

# ETHNOGRAPHY AND/AS THEORY

Anthropology Graduate Seminar  
Hale Seminar Room  
Monday 10-12:30

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What is the ethnographic? How do we practice and write ethnography? In this seminar, we will look beyond ethnography as method to consider ethnography as theory. Ethnographic knowledge is both epistemology and ontology, a way of knowing and a way of being. It is experiential, embodied, and empathetic, and is the foundation of field efforts to arrive at—as Clifford Geertz so famously stated in 1973—how people collectively explain themselves...to themselves. It is through ethnography that we can get to “where true life and real lives meet.” Ethnography is excessive and it is messy, but so is life. Our goal in ethnographic research is to get to this excess and messiness, to the lived expectations, complexities, contradictions, and possibilities of any given cultural group. In this seminar, we will explore ethnographic theory through reading widely across contemporary anthropological ethnography. Welcome.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Reaction Essays.** Weekly one-page commentaries (*not* summaries) on the readings are due by midnight the evening before class; these should focus on questions for discussion, confusions, points for clarification, and comparisons between readings. Your essays are to be submitted to an email group established for the course so that everyone will benefit from reading each other’s responses prior to class discussion.

**Short Papers.** Two 5-6 page papers will be due; one in Week 6, and one in Week 11. Specific parameters for the assignment will be given two-three weeks prior to the due date.

**Research Paper.** The course will culminate with a 15-20 page research paper tailored to each student’s theoretical and ethnographic interests. A paper proposal with bibliography is due in class in Week 12. The paper is due by 5:00 on the Friday of Week 16.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1      INTRODUCTION

Week 2      ETHNOGRAPHY & THEORY I: Arguments about Ethnography

- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, pp. 310-333.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1991 "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness," in Richard G. Fox, *Recapturing Anthropology*, Santa Fe: SAR Press, pp. 17-44.
- Marcus, George E. 1995. "Ethnography In/Of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 95-117.
- Willis, Paul and Mats Trondman. 2000. "Manifesto for *Ethnography*," *Ethnography* 1(1): 5-16.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2000. "Locating Ethnography," *Ethnography* 1(2): 261-267.
- Fortun, Kim. 2012. "Ethnography in Late Industrialism," *Cultural Anthropology* 27(3): 446-464.
- McGranahