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Doing
Ethnography

2nd Edition



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What Is Ethnography?

When Hermes took the post of messenger of the gods, he promised Zeus not to lie. He did not promise to tell the whole truth. Zeus understood. The ethnographer has not.

Vincent Crapanzano, 1986: 53



Learning objectives

- To gain an understanding of ethnographic methodology.
- To grasp the differences between attitude, belief and behavior.
- To gain familiarity with the main elements of ethnographic methodology.
- To understand the advantages and drawbacks of ethnographic methodology.
- To appreciate the historical roots of its development.
- To identify the most important methodological differences between doing ethnography in sociology and anthropology.

1.1 Introduction

Most forms of knowledge are situated and socially constructed. In other words, they arise from people, following specific purposes, in a given historical context whose features they inevitably reflect, including the tendency to perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices. Ethnography is not immune to this tendency.

As a methodology with more than 100 years of history, ethnography began to develop in the context of the Western world as a form of knowledge investigating distant non-Western cultures, impenetrable to any form of analysis consisting of fleeting contact or brief conversations. Despite good intentions of gaining a deeper understanding, ethnography is still a colonial method that must be, in a sense,

de-colonialized. And you, students in every part of the world, can make a crucial contribution to that end. But first you need to understand what ethnography is, can be, and most importantly is not.

In recent years, ethnography is gaining increasing currency in social and applied research, and it may become a mass phenomenon in years to come. Why? Because we now live in what one might call the 'observation society' (see Chapter 17).

The goal of this first introductory chapter is to help to understand the concept of ethnography, to clarify its main advantages and drawbacks, and to identify and outline the more urgent tasks of ethnography in contemporary societies.

1.2 An overview of ethnography

Read the following passages from two classical ethnographic works carefully.

SECONDARY ADJUSTMENTS

The first thing to note is the prevalence of make-do's. In every social establishment participants use available artefacts in a manner and for an end not officially intended thereby modifying the conditions of life programmed for these individuals. A physical reworking of the artefact may be involved, or merely an illegitimate context of use [...] In Central Hospital many simple make-do's were tacitly tolerated. For example, inmates widely used freestanding radiators to dry personal clothing that they had washed, on their own, in the bathroom sink, thus performing a private laundry cycle that was officially only the institution's concern. On hard-bench wards, patients sometimes carried around rolled up newspapers to place between their necks and the wooden benches when lying down. Rolled-up coats and towels were used in the same way ... Older patients who were disinclined or unable to move around sometimes employed strategies to avoid the task of going to the toilet: on the ward, the hot steam radiator could be urinated on without leaving too many long-lasting signs; during twice-weekly shaving visits to the basement barber shop, the bin reserved for used towels was used as a urinal when the attendants were not looking ... In Central Hospital, toilet paper was sometimes 'organized'; neatly torn, folded, and carried on one's person, it was apologetically used as Kleenex by some fastidious patients. (Goffman, 1961: 207-9)

SOCIAL DEATH

When, in the course of a patient's illness his condition is considered such that he is dying or terminally ill, his name is posted on the critical patients list ... Posting also serves as an internally relevant message, notifying certain key hospital personnel that a death may be forthcoming and that appropriate preparations for that possibility are tentatively warranted. In the hospital morgue, scheduling is an important requirement. Rough first drafts of the week's expected work load are made, with the number of possible autopsies being a matter which, if possible, is to be anticipated and planned for. In making such estimates the morgue attendant consults

posted lists from which he makes a guess as to the work load of the coming week. The posted list is also consulted by various medical personnel who have some special interest in various anatomical regions. County's morgue attendant made it a practice to alert the ward physician that Doctor S. wanted to get all the eyes he could (Doctor S. was a research ophthalmologist). To provide Doctor S. with the needed eyes, the morgue attendant habitually checked the posted list and tried, in informal talk with the nurses about the patient's family, to assess his chances of getting the family's permission to relinquish the eyes of the patient for research. Apparently, when he felt he had located a likely candidate, a patient whose family could be expected to give permission at the time of death, he thus informed the pathologist, who made an effort, via the resident physician, to have special attention given to the request for an eye donation. (At several places in the hospital: on the admission nurse's desk, in the morgue, in doctors' lounges, and elsewhere, there were periodically placed signs that read 'Doctor S. needs eyes', 'Doctor Y. needs kidneys', etc.). (Sudnow, 1967: 72-3)

For some of you this may have been your first encounter with an 'ethnographic account', a distinctive literary genre which in certain respects resembles a novel.



