



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
AND AREA STUDIES
HUMANITIES
AARHUS UNIVERSITY



Seminar

Revisiting Research Methods in Social Sciences

Organised jointly by Sambalpur University and CISCA / Aarhus University

Sambalpur, 25th – 27th of November 2010

Almost 25 years ago James Clifford and George E. Marcus in their book “Writing Culture” explicitly questioned and challenged the existing research paradigm by arguing that ethnography faced a crisis of authority – a diagnosis that indeed plunged the discipline into a debate on such the crisis if not into a crisis. Yet, the volume highlighted and reemphasized important issues – first and foremost the entanglement between power and representation - and argued for paying closer attention to epistemological issues in representing “others”, particularly when Western ethnographers write about non-Western cultures.

However, revisiting these issues in a workshop in India with its own distinctive anthropological tradition immediately questions such Western / non-Western dichotomies and alerts us to constructions of otherness based on regional identities, caste and class issues, gender biases etc. Central questions such as “Who is represented by whom and how?” or “What can and shall we document and represent – being aware of our own limits in experiencing, describing and analysing ethnographic contexts in an all-encompassing way?” keep puzzling and troubling researchers – also in view of a relatively higher frequency and intensity of cultural and face-to-face encounters.

One development in the discipline has been an intensive discussion and development of research methods. The debate over authenticity has led to challenging the traditional ‘black box’ of field work and called for new and more transparent ways of dealing with data, linked to various analytical strategies and epistemological stances such as social constructionism, neo-realism, narrative analysis, etc. Also, changes in global society and changes in the ways we as researchers engage in it when doing field work have required development of new

approaches such as multi-sited ethnography and cyber-research. Finally, development of tools such as software for qualitative analysis (e.g. Nvivo) has opened up for new ways of managing and analyzing data, like being able to work with larger data sets or new types of doing comparative analysis.

We propose to look at the following issues:

- The issues of time: “deep ethnography versus short-term fieldwork” as we are aware that substantial ethnography is increasingly under pressure from funding agencies.
- The challenges of multi-sited fieldwork appropriate in new contexts, yet under the above-mentioned constraints.
- The role of interdisciplinarity in approaching topics and fields.
- The potential of auto-ethnography and the ways it can enhance, challenge or supplement the research of foreign researchers entering the field.
- The continuing question of subjectivity and objectivity – a question that is intrinsically linked to situation and location of the self in the research as well as the written “product”.
- Approaches to and ethical dimensions of doing research with particularly vulnerable groups and/or sensitive issues
- The inclusion of new aids in research such as visual or audio devices and qualitative analysis software.

The intention of the workshop is not only to look at these vexed issues of research methodology, but also to pay attention to the question of how to apply the research results in the teaching process – taken it for granted that a high quality teaching is always research based. Thus, we also ask how to teach research methods at departments in Denmark and India and how to design curricula on methodology in a joint Indo-European teaching approach.

Convenors: Prof. Deepak Kumar Behera, Dr. Jens Seeberg, Dr. Uwe Skoda

Please send your abstract to CISCA@hum.au.dk. Deadline for submission of abstract is 10th of October, 2010.