

Anthropology Today

By the early 1990s anthropology had become a very diverse field with numerous areas of specialization. For example, the American Anthropological Association, one of the discipline's most important professional organizations in the United States, includes sections focused on such specific topics as agriculture, consciousness, education, the environment, feminism, film and photography, museums, nutrition, politics and law, psychology, urban issues, and work. Other groups focus on geographic areas, including Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and North America. Specialization within anthropology has become so important that many academic departments have begun questioning the need to teach about the original four subfields. New research agendas have also emerged, and several new trends in world culture have dramatically changed anthropology. Independent, self-sufficient cultures—the focus of traditional anthropology—have virtually disappeared. In addition, the world faces increasing problems of poverty, violence, and environmental degradation. In response to these trends, many anthropologists have shifted their attention to studying urban culture and the workings of global culture. Much new research examines the dynamics of global commerce and the international exchange of ideas, beliefs, and cultural practices. Beginning in the 1980s a series of new ideas, collectively called postmodernism, also raised questions about some of anthropology's fundamental methods and

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T.yasmin osam

objectives. As a result, some anthropologists have moved into a new area of research sometimes known as cultural studies. Others have continued to use more traditional anthropological research methods to solve problems associated with cross-cultural conflicts. This type of work is known as applied anthropology.