Exercise 1.1

Before moving forward, please discuss with your instructor or classmates:

- Your reactions to the two passages.
- Your emotional reactions to them.
- Have you ever thought such things could be happening in a hospital?

1.3 Defining ethnography

The two above passages were written on the basis of what social scientists call systematic observations. The authors, Erving Goffman and David Sudnow, were physically present at the time that this happened and saw it with their own eyes. The most striking features of these accounts are the precision of the observations, the number of details presented and the vividness of the text. The two authors documented the daily routines of an organization with great acumen and insight, discovering emerging social routines and rituals.

But, one might ask, couldn't the same information have been collected in a different way, for instance by interviewing some of the patients? Perhaps, but this would have required the interviewees to be extremely aware of their actions and possess a great capacity to call to mind every single detail of their lives. Neuroscientists and social researchers would agree that very few people, if any, have these abilities. Couldn't the details have been gathered by administering a questionnaire to the

personnel then? Well, most certainly not. No questionnaire, regardless how well made it is, could gather all these details at once. And besides, such a goal is not the purpose of the survey method, which was developed to handle a different type of information.

So what does ethnography consist of and why is it different from interviews and surveys? In order to answer these questions, we must start by defining what ethnography is (and is not).

1.4 A definition of ethnography

As humans, to acquire knowledge of the outside world we use different senses: sound, sight, touch, smell, taste, etc. And yet these senses do not gather and deliver information to our brain to be processed separately, but rather are constantly interacting with each other. During this interactive process it is normal that one sense acts as the principal source of information for our brain to process, rather like the Center in a basketball team. Indeed, we can imagine these senses as basketball players who alternate in the role of Center but always need the cooperation of all the others to score a point.

For ethnography the central cognitive device, the research strategy that defines it, is 'observation'. Of course, it is also crucial to listen to the conversations, read the documents produced by the organization under study, ask people questions, and so on. And yet what most distinguishes ethnography from all other research methods is the essential role of observation. Having this in mind, we can now move on to other issues.

Ethnographic methodology is comprised of two main approaches to observation: 'non-participant observation' and 'participant observation'. The former involves the researcher observing the subjects 'from a distance', in other words avoiding any interaction with them. Researchers who favor this strategy are seemingly more interested in adopting an objective stance and willing to overlook the importance of the symbolic sphere, while making sure they do not interfere with the social actors' courses of action so as not to influence their behavior.

On the other hand, participant observation considers the interaction between the researcher and the social actors as crucial to understanding their behavior. An adequate definition of participant observation is a strategy where the researcher:

1. establishes a direct relationship with the social actors by
2. staying in their natural environment
3. with the purpose of observing and describing their behavior, and by
4. interacting with them and participating in their everyday ceremonies and rituals
5. learning their code (or at least parts of it) in order to understand the meaning of their actions, and
6. collecting ethnographic notes in a rigorous and systematic way.

There are several intermediate situations between the two extremes of participant and non-participant observation. Regardless of the strategy, however, ethnographic methodology gives priority to the observation of actions performed in concrete settings as its primary source of information and only on a secondary or ancillary level are other sources of information used by the ethnographer. Informal conversations, individual or group interviews, and documentary materials such as diaries, letters, class essays, organizational documents, newspapers, photographs and audio-visuals are just some such examples.

As sociologist John Heritage suggests, if one is interested in action, the statements made by social actors during interviews cannot be treated 'as an appropriate substitute for the observation of actual behavior' (1984: 236). In fact, there is a well-documented gap between attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (La Piere, 1934); as well as between what people say and what they actually do (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1983).

