



Ethnographic fieldwork and its implications from the perspective of sexual studies.

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SUMMARY

This study is a bibliographic review about the discussions held in the field of ethnographic work from classic anthropological studies, which are driven by the thinker Bronislaw Malinowski, James Clifford Geertz, Marshall Sahlins, to contemporary anthropological studies, which take into account their analyzes make significant contributions and implications for anthropological work, or specifically the studies of ethnographic work. Here we propose to discuss the contributions of such studies to work and research in the field of sexualities, and how these studies contributed and continue to contribute to the reading of realities related to the experience of multiple sexualities.

Keywords: Anthropology, Ethnographic work, Sexualities, Field research.

Ethnography

Ethnography is one of the aspects of study in the field of Anthropology (science that has the human being as the main object of its study, carrying out research into its origin, as well as humanity in general) used to collect data. It is known for having its object of study, very close to anthropological science itself, in carrying out a diverse and detailed study regarding the culture of people and the behaviors of certain societies, in the way they act and coexist with each other (MADU-REIRA; WHITE, 2015).

Better knowledge of the past, especially when the culture of humanity is highlighted, is only possible when there is an in-depth study of these civilizations. The work of ethnography is precisely this, to experience communities, understand how they behave, understand relationships that exist between these people and their ancestors, in addition to demonstrating the importance of this study to understand, in a more comprehensive way, the development of all civilizations. and contemporary society (WENETZ; MARTINS, 2020).

When this method of studying the behavior of communities and main contemporary and ancient societies is presented, one of the main scholars of Anthropology must be identified, who acted in a very similar way to ethnographic concepts: Bronislaw Malinowski. Among so many important figures, he is considered one of the fathers of social anthropology, being identified as one of the main defenders of functionalist theory (SANTOS, 2013).

Functionalism can be identified as one of the anthropological branches, in addition to the social sciences themselves, which has as its object of study the behaviors of certain societies, that is, it seeks to identify the most basic aspects of each community studied. In short, the functionalist theory, presented by its various scholars, identifies that each part of a society is responsible for forming its whole. Several cultures form a single general culture (MADUREIRA; BRANCO, 2015).

This means that, in the same community, there are several other social groups. Each individual present in this social group has their own habits, behaviors, beliefs, customs, and life stories. This set of cultures of a social group, when combined with the behaviors of people belonging to another group, directly helps in the formation of a single broader culture, which represents the entire community. In the same place, there are different contexts. These contexts come together and form a

even more comprehensive context, which represents the entire local society (MADUREIRA; BRANCO, 2015).

1 According to Malinowski himself, in his work "Argonauts of the western Pacific: an account of the enterprise and adventure of the natives in the archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea", it is possible to carry out a more general study of a large society, when it is dismembered. In other words, understanding the culture of specific groups in the same environment allows the researcher to understand the functioning of the whole (MALINOWSKI, 1984).

For scholars of functionalism, according to Malinowski (1984, p. 10), "[...] the cultural elements

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als cannot be manipulated and composed arbitrarily because they are part of defined systems, specific to each culture and which it is up to the researcher to discover.” The research instruments used by functionalism scholars indicate that, through direct observation of social groups, it is possible to understand the culture of society (MALINOWSKI, 1984).

Until that moment, the research and studies that were carried out on communities and their specific behaviors were done only “from the outside”. This was another point of development and change in the theory presented by Bronislaw. According to him, for studies of social groups to be better understood, it was necessary to experience everything that happened in the area up close. In other words, as presented in his work, when he does a field study of natives in the archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea, it is necessary to use a period of time to understand how culture works (MALINOWSKI, 1984).

In his same work, Malinowski proposes a major change in field research, because “[...] it consisted of the practice of what is nowadays called participant observation.” (1984, p. 13). Through visits to the village of these natives, without interfering in their culture and customs or even directly influencing any behavior, he was able to better understand how people organized themselves (MALINOWSKI, 1984).

