

**PEOPLE, PLACE, AND TIME:
HOW STRUCTURAL FIELDWORK HELPS WORLD-SYSTEMS ANALYSIS**

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ABSTRACT

Some of the most insightful work in the political economy of the world-system area has been produced by researchers whose extensive fieldwork offers them deep familiarity with people and locales. Few other methods are as useful to understand the impacts of structural change on daily life and the ways agents resist, alter, and shape emerging structures. Yet such structural fieldwork is marginalized by the over-reliance of pedagogical materials on social constructionist, social psychological, or interactionist perspectives and also in world-systems research and writing by the privileging of long durée historical or quantitative cross-national methods. This paper introduces the concept of structural fieldwork to describe a qualitative field methodology in which the researcher is self-consciously guided by considerations emerging out of macro-sociological theories. We identify four advantages of structural fieldwork: the illumination of power's multiple dimensions; examination of agency and its boundaries or limitations within broad political and economic structures; attention to nuances of change and durability, spatial and temporal specificities, and processes of change and durability; and challenging and extending social theory. These advantages are illustrated in select examples from existing literature and by discussion of the two author's fieldwork-based research. The paper concludes that explicit attention to fieldwork may strengthen political economy and world-systems research and also de-marginalize political economy informed by structural fieldwork.