1.5 The gap between attitudes, beliefs and behavior

Before Heritage, the American sociologist Edward C. Lindeman (1885–1953) had argued against surveys in his famous book *Social Discovery*:

if, say the behaviorists, you wish to know what a person is doing, by all means refrain from asking him. His answer is sure to be wrong, not merely because he does not know what he is doing but precisely because he is answering a question and he will make the reply in terms of you and not in terms of the objective thing he is doing. (1924, quoted by Converse, 1987: 54)

Several studies have shown the extent of the gap between attitude and behavior, between what people think, feel or believe and what they do; between feelings and actions. Some classic studies have been collected by Deutscher (1973). A pioneering study by La Piere (1934), focused on the presumed consistency between people's attitudes and their behavior (a topic subsequently much debated in the 1940s and 1950s). In his study, La Piere concluded that there was no relation between attitude and behavior since social actors are often inconsistent, unconscious and irrational. In the experiment, he spent two years traveling in the United States by car with a Chinese couple. During that time, they visited 251 hotels and restaurants and were turned away only once. Six months after the conclusion of their travels, La Piere mailed a survey to all the businesses they had visited with the question, 'Will you accept members of the Chinese race in your establishment?' The available responses were 'Yes', 'No' and 'Depends upon the circumstances'. Of the 128 that responded (that is, half of those asked), 92% of the owners of cafes and restaurants and 91% of hoteliers answered 'No', thus contradicting their previous actual behavior. A result that openly contradicted the previously observed behavior. They were asked, after

all, what they believed they would do. However, in accepting the couple the hotel and restaurant owners were guided by logic and rational economics that had little to do with their values, beliefs, attitudes and feelings regarding the Chinese. We can see a similar process in the following case study from Garfinkel's own work.



Case study

Rewriting actions

In 1954 the American sociologist Harold Garfinkel was conducting, along with Saul Mendlovitz, research on jury trial. By interviewing the members of the jury and recording their dialogues the aim of the research was to reconstruct and describe how the jurors acted and in particular how they came to a decision of innocence or guilt.

Garfinkel (1967: 104–15) noted that there was an informal set of rules that the members of the jury had to follow to reach a proper decision. Nevertheless, by observing the actual work of the jury, he found that these rules were rarely applied. Rather, the same rules were used *retrospectively* to justify any decision taken. This was a way to regulate a decision-making process that was anything but straightforward. He observed the members of the jury started from the result of the action and then traced it back to streamline the process leading up to it. They used the rules to perform an *ex-post* rationalization of the fact whereby their accounts would show the good sense of *any* outcome, rather than reproduce what people really thought at the time of the deliberative process.

1.6 The apparent paradox of participant observation

Ethnography requires the researcher to participate at some level in the social life of the actors they observe, while at the same time maintaining sufficient cognitive distance so that they can perform their study properly. The researcher must therefore strike for a difficult balance between two opposing issues which, to paraphrase the title of a well-known book by the German sociologist and historian Norbert Elias, we may call 'involvement and detachment'. From a strictly philosophical point of view, this balance is simply impossible to achieve because 'society and people are so organized that the goals of scientific and empathic understanding are competitive in principle. It may not be possible to be a participant and a scientist simultaneously' (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979: 49). As the Austrian philosopher Alfred Schutz pointed out, this cognitive paradox does not just concern the scientist; it also affects the social actors that the researcher wishes to study:

the actor who lives in his ongoing process of acting has merely the in-order-to motive of his ongoing action in view, that is, the projected state of affairs to be

brought about. Only by turning back to his accomplished act ... the actor can grasp retrospectively the because-motive that determined him to do what he did or what he projected to do. But then the actor is not acting any more; he is an observer of himself. (1953: 22)

Aside from the philosophical impossibility, there is an interesting intellectual consequence in this quote. The actor who participates is temporally and cognitively different from the actor who observes. Participation and observation cannot consequently be contradictory; rather, they are two distinct aspects of social life and interaction. Even in research, they do not contradict each other because they cannot overlap at any given moment.

