

Workshop Ethnographic Approaches in Social Inquiry: From Theory to Practice

3rd Term, Academic Year 2024 -2025

Instructors:

Caitlin Procter (EUI)
Eleanor Knott (London School of Economics)
Natasja Rupesinghe (EUI)
Wendy Pearlman (Northwestern University)

Organizers: Anna Reißig, Esteban Scuzarello

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Credits: 10/20

Dates, times and rooms:

Monday, 12 May 10:00-12:30, 13:30 – 16:00, Seminar Room 2 (Badia)
Tuesday, 13 May, 10:00-12:30, 13:30 – 16:00, Seminar Room 2 (Badia)
Wednesday, 14 May, 10:00-12:30, 13:30 – 16:00, Seminar Room 2 (Badia)
Friday, 16 May, 10:00-12:30, 13:30 – 16:00, Sala Triaria (Villa Schifanoia)

Overview

The workshop ‘**Ethnographic Approaches in Social Inquiry: From Theory to Practice**’ brings together researchers and experts interested in applying ethnographic methods to social and political research. Over five days, participants will explore the practical and theoretical aspects of ethnography, including accessing the field, safeguarding researchers and subjects, analyzing empirical data, theorizing, and writing ethnographic narratives. The workshop will be taught by lecturers from diverse fields ranging from Political Science to Anthropology.

Part of the course is focused on the challenges and practices of conducting fieldwork in varied contexts, featuring facilitators with extensive experience in Northern Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia. The workshop emphasizes practical skills over theoretical discussions, providing participants with actionable insights to apply to their own research.

The interactive workshop will allow attendees to gain practical experience with ethnographic practices, concluding with applications to research across disciplines and topics. To earn credits, participants must actively engage and attend at least three of the five sessions.

Structure

Session 1 – Fieldwork in Challenging Contexts with Natasja Rupesinghe

Session 2 – ‘Working with Concepts’ with Eleanor Knott

Session 3 – Ethnographic Interviewing with Wendy Pearlman

Session 4 - Ethics and Care: Conducting Inclusive and Safe Fieldwork with Caitlin Procter

Requirements: Participants can attend the workshop either for 10 or 20 credits. Participation for 10 credits requires attendance on a minimum of two days, participation for 20 credits attendance on a minimum of four days. Participants can choose the sessions to attend according to their interests. The workshop sessions involve interactive parts and exercises that need to be completed.

Workshop programme

12 May – Session 1: Fieldwork in challenging contexts with Natasja Rupesinghe

10:00-12:30: In contexts marked by insecurity and risk, researchers cannot always conduct immersive research or do first-hand participant observation. During this session, Natasja Rupesinghe draws on her extensive fieldwork experience in Mali to discuss the risks, ethics, opportunities and constraints of conducting fieldwork in contexts marked by conflict and insecurity. What are the main considerations to think through before leaving? How can researchers ensure they are prepared to navigate these types of settings? What strategies can we use to overcome distance from the field site? How can the research setting shape what people tell us? Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their own field sites, consider potential risks and challenges that could arise in the field and devise a plan to mitigate these.

12:30-13:30: *Lunch break*

13:30-16:00: During the second half of the day, we will delve into the practical challenges related to conducting fieldwork in difficult contexts. We will discuss the process of selecting interlocutors, the politics of obtaining access, best practices for working with key informants, research partners and interpreters, the importance of time in building trust-based relationships and how to conduct interviews and focus groups on sensitive topics in contexts where fear and social mistrust is pervasive. Participants will be asked to reflect on their own strategies for gaining entrance to their field sites and for building relationships with interlocutors and research partners.

Readings

Required

Elisabeth Jean, "Ethnographic Research in the Shadow of Civil War," in *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) – Chapter 2

Krause, J. (2021). The ethics of ethnographic methods in conflict zones. *Journal of Peace Research*, 58(3), 329-341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343320971021>

Fujii, Lee Ann. "Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence." *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 2 (2010): 231–41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25654558>.

Additional:

Cronin-Furman K, Lake M. Ethics Abroad: Fieldwork in Fragile and Violent Contexts. *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 2018;51(3):607-614. doi:10.1017/S1049096518000379

Sluka, Jeffrey A.. "Reflections on Managing Danger in Fieldwork: Dangerous Anthropology in Belfast". *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Culture*, edited by Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 276-294. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520915718-025>

Guevara, Berit Bliesemann de, and Morten Bøås, eds. *Doing Fieldwork in Areas of International Intervention: A Guide to Research in Violent and Closed Contexts*. 1st ed. Bristol University Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv12pnsqg>.

Eriksson Baaz, M., & Utas, M. (2019). Exploring the Backstage: Methodological and Ethical Issues Surrounding the Role of Research Brokers in Insecure Zones. *Civil Wars*, 21(2), 157–178.

