

Review of: "Is Fieldwork losing its grace? Encountering Western and Indian Experience"

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While reading this otherwise comprehensive overview of the ongoing crisis of anthropological fieldwork that touches on important issues and covers multiple authoritative sources, I could not escape the impression of its somewhat anachronistic character. Besides the rather outdated bibliography (most of the sources used have been published more than a quarter of a century ago), there is an issue of a biased literature selection: many of influential and much cited publications on anthropological fieldwork, both recent and more distant in time, are missed, and the omissions are peculiar, for most of them belong to the genre of critique and analyze the construction of fieldwork in anthropology in its classical form (cf.: Gupta & Ferguson 1997b). If the exclusion of the most recent publications, bearing on the issues the author raises, could be explained by, say, lack of adequate resources at hand, such as author's time constraints or material unavailability of costly books, the absence in this paper of the mention of such key works on fieldwork transformations (to name the most prominent) as those written by James Clifford, George Marcus, James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, Paul Rabinow, and Henrika Kuklick (Clifford 1988, 1997; Marcus 1998, 2012; Marcus, Fischer 1986; Gupta, Ferguson 1997a, b; Kuklick 1991) is surprising.

It is also evident that the author of the paper laments the deterioration precisely of the classical form of anthropological fieldwork, the model that has been and remains the object of harsh, but fair political and ethical critique (among many of its flaws is the naturalization of the Other /cf.: Kuklick 1991/, and the perpetuation of unequal power relations between the observers and observed /cf.: Stocking 1983, Fabian 1983/).

To prove my point that the classical fieldwork model remains exemplary and standard model in this paper, I shall mention its other glaring absences or omissions that concern a wide array of anthropological sub-disciplines that the author chooses not to mention, although all of them rely on fieldwork and ethnography as their main methods and data sources. Among these there are both such long established and thoroughly institutionalized disciplines as urban and medical anthropology, and more recent but burgeoning research fields and anthropological specializations such as digital anthropology, anthropology of business and organizations, anthropology of tourism, and anthropology of science and technology, each of which demands and enacts substantial transformations of the classical model, including fieldwork

temporalities, the nature of observation and of the relations with the observed, the rethinking of the ideal of immersion, etc. Moreover, the author does not mention new research approaches and/or methods that have been formed as a result of the critical approach to the standard or classical fieldwork model. Among them one should mention dialogical anthropology, autoethnography, and co-authorship with 'the observed' (cf.: Holmes, Marcus 2008). Their omission from the overview creates the wrong impression that the classical fieldwork model still preserves its dominance in anthropology, despite its deepening crisis since the early 1980s, when the first experimental ethnographies such as "Nisa" by Marjorie Shostak (1981) were published. I would also recommend to the author to include for the students' benefit into the paper's bibliography some handbooks and anthologies on ethnographic fieldwork, such as 'The Sage Handbook of Fieldwork', edited by Dick Hobbs and Richard Wright, or 'Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader', edited by Antonius C. G. M. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka.

Having enumerated my suggestions and critical comments, I still consider this paper quite a valuable contribution to the existing publications on the history and current state of anthropological fieldwork as a concept and method. Its value could be enhanced if the author explicitly mentions that he deals with the classical models of the fieldwork and of the field site, and that his overview is focused on their pre-1980s understanding. With these caveats the paper could be used in education of anthropologists, as it nicely summarizes important issues of the field construction in certain periods of the discipline's history.

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