

University of Maryland Study in London Programme

## **SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF BRITAIN**

Anth398L

Spring Semester 2008

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Our course combines various methods to explore ways of life in Great Britain. For each student, the core is an ethnographic project on a topic of his/her choice - a group of people, an activity, or a place.

We meet weekly for three purposes: as a seminar for considering basic concepts and methods in social and cultural anthropology; as a workshop for assessing methods and techniques in field work; and as a forum for sharing experiences and exchanging ideas. The seminars will be based on lectures and readings and the workshops on short assignments. See p. 2.

There are three sets of assignments: short, in most weeks; a mid-term review; and a final report. There are no examinations.

The weekly assignments are to help students into their respective projects by simple steps, and to develop skills of observation, description and analysis. Most are likely to be based on concurrent field work, and they can be used to accumulate material for the final paper. See p. 3.

The mid-term assignment is to analyse a book. See p. 4.

The final paper will be a report on a project of regular participation or observation and interview as appropriate to students' respective topics. Topics are selected in agreement with the teacher. See p. 5.

GRADING	%
class participation	15
short assignments	30
mid-term review	10
final report	45

The course text is Thomas Hylland Eriksen 2001 *Small places, large issues: an introduction to social & cultural anthropology* (2nd ed.) London: Pluto (ISBN 0-7453-1772-3), *Eriksen* on the following pages. Helpful background for many topics can be found in Nicholas Abernethy & Alan Warde et al. 2000 *Contemporary British society: a new introduction to sociology* (3rd ed.) Cambridge: Polity, *CBS* on the following pages.

## MEETINGS

- 1 (31 January) introduction: society and culture in Britain  
*Eriksen* Epilogue
- 2 (7 February) what is anthropology, ethnography?  
*Eriksen* cc. 1-2, 19  
Laura Bohannon 1966 'Shakespeare in the bush' *Natural History* 75: 7
- 3 (14 February) East End - walk (from Liverpool St. station, top of Bishopsgate escalator)  
*Eriksen* c. 3 (skim)
- 4 (21 February) world views: society, person, soul, gods, Nature  
*Eriksen* cc. 4-5 (skim), 6, 15  
Nigel Rapport 1993 *Diverse world-views in an English village* c.9 Edinburgh: EUP
- 5 (28 February) material culture: clothes; food and its eating; houses as homes; tools  
*Eriksen* c. 12, c. 13 (skim)  
Sophie Chevalier 1998 'From woollen carpet to grass carpet' ed. Daniel Miller *Material cultures*  
London: UCL
- 6 (6 March) speaking - do the British say what they mean, mean what they say?  
Roger Hewitt 1986 *White talk black talk* pp. 150-72 Cambridge: CUP  
Susan Paul Pattie 1997 *Faith in history* pp. 204-11 Washington (DC): Smithsonian
- 7 (13 March) 'communities': nationalities, ethnicity; insiders/outsideers  
*Eriksen* cc. 17-8  
preview mid-term reviews
- 8 (3 April) reproduction: schooling; networks; class; solidarity and opposition  
*Eriksen* cc. 5, 8-10, skim c. 7  
John N Gray 2000 *At home in the hills* c.9 New York: Berghahn
- 9 (10 April) the 'family'  
*Eriksen* cc. 4-5  
Timothy Jenkins 1999 *Religion in English everyday life* c.III:3 New York: Berghahn
- 10 (17 April)  
tutorials
- 11 (24 April) Cambridge: take the 10.15 train from King's Cross  
*Eriksen* c. 3
- 12 (1 May) making a living: economic identities  
*Eriksen* cc. 11-3; c. 3 (skim)  
J Christopher Holloway 1981 'The guided tour' *Annals of Tourism Research* 8:3  
Sophie Day 2001 'Biological symptoms of social unease' ed. Soraya Tremayne *Managing reproductive life* New York: Berghahn  
preview final reports
- 13 (8 May) religion: faiths and congregations  
*Eriksen* cc. 14-5  
Sharon Macdonald 1997 *Reimagining culture* c. 6 Oxford: Berg
- 14 (15 May) review  
*Eriksen* c. 16

## BRIEF ASSIGNMENTS

Think about the sequence of assignments and what kinds of work you will have to do for them, week by week. Use opportunities to refer to the weekly readings and, or, your own discoveries of relevant references; and feel free to draw comparisons with your colleagues' projects; but note that, except where otherwise indicated, these exercises are to be carried out by yourself. Each of these assignments is likely to run to a couple of pages. The dead-lines are the respective meetings, listed.