But participant observation involves another paradox, the one of reflexivity, which has been well described by the Italian anthropologist and linguist Alessandro Duranti in the context of ethnographic methodology:

the more [the ethnographer] immerses himself in social reality and acquires a way of behaving and interpreting reality similar to those of the subjects he is studying, the more their behavior and relative vision of the world seem natural to him and therefore difficult for him to grasp. (1992: 20)

It seems impossible to acquire full empathic knowledge and be able to communicate it at the same time, and from a practical perspective,

total empathy is professionally and practically impossible. It is precisely the constant reflecting, taking notes, asking questions, completing questionnaires, taking photographs, recording and then transcribing, translating and interpreting imposed upon us by our profession that prevent us from getting completely 'inside' the culture which we want to study. (1992: 20).

In light of these observations the paradoxes seem to be irrelevant to the practice of ethnography, although they still preserve their role of making research self-reflexive by nature. Being simultaneously, or intermittently, 'inside' and 'outside' of the cultural code is therefore a normal component of the researcher's role.

1.7 The birth of ethnographic methodology

Writing a full history of ethnography is beyond the point of this book. What follows is a brief overview of two of the fundamental steps of its methodological evolution within anthropology: the British School of Social Anthropology and Geertz's interpretative anthropology.

The birth of ethnography is commonly dated back to a period between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It developed from ethnology, a discipline

which in the first half of the 1800s split away from anthropology, at the time dominated by the physical and biological paradigm. Initially, ethnology was concerned with studying people, mainly through the analysis and comparison of their material artifacts and their cultures, producing a classification based on some of its most salient features. At the beginning, ethnologists did not collect information by means of direct observation; instead, they examined official statistics, documents originating from government officials and missionaries, accounts of journeys, archaeological findings, artifacts harvested by exotic art collectors, or they simply interacted with travelers, missionaries and explorers. These first ethno-anthropologists considered the natives to be too 'primitive' and often described them as savages needing to be educated. Thus, they assumed natives could not be used as direct informants because they could not be trusted to provide objective information. Only partially influenced by the wave of scientific racism, this prejudice was also held towards the poor in the United Kingdom towards the end of 1800s.

Ethnographic methodology did not suddenly erupt in the discipline of anthropology; rather it arose gradually through the work of various seminal authors. Of singular importance are the English social anthropologists Bronislaw K. Malinowski (1884–1942) and Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955). British social anthropology went beyond the positivistic intellectual climate and the subordination to natural science of that time and, according to Radcliffe-Brown (1948), rebranded itself as a 'natural science of society'¹ better suited to offer an objective account of culture than any other methods used by anthropologists. Radcliffe-Brown's criticism was primarily towards the dominant speculative, or 'armchair', anthropology that relied exclusively on secondary sources rather than promoting direct observations of social customs, rituals and ceremonies in order to discover the 'laws' that govern society.

Malinowski is commonly regarded as being the first anthropologist to employ ethnography. In his famous introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* – the book which outlines his research conducted in the Trobriand Islands of the Melanesian archipelago off eastern New Guinea – Malinowski described the methodological principles underpinning the main goal of ethnography, which is 'to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world' (Malinowski, 1922: 25). To this end, Malinowski lived for two years (between 1914 and 1918) among the Kula of the Trobriand Islands. He learnt their language (Kiriwinian), used natives as informants, and directly observed the social life of a village, participating in its everyday activities. Malinowski introduced that view 'from within' that American anthropologists in the 1950s would define as the 'emic' perspective – as opposed to the 'etic' or comparative perspective, which instead sought to establish categories useful for the analyst but not necessarily important for the members of the culture under study.

