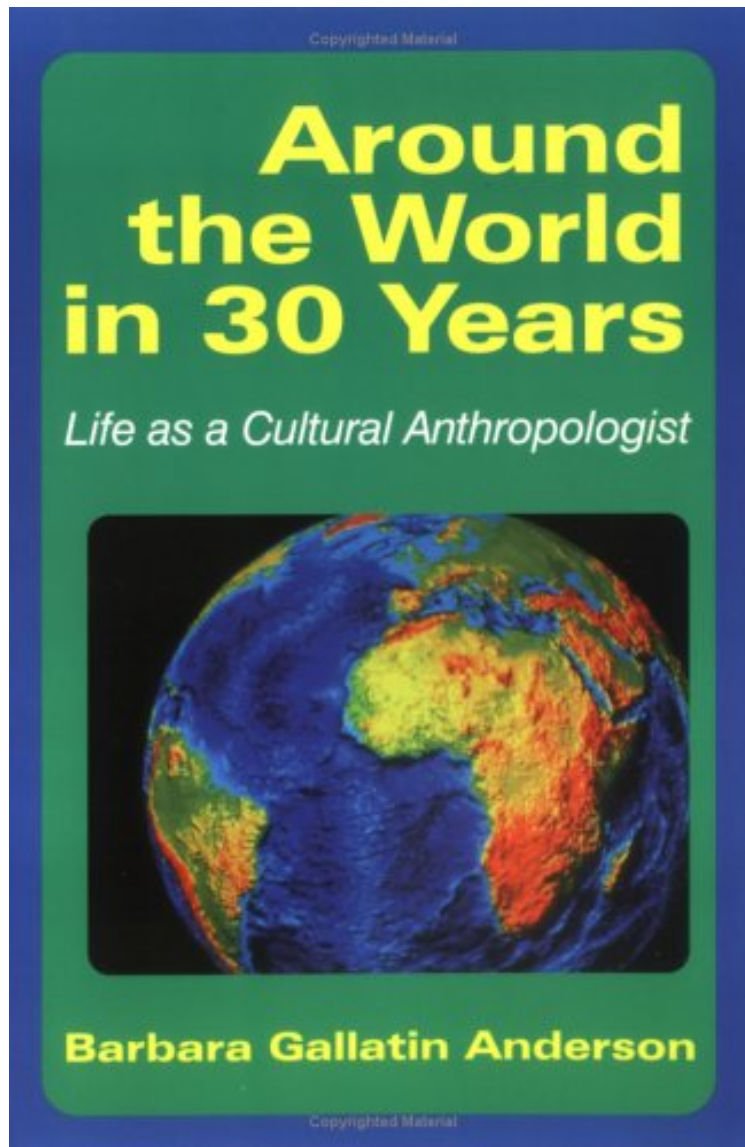


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Around the World in 30 Years: Life as a Cultural Anthropologist

Barbara Gallatin Anderson

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Anderson brings to life a range of cultures from the tribal Hmong to a United States military base. With humor and a precision born of hands-on familiarity with the regions involved, she draws the reader into startlingly real identification with other people's worlds: France, Denmark, Thailand, India, Morocco, Japan, Corsica, China, Russia, and the United States. Collectively, these chapters give us insight into a gamut of anthropological themes, the challenges of applied fieldwork, and the impact of change on world cultures. Also by Barbara Gallatin Anderson and available from Waveland Press: *First Fieldwork: The Misadventures of an Anthropologist* (ISBN 088133491X). Titles of related interest available from Waveland Press: *Barley, The Innocent Anthropologist: Notes from a Mud Hut* (ISBN 1577661567); *Bohannon-van der Elst, Asking and Listening: Ethnography as Personal Adaptation* (ISBN 9780881339871); *DeVita, Stumbling Toward Truth: Anthropologists at Work* (ISBN 1577661257); *Gardner-Hoffman, Dispatches from the Field: Neophyte Ethnographers in a Changing World* (ISBN 1577664515); and *Lenkeit, High Heels and Bound Feet: And Other Essays on Everyday Anthropology* (ISBN 9781478615231).

Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Identification of oneself as an anthropologist triggers fairly predictable reactions. People at parties and strangers on planes will want to share with you memories of spectacular archeological sites, or they will have questions as to the validity of claims that the body of a woman found by a local roadwork crew is 12,000 years old. In this amiable inquisitiveness they share in the not uncommon conviction that anthropologists, by definition, move about the world unearthing things. Indiana Jones has a lot to answer for. Where the immediate prospect is one of side-by-side togetherness on a ten-hour flight, a choice suggests itself to those of us who, as anthropologists, do not routinely dig nor focus on past cultures. Go along with their enthusiasms as best we can, short of misrepresentation, or launch into a few clarifications about the field of anthropology in general. Yes, you are an anthropologist, but although anthropologists are broadly trained (digressions here can be lengthy), your field of specialization is neither archeology nor physical anthropology. You are a cultural anthropologist. In particular, an ethnologist. You work with live people, not dead ones. Time and multiple plane trips, however, have left me less sanguine about identifying myself as an anthropologist at all. It is simply no good trying to explain to a fellow passenger why you are traveling six thousand miles to a destination spurned by tourists, to watch and listen to men and women, every one of whom is a stranger to you, and none of whom will be keen about your presence among them. It would take less time to explain why you are a fleeing embezzler. In villages, towns, and cities of the world cultural anthropologists seek out all kinds of people into whose worlds they must make entrance. They find themselves dependent on the goodwill--or minimally, approachability--of strangers in exploring the commonplace as well as more intimate, less-shared dimensions of daily life. This is fieldwork. Doing fieldwork over long periods of time, both with empathy and with the monitoring dispassion of a trained observer, constitutes the insider/outsider duality of our discipline. In reporting on the ways of life of peoples of the world, cultural anthropologists involve themselves in the activities of their chosen communities. They keep "fieldnotes" on what they learn. And later, with the polish of post-fieldwork reflection, publish their best efforts. In regional and national conferences, anthropologists communicate with one another, inviting comparative debate. In the ideal course of things, insight into human behavior, its roots, complexity, and variation builds within anthropological literature--and sometimes beyond. This is the course of wisdom. The reader needs to know, however, that not all cultural anthropologists find themselves unerringly on so commendable a course . . . as the following chapters will surely confirm. Fortunately for me, a variety of opportunities and enticements have moved me about the world more widely than I had ever planned. This book draws upon some of the fieldwork involved. That the cumulative time span is far from negligible absolves me, I hope, from too sober judgment upon the diversity of cultures represented and the brevity of my treatment of them. No selective recall of a culture can prove as edifying as a full and proper ethnographic account of it. I know that. But my goal here is more modest and limited. I have tried to take the reader along with me in terms of the impact and immediacy of fieldwork as it affects the anthropologist--at least this anthropologist. I had three mandates for including a particular narrative: 1) it provided insight into a dimension of culture I might otherwise not have acquired; 2) it speaks to the inevitable failures as well as successes in fieldwork; and 3) it makes visible the anthropologist in the vulnerability of the field theater, in contexts different from published reports, with their selective hindsight. This book documents encounters with various people's formulas or game plans for survival and getting along with one another, largely by virtue of having been born at a particular place, to a particular family, at a particular time in history. Of sustained interest to me have been the cognitive and emotional profiles of the world's peoples to the extent that these can be captured. Minimally this involves not only a comprehension of wide-ranging formulas for living but an identification with and empathy for the logic that underlies them. An ambitious and often humbling effort. Part of the challenge lies in recognizing the kind of "receptors" that we as anthropologists bring to the field: the learned codes within us for becoming involved in life around us, for processing and translating what we see and experience--meaningfully and justly. Intellectually and emotionally (a contrived dichotomy!) the anthropologist walks a tightrope. Fieldwork classes prepare us for what to do, and that training is critical. What we can less adequately be prepared for is how we internalize the field experience, what each of us as anthropologists will draw upon in registering life around us. The "jigsaw" of our own lives, our relationships as sons and daughters, spouses or parents, our codes of behavior and judgment: these are "tamed" in the

field but never rendered wholly inoperable. Indeed, we learn gradually to put them to use in identifying with the particular social "fit" that shapes a people's view of themselves, of family, of others, and of the world around them. Anthropologists are cultural translators. Basically they find themselves projecting what, analytically at least, can be viewed as a multiple-personality approach to fieldwork. Behavior that might well invite psychiatric scrutiny at home becomes standard operating procedure in the field. This is because the acrobatics of fieldwork demand changing levels of readiness and newly adaptive behaviors on the part of the anthropologist. Put more simply, we learn to function from whatever reservoirs of "self" (more accurately of "selves"), from whatever assets of experience, empathy, or identification we can draw upon to make sense of unfamiliar worlds. And we are actors. Vicariously we "become" the local sons and daughters, wives and husbands, parents with children in tow, friends, neighbors, tradespeople and curers. The list is long. We register experience through these and other very personal lenses. We project, however formlessly, a new and varied identity within the field "theater." In terms of the community's vision of us, we retain at best a suspect identity. Even the most gracious villagers and townspeople have difficulty advancing a plausible framework for our activity among them. Essentially we are invaders . . . however discreet our hovering. Within the "niche" that people everywhere seek to assign us, we are the persistent "stranger." Whatever the script, the irony of fieldwork lies in that compellingly unresolved insider/outsider challenge central to the most modest degree of success in work as a cultural anthropologist.