

SOAN304

Anthropological Research Methods

Spring 2017

Nicely 321, Th, 3:30-6:00pm

Instructor: Dr. Sylvain Perdigon

sp06@aub.edu.lb, Nicely 201D

Office hours: Tuesday, 3-6pm (by appointment)

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

This course is about the various methods of inquiry and interpretation used in anthropological research. Though ethnographic methods are shaped by each research situation and its particular historical and cultural circumstances, they are also guided by broad theoretical questions. This course takes the perspective that research is comprised of three inter-related domains: creative theoretical speculation, methodological ‘operationalization’ of theoretical questions, and concrete research practices. The trick (or ‘magic’) of ethnographic research is to relate empirical and observational data in many forms to the theories that motivate their collection. We explore the politics and ethics of research, kinds of observation, effective interviewing strategies, note-taking, conducting surveys, examining archives, ways of ‘coding’ or indexing information, data analysis, and approaches to writing.

COURSE PHILOSOPHY

Anthropology is the field of empirical research and theoretical inquiry that aims at assembling thick accounts of actual social worlds. It is both a very exciting and a very intimidating endeavor. At one level, you simply want to get it *right*, reach conclusions that have a claim to legitimacy and authoritative knowledge according to disciplinary standards and will get you your degree, job offer or publishing contract. But of course, you also want your findings to *make a difference* and be *significant*, eloquent, of consequence — to disclose connections, aspects, and zones of human experience not or poorly known before your research —, and this often implies elaborating on, sometimes even departing from, the received ways of doing anthropology and the theoretical assumptions and social imaginaries they are embedded in. Finally, you know or feel that your research ought to be conducted in a *responsible* manner, that is, in a manner *responsive* to the obligations you will incur as you enter and cultivate relations through fieldwork, and as you venture, later on, to speak or write about other people’s lives. And these obligations, you mostly do not know what forms they are going to take as you embark on your project, nor how they are going to transform your very self.

This course is designed to initiate MA students into the practical logic of anthropological inquiry, from articulating a research question to conducting fieldwork to writing in the ethnographic genre. The course will take us through the ethnographer’s toolbox, including participant observation, fieldnotes, interviews, social mapping, survey design, data coding,

extended case-study and other forms of analysis and modes of presentation. But the course is not just a survey of the tricks of the trade. In doing so, we will explore systematically the relations between the conceptual and the empirical — how different types of *evidence* (words, observations, numbers, images, maps, etc.) enter into and shape ethnographic accounts and anthropological theories. We will also develop a sustained reflection on the *necessity* to think critically and *imaginatively* about what constitutes “the field” and our research instruments, including the most useful, most dubious one we have: this part of our self drawn to ethnographic fieldwork.

Regarding the organization of the course, we shall take our cue from anthropologists’ long-standing habit of describing their practice as *a craft* (or what the Ancient Greeks called *technè*)¹ rather than a clearcut set of formal procedures. By this, they mean not only that their standard methods of data collection always have to be infinitely refined, tweaked, or reinvented to espouse the contours and lines of force and flight of whatever social world one is working in and on. They also mean that anthropology, really, is something one can learn to do only by doing it. Accordingly, I want you to think of our course a bit as a carpenter’s workshop or a pottery studio. What you learn in this course depends only partially on what I plan to teach you. It depends at least as much on your willingness to experiment on your own terms with the various techniques we will explore, and to share your successes, missteps and other tips with your fellow apprentices for mutual instruction. The course must also be a stepping stone on the path toward the completion of your MA degree. Concretely, you will be tasked with designing and conducting exploratory fieldwork for your MA thesis research project, in parallel to developing the building blocks of a research proposal. Your responsibilities for class will include sharing various stages of your work with your classmates and following the development of their own projects.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this class, students will have acquired basic tools and skills to:

- articulate a research question and design an ethnographic research project
- write an anthropological research proposal
- apply standards methods of anthropological inquiry, including participant observation, note taking, formal and informal interviews, social mapping, and surveys
- analyze qualitative and quantitative ethnographic data
- select the appropriate mode of presentation to share their findings
- reflect critically on the kind of evidence on which anthropology rests its claim to legitimacy and authoritative knowledge, and on the relation of the empirical and the conceptual in anthropological research.