According to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) the ethnographic study of cultures consists of two distinct phases. A first empirical phase of thick description, in which researchers need to study the system of meanings embodied by the

symbolic actions of the participants and a second theoretical stage where they must connect the observations to the social actors' specific social, cultural and psychological context (Geertz, 1973). Geertz's suggestion brings to the researcher's attention the organizational factors that support, especially in modern societies, any belief system.

From the 1920s onwards, ethnographic methodology was primarily absorbed into sociology and later into psychology. Although it was heavily used by researchers who mostly belonged to the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, interestingly enough as many as 70 years earlier the French mining engineer turned sociologist Pierre Le Play (1806–92) had used a primitive form of participant observation in his study of working-class families. The English philanthropist Seebohm B. Rowntree (1871–1954) also used primordial forms of participant observation (after 1886) for his sociological inquiry into poverty and living conditions in the slums of London.

Despite this long-time tradition of sociological ethnography and their initial rejection of this methodology, many anthropologists continue to this day to associate sociology with quantitative methods such as the survey, deeming themselves the sole (jealous) custodians of the ethnographic method (Atkinson et al., 2001: 2).

1.8 Anthropology and sociology: methodological differences

When ethnography was adopted by social research – a discipline distinct from social anthropology – issues of adaptation required a partial revision of its methodology – a revision which affected post-war anthropology as well. In fact, from the inception of the ethnographic methodology, according to Benedict's (1934: 7) authoritative opinion, anthropology differed from the other social sciences in that it focused on societies outside the Western hemisphere. But starting from the late 1940s various anthropologists came back and began studying the working-class communities in America and the United Kingdom. This 'return home' of the anthropologists inaugurated the 'Human Relations' movement and created the field of applied anthropology, as well as that of industrial and organizational anthropology. This marked the downfall of the established tradition whereby social scientists, typically sociologists, study industrial societies in the West as opposed to anthropologists who study exotic non-Western societies.

Conducting ethnographic research in a society where the researcher is embedded raises epistemological and practical issues that differ from those encountered by classical anthropologists. Applying the ethnographic methodology to the study of foreign cultures is very different from conducting ethnography in an organization such as a school, a social service or a business, which belong to the same culture as

the researcher. This issue was well understood by the American anthropologist Clark Wissler. On writing the foreword to *Middletown in Transition* (1937), the celebrated study by Robert and Helen Lynd which he described as ‘a pioneer attempt to deal with a sample American community in the manner of social anthropology [by conducting] social anthropology of contemporary life’ (1937: vi), Clark admitted that:

whatever may be the deficiencies of anthropology, it achieves a large measure of objectivity, because anthropologists are by the nature of the case ‘outsiders’. To study ourselves as through the eye of an outsider is the basic difficulty in social science, and may be insurmountable. (1937: vi)

1.8.1 Three main differences: natural attitude, language and ‘being a native’

What is a natural attitude?

Anthropologists who are studying societies other than their own find it relatively easy to grasp their salient characteristics, isolating them from what they perceive as familiar. As soon as these anthropologists arrive at their foreign destinations, a wide range of phenomena impact them. Cognitively, because they are extremely new, they just need to be recorded and interpreted. As Schutz wrote (1944), they could rely on the cognitive privilege of an immigrant, which consists of the ability to see the intersubjective nature of behaviors and beliefs as clearly distinct, which for the natives are natural, obvious, taken-for granted and normal. Schutz (1889–1959) left Austria in 1939 following the Nazi occupation and moved to New York City; he had thus personally experienced this particular cognitive status. However, as Schwartz and Jacobs sharply pointed out (1979: 251), ‘the attitude created by being a stranger – the sense of being on the edge of one’s cognitive seat – can decay extremely rapidly’. For that reason, anthropologists train to ‘maintain their natural attitude’ even while they acquire native knowledge of an alien culture. The estrangement technique is designed to be a way to maintain the same attitude of an immigrant as long as possible, so that the ethnographer continues to be surprised by what he or she observes.

What language are we speaking?

