I am interested in past anthropological practice to see whether it provides a reasonable guide to future practice, specifically with regard to the ethical conduct of ethnographic fieldwork. A post-graduate conference examining new and innovative research techniques is not the place to review the checkered history of ethics in anthropological practice. I propose instead to address an issue that emerged implicitly from the silence, on the part of conference delegates, to questions I asked from the podium: (1) were they familiar with the discipline’s ethical code? ‘Ethical codes arrived late in anthropology and played a negligible role in the professionalization of the discipline’ (Pels 1999:110). ‘[T]he main ethical issues and debates about ethics … are not really capable of resolution. The field of “literary anthropology” actually covers two fields of study. The first is an exploration of the role that literature plays in social life and individual experience, in particular social, cultural, and historical settings. Included in this study is the question of what “literature” is. Literary anthropology can be understood here as an exploration of different kinds of genre of expression, and how these genres can be said to have a historical specificity, a cultural evaluation, and a social institutionalism attached to them. The anthropologist

The Role of Anthropological Literature in Contemporary Shamanic Practices


Author: Elina Hytönen-Ng

Keywords: learning; literature; neo-shamanism; shamanic practices; tradition

DOI: https://doi.org/10.3167/ajec.2016.250104

Restricted access

Anthropology and anthropological literature have had an irreversible effect on the practice of contemporary shamanism. In this small-scale study, I look at the complex ways the literature has been recorded, initiated interest, revived and verified the shamanic practices. Over the years, anthropologists have also caused distortions in revived practices as they have left some things unrecorded. On the basis of written responses and interviews from shamanic practitioners and active drumming-group members, I demonstrate that the argument of neo-shamanism as the only form of shamanism still alive is not completely true. Attention is drawn also to the claim about the cycle of learning in contemporary shamanism. My argument is that the main part of learning in the deeper levels of shamanic practices still happens in face-to-face situations.