Thanks to this research, Malinowski brought about a great advance in this study practice, “[...] starting to live permanently in the village, away from other white men and learning the native language, [...]” (1984, p. 13). This was very important for functionalist theory, for Anthropology itself and, in the future, ethnography, because it ended up causing a great change in the way researchers acted and practiced their studies, and “[...] replaced it in largely through direct observation, which is only possible through daily coexistence, the ability to understand what is being said and to participate in the conversations and events of village life” (1984, p. 13).

In order for the natives to feel more comfortable with Malinowski, who, in theory, was a strange man, he needed to demonstrate that he was willing to live their way, and not impose his customs. This makes the entire study process much easier, because they would not feel repelled by interacting. It is important to be willing to learn from the environment in which you are inserted, so that the entire study can be carried out in a broader way (MALINOWSKI, 1984).

All this time that the researcher spent together with the natives, in addition to teaching him about the customs and behaviors of those people, meant that Malinowski was able to learn the native language and make a relationship between all the events that occurred at the location. This, in addition to being an innovation of great relevance to the work, allowed the scholar to share his experience on site, bringing new interpretations to other anthropologists and historians who fit into this same aspect and line of thought (MALINOWSKI, 1984).

Another important researcher to be highlighted in this field of ethnography studies was an anthropologist living in the United States, who ended up standing out for what is known as symbolic anthropology, or analysis of symbolic practice in the anthropological concept: Clifford Geertz. Precisely because of this factor, he ended up becoming one of the most influential researchers of his time, bringing several contributions to several other researchers of the same time, with quite recurring innovations on the subject (GEERTZ, 1997).

Geertz brought information of great importance to society and to scholars themselves, as well as being intriguing. He brought up the idea that, before even studying other communities with different customs and behaviors, the researcher must know himself a lot, because, when realizing how things work, there can be a kind of strangeness about himself (GEERTZ, 1997).

Ethnocentrism is a current of thought that studies human communities in a present way. As stated by Malinowski, the face-to-face study of native peoples from different cultures was the best way to actually get to know those people and how they related to each other. Geertz, in turn, stated
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“... you want, before even analyzing other types of society, scholars of ethnocentric theory should get to know yourself better, so as not to maintain a prison within yourself, analyzing your own inner self which, in a way, is also a complex being with different behaviors (GEERTZ, 1997).

According to Santos (2013), Geertz makes a statement that “it would only be possible for the researcher make a translation of different cultures based on the interpretation given by the groups themselves about the culture of which they are part” (p. 102). At this point, he already presents a culture to the theory initially expressed by Bronislaw Malinowski. According to Geertz, it is not possible to know the culture and customs of a people through the interpretation made by what is perceived, but only through the reports of the people themselves (SANTOS, 2013).



In his book, "Local knowledge: new essays in interpretative anthropology", Clifford brings a passage sage from a study he also carried out with people from Java, a poor and small island. In his report, he says he witnessed the sudden and inexplicable death of a young man's wife, which ended up generating a large set of feelings, which were expressed in front of him. According to him, only from these face-to-face manifestations is it possible to perceive "[...] the moral importance of personal sincerity, taking this conception of the self seriously, and appreciating this type of power, however inaccessible it may seem" (GEERTZ, 1997, p. 94).

In his symbolic anthropology, also known by some as interpretative, Geertz indicates that human beings are quite attached to symbols. It is as if symbolic use directly helps in the cultural and behavioral understanding of human beings. This culture, in turn, is something in which people find themselves (GEERTZ, 1997).

More broadly, symbolic, or interpretative, anthropology concerns the study of those symbols on which man depends greatly. They help, in a way, to better understand a given society. People therefore live in an environment that they themselves created. This environment, sometimes called a web, by Clifford Geertz himself, is his culture, which can be interpreted and identified through analyzes and face-to-face studies regarding his particular behavior (GEERTZ, 1997).

The cultural symbol presented in Geertz is an object or material that can be used to guide a certain culture. When found, symbols must be precisely analyzed, interpreted and studied, so that there can be more detailed future observations about that culture. They are of great importance for cultural investigations, because they are living examples that customs and behaviors have remained (BORTOLAMI, 2016).

Another important researcher on the subject, who is also in favor of the concept of ethnographic research, is the Brazilian Mariza Peirano. In her studies and field research, she defends the way ethnography works, with face-to-face studies to determine cultures and behaviors (PEIRANO, 2014).

