

Archiving Anthropology

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Abstract: Using case studies from the continuing work of the Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing at the University of Kent at Canterbury we discuss ways in which the anthropological research process is enhanced or altered through the creation of online archives of fieldnotes and other research material such as photographs, film and the results of their analysis. Dissemination of field data in this manner both enhances academic debate by enabling alternative analysis and provides rich resources for teaching as demonstrated by the experience rich anthropology project.

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1. Background

Anthropologists have problematic relationships to archives. On the one hand, they use archived material voraciously by applauding Pat BARKER's innovative use of WHR RIVERS' unexpurgated field notes in her novels, and using MALINOWSKI's diaries for teaching. On the other hand, things become rather different when the question of archiving their own material arises. The possibility of granting others access, no matter how circumscribed or how far postponed in the future, seems to cause more or less acute feelings of discomfort and unease. [1]

The old English proverb has it that who pays the piper calls the tune. Technically all research funded by UK Government agencies is crown copyright (even if this is never taken up), just as most recent academic contracts include a clause giving the employees (universities) copyright of their employees' labours! Again this is in practice not implemented in the case of anthropologists. But copyright is not really the issue here as much as the ownership and preservation of the products of research. By products some understand basic research data such as field notes, photographs and recordings. [2]

Agencies such as the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) are increasingly taking the view that since they pay for research to take place they have some say in what happens to its products. The ESRC have revised their [Datasets Policy](#) (partly in response to the 1988 Copyright Act) and have done this

in the light of the discussions with [Qualidata](#). Although the ESRC requires researchers to 'offer' their field notes for deposit in archives, applicants can discuss with them ways in which this might or might not be possible for some or all of their data. The Archive Centres together with ESRC have produced documents giving guidance as to best policy on archiving. This is not at all a bad thing. If we produce research material that may be of use to others (perhaps at a date far in the future—consider the use made of RIVERS' field notes by Pat BARKER in her trilogy, 1995) then it makes sense to consider this from the beginning. [3]

An extreme scenario to which would ensure protecting the confidentiality of informants, and guarantee that their copyright will not or cannot be abused might be to burn all of one's field data. And if an anthropologist answers by saying no they won't burn it while they live for they may do more work on the notes, will they leave explicit instructions that they be burnt by their executors? And should the executors honour such requests? In a couple of hundred years I would like to think my field notes may be of passing historical interest, and once I and the people named are long dead I think that those broader intellectual responsibilities begin to take on greater importance. [4]

So, just as I will not make my field notes available now, I intended to preserve them, and to take steps to have them preserved. I had not thought of this when I began my research. Had it been pointed out to me then, I may have made a few minor changes but nothing very substantial. The point that the Qualidata initiative raises is an important one—just as we have important obligations to our informants so too we owe something to those that fund the research and to future generations of researchers. If some research material is best burnt then burn it. What we save from the ashes should be treated properly (not left undocumented in shoe boxes in attics where no one else knows it exists). We should take steps to treat properly and with due care the field material that we intend to leave to the future. [5]

2. Case Studies

With that in mind the [Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing](#) (CSAC) at the University of Kent at Canterbury has pioneered the use of the WWW to make field data and the results of its analysis easily available. This has raised in a practical fashion many of the general issues concerned. [6]

2.1 Case 1: Paul STIRLING's Turkish Village Archives. Two Turkish villages and their emigrants: 1950-96

The work of Professor Paul STIRLING's research data and results from Turkey between 1949 and 1994 has been archived at CSAC (see <http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/stirling.html>). It consists of 28 odd volumes of typed-in notes, two volumes of his wife's field notes, and all his known field materials, including photographs, video tape and sound tapes (although not all of these are online).

For reasons of copyright and in order to maintain confidentiality the latter are available to qualified scholars upon application to CSAC). [7]

In 1990, Paul STIRLING was persuaded to set about publishing this research; all field notes, and other research materials in his possession, collected since 1949. These stemmed from longitudinal field work in two Turkish villages, beginning with two periods of immersion field work 1949-52, and culminating in a restudy in 1985-6, funded by the ESRC. These materials include details about the villages' labour emigrants within Turkey, and to Europe and Arabia; and some of the notes of his wife Margaret (1949-52), his main research collaborator, Emine ONARAN INCIRLI OGLU, and others (1985-93). He also has several hundred photographs, a video, and some sound tape cassettes. Besides these, the archive on the web includes all his published and printed materials on Turkey. His main 1949-52 field results are published in his book "Turkish Village" (STIRLING 1965), and a two week research revisit in 1971 in his article "Cause, Knowledge and Change" (1974). Since then he has made many brief visits, up to 1994. In 1981-2, he acted as a Consultant to the Open University and the BBC, in making two twenty five minute instructional films, based on this research, about labour migration. He was Visiting Professor at the Middle East Technical University 1983-6, and in 1985-6, he made a full scale restudy (supported by the British ESRC). [8]

This work is the first public publication of a new kind of major anthropological work on the Internet. Ethnographic monographs have already been published on the Internet, many of them by CSAC Monographs (and one of these a part of this project). However, there are very few anthropological works in any medium that approach the scope of this work. His plan is still unique, combining a wide range of previously published academic works covering his entire career of 48 years, the data from which these works are derived, field notes of the original and of subsequent research, and new academic results which arise from the juxtaposition of all this material. Due to Prof. STIRLING's death it is not as yet as integrated as we would like, but work on integration is progressing slowly. [9]