13 May – Session 2: Working with Concepts with Eleanor Knott

10:00 – 12:30: How do we use concepts in designing and conducting an ethnographic project? Where do our concepts come from? How do we engage with concepts and rethink them in the process of conducting research, not least in a flexible, uncertain, and iterative terrain such as ethnographic fieldwork? In this session, drawing on her field research experience in Moldova and Crimea, Eleanor Knott will discuss these issues. In particular, we will focus on our discussion on two thorny, and often undefined concepts, namely 'local' and 'field'.

12:30 – 13:30: *Lunch break*

13:30 – 16:00: The second part of this workshop addresses the challenges of connecting the different stages of ethnographic research, from designing to doing, and navigating the iterations between theory and practice. We might, for example, experience a potential mismatch between available concepts in the literature and the phenomena we seek to explore or explain. Together, we will examine how to deal with these concepts and issues, including what solutions of reconceptualization might offer. We will also investigate the synergies but also potential

tensions between ethnographic approaches and theory-building or development. More broadly, participants are invited to bring their own conceptual issues and particularly thorny concepts that they are working through to this part of the workshop.

Readings

Required:

Knott, E., & Alejandro, A. (2024). [From Conceptual Misalignment to Reconceptualizing: Demonstrating the Process of Reconceptualization](#), *Global Studies Quarterly*, 4(3).

Additional:

Knott, E. (2025). [Methodologies of Informed Intuition: The Role of Informed Intuition and Intuitive Openness](#), *Perspectives on Politics*.

Knott, E. (2019). [Beyond the Field: Ethics after Fieldwork in Politically Dynamic Contexts](#). *Perspectives on Politics* 17(1): 140–153.

14 May – Session 3: Ethnographic interviewing with Wendy Pearlman

Drawing on her extensive experience in ethnographic interviewing to study the comparative politics of the Middle East, social movements, and forced migration, Wendy Pearlman will guide us through this workshop session. How does ethnographic interviewing differ from other types of interviewing? How should we prepare for ethnographic interviews? How can we integrate interviews with other ethnographic methods, such as participant observation? What role do emotions play in the interviewing process, and how can they be navigated to enrich our analyses? These questions will be explored during the session.

10:00 – 12:30: Wendy Pearlman will speak about ethnographic interviewing in contexts of authoritarianism and forced migration, followed by a discussion and Q&A.

12:30 – 13:30: *Lunch break*

13:30 – 16:00: The second part of this session involves a practical interviewing exercise, followed by a discussion in the plenary.

Readings

Required

Pearlman, W. (2023). [Emotional Sensibility: Exploring the Methodological and Ethical Implications of Research Participants' Emotions](#), *The American Political Science Review*, 117(4): 1241–1254.

Pearlman, W. (2024). [Interviewing Vulnerable Populations](#), in Jennifer Cyr and Sara Wallace Goodman, Editors, *Doing Good Qualitative Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press – Chapter 18.

Fujii, L. A. (2018). *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach*. London: Routledge.

Additional

Pearlman, W. (2017). *Memory as a Field Site: Interviewing Displaced Persons*, *International journal of Middle East studies* 49(3): 501–505.

16 May – Session 4: Ethics and Care: Conducting Inclusive and Safe Fieldwork with Caitlin Procter

10:00 – 10:20: Workshop introduction

10:20-12:30: Conducting immersive fieldwork can be an exciting and highly productive way of gathering data and exploring social issues. However, it always comes with dilemmas and challenges that researchers must navigate: What does ethics mean, and what does it entail beyond standard ethics reviews (RECs)? When should we care about ethics, and how does it evolve throughout the research process? Are participatory methods a practical solution to many ethical dilemmas? During this first session, Caitlin Procter will draw on her extensive fieldwork experience in Palestine and Israel to address some of the most fundamental and pressing challenges and considerations involved in conducting immersive fieldwork.

12:30-13:30: *Lunch break*

13:30-16:00: The second session of the day will focus on safety in a broader sense: What does safety mean? Safety for whom, and in relation to what? How do we protect ourselves, our research subjects, and the data we collect? How do you prepare yourself for the field? How should we strive for a balance between being too immersed and too distant from the people we study? Participants will be invited to reflect on the various ways safety comes into play during fieldwork, considering not only their research subjects and data but also their own well-being.

Readings

Required

Procter, C., & Spector, B. (Eds.). (2024). *Inclusive ethnography: making fieldwork safer, healthier and more ethical*. SAGE Publications Limited.

Additional

Kušić, K., & Záhora, J. (2020). *Fieldwork as failure: Living and knowing in the field of international relations*. E-International Relations.

Christensen, Garret, Jeremy Freese and Edward Miguel (2019), “[What Is Ethical Research?](#)” (P. 11-31) in Christensen, G., Freese, J., & Miguel, E. (eds), *Transparent and reproducible social science research: How to do open science*. University of California Press.

Workshop background readings (*preliminary*)

Neumann, C. B., & Neumann, I. B. (2018). [Power, Culture and Situated Research Methodology](#). Cham: Springer International Publishing.