Chapter 3
Doing Cultural Anthropology
Chapter Outline

• Arriving at Fontana del Re
• A Little History
• Anthropological Techniques
• Changing Directions and Critical Issues in Ethnography
Chapter Outline

• Ethical Considerations in Fieldwork
• Bringing it Back Home: Anthropologists and Human Rights. You Decide
Fieldwork

- Field is an essential component of the anthropological experience.
- As Belmonte’s description of his first experiences at *Fontana del Re* shows, fieldwork brings confusion, strangeness, alienation, and a host of challenges and dilemmas.
Ethnography

- The major research tool of cultural anthropology; includes both fieldwork among people in society and the written results of fieldwork.
- Gathering and interpretation of information based on intensive, firsthand study.
Fieldwork

- Firsthand exploration of a society and culture.
- Reveals the difference between what people say they do and what they do.
Anthropologist and Informant
History of Anthropology

- The first scholars who called themselves anthropologists worked in the second half of the 19th century.
- The most famous were Sir Edward Burnett Tylor and Louis Henry Morgan.
- They saw themselves as compilers and analysts of ethnographic accounts, rather than field researchers.
Evolutionary Anthropology

- Morgan and Tylor relied on the writings of travelers, explorers, missionaries, and colonial officers - for their data.
- They used data from archaeological finds and colonial accounts of current day peoples to produce evolutionary histories of human society.
- They used type of technology and social institutions to place each society on an evolutionary scale of increasing complexity.
Franz Boas

• A critic of evolutionary anthropology, he insisted that grasping the whole of a culture could be achieved only through fieldwork.

• Believed that anthropologists must live among the people they studied, observing their culture and, participating in it.

• Boas’ style of fieldwork became known as participant observation.
Ethnocentrism

• The belief that one’s own culture is better than any other.

• Ethnocentrism can lead members of one culture to force their ways of life on another.
Racism

• Racism is beliefs, actions, and patterns of social organization that exclude individuals and groups from the equal exercise of human rights and freedoms.

• The transformation from ethnocentrism to racism underlies much of the structural inequality found in modern history.
Boas and Cultural Relativism

- Boas insisted that anthropologists approach each culture on its own terms, in light of its own notions of worth and value.
- This came to be known as cultural relativism, and is one of the hallmarks of anthropology.
- Boas argued that all human beings have equal capacities for culture, and that although human actions might be considered morally right or wrong, no culture was more evolved or of greater value than another.
Participant-observation

- Fieldwork technique that involves gathering cultural data by observing people’s behavior and participating in their lives.
  - Anthropologists work with respondents who guide them and offer insights into the culture.
Techniques

• Questionnaires
• Open ended questions
• Structured interviews
• Mapping
• Photography
• Observation
• Measurement
Culture Shock

- The feelings of alienation, loneliness, and isolation common to one who has been placed in a new culture.
- Most researchers experience some degree of culture shock.
Cross-Cultural Comparison

- British and European anthropologists were interested in **ethnology**, the attempt to find general principles or laws that govern cultural phenomena.

- In the 1860s, Herbert Spencer began to develop a way of organizing, tabulating, and correlating information on a large number of societies, a project he called *Descriptive Sociology*. 
Cross-Cultural Comparison

- William Graham Sumner, Albert Keller, and George Murdock brought Spencer’s ideas about cross-cultural comparison to the United States.
  - In the late 1930s, Murdock and Keller created a large, indexed ethnographic data base at Yale University.
  - First called the Cross Cultural Survey, in the late 1940s the project was expanded to include other universities and its name change to the Human Relations Area Files (or HRAF).
Feminist Anthropology

• Questions gender bias in ethnography and cultural theory.
• Men, who had limited access to women’s lives, performed much of the fieldwork and ignoring women’s perspectives perpetuates the oppression of women.
• **Andocentric bias** - Distortion in theory and ethnography caused by excessive focus on male activities or male perceptions of female activities.
Postmodernism

• Theory that focuses on issues of power and voice.
• Postmodernists suggest anthropological accounts are partial truths and reflect the background, training, and social position of their authors.
Collaborative Ethnography

- Ethnography that gives priority to cultural consultants on the topic, methodology, and written results of ethnographic research.
Ethical Fieldwork

Anthropologists must:

• Obtain consent of the people to be studied.
• Protect them from risk.
• Respect their privacy and dignity.
Native Anthropology

- Study of one’s own society.
- Anthropologists must maintain the social distance of the outsider.
- Becoming more common as native cultures disappear.
Quick Quiz
1. Participant-observation
   a) means that people who are the subjects of a study observe their own behavior.
   b) is carried out in a laboratory setting.
   c) is an intensive field research method, in which the investigator lives among the subjects of study.
   d) is another way of describing a telephone survey technique of collecting data.
2. The philosophy that there is no single objective reality but rather many partial truths or cultural constructions, depending on one's frame of reference is known as

a) holism.
b) postmodernism.
c) globalism.
d) fundamentalism.
e) positivism.
3. The ethnographic database used most frequently to statistically test relationships between two or more culture traits across world cultures is

a) the Human Relations Area Files.
b) the Summer Institute of Linguistics.
c) the Smithsonian Records.
d) the National Institute of Mental Health.