

Social Anthropology Paper

Due Monday 21 May by 17h00.

Write a short paper (1500-2000 words) analyzing a form of ambivalence and its relationship to an ideological discourse. This must be based on at least one successful interview and on field observations of your own (in a site of your choosing).

Explanation

Let me spell out what the assignment is about, in plain language.

The analytical idea here is that people often have mixed feelings about social situations that they inhabit. And these mixed feelings (neither all bad nor all good) don't just emerge randomly. They are a reaction to powerful ideological discourses that tell us, for example, how to exist in the world, how to act, what is appropriate or taboo, how to understand surprising events, where to show up and where to avoid. . .

In short, ideological discourses *tell you your place in the world*. And they tell you *how to rationalize staying in that place*.

But in fact, often people aren't entirely comfortable with being told their place. Partly this is because many social locations involve dealing with contradictory expectations, incoherent values, and longstanding historical antagonisms. Thus, when someone is ambivalent, as a researcher, you can then explore the social sources of their ambivalence. That's not to say that ambivalence *always* maps directly onto someone's immediate circumstances, but it is a hypothesis that one can explore.

Details

The assignment for this paper is to explore this hypothesis in the following way:

- (1) Locate someone who is interesting to talk to and who wants to talk to you;
- (2) Do an interview with them;
- (3) Tape-record the interview or take notes (or both);
- (4) Think about moments of potential mixed feelings or ambivalence in the interview;
- (5) Think about ideological discourses that may have shaped those moments;
- (6) Choose a social site relevant to the feelings or discourses you've identified;
- (7) Visit that site and take some notes about that space;
- (8) Write a paper describing the interesting moments in your interview, and explaining what you think they have to do with the ideological discourses you identified and the site you visited.

Notes

- It is perfectly acceptable, and probably desirable, to do your interview with someone you already have some sort of social relation with. As we've discussed, it can be difficult to interview complete strangers.
- This is a classroom exercise, not a part of your Honours research project. I would recommend you choose a topic different from your Honours research topic, since any data you collect for this module won't be admissible for your research project (since you do not yet have ethics clearance).
- If you aren't sure how to get started, please email me at elit@sun.ac.za, and I will give you guidance.
- If you find it hard to "locate" moments of ambivalence in your interview, just remember that *any* instance of mixed feelings is worth writing about.
- Your mark will primarily depend on the merits of your fieldwork and subsequent analysis. Good writing is, as always, highly encouraged. If it is useful to you to cite the readings, please feel free to do that. Politically relevant or reflexively courageous research topics are also always very welcome.