Every anthropologist is therefore constantly reinventing anthropology; each researcher, rethinking the discipline. And this has always been the case: from Malinowski finding the kula among the Trobrianders; Evans-Pritchard, witchcraft among the Azande; Florestan, reviewing the Tupinambá war in the archives. Anthropologists today, like our predecessors, have always had/have to devise new ways of research – what some like to call "new ethnographic methods". (Ethnographic) methods can and will always be new, but their nature, derived from who and what they want to examine, is old. We are all inventors, innovators. Anthropology is the result of a permanent intellectual recombination (PEIRANO, 2014, p. 381).

From this point on, it is possible to see that all anthropologist researchers based their techniques on the ethnographic method. Even though, over time, there were reinventions and additions of ideas to this form of study, ethnography has always remained present and as the main object for cultural analysis. This was mainly due to the fact that the ethnographic basis is based on description through direct analysis of events, with experience present in the reality of certain communities (PEIRANO, 2014).

Several other researchers followed this line of thought, such as Marshall Sahlins, who stated, in his research and works, that the cultures of each location were created through their geographical position and time. In all these researchers, it is possible to identify, as a common cultural symbol, the native villages in which they carried out their studies. Everything they ended up finding in that environment, from materials and objects used by local residents, to their most basic customs, such as dances and other manifestations, could be a kind of cultural symbol, which would directly assist in their research (MOREIRA, 2012).

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Just like any and all fieldwork, ethnography uses direct contact, with intensity and for a very long period of time. Precisely for this reason, researchers need to travel and spend a few moments in the environment that will serve as the stage for the study. Furthermore, to complete it, it is necessary to collect information from the people who are inserted in that environment, to be able to complement, in a broader way, the observations that are carried out on site (FEIJÓ; MACEDO, 2012).

According to Bogossian (2017), the ethnographic method "[...] involves observation, participation, description and recording of the phenomena of the social group that the researcher is studying – "the other"" (p. 24). This makes the issue that was previously presented in Geertz even clearer. There's no way to know,

really, how people behave, without direct information from people, with comments from them. Observation alone, even if present, is not completely clear and concise for studies (BOGOSSIAN, 2017).

For this study to be carried out well, the researcher needs to follow each step of the process at once, at the right time, without interference from any party that could change the direction of the research. It is very common, nowadays, to see the use of ethnographic research to carry out academic work and, even, by large companies in specific sectors, to evaluate their customers' thoughts and opinions about themselves (SAHLINS, 2003).

Based on this assumption, it is possible to perceive the strong presence of ethnographic fieldwork to study a very broad area of society: gender issues. They are part of a very intriguing subject for society, because it has always been very difficult to understand how gender identities are formed and how this is represented in the mind of each human being present in society (SAHLINS, 2003).

Faced with so many racial and gender stereotypes, in addition to the ideologies that are created, the work that researchers have to identify how, in fact, genders are formed becomes even more difficult. If it is born with the child and is only developed over the years, or if it presents itself to the individual according to their own choice or according to what society prefers them to be or identify with (MOREIRA, 2012).

Gender, however, differs from these two concepts, in addition to being independent of them. The meaning of this word concerns the set of characteristics that allow identifying the most basic differences between masculinity and femininity. It is, therefore, the gender with which the person will identify. Precisely for this reason, it distances itself from and is independent of the meanings linked to sex and sexuality, because it only represents a certain person's proximity to the masculine or feminine (MOREIRA, 2012).

There is also, in the study carried out by the authors, another exemplification regarding how gender ideals are presented to people, while they promote this concept as “[...] implicated in the reiteration of these learnings and these behaviors, which opens the possibility of copying, repetition and, at the same time, deviation.” (WENETZ; MARTINS, 2020, pp. 116-117).

Through these passages, one of the aspects of possibilities that are applied to gender issues becomes even clearer. On the one hand, there are those who propose that society plays a role of fundamental importance and weight in allowing a person to “choose” their gender or, in some cases, be “forced” to find themselves on one of the two sides, for reasons that permeate acceptance by everyone. For other people, gender is already intrinsic to the human being's personality, they are born with it and are only developed as taught by their parents, so that it comes to the fore with maturity (OLIVEIRA, 2017).

However, this is just one of the many questions that exist around the world. It is quite complicated to discover, clearly, easily and quickly, how issues of gender, choice and orientation work. A quick study or reading of different authors would not be enough to reach a common ideal or answer on the subject. From there, the importance of carrying out ethnographic field research must be highlighted (OLIVEIRA, 2017).

When studying, closely, the behavior of a given society, as well as a specific group or family, especially those that are considered more rigid, it is possible to achieve a more concrete contribution on the subject. Participating daily and directly in the experience of a given region, observing how they behave, how they dress, how they communicate, the times they leave and arrive home, in addition to the way they see other participants in the place, is a good way to get involved. see the formation of gender in people. This is a very complex concept and it would take a long time to formulate a good answer (OLIVEIRA, 2017).

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Furthermore, it must be remembered that it is necessary to collect opinions and positions from everyone regarding the subject being studied, because observation, in these cases, would not be enough. Sometimes, a person may not demonstrate, in his behavior, what he is thinking. Therefore, it is always important to listen to everyone in the group (OLIVEIRA, 2017).

It is at this moment that we can arrive at a concept of what gender issues are. Understanding everything we have about sexuality, sex and the gender context itself, in addition to identifying the way in which social groups interfere in the formation of the individual, gender issues concern the way in which society manages to create different roles that are, in a certain way, attributed and related to men and women (NAGAMI, 2014).

In many situations, especially in the context of the contemporary world, there is no defined role defined for the male and female genders (it is possible to see, in most cases, couples who do not live with defined roles, but with help and mutual construction of the relationship). But, there is always that group of more rigid and controlling people, who define behaviors that must be carried out by men and women, such as taking care of children and the house, or going out to work and paying bills (MADUREI-RA; BRANCO, 2015).

The population today, in its vast majority (apart from the few exceptions), is still very stereotyped. In other words, there is a generalization of roles, functions and everyday situations, which these people link to a certain group of human beings. If there were, in fact, no ethnographic study, all that would be known about people would be the stereotypes that are created by the entire society, but without prior confirmation (MADUREIRA; BRANCO, 2015).

There is no way to know, in a concrete way, how a certain social group behaves, without living together for some time and listening to their perspectives. Without this observation, everything becomes just an imagination of what could be real and is not confirmed as quality research. At this point, the importance of carrying out ethnographic work is even more evident so that the society being studied is understood (FEIJÓ; MACEDO, 2012).

These gender issues, their formation and identification by individuals, were very well studied in Bogossian (2017), when the author carried out ethnographic field research, training his observation with children and adults from a specific educational institution, during practically the entire time: from classes, breaks and situations in which teachers or other school professionals requested the participation of boys or girls, already giving a stereotypical idea of the subject (BOGOSSIAN, 2017).

The author reports, in his research, about the difficulties that make up the ethnographic study, in addition to the fact that he is carrying out a study with children, which is also not simple. But, as all work based on ethnography must be, it was a detailed, slow observation that could make a large-scale contribution to future studies (BOGOSSIAN, 2017).

In one of his passages in the study that was carried out, the same author mentioned above presents what:

[...] teachers reinforce, often without being aware, the behaviors that are expected for boys and girls, which obviously includes their clothes. The way teachers talk to girls, praising their sweet and gentle attitude or justifying a boy's careless activity; the fact that the girl's help is requested in the cleaning task, while the boy is asked to carry something; the way adults separate conflicts, defending and preserving girls from "natural" aggressiveness on the part of boys – all of this demonstrates that behavioral expectations are different for girls and boys. What is valued for some is not valued for others and vice versa (BOGOS-
SIAN, 2017, p. 29).

The situation is completed shortly afterwards by the same author, as he presents a situation he witnessed at a certain moment. According to the report presented, one of the teachers at that same school had made a comment about a certain girl's hair. A boy nearby, with shaved hair, asked if she had spoken about him. The teacher, immediately afterwards, said no, because she would not match a man using a "Maria Chiquinha" hairstyle (BOGOSSIAN, 2017).