¹On *technè*, see Vernant, Jean Pierre. 2006. *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*. New York: Zone Books.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Requirement	Percentage	Due
Attendance	10 %	
Participation	10 %	
Research problem	6 %	by week 3
Research background	6 %	by week 5
Fieldnotes I	7.5 %	by week 6
Research Questions	6 %	by week 7
Interview Report	5 %	by week 8
Contribution Section	6 %	by week 9
Mapping exercise	5 %	by week 10
Methods section	6 %	by week 11
Survey Memo	5 %	by week 12
Fieldnotes II	7.5 %	by week 12
Complete Proposal Draft	20 %	by week 13

1. **Attendance (10%) and participation (10%).** This course will be run as a seminar. The attendance and informed participation of each and every student is not just required, it is the very substance of our endeavor. I will deliver introductory lectures on the course material, but what we learn will be driven in good part by the questions, comments, ideas and energies that you bring to our discussion. There is no point in coming to class if you have not read, annotated and thought carefully about the course material and have no intention to explore in the discussion its relevance and applicability to your research project and those of your classmates. A failure on your part to do this work of preparation on a regular basis, or to make it evident to me through your active contribution to class discussion, would significantly impact this portion of your final grade. I will take attendance at the beginning of every session.

Note in this respect that this a rather reading-intensive course, or at least as reading-intensive as an MA-level seminar would typically be in a good American or European university (the reading load for each week is 120+ dense pages on average). I cannot insist on this enough: you must plan on keeping a strict, organized reading routine throughout the semester in order to cope with this load (i.e. starting the readings the day before class will not work). I expect participants in this course to do close, active readings of the material. You should come to class with a clear idea of the plan of the chapters or articles you have just read, of the argumentative strategies that authors employ, and a handful of key words and specific passages in mind for discussion. **I ask that you print out all of our materials and that you bring the reading(s) for the week to class.** Take notes in the margins, highlight passages, draw arrows between ideas you would like to connect — in other words, grapple and wrestle with the text itself. Do you have questions at certain points? Write that down. If the scholar/author was sitting across from you, would you have a question? Write that down. Did something prompt and inspire you to think about how you could go about conducting your own research project? Write that down.

2. **Research proposal (50%, in steps).** One core objective of this course is that every student should have by the end of the semester a complete draft thesis proposal which needs only a bit of fine-tuning to be successfully defended in front of your MA committee. This assignment, which will require a significant, continuous effort on your part, is designed to help you build and sustain momentum towards the timely completion of your degree. The course's second session (Week 2) will be devoted entirely to the nuts and bolts of putting together a compelling research proposal. Starting on week 3, you will submit successive assignments adding up to the building blocks of a research proposal in anthropology: **research problem (6% of the final grade)**, **research background (6%)**, **research questions (6%)**, **methods (6%)**, and **contribution/theoretical relevance section (6%)**. You will quickly realize that working on one such building block entails keeping tabs on, and adjusting, the four other ones. Therefore, I strongly advise you to open five corresponding files from the very start of the semester, and to assume that you will have to be working on the five sections at once throughout the course. At the end of the semester, you will bring these sections together in order to submit on week 13 a **full proposal (20%)**—a final step of which you should assume that it will involve a significant amount of tweaking and re- or new writing.

In accordance with the conventions followed by the American Anthropological Association, you should use the **Author-Date Chicago citation style** in your written assignments. Refer to the [How to cite your sources page](#) on the AUB library website for the necessary information on the Chicago citation style and useful citation management tools. Schedule an appointment at the library or the writing center if you are unsure of how to use these resources.

3. **Fieldwork exercises (30% in total).** Finally, the remaining written assignments for the class will revolve around actual, exploratory research activities that you will conduct over the course of the semester for the development of your research project. These includes **fieldnotes (in two installments, 15% in total)**, one **survey memo (5%)**, an **interview report (5%)** and a **mapping exercise (5%)**. I shall explain in class what the specific requirements and parameters for each assignment are in the weeks preceding submission.

Two notes on assignments:

- One key element to your success in this course, and benefiting from it, is **pac-ing**. Start early, and work consistently. Except in truly exceptional, documented circumstances, I will not accept late assignments.
- Assume that the assignments you will be submitting over the course of the semester can and will be read by your classmates. I will sometimes circulate works you submit to me to the rest of the class so that we can have a collective conversation on examples of felicitous moves or common false steps to avoid.

