

CONF 695: SPECIAL TOPICS IN CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND RESOLUTION: ETHNOGRAPHY IN CONFLICT ZONES

Spring 2002 (Section 001)

Monday, 7:20-10:00 p.m., ENT 77

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Office hours: At ICAR (A110): By appointment

Main Campus (Robinson B323): Monday: 6:30-7:00 p.m.

Tuesday: 2:30-4:00 p.m.

Course Description

This “special topics” course, designated an “experimental course” in the ICAR curriculum, is an opportunity in a seminar setting to explore problems and issues arising in ethnographic fieldwork carried out by researchers working in zones of active conflict. More often than not, in these works, the nature of the conflict (origins, parties, and so on) is the primary concern of the research, and thus potentially of substantive interest to students in ICAR. But the fact that the major research methodology is ethnographic is of equal interest to us here. The “lens” through which the conflict is viewed is that of first-hand, participant-observer, and “experience-near” fieldwork. Inevitably in this sort of research, the role of the fieldworker as a certain kind of third party is brought to the fore. Methodological and theoretical concerns may blend with political and moral ones in ways that may be usefully compared to the sorts of third party interventions understood in conflict resolution work. My aim is to examine critically a number of recent ethnographies drawn from a variety of field-settings, conflict-types, and geographical areas, including Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland, India, Guatemala, (tribal) Pakistan, and the USA.

Although neither course is prerequisite, I envision this seminar as fitting very well with CONF 727, Ethnographic Methods, as taught by Prof. Peter Black in the Fall semester, and my own CONF 720, Ethnic and Cultural Factors in Conflict Resolution, taught in the Spring.

A note on “experience-near” ethnography: I have borrowed this term from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who, in turn, lifted it from the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, who spoke of “experience-near” and “experience-distant” *concepts*. This is how Geertz (in an essay on “anthropological understanding” first published in 1974) characterizes the two concepts:

“An experience-near concept is, roughly, one that someone—a patient, a subject, in our case an informant—might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others. An experience-distant concept is one that specialists of one sort or another—an analyst, an experimenter,

an ethnographer, even a priest or an ideologist—employ to forward their scientific, philosophical, or practical aims. ‘Love’ is an experience-near concept, ‘object cathexis’ is an experience-distant one.”

Geertz is careful to warn us that the distinction is not necessarily “a normative one, in the sense that one concept is to be preferred as such over the other. Confinement to experience-near concepts leaves an ethnographer awash in immediacies, as well as entangled in vernacular. Confinement to experience-distant ones leaves him stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon.” One of the things we will pay attention to is how each of our ethnographers negotiates this tension, between “immediacies” and “abstraction,” as a sort of third-party, while dealing with the added stress of working in active zones of conflict.

Course Requirements

Required Readings:

Begona Aretxaga, *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland*

Kevin Avruch, “Notes Toward Ethnographies of Conflict and Violence”

Avram Bornstein, *Crossing the Green Line Between the West Bank and Israel*

Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*

Ted Conover, *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*

Lincoln Keiser, *Friend by Day, Enemy by Night: Organized Vengeance in a Kohistani Community*

James Laue, “The Emergence and Institutionalization of Third Party Roles in Conflict”

Cynthia Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues With Sikh Militants*

Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemala Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy*

Jeffrey Sluka, “Participant Observation in Violent Social Contexts”

The main requirement for the class is a paper on some aspect of “working”—defined as research or conflict resolution practice-- in active zones of conflict. Since I want the paper to reflect your own research, theory, and/or practice interests, I am open to a wide range of topics. You should discuss a potential topic with me as early as you formulate one, but no later than Week 6 (March 4). The paper is due at the last class session, May 6, 2002, when you will also be asked to report in summary form on its findings.

Course Program

Note: Due to the celebration of Martin Luther King Day, this class begins in the second week of the term and ends on the Monday of exam week, May 6. All the dates and week-numbers, below, refer to the *class* calendar.

- Week 1 (1/28):** Course Orientation: Fieldwork in Zones of Conflict; The Fieldworker As “Third Party?”
Read: Avruch; Sluka; Laue (handouts)
- Week 2 (2/4):** Some More-Or-Less “Classic” Work; Keeping Your Ethnographic
Week 3 (2/11): Distance (Or Trying To); Tribal Pakistan and the Hindu-Kush: A Culturally “Endemic” Conflict Zone?
Read: Keiser
- Week 4 (2/18):** Conflict Through the Lens of Gender in Northern Ireland; Third Party
Week 5 (2/25): As Feminist
Read: Aretxaga
- Week 6 (3/4):** Mapping Conflict: Borders and Zones of Conflict; Diasporas and
Week 7 (3/11): Homelands; Israel/Palestine; Participant Observation and Positionality
Read: Bornstein
- Week 8 (3/18):** Midsemester Recess (no class); Take Stock
- Week 9 (3/25):** An American Urban Zone of Conflict; Fieldwork and Danger;
Week 10 (4/1): Criminality, Cocaine, and Capitalism
Read: Bourgois
- Week 11 (4/8):** Participant Observation in the Full Sense of the Term; Third Party as “Second” Party; The American Prison as a Conflict Zone
Read: Conover
- Week 12 (4/15):** Talking to Terrorists; Violence, Nationalism and Transnationalism
Week 13 (4/22): Read: Mahmood
- Week 14 (4/29):** Coming Out “The Other Side?” (Recollecting Conflict and Violence); The Interview as Testimony: “Truth,” Memory, and Narrative in Post-Conflict Guatemala
Read: Schirmer
- Week 15 (5/6):** Guatemala cont.; Reprise and Summary Reports of Research (Class) Paper Due