These situations, no matter how simple and futile they may seem, form thoughts in children's heads that could become situations of prejudice in the future. A child, whether a boy or a girl, who lives in environments where women must wear pink and men must wear blue, grows up with the mentality that whatever is different does not belong to that genre and this, despite being common, is quite complicated and bad (MADUREIRA; BRANCO, 2015).

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Phrases that are used, even with five-year-old children, such as: "walk like a man", "fix that hand", "men don't sweep the house", are situations that show that society interferes, yes, a lot, in the formation of gender and the character of individuals, even if indirectly. Instead of teaching the path that can be followed, there is an example of imposition in being what they consider most correct for the group in which one lives (SZEREMETA, 2017).

Prejudice, rooted and naturalized by society, is reinforced by the school institution,

without the ability to problematize or denaturalize everyday situations of oppression. It is for this, among other reasons, that men who wear earrings or different hairstyles are still laughed at, depending on their social or professional status. The same happens with women who prefer to wear pants, have tattoos or have short hair. For the same reason, it is not uncommon for homosexuals who exchange affections or men who dress in “feminine” clothing in public places to be ridiculed or even victims of violence. in Brazil, including murders (BOGOSSIAN, 2017, p. 30).

Due to these and other factors, there has been a frequent increase in issues involving the practice of feminism lately. Women who, for particular reasons, feel trapped by certain behaviors imposed by society, end up finding themselves needing to fight for equal rights with men, who are still placed in a prominent position by everyone. This movement, triggered not long ago, ended up taking on a huge proportion in recent times (BORGES; BORGES, 2018).

This statement is also confirmed in Feijó and Macedo (2012), indicating that “[...] inequalities resulted from differences in opportunities that generated issues of male domination and power and female subordination” (pp 21-22). This is a very recurrent issue in today's society, which heavily judges these ideas about the position between men and women, as one being more important than the other. All of these factors are present in contemporary social groups, which emerged a long time ago (FEIJÓ; MACEDO, 2012).

And, the best way to understand how these judgments work or even from what, as well as where they originate, is through carrying out a detailed study on the subject. The best way to prove this, therefore, is from the ethnographic study itself, such as the one carried out by Bogossian (2017), when he spends a good part of his time in a school, where there are many children, boys and girls, girls, in addition to adults themselves, teachers and other professionals (BOGOSSIAN, 2017).

Therefore, in the work carried out by Bogossian (2017), the difference that exists in ethnographic work carried out in the field can be seen. Even though it seems simple, as it was carried out in a school environment, the present author's research lasted around three months (between April and June) and this shows how slow the observation needs to be, in order for it to be well carried out. Furthermore, it goes through stages that are not just the act of observing. It is also necessary to conduct interviews with a certain group of participants, in order to seek new information and life experiences from such teams (BOGOSSIAN, 2017).

For this research to be carried out well, the researcher needs to feel what those observed are also facing in their daily lives. And, for this, in addition to observing, it is necessary to listen to those involved in the research. However, ethnographic work carried out in the field is not completely dissociated from narrative literature review work. It is very important to use a scientific basis for your research. Even though your work appears to be innovative, some scholar has already commented on something similar (NAGAMI, 2014).

The same situation described above can be confirmed by Szeremeta (2017), proposing that research based on the ethnographic aspect is not complete when it only comes down to exclusive work in the field. Therefore, “[...] a theoretical basis, empirical and bibliographical experience on the topic investigated is necessary” (p. 164). Furthermore, the author also proposes the importance of raising issues regarding the topic, so that hypotheses can be created for possible conclusions later on (SZEREMETA, 2017).

Regardless of the subject being addressed, ethnographic fieldwork is an important tool for understanding society and how it acts in the formation of human beings. It is known that there is a lot of influence from the environment in shaping a person's character, but this does not always happen. It is not because someone was born into a “good” family that will also be fair. Or, just because you were born into a family with bad character doesn't mean you will be like that. What we have, therefore, is the idea that the best way to come up with possible solutions for this is through the experience made possible by field study (NAGAMI, 2014).

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