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Social and cultural anthropology

Higher level

Paper 1

9 May 2025

Zone A afternoon | **Zone B** afternoon | **Zone C** afternoon

2 hours

Instructions to candidates

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Section A: read the passage and answer questions 1 and 2. Choose either question 3 or 4. Answer question 5.
- Section B: answer the question.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is **[40 marks]**.

Section A

Read the passage.

Passage adapted from Tilche, A., 2022. Broken gods: Collaborative filmmaking in troubled times. *American Anthropologist*, 124(3), pp.490–503.

5 In 2017–2019, I (an Italian white woman and anthropologist in a UK university) was involved in the production of *Broken Gods*, a film that documents the cultural erasure and conversion of Rathavas—an indigenous group in India—to Hinduism. The film was a collaboration with indigenous activist and filmmaker, Dakxin, and indigenous Rathava staff working in a community museum.

10 Dakxin wanted to make a film that condemned the intrusion of Hindu organizations in India’s indigenous lands. However, the museum staff hoped to emphasize continuity between Hindu and indigenous traditions and were themselves implicated in conversion to Hinduism. As an outsider, I proposed to make a film that reflected these differences while maintaining a collaborative approach.

15 Traditionally, Rathavas worshipped ancestors and village gods in the form of clay figures placed in the landscape and mural paintings known as Pithora inside people’s homes. They interacted with the gods through collective ceremonies that involved possession, animal sacrifice, and the ritual consumption of alcohol and meat. However, vegetarianism and the discourse of purity promoted by Hindu organizations now condemns such rituals. As a consequence, Pithora paintings are being painted over, while clay figurines have become piles of debris scattered at village borders. For those who convert, becoming Hindu offers the promise of a better life.

20 Conversion to Hinduism is led by people external to the area, as well as by Rathava gurus (religious teachers) who internalized a discourse of self-hatred and see their ancestral life as one of sin. As a guru in the film explained, “I used to be a Rathava. I wore the same clothes, spoke the same way as those people did. Through the path of reform, I have become better.”

25 In one interview about the influence of Hinduism in the area, a museum staff member emphasized similarities, minimizing the impact on Rathava society while framing its presence as a continuum with their traditions: “In the past there were no temples or even statues for our gods. The sun, the moon, trees and rivers, those were our gods. The Hindus have taken these very things: they are in their literature, in their devotional songs and in the prayers of their gurus.”

30 The film employs different forms of ethnofiction, a technique that blends documentary and dramatic form by asking protagonists to enact aspects of their lives in front of the camera. Led by the museum staff, we filmed Pithora painting ceremonies in villages through the practice of reenactments, which participants themselves proposed and staged. A few days into the shoot, a Pithora artist invited us to film a painting he had just completed. Following his instructions, we filmed the fresh painting and interviewed the team of painters, the householders, and the shaman who had presided over the ceremony. As we talked with camera in hand, the shaman insisted we should film him in action.

35 While film can enable forms of collaboration, it can also create disagreements. One night,
we attended a religious Hindu ceremony. We filmed the guru on his throne while devotees
congregated at his feet, handing him money to receive his blessings. Driving back that night,
Dakxin kept laughing, making fun of the guru. He pleaded to the museum staff to wake up and to
40 stop following “such idiots,” who were just after their money. However, instead of changing their
minds, they became defensive and began managing interviews to minimize the impact of Hinduism
on Rathava culture, informing other Rathavas to do the same. As the museum staff thought about
it further, they began demanding that scenes of the film be censored. In dialogue with them, Dakxin
and I reached an agreement around censorship. We removed some of the guru’s most provocative
sentences, although we kept the interview in its essence. Collaborative methodologies, such as
45 early screenings to gather community feedback, also resulted in conflicting viewpoints. In the
absence of agreement, we aimed to accommodate multiple perspectives.

Collaborative ethnography is often projected as an empowering strategy with the potential to
intervene in existing struggles. So-called Others become stakeholders and participants. This
approach has a commitment to reflexivity. However, while reflexivity successfully addressed
50 differences in knowledge and understanding and exposed power relations in our film, it did not
solve them.

Answer question 1 **and** question 2.

1. Define the term **community** and describe how it can be understood and applied in the context of the passage. [4]
2. Analyse the ethnographic data presented in the passage using the concept of **social relations**. [6]

Answer **either** question 3 **or** question 4.

3. Compare and contrast the way in which the key concept of **change** or **materiality** is evident in the passage with how it is evident in **one** other ethnographic example you have studied. Make reference to theory in your answer. [10]

OR

4. Compare and contrast the approaches to research adopted by the anthropologist in this passage to the approaches to research used by **one** other anthropologist you have studied. Make reference to concepts, ethnographic material and theory in your answer. [10]

Answer question 5.

5. What does it mean to live in society? Discuss with reference to **at least two** sources of ethnographic material and examples from the passage. [10]

Section B

Answer question 6.

6. With reference to **either** stimulus A **or** stimulus B **and** your own knowledge, discuss the defining features of anthropological ethics.

[10]

Stimulus A

Sarcelles is a working class suburb (*banlieue*), fifteen kilometers north of Paris, a place historically represented as marginal and violent. With its 60 000 inhabitants, it constitutes an urban space mythologized through media, film, and photographic narratives. Locals are aware of the city's unflattering image and endure the consequences of this stigma daily, particularly in terms of access to the labor market. This "bad image" results in part from a long history of visual marginalization. For three years, I was immersed in Sarcelles as a photographer and an anthropologist. While photographing the daily lives of locals, I recognized the importance of critically situating my production within a wider visual history of the community. As soon as I started my fieldwork, I encountered objections from local inhabitants to the stereotypical image of their city. One of the first things participants asked me was to "show another face of the city" to "see deeper than the apparent misery." As a Colombian, I was perceived as an outsider who wasn't just observing but creating new narratives in and of this space. People told me that as an outsider, I would manage to "see differently" daily life in Sarcelles. Residents were concerned about how my photographic narratives would depict Sarcelles. As one inhabitant put it: "We are sick of white journalists who come here and speak for us."

[Source: Adapted from Leion-Quijano, C., 2022. Why Do "Good" Pictures Matter in Anthropology? *Cultural Anthropology* 37(3), pp.572–598.]

Stimulus B

On arrival, the ethnographer offers gifts to the community involved in his research: the Madihá people of Santa Júlia village, Upper Purus River, Brazil (2008).



[Source: Frenopoulo, C., 2008. Unpublished. From photographer's private collection.]

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References:

- Section A** Tilche, A., 2022. Broken gods: Collaborative filmmaking in troubled times. *American Anthropologist*, 124(3), pp. 490–503. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13735>. Open access. Source adapted.
- Stimulus A** Leion-Quijano, C., 2022. Why Do “Good” Pictures Matter in Anthropology? *Cultural Anthropology* 37(3), pp. 572–598. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca37.3.11>. Source adapted.
- Stimulus B** Frenopoulo, C., 2008. Unpublished. From photographer’s private collection.