Language is another level where methodological differences between the work of ethnographers studying organizations in their own society and that of anthropologists who analyze foreign societies are to be found. Whereas it is common practice for an anthropologist to acquire command of a completely new language or employ a translator, the ethnographer must only learn a specific communicative sub-code. Yet, paradoxically, knowing the subjects’ language makes observation much more complicated. Suppose that the researcher possesses the same linguistic knowledge,

or the same understanding of basic 'structures of everyday life', to use an expression dear to phenomenologists, as the social actors. It is reasonable to assume that it is from this particular knowledge that the researcher would investigate, recognize and codify social structures. And yet in doing so, the researcher will use the very same linguistic resources, common-sense social categories embodied in everyday language, as the social actors that he or she is studying (Zimmerman and Pollner, 1970), putting themselves in a position to nullify the advantage of not being native. Unless the observation process is supported and reinforced by some kind of reflexive research practice, at the level of understanding it may reproduce knowledge riddled with platitudes and superficial stereotypes; hence the epithet 'folk sciences' dismissively given by ethnomethodologists to the rest of the social sciences. Of course, researching in societies with a distinct linguistic difference may entail a completely different set of methodological issues concerning, for example, the complex and potentially unstable relationship between the informant/interpreter and the researcher.

What is a native?

The well-known study by Zimmerman and Pollner (1970) introduces another issue relative to the distinction between natives and the researchers studying their own society. Assuming that the ethnographer is a member of the society under study, it seems inappropriate to persist using the term 'natives' for the other social actors. In fact, the term 'native' identifies 'a person inhabiting their place of birth'. And yet it is not uncommon that 'natives' live in the same city as the ethnographer and perhaps share the same interests or favorite places to go. When the ethnographer is working in their own country – even when they travel to areas or regions other than the ones where they normally hang out – the very same language continues to be something shared with the subjects, as well as the food, attire, music, television and radio programs, and much more. Even some immigrant cultures – like the Chinese, Pakistani and Filipino communities in the United Kingdom – though they are composed of non-natives, devote part of their daily activities trying to integrate the ethnographer's own culture. The uncertainty around the nature of the boundaries that separate the ethnographer and 'native' becomes evident the moment the research starts. We are not suggesting this is an issue that only applies to Western societies. The very same issue applies, for example, to an Indian ethnographer doing research in New Delhi.

The ethnographers who study their own society find themselves in the very same extraneous situation as the classic anthropological studies only on the rare occasions when they are researching enclosed subcultures to which gaining access is particularly difficult, such as certain ethnic communities, cults or groups engaged in deviant behaviors. In most cases, even when the society under study has exotic names, as in Shetland Islanders, Orkneyans or Manxmen, anything from dressing code, to driving style, to polite ways of asking for food or drink are not radically different from those of the ethnographer's own community. For these reasons, in

what follows we shall avoid using the term 'native', preferring the more appropriate labels of 'social actors', 'subjects' or 'participants'.

1.9 Concluding remarks

Ethnography is a particular form of knowledge that develops through specific techniques. Nevertheless, defining 'ethnography' is always difficult because, as we shall see in the next chapter, its meaning is broad and complex. We suggest the following approach. Let's break up ethnography, which underlines the theoretical basis of a research approach stemming from a particular scientific tradition, into 'participant observation', 'fieldwork' and 'case study'. We already defined 'participant observation' as a distinctive research strategy. The term 'fieldwork' stresses the continuous presence of the researcher in the field, as opposed to 'grab-it-and-run' methodologies like survey, in-depth interview or content analysis of documents and recordings. Finally, let's agree that 'case study' denotes an extensive research activity on a system bounded in space and time and embedded in a particular physical and socio-cultural context. Research is therefore conducted using several methodologies, methods and sources of data such as participant observation, interviews, audio-visual materials and documents (Creswell, 1998: 61).

If you want to examine each of the concepts we just presented in depth you can refer to Bryman (2001) for ethnography, Pole (2004) for fieldwork, Matthew (2005) for 'case study', and Hughes and Sharrock (2008) for participation observation.

