Year 4 of ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 3 of UPOA-ML13 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology

- Year 4 of UPOA-ML14 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology (with Intercalated year)