### ASSIGNMENT BY MEETING

- 2 Choose a place. (This assignment must be undertaken unaccompanied.)
  - (a) Listen to all the different sounds there - the longer you listen, the more you will notice. Note them. Then write your impressions up.
  - (b) Repeat the exercise but, this time, for what you see.Do not try to guess what people are thinking. Include non-human sounds and sights.
- 4 Do an interview on some subject appropriate to the interviewee. Write the interview up - in whatever style you deem fit - including brief description of the person and your interaction. What went well? How could you improve? In a second interview, to follow up, what question would you start with and why?
- 5 Describe your first impressions of the scene where you intend to study. Consider both the details and the general atmosphere. Who is there? Bring a colleague to help you, if you like.
- 6 Describe the material culture of the scene that you are studying. Who uses what, when, where and how? Are there patterns of use and response? Do you detect boundaries? What do the things or materials reveal about ideas and social relations?
- 7 In the situation that you are studying, who talks about what to whom, and in what way(s)? Are there varieties or variations of the pattern and, if so, what are they and what do they depend upon?
- 8 Find someone at the scene that you are studying or else someone who knows a lot about the situation. Interview the person about your theme. Note their own words and information, and include a note on the person too and on your interaction.
- 9 (a) Prepare a bibliography of five or six books as background for your final report. At least three should be in anthropology. For each, explain how it pertains to your subject.  
(b) Choose any one of the readings in the pack or any chapter from either *Eriksen* or *CBS* which you find helpful for your field study. Use an incident, scene or idea from your study to illustrate or to argue against ideas in that reading, explaining how they relate to your project.
- 11 In the situation that you are studying, how do the participants deal with each other? What are their responsibilities, rights or privileges? Are there forms of control, explicit or implicit? Adapt these questions to suit the situation. Describe an event or exchange that illustrates the pattern.
- 12 How does the situation that you are studying fit into the broader pattern of British life? How, for example, does your (say) club fit into life in London, and how does it compare to other such scenes? How has it changed or is it changing? Does it bear on social issues? Can you relate it to any principle in *CBS*? Bring a colleague to help you, if you like.

## REVIEW

Review a book, showing how it reveals ways in which people relate to each other and think of life. What does it show of their institutions, customs, attitudes and, or, expectations? What causes their social patterns? How can you relate the book to a theme or principle in *Eriksen* and, or, *CBS*?

Select one of the following titles in consultation with your teacher. Or consult him if there is another, not listed here, that you would prefer to review in stead; but note that the list is strongly recommended.

Your review is likely to run to four or five pages. Please submit it by 3 April.

- Claire E Alexander 2000 *The Asian gang: ethnicity, identity, masculinity* Oxford: Berg  
Gary Armstrong 1998 *Football hooligans: knowing the score* Oxford: Berg  
Gerd Baumann 1996 *Contesting culture: discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London* Cambridge: CUP  
Rebecca Cassidy 2002 *The sport of kings: kinship, class and thoroughbred racing in Newmarket* Cambridge: CUP  
Frank Coffield et al. 1986 *Growing up at the margins: young adults in the North East* Milton Keynes: Open University  
Abner Cohen 1993 *Masquerade politics: explorations in the structure of urban cultural movements* Oxford: Berg  
Jeanette Edwards 2000 *Born and bred: idioms of kinship and new reproductive technologies in England* Oxford: OUP  
Janet Finch & Jennifer Mason 1993 *Negotiating family responsibilities* London: Routledge  
Janet Finch & Jennifer Mason 2000 *Passing on: kinship and inheritance in England* London: Routledge  
Marie Gillespie 1995 *Television, ethnicity and cultural change* London: Routledge  
Kevin Hetherington 2000 *New Age Travellers: vanloads of uproarious humanity* London: Cassell  
Tözün Issa 2005 *Talking Turkey: the language, culture and identity of Turkish speaking children in Britain* Stoke: Trentham  
Phil Jackson 2004 *Inside clubbing: sensual experiments in the art of being human* Oxford: Berg  
Charles Jedrej & Mark Nuttall 1996 *White settlers: the impact of rural repopulation in Scotland* Luxembourg City: Harwood  
Daniel Miller et al. 1998 *Shopping, place and identity* London: Routledge  
Karen O'Reilly 2000 *The British on the Costa del Sol: transnational identities and local communities* London: Routledge  
Ruth Prince & David Riches 2000 *The new age in Glastonbury: the construction of religious movements* New York City: Berghahn  
Simon Sinclair 1997 *Making doctors: an institutional apprenticeship* Oxford: Berg  
Ian Taylor et al. 1996 *A tale of two cities: global change, local feeling and everyday life in the north of England - a study of Manchester and Sheffield* London: Routledge  
Nicole Rodriguez Toulis 1997 *Believing identity: Pentecostalism and the mediation of Jamaican ethnicity and gender in England* Oxford: Berg  
Claire Wallace 1987 *For richer, for poorer: growing up in and out of work* London: Tavistock  
Bronwen Walter 2001 *Outsiders inside: whiteness, place and Irish women* London: Routledge  
Malcolm Young 1991 *An inside job: policing and police culture in Britain* Oxford: OUP

## APPENDIX 1

### ETHNOGRAPHIC PROJECT

*The aim* is to learn about life in Britain, to get close enough to people living here to listen to them and talk with them. Your job is to make sense of what you observe, of what they do, say and think, of conditions affecting them, and of how they themselves make sense of that part of life that you share with them.

Most students will select a group, an activity or a place in London for ethnographic study. Note that this exercise is not a career move. For, first, the point is to find out about others by their own lights, not with priorities of yours; and, second, it is unlikely that you could observe others' technical work without impeding them. Nor is it intended as work-experience although, if you can contribute without hindering others, work as a volunteer can provide an excellent opportunity for a case study.

*What could you study?* Here are some types of situation.

- nursing home or hospital (volunteer)
- church, temple, mosque etc. or associated club etc.
- club - pub (music, sport etc.); social - e.g., elderly, ethnic
- adult education centre
- small museum or theatre (volunteer)
- shopping - garden centre, local market etc.
- charity shop (volunteer)
- neighbourhood - e.g., Camden Town, Golders Green

Often, 'scenes' which appear - or are - initially difficult to enter turn out to be the easiest for the ethnographer to manage while others which seem easy to enter become more difficult as you continue. You always do find a way around the problem; but every project has its difficult phases or moments.

*How do you begin?* You may well investigate several possibilities before settling on a project. You could start by walking about or taking a bus. Listen, look. The group or place that you choose should have the following characteristics.

1. You will learn from it about London and Britain. This does not necessarily mean studying English people. It could mean studying Irish or Africans, for instance, immigrants or members of minorities. It means not choosing a pub, for instance, frequented by Australians et al. not settled here.
2. There is enough activity to indicate how people engage with each other.
3. You can fit in - to the crowd (e.g., cafeteria), the work (e.g., charity shop), the scene (e.g., sport); your presence is not disruptive.
4. You can go there regularly. Perhaps the place lies just around the corner or you may be prepared to travel. Be realistic and fair on yourself.

In some cases, it is necessary, before you even start to explore, to book an appointment for interview with an appropriate person. It may be appropriate to write a formal letter, explaining yourself briefly and saying that you will 'phone to ask whether you could make an appointment - letters are always appreciated in Britain.

Where a letter is recommended, I can provide you with a cover letter on University stationery to vouch for your good will, sanity etc., to be sent along with your own.

How, then, are you to explain yourself and what you are trying to do? Choice of situation, formal or informal, makes a difference.

Work on neighbourhoods, pubs etc. may be easier to begin because you can postpone introduction, just hanging out a while, observing. By the time that you have to explain what you are doing, you will have a better idea of what it is that you are up to, and why.

Those undertaking work in more restricted situations should explain, simply, that they are students in the University of Maryland, taking a course on life in Britain, that the course requires them to study some particular aspect of the life, and that the people that they are approaching are an example of that aspect that it is hoped to study. Start by getting an appointment for interview with the administrator or the person who could give you permission to work there; and use that opportunity to gain at least some information about that person, the institution, its role in the neighbourhood and in society. The worst that can happen is a refusal; but, as an ethnographer, you can learn even from that. Remember that you could help the people with whom you propose to work. Mention that - it may be enough.

*The report* will probably build on your work for the short assignments and it should make critical reference, where appropriate, to the articles and books that you have read. It is likely to run to about 15 pages, not including any appendices, illustrations etc.. Provide an abstract of the report (a single paragraph) on a separate page at the beginning. If you would like to have the report *returned* to you after the semester, consult Dr Koehler before the final meeting of the course.

Throughout your work, remember that your meetings in class, with colleagues and teacher, are to support you with ideas, advice and encouragement. Both the other formal assignments and the discussions, formal and informal, of your project and your colleagues', will help you to recognize how much you are finding out, day by day.

Indeed, you may find, after a while, that your project is a more or less continuous preoccupation. Not that it is a burden (!) but one good practice is to keep a field diary. It can help you to note various observations and remarks which the weekly assignments do not require; and it becomes a record of your own reflections, some of which may be useful in completing the final report. It may well help too to watch the press, magazines etc. for coverage of the type of situation that you are studying or of some of the social and cultural issues (note the final short assignment).

## APPENDIX 2

### HONORS OPTION

Honors students will sit an unseen examination. They will choose one of three questions to answer in 2500-3000 words.

Answers are expected to show the following attainments.

- \* Substantive knowledge of the social anthropology of Britain and of the literature
- \* Awareness of how ethnographic evidence is collected and of what can or cannot be deduced from it
- \* Capacity for critical thought and argument

Standard practice in citing references is expected.

This is a 'take-home' assignment. The questions will be given out on 10 April and the answer is due on 24 April. This dead-line is not flexible.

The distribution of graded elements for students taking this option is as follows.

	%
Class participation	10
Short assignments	25
Mid-term review	10
Exam	15
Final report	40