KEY POINTS

- The central cognitive model of ethnography is observation.
- Ethnographic methodology includes two research strategies: non-participant observation and participant observation.
- The birth of ethnographic methodology is usually dated to the period between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- The three authors who contributed most to the early development of ethnographic methodology were the anthropologists Bronislaw Kaspar Malinowski (1884-1942), Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955), and Clifford Geertz (1926-2006).
- Conducting ethnographic research in a culture or society to which the researcher belongs is particularly difficult because it is likely they will not see its fundamental social structures.
- Ethnography should therefore be used with particular methodological caution in these cases.
- The ethnographer's main cognitive goal is to separate him or herself from the natural attitude that takes social conventions and everyday behavior for granted as normal or obvious.
- This natural attitude prevents the ethnographer from seeing conventions, behaviors or social structures as activities which are constantly socially and situationally constructed.
- The natural attitude can be partly eliminated by using estrangement techniques. These help the ethnographer maintain the attitude of the stranger as long as possible, so that he or she continues to be surprised and sees social scenes to which he or she is accustomed as strange and new.

KEY TERMS

Case study Research on a system bounded in space and time. Research is conducted with different methodologies, methods and data sources, such as participant observation, interviews, audio-visual materials, documents, etc.

Ethnography A methodology which privileges the cognitive mode of observation as its primary source of information. This goal is also supported, in a secondary or ancillary way, by other sources of information used by ethnographers in the field: informal conversations, individual or group interviews, and documentary materials (diaries, letters, essays, documents, newspapers, photographs and audio-visual among other things). Ethnography entails two research strategies: *non-participant* observation and *participant* observation.

Fieldwork Generic term for the researcher's continuing presence in the field, as opposed to 'grab-it-and-run' methodologies. Fieldwork can be conducted using diverse methodologies and methods including ethnography.

Non-participant observation A strategy where the researcher observes the subjects 'from a distance' avoiding any interacting with them. Those who use this strategy are not interested in investigating the symbolic sphere and do not interfere with the subjects' actions so as not to influence their behavior.

Participant observation A strategy where the researcher 1) establishes a direct relationship with the social actors by 2) staying in their natural environment 3) with the purpose of observing and describing their behavior, and by 4) interacting with them and participating in their everyday ceremonials and rituals, 5) learning their code (or at least parts of it) in order to understand the meaning of their actions and 6) collecting ethnographic notes in a rigorous and systematic way.

RECOMMENDED READING

Undergraduate students

Green, Judith L., Skukauskaite, Audra and Baker, W. Douglas (2012) 'Ethnography as epistemology'. In James Arthur, Michael Waring, Robert Coe and Larry V. Hedges (eds), *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education*. London: Sage, pp. 309-21.

Graduate students and advanced researchers

Hammersley, Martyn (2013) *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* London: Routledge.



Exercise 1.2

Read one of the monographs cited in this chapter. Answer the following questions:

- Was participant or non-participant observation used?
- In what setting was it used?
- How long did the researcher stay in that setting?
- What was the purpose of the observation?
- What forms of behavior (routines, rituals and ceremonies) were observed?



Exercise 1.3

Now assess the study you have just read:

- Does it give precise and detailed descriptions of the social actors' routines?
- What did you learn from this study that you did not know already?
- Did you find reading the study enjoyable or boring?
- Was it a study based exclusively on observation or did the researcher use other sources of information (interviews, documents, conversations among social actors or videos)?

SELF-EVALUATION TEST

Are you ready for the next chapter? Check your knowledge by answering the following open-ended questions:

- 1 What is ethnography?
- 2 What are the main attributes of participant observation?
- 3 What does 'secondary source' mean?
- 4 What are four of the 'secondary sources' of ethnography?
- 5 What are the main differences between sociological and anthropological ethnography?

Note

- 1 The first generation of social anthropologists, was formally trained in the natural sciences. Malinowski, graduated in physics and chemistry from the University of London; Elliot Smith was a biologist; and William H. R. Rivers (1864–1922) was a medical doctor and a psychologist.