

## Workshop

# (DOING) ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK: BETWEEN PARTICIPATION AND OBSERVATION

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## Overview

Participant observation is considered to be the defining method of ethnographic fieldwork. This workshop aims to introduce students to the method of participant observation, both in terms of central theoretical issues as well as providing the opportunity for practical exercises and reflection. The central goal is to practice bringing participant observation into the students' repertoire of research techniques. Core concepts that we will deal with include: the tension between participation and observation; the nature of 'the field'; research relationships and social obligations; and methodological orientations.

## Format

The workshop will follow a hybrid format that includes presentations by Prof. Lauser and Dr. Maud, text analysis/discussion, film analysis/discussion, and practical exercises.

## Key texts

Bielo, James S. *Anthropology of Religion: The Basics*. The Basics. London; New York: Routledge, 2015.

DeWalt, Kathleen Musante, and Billie R. DeWalt. *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002.

## Schedule

### Day 1 – Monday 8.10.2018

#### Morning

9.00 – 9.45: *Introduction and organization*

9.45 – 10.30 *Presentation + Discussion: Ethnography between participation and observation*

This session will introduce the basic problematic of doing ethnographic research, which we characterize as involving a tension between participation and observation. These two elements put different, even opposing, demands on the researcher and thus must be negotiated throughout the course of research. In this session we will discuss theoretical questions regarding the nature of participant observation. Instead of seeing the tension between participation and observation as a fundamental problem for research, we will discuss it as a productive space for the production of ethnographic insights.

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This session will also introduce the topics that we will explore throughout the rest of the workshop: The nature of the field; Research relationships and interlocutors; Four 'methodological orientations'.

10.30 – 10.45 Break

10.45 – 11.30 Text discussion

**Literature:** DeWalt and Dewalt, Chapter 2

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**Afternoon**

*14.00 – 15.00: Presentation and discussion 'The field'*

Anthropologists are said to do 'fieldwork', but what is 'the field'? Is it best thought of as a place, a network, a set of relations? How does one 'enter' the field? Is this a single act, or a gradual process? What does it mean to be 'in' the field? How 'big' should it be?

The goal of this session is to allow students to reflect on the nature of 'the field' and to problematize its 'taken-for-granted' character. We will reflect on the researcher's role in 'creating' the field and how this affects the possibilities of research.

*15.00 – 17.00 Film and discussion 'Celso and Cora'*

In this session we will view the classic ethnographic film made by Australian filmmaker Gary Kildea. Set in Manila in the 1980s, *Celso and Cora* represents an example of the 'participating camera'. Through the camera, we are introduced to the gradual process through which the researcher becomes more and more integrated into the everyday life of his interlocutors. The film will give us the opportunity to discuss the nature of participation, observation, and the field.

**Day 2 – Tuesday 9.10.18**

**Morning:**

The morning session will deal with the categories of participation and observation separately. Working with the key texts, will move through the 'stations' of, and problems associated with, participation in part 1. In part 2, we will focus on the various strategies of observation that may be employed in ethnographic research as well as the different 'levels' of observation.

*9.00 – 10.00: Text discussion: Learning to participate*

**Literature:** DeWalt and DeWalt, Chapter 3

10.00 – 10.15 Break

*10.15 – 11.30: Text discussion: Learning to observe*

**Literature:** DeWalt and DeWalt, Chapter 4

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**Afternoon:**

*14.00 – 14.45: Presentation: Research relationships and social obligations*

This session will be devoted to the question of the importance of relationships to our interlocutors, sometimes called 'informants'. What are the different approaches that can be taken to conceptualizing the relationship to our interlocutors? Are they mere 'sources'

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of information', or is it better to think of them as 'co-researchers'? What ethical questions should we take into account in our interactions? How do we maintain reciprocity and generally care for good relations?

14.45 - 15.45 Film: *Ngat is Dead*

In addition to discussion, we will view excerpts of the ethnographic film, *Ngat is Dead*, featuring the Dutch anthropologist Ton Otto.

15.45 – 16.00 Break:

*16.00 – 17.00: Text discussion: Four methodological orientations*

This session raises the question of whether there is a single 'correct' orientation for the researcher to adopt vis-à-vis his/her interlocutors and/or topic being studied. Drawing on the anthropology of religion, we will discuss four possible methodological orientations, each one implying a different 'attitude' towards the subject matter of research.

- Methodological atheism
- Methodological agnosticism
- Methodological ludism
- Methodological theism

While developed in the anthropology of religion, we argue that these notions can be applied to anthropological research in general. While none of these are more 'correct' than others, they do imply different goals and potentials of research.

The goal of this session is to encourage students to reflect on their own orientation to topics and to consider how this can influence the possibilities and outcomes of research.

**Literature:** Bielo, chapter 2, "Doing religious ethnography".

### **Day 3 – Wednesday 10.10.18**

#### **All-day excursion. Lên Đồng in Đền Lảnh and Đền Đại Lộ, Hà Nam**

The whole group will travel to participate in and observe Lên Đồng ceremonies. We will use these ceremonies as an opportunity to reflect upon the key terms and arguments that we have discussed throughout the workshop: participation; observation; 'field'; and the methodological orientations.

### **Day 4 – 11.10.18**

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*9.00 – 11.30: Reflections (student-led activity)*

In the morning, students will be asked to spend some time preparing written reflections based on their experiences of the previous three days. Students will be given a questionnaire and will have the opportunity to discuss amongst themselves. These reflections will be used as the basis for discussion in the afternoon session.

*14.00 – 15.15: Discussion of student reflections*

In this final session, students will present their reflections that they worked on in the morning and we will engage in a final discussion of, and reflection upon, the workshop as a whole.

**15.15 – 15.30 Break**

15.30 – 17.00 Feedback interviews

In the final section Prof. Lauser and Dr. Maud will interview selected students on their experiences during the workshop. In particular, we are interested in understanding intercultural understandings of the teaching and learning context and experience of the students.

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