COURSE POLICIES AND ETIQUETTE

1. Attendance and participation

Timely attendance at each class meeting is required. Your attendance and engaged participation are essential for the success of this course, as they are for the benefit of your classmates and of yourself. I will take attendance at the beginning of each class session. By coming late to class, you will be marked as absent, unless you come to see me at the end of the session with a valid excuse for being late. Absences for which a medical excuse is provided (on professional letterhead) will be recorded but not figured in the attendance grade. Likewise, one absence for which advance notice is given by email will not be figured in the attendance grade. Any significant tardy arrival in, or early departure from, class will be figured as a half absence. **Anyone who has more than four class-long, unexcused absences will be dropped out from the course.**

2. On listening and note-taking in class

A basic ground rule: **there is to be no computer, cell phone or electronic notepad usage in class.** You will be publicly shamed and asked to leave the classroom if caught using any of the above. Instead, use a pen and notebook to take notes. A core element of discussion is engagement, not transcription. The listening is just as important (or perhaps even more important) than the speaking during discussion, and active listening is more easily achieved through longhand note-taking than when an electronic device stands in the way with its distractions. In addition, recent studies show that [students who write out their notes on paper learn significantly more and better](#)^[10:37:11].

3. Office hours and email etiquette

Please be thoughtful in your academic communication. It is important to develop appropriate emailing styles for different contexts. Your professors and your peers expect emails to be written free of texting shorthand, with an appropriate salutation.

Feel free to contact me outside of normal hours, but understand that you must allow a 24-hour window for an email response. Note, too, that I cannot discuss grades, or answer substantive questions about course material, over email.

All meetings (even during office hours) must be scheduled in advance. There is an [“Office Hours Sign-Up”](#) button on the top of the Moodle site for the class.

4. Academic honesty

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. In accordance with the [AUB Student Code of Conduct, Sections 1 and 2](#), **plagiarism** of any kind will be penalized to the fullest possible extent, without warning or exception. I will give a grade of zero on the assignment where the violation has occurred and refer the case to the Student Disciplinary Affairs Committee.

The most common causes of plagiarism are not deliberate dishonesty, but stress and uncertainty. You are encouraged to begin assignments well in advance of the deadline, and to check with the instructor if you have any questions. Whenever you draw upon somebody else’s words or ideas to make a point, give them credit in a note. If you have questions about documentation requirements, don’t guess – just ask. The AUB website contains a [useful page](#) with information and tutorials designed for students on this topic.

5. Accessibility

AUB strives to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers due to a disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please inform me immediately so that we can privately discuss options. In order to help establish reasonable accommodations and facilitate a smooth accommodations process, you are encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Office: accessibility@aub.edu.lb; +961-1-350000, x3246; West Hall, 314.

6. On the ethics of anthropology

The anthropology class is often an ethical space where differences are negotiated. These differences pertain not only to the unfamiliar forms of life conjured up in ethnographic texts, but also to the diverse political, moral, spiritual or intellectual commitments that students and instructor bring with them into the classroom. Taking this course implies a willingness, on each participant's part, to learn to recognize, through the medium of anthropology, the layering of dispositions, heritages and social forces that help to compose our personal orientations to the world. It also implies a firm commitment to attend to our differences in this regard in a spirit of mutual responsiveness, generosity and respect.

Weekly reading schedule

Electronic copies of all the required journal articles or book chapters will be made available on Moodle. I ask that you print out all of our materials and that you bring the reading(s) for the week to class.

I reserve the right to make (slight) modifications to this reading list as the semester unfolds, but the topics covered will remain the same.

Week 1 Introduction

Week 2 From research interest to research proposal

Examples of thesis proposals successfully defended at AUB in recent years.
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/es15lwz7rrrz976/AAArUGZdD2jOsYPkuaFKOVXVa?dl=0>

Luker, Kristin. 2008. *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences: Research in An Age of Info-glut*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. (Chapters 4, 5, and pp. 136-145 in chapter 7)

HAMMERSLEY, M. and Paul Atkinson. 2007. *Ethnography : Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge. (Chapter 2)

SILVERMAN, S. 1991. Writing grant proposals for anthropological research. *Current Anthropology* 32 (4): 485-489.

AIELLO, L. C. Grant season journal, part 2: How to write winning answers to our project description questions. <http://blog.wennergren.org/2012/02/grant-season-journal-part-2/> (accessed January 25, 2017).

Examples of project description, Wenner Gren Foundation, Dissertation Fieldwork Grant in Social-Cultural anthropology. http://www.wennergren.org/grantees_results?keys=&vid=9®ion=&tid

Week 3 A critical approach to methodology

MALINOWSKI, B. 1922. Introduction: The subject, method and scope of this inquiry. In *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge, 2002. (pp. 1-20)

AGAR, M. 1996. Ethnography. In *The Professional Stranger : An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*. San Diego: Academic Press. (pp. 113-133)

GUPTA, A. and James Ferguson. 1997. Discipline and practice: "The field" as site, method and location in anthropology. In *Anthropological Locations : Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (pp. 1-46)

MARCUS, G. E. 2007. Ethnography two decades after writing culture: From the experimental to the baroque. *Anthropological Quarterly* 80 (4): 1127-1145.

SMITH, L. T. 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies*. London: Zed Books. (Chapters 1, 2, 3)

Lury, Celia, and Nina Wakeford. 2012. "Introduction: A Perpetual Inventory." In *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*, edited by Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford, 1–24. Oxon: Routledge.

Week 4 Writing as a method of ethnographic inquiry

EMERSON, R. M., Rachel I Fretz, and Linda L Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Chapters 1 and 2)

JACKSON, J. 1993. "I am a fieldnote": Fieldnotes as a symbol of professional identity. In *Fieldnotes : The Making of Anthropology*. Ed. Robert Sanjek. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press. (pp. 3-33)

TAUSSIG, M. T. 2011. *I Swear I Saw This : Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (excerpts)

AGAR, M. 1996. Beginning fieldwork. In *The Professional Stranger : An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*. San Diego: Academic Press. (pp. 133-167)

Week 5 Using language-in-use

KEATING, E. and Maria Egbert. 2004. Conversation as a cultural activity. In *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. Ed. Alessandro Duranti. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.. (pp. 169-196)

MARANHAO, T. 1993. Recollections of fieldwork conversations, or authorial difficulties in anthropological writing. In *Responsibility and Evidence in Oral Discourse*. Ed. Jane H. Hill and Judith T. Irvine. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (pp. 260-288)

FAVRET-SAADA, J. 1977. *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Presse, 1980. (pp. 1-24)

EMERSON, R. M., Rachel I Fretz, and Linda L Shaw. 1995. Pursuing members' meanings. In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (pp. 108-141)

MURCHISON, JULIAN M. 2010. Interviews. In *Ethnography Essentials : Designing, Conducting, and Presenting Your Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (pp. 99-114)

Week 6 Tracking the social as emergent

LAW, J. 2004. *After Method : Mess in Social Science Research*. London: Routledge. (chapters 1, 5, 6)

STEWART, KATHLEEN. 2005. Cultural poesis: The generativity of emergent things. In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Ed. Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. (pp. 1015-1030)

Week 7 Working with one's self

KONDO, D. K. 1986. Dissolution and reconstitution of self: Implications for anthropological epistemology. *Cultural Anthropology* 1 (1): 74-88.

AGAR, M. 1996. Who are you to do this? In *The Professional Stranger : An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*. San Diego: Academic Press. (pp. 92-112)

POVINELLI, E. A. 2006. Rotten worlds. In *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*. Durham: Duke University Press. (pp. 27-93)

POVINELLI, E. A. 2007. Disturbing sexuality. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106 (3): 565-576.

Back, Les. 2012. "Tape Recorder." In *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*, edited by Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford, 245–60. Oxon: Routledge.

Week 8 With all one's senses

STOLLER, P. 1997. The sorcerer's body. In *Sensuous Scholarship*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. (pp. 4-23)

PINK, S. 2009. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. Los Angeles; London: SAGE. (Chapters 1, 2 and 4)

ROBBEN, A. C. G. M. and Jeffrey A. Sluka. 2007. *Ethnographic Fieldwork : An Anthropological Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub. (Article by P. Stoller)

Marres, Noortje. 2012. "Experiment: The Experiment in Living." In *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*, edited by Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford, 76–95. Oxon: Routledge.

Week 9 Mappings

MURCHISON, JULIAN M. 2010. Tables and charts. In *Ethnography Essentials : Designing, Conducting, and Presenting Your Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (pp. 143-157)

CAROL, S. 1975. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Harper Torchbooks. (Chapters 1, 3, 6)

REYNOLDS, P. 2013. *War in Worcester*. New York: Fordham University Press. (Chapters 1 and 2)

Week 10 Numbers: why and how

MITCHELL, J. C. 1967. On quantification in social anthropology. In *The Craft of Social Anthropology*. Ed. A. L. Epstein. London: Tavistock. (pp. 17-46)

AGAR, M. 1996. Narrowing the focus. In *The Professional Stranger : An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*. San Diego: Academic Press. (pp. 167-184)

REYNOLDS, P. 2000. The ground of all making: State violence, the family, and political activists. In *Violence and Subjectivity*. Ed. Arthur Kleinman, Ramphela, Mamphela, Pamela Reynolds, and Veena Das. Berkeley: University of California Press. (pp. 141-170)

