One of Us? Insider Ethnography with Jewish Communities

Arlene and R. Raymond Rothman Workshop in Jewish Studies at Syracuse University
Co-sponsored by the Jewish Studies Program at Syracuse University and The Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life at Rutgers University, with thanks to The Schwartzman Endowed Faculty Seminar Fund.

May 22-23, 2022

Deadline for submissions is February 28th, 5PM Eastern.
Participants will be notified of their acceptance by the end of March.

Submit your proposal here: https://forms.gle/keYbUPpteCwCFght7

For questions, contact Shira Schwartz seschwar@syr.edu or Michal michal.raucher@rutgers.edu

This workshop is being organized by Shira Schwartz (Syracuse University) and Michal Raucher (Rutgers University) to explore and collaborate on navigating the complex relationships that can develop between ethnographers and the Jewish communities they study. While researchers within anthropology and related ethnographic fields have reflected on the tensions that emerge from subject positions within the ethnographic encounter, this reflexivity is often premised on stark differences between researchers and their communal field sites. This workshop aims to gather a diverse group of scholars who conduct ethnographic research within a range of Jewish communities to scope out the particular terrains of insider ethnography as it pertains to the study of Jews and research with Jewish communities. We hope to gather these research experiences with the understanding that our various communal sites inform and shape one another, and with attention to the specificities of Jewish identities, subject positions, and communal formations of “insiderness”. Over a two-day period at the end of May 2022, we will meet to discuss the ethics, tensions and practical concerns related to having varying degrees of “insider” positions in relation to our ethnographic field sites. We use the term “insider” broadly to refer to an array of personal attachments, connections, and interests related to one’s field site and communities of study. We are especially interested in scholars who have personal ties, broadly conceived, to the communities which they are researching, and those who have marginal subject positions, including but not limited to OTD, queer/trans, researchers of color, researchers whose Jewish identities may be questioned or in flux, and non-Jewish researchers whose research is inflected by questions of “insiderness”.

Some of the questions we hope to explore in this workshop include:
What does it mean to be an “insider” in research with Jewish communities, and what are the ethical challenges of this role?

Who is our work for, and how do we navigate our multiple audiences?

How might our research and/or the dissemination of our findings affect the lives of our research participants? How do we prepare for and navigate this result, especially when we may be in continued relation with those same people?

How do we protect our research participants’ identities when sharing research with Jewish communities?

How do we protect our own safety when conducting research and sharing data that threatens the communal norm?

How do marginalized researchers conduct research within communities whose majoritizing norms may pose a variety of tensions or risks?

How can we share research with participants and communities while recognizing distinct interests and perspectives on data?

Are there models for managing the relationship between our research and our communities if we live within a community that we study?

Can we ever just be a community member? Is it possible to not be seen as a researcher? Can we ever not be conducting research?

How do we navigate interventionist, activist, and scholarly concerns of our research?

How do we make decisions about accepting Jewish communal and organizational funding?

How do we negotiate relationships with funding stakeholders while protecting our academic freedom?

The goal of this workshop is to develop a trusted network of scholars to discuss the complexities of our relationships to our fieldwork and to develop ethical approaches to insider ethnographic praxis. We intend to bring together an interdisciplinary group of scholars working within Jewish communities around the world. Over a two-day period we will have three sessions, each one focusing on a theme that emerges from the submissions. We will be spending time discussing our case studies and developing strategies for thinking about and approaching them, with the help of respondents from other ethnographic sites and adjacent disciplines. Your proposal should include your CV and a 500-800 word abstract that tells us about your research site, the case study you want to explore in the workshop, and how insiderness shapes your fieldwork. Submit your proposal here: https://forms.gle/keYbUPpteCwCFght7

Publication opportunities may emerge from the workshop. To facilitate equitable participation, we are able to pay for travel to Syracuse, NY, two nights of lodging, and food for all whose proposals are accepted.

COVID-19 Planning:
While we hope that this meeting will take place in person, we recognize that the world's current state is in flux and that this may not be feasible. While making final plans for this workshop we will consult both participants and local health experts and take into account the rates of Covid-19 transmission. Our participants’ health, safety and ability to access the workshop is of highest priority for us; therefore, if necessary we will postpone or change the format of the meeting. Please see the question below for indicating planning preferences for this workshop.