

From BenaBena to Berlin: principles of transcultural ethnography

Winter Semester 2023/24: 16 October 2023 – 17 February 2024

CATEGORY

Urban Culture and Society

COURSE STRUCTURE

2 contact hours à 45 min per week (winter semester: 16 weeks)

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Time

Day: Monday, 10-12 s.t. (10:00 am – 11.30 am)

Place

Room 0323-26, Hausvogteiplatz 5-7, 10117 Berlin

COURSE LANGUAGE

The language of the course is English (B2 minimum level required), and conversational German (A2) is recommended for class assignments. Academic articles, recordings, and videos are English language based. The nature and structure of the course will require participants to engage local (Berlin) residents in conversation.

Language requirements (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

English: B2

German: A2

TARGET GROUP

International exchange students and domestic students of all subjects, with a strong interest in acquiring and expanding their knowledge in cross-disciplinary research methods currently used in transcultural ethnographic fieldwork. This course is designed for undergraduate students. Master students may participate if their home university agrees. Regular degree-seeking students can select the course within the elective part of their study program (überfachlicher Wahlpflichtbereich üWP). No background knowledge in ethnography or ethnographic research methods is required.

CREDITS = 5 ECTS

The Berlin Perspectives courses are offered by the Career Center as part of the elective program üWP. Registration takes place via Agnes. All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The aim of this seminar series is to introduce students to the techniques and methods necessary for fieldwork in transcultural ethnography, ranging from remote tribes in Papua New Guinea (i.e. the BenaBena tribe) all the way to one of the most vibrant capital cities in Europe: Berlin. Conceptual, ethical, and methodological issues are discussed, and a substantial practical component is included. Students will learn how to collect qualitative data in settings of their choice within the city of Berlin, which may vary between Berlin cafés, the Berlin nightclub scene and concert halls, the Studentendorf Schlachtensee, and migrant community centers.

In this course, we seek to bridge the gap between theoretical methodological approaches and practice-based research in the field by placing a focus on the experiential, tangible, and subjective dimensions of ethnography. We emphasize the dialogue between theory and practice of qualitative fieldwork research in contemporary (and primarily) urban environments, where all genres of human culture are created, exhibited, performed, and consumed. The city of Berlin offers itself as the ideal setting as it stands for “cosmopolitanism and tolerance, freedom, and diversity” (<https://www.visitberlin.de/en/blog/11-tips-berlins-multicultural-side>). The course includes theoretical seminars and workshops that aim to introduce students to issues related to observation, interview techniques, listening practices, social skills for conducting qualitative research, and analysis techniques of qualitative data. The general principles governing ethics in transcultural ethnography research (e.g., consent, and the role of the researcher with the participants s/he studies) and audiovisual recordings are also presented.

Course projects must include a substantial fieldwork component involving human participants of any background and in any setting in relation to the experience of living, working, and creating in Berlin. The course will enable students to develop their social skills, gain knowledge of contemporary ethics procedures regarding fieldwork research, get to see the city of Berlin itself through the eyes of people who call it their home, and acquire a solid methodological toolpack for present and future endeavors in the field of transcultural and ethnographic explorations.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Knowledge

- be aware of the main ethical and theoretical issues raised in fieldwork research in transcultural ethnographic research
- be aware of ethics procedures and regulations in relation to ethnography
- contextualize and interpret data acquired via (participant) observation and interviews

Acquisition of Academic & Analytical Skills

- Analyze key components of academic articles in relation to their relevance and methods section to their own work.
- Offer and receive feedback in relation to ongoing projects, and see how their work contributes to the broader academic discussion
- have a full grasp of qualitative data encoding, qualitative analysis methods (i.e. thematic, narrative, IPA) and strategies (GTA, structured)

Achievement

- be able to set up a fieldwork project in transcultural ethnography, using participant observation, interviews, and guided discussions
- familiarize with ethics in fieldwork research involving human participants
- be able to communicate and present research findings in an academic context

READINGS

Berg, M. L., & Sigona, N. (2013). Ethnography, diversity, and urban space. *Identities*, 20(4), 347-360

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press.

Fenn, J., & Gilman, L. (2019). *Handbook for Folklore and Ethnomusicology Fieldwork*. Indiana University Press.

Glesne, C. (2016). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. Pearson. One Lake Street, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2019). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. Routledge. Chapter 5: Insider Accounts – listening and asking questions.

Hegelund, A. (2005). Objectivity and subjectivity in the ethnographic method. *Qualitative health research*, 15(5), 647-668.