The field notes are significant in themselves. We are unaware of any other such set of published field notes which cover the time span of Prof. STIRLING's, career and which are available to the research community at large. The field notes include alteration of all personal names in order to protect villagers' identities and descendants. The names were replaced consistently, so that individuals can be traced by cross-reference throughout the notes, and located in the formal longitudinal database associated with the project. The job of matching to the database calls for a degree of skill with computers. A confidential code list will enable future bona fide researchers to continue STIRLING's work. [10]

STIRLING's photographs, taken over the forty five years of research are unique, and many of these are on-line. Due to Prof. STIRLING's premature death annotation of these photographs is presently poor, although this work will be updated. Taken over the entire research period, they provide a unique form of documentation of this dynamic period of transition for Turkey even with their present state of documentation. A large amount of interview data has been

transcribed and/or glossed. A small amount of video material is available. As confidentiality issues are resolved these will be published over the coming years in both transcribed form and audio/video. [11]

2.2 Case 2: The Experience Rich Anthropology Project (ERA)

The [Experience Rich Anthropology](#) (ERA) project was funded by HEFCE as part of their FDTL program. At the conclusion of the project we had contributions from sixteen researchers at six institutions. The project built on the work being done since 1985 at the Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing, University of Kent at Canterbury. Consortium partners included Anthropology departments at Universities in Belfast, Oxford, Oxford Brooks, London, Manchester, and Canterbury. The major focus of the ERA project is to make it possible for teachers of anthropology and social anthropology to develop and construct their own teaching and learning materials from those that are being hosted at the sites of various members of the consortium. [12]

Informal transmission of experience is being threatened by current pressures of numbers. Formalisation is a means to its survival. Changes in scale imply that existing good practice will not perpetuate since personal presentations of experience do not work in the same way in large groups. Instead techniques must be developed to convey the immediacy of experience to individual students however large and heterogeneous a group they may comprise. If these techniques are efficient they can be used to introduce the experiential based teaching of anthropology in new places in the curriculum. [13]

Our intention was to promote and disseminate innovative and successful means of developing materials for both teaching and learning while at the same time serving as an alternative form of research output. We thus took as our principal aim the narrowing of the gap between research and teaching. Those teaching anthropology are researchers who typically employ only a little of their research, and often only the published results, in their teaching. The position of visual materials illustrates this—field photos are among the largest and least exploited resources produced by anthropology. The relative accessibility of camcorders (analogue and now digital) means that a surfeit of unanalysed and subsequently under-used visual material is currently being accumulated by contemporary researchers. [14]

The methods, practices and experience resulting from the ERA projects provides some guidance and pointers to ways round the problems of maintaining and improving the role of 'other' research inputs into the process of teaching and learning. [15]

The [Pitt Rivers Museum](#), Oxford (PETCH & DUDLEY 1998) produced an ERA element entitled "Pitt Rivers: anthropology and ethnography in the nineteenth century, the history of museums, field collection and the iconography of shields". This element presents material (on a diverse number of anthropological themes) relating to the person and ethnographic collections of Lieutenant-General Pitt

RIVERS concerning museum displays and specific objects (shields). Manchester (GLEDILL & HARRIS 1998) produced an ERA element titled: "Peasant Social Worlds and their Transformation". This element provides an account of the changing economic, social and political situations of peasant societies in the twentieth century. [16]

Queens, Belfast (REILY & WEINSTOCK 1998) produced an ERA element titled: "Venda Girls' Initiation" based on John BLACKING's work between 1956 and 1958 amongst the Venda of the Sibasa district of the Northern Transvaal. The aim of this element is not so much to outline the way in which the Venda material marked John BLACKING's work as it is to represent his data on initiation schools in the spirit in which it was originally published: as an invitation for further analytical readings. [17]

Oxford Brookes University (FOWLER 1999) produced an ERA element entitled "Working Notes on the Chiefdom of Bum". This element is concerned with the region of West-central Africa, the Cameroon Grassfields and contains a wide variety of ethnographic materials including Sally CHILVER's field diary and the results of collaborative fieldwork undertaken by CHILVER and KABERRY (see http://era.anthropology.ac.uk/Era_Resources/Era/Kingdom_Bum/). The pilot version was tested at the OBU as an advanced level double module in anthropology. [18]

Kent (BAGG & COLCLOUGH 1998) produced an ERA element entitled "The Ascoli Project: a Puglian town and its hinterland". This project examines changes in kinship and family forms and in marriage and inheritance strategies during the period 1700 -1990 in Ascoli Satriano, a small city in southern Italy. The project seeks to offer a new synthesis of historical and anthropological materials, using a combination of archival material and ethnographic fieldwork while exploring the main documentary research resources available to historically-inclined anthropologists. [19]

3. Future Prospects

Work on the ERA project continues—some new material is currently under preparation at University College, London and at the University of Oxford. In the long term we see that this sort of material will be an inevitable and welcomed by product of the research process itself. Work is currently underway on a variety of anthropological research projects that have an archival focus either as a starting point—or in order to undertake the research. Researchers associated with CSAC are currently studying the role of migrant newspapers in northern France, using sample pages of a Polish languages newspaper as interview prompts while others are working on early Buddhist texts which have been archived in different libraries around the world in order to prepare scholarly commentaries and explore their religious significance disparate materials must be united. The World Wide Web both facilitates this and enables the results to be made available for critical scrutiny. [20]

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