

Informed Consent

Throughout this project we took great care to ensure informed consent. We shared materials with research interlocutors whenever practicable. We could not use a form to record this because this would have raised suspicion and hostility among those we worked with. The primary research method was ethnographic, we consequently treated informed consent as a process and an ongoing conversation. This is also the way our professional body The Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth encourages us to think of consent:

Many of the communities studied by anthropologists are highly suspicious of formal bureaucratic procedures and often of their state or local forms of the state. Under these circumstances, requests for signatures on printed forms are liable to arouse suspicion and therefore standard procedures for obtaining written consent can be problematic. It is possible and appropriate, however, to obtain informed verbal consent. In working with informants with limited literacy or with learning difficulties that might render informed consent as commonly understood problematic, it may be appropriate to give people the chance to discuss their consent to an interview with friends, family or other trusted acquaintances. Repeated checking with informants during the research process, can ensure that the continuity of consent is maintained (ASA, Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice, p.2).

We worked in this spirit. In addition, those in the village were familiar with anthropologists and anthropological research. Anthropological monographs featured amongst the possessions of some villagers because the works of the first generation of anthropologists have found their way there. In all three field sites, the villagers openly discussed anthropology and previous studies; therefore, the research was a public and shared activity to which many villagers knowingly and enthusiastically contributed.

In the case of film and photography, again, some villagers had images produced by previous anthropologists. They worked in helping us recreate and update these images for research. We worked in the spirit of the ASA:

Photography (both stills and film) is a very important tool of anthropological inquiry. Filming should always be overt. Moreover, in the case of large public events it is likely that not everyone photographed/filmed will have the chance to give verbal consent. In such cases the researchers should do all that is possible in his/her powers to not compromise people's identities or security in public presentations of the material.