Liamputtong, P. (2009). Qualitative data analysis: conceptual and practical considerations. *Health promotion journal of Australia*, 20(2), 133-139.

Yin, R. K. (2015). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. Guilford publications. Chapter 6: data collection methods

ASSIGNMENT INFO

Workload and assignments

In order to be granted 5 ECTS, participants will be asked to

- actively attend all sessions (a minimum of 75% attendance is required for classroom sessions)
- present their findings in a classroom presentation
- hand in a final written project assignment (approx. 25000 characters), which is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Berlin.

Failure to fulfill one of the mentioned components results in failure of the class.

Assessment Components

The final grade will be composed of the above-mentioned assignments:

Presentation 30%

Final project 70%

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Dr. George Athanasopoulos (Institute of Musicology and Media Studies, HU-Berlin)

I am a researcher and lecturer in cognitive ethnomusicology (PhD, University of Edinburgh 2013) with a focus on the cross-cultural perception of music, based at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. I have conducted fieldwork in the United Kingdom, Greece, Germany, Japan, Pakistan, and Papua New Guinea. My work has been funded by the Marie Curie Foundation, the Sasakawa Foundation, the University of Edinburgh, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and the Onassis Foundation. I am currently working on how music affects and is affected by socio-cultural factors.

COURSE SCHEDULE

2 hours à 45 min per week

Christmas Break from 25 December 2023 and 5 January 2024

Please note: This course starts in the second week of the semester. Monday, October 16, 2023 is *Dies Academicus* at Humboldt-Universität. No classes take place this day.

PART I

Week 1: Seminar 1: Introduction & Developing a project

- What is it that we do? Why do we do it? How do we do it?

Week 2: BEFORE THE FIELD: The qualitative method (+/-)

- Data collection methods in qualitative research (archives, interviews, observations)

Week 3: Preparation outline: creating a research plan schedule

- 1st & 2nd Qs, creating a research plan schedule (organisation, logistics & documentation, significance), Expectations vs reality. 1st session on physical & emotional well-being

Week 4: Ethics

- Code of Conduct & Ethics considerations for your project // Finalizing your research proposals

PART II

Week 5: IN THE FIELD: First contact

- Entering the field; identifying contacts; participant selection; Introductions; asking for consent; session documentation; equipment set-up

Week 6: fieldnotes and documentation workshop

- Fieldwork then and now, Taking fieldnotes, Notebook set-up, Seating diagrams, (Lots of) practical applications

Week 7: interviews

- Background // Types // Time-duration-location // crafting open-ended questions // listening & ending

Week 8: Observation & participant observation

- Interactions, Observation // Participant observation – are you welcome?

Week 9: Workshop (excursion) & leaving the field

- – On-site fieldwork/workshop exercise // Data organization, Documenting, Preliminary dissemination recap

PART III UPON RETURN FROM THE FIELD

Week 10 Upon return from the field: analysis I

- Weekly goals: Interview transcription.

Week 11 Upon return from the field: analysis II

- Weekly goals: Coding Qualitative Data Strategies: Interview transcript tagging and theme creation. Analysis, Subjectivity, Selectivity, Representation.

Week 12 Workshop: Coding/thematic analysis exercises

- Weekly goals: Hands-on training on coding/thematic exercises, incl. hierarchical structures, & Grounded Theory/Structural analysis

Week 13 Upon return from the field: analysis III

- Weekly goals: Basic descriptive statistics. 2-minute student presentations of ongoing projects & peer review.

Week 14 Workshop: setting up a Qualitative paper

- Weekly goals: Analysis and reflection on recorded activities. Setting up a Qualitative paper.

Week 15 – Double seminar: Student presentations

- Student project presentations & peer reviews

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Registration on Moodle (HU's e-learning platform)
- The course is delivered on-site unless stated otherwise

in case of online sessions

- Fully functional device (laptop, tablet, PC)
- Stable internet connection
- Software: Zoom (video/audio)
- *Recommended* hardware: external headset for better sound quality

EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Preparation for lively discussions: be on time, have at least the required readings completed, and points in mind for discussion or clarification.

Assignments: complete all assignments according to the specified requirements on the schedule including handing them over to the lecturer.

Commitment: pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinion in this international classroom. For more information on the latter, see the following section on "Commentary on language and methodology for a diverse group of students".

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies. **Plagiarism** in even a small assignment will result in failing the entire course. See **ZSP-HU** (Fächerübergreifende Satzung zur Regelung von Zulassung, Studium und Prüfung der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), **§ 111** (Täuschung).

Attendance policy: Students must contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the lecturer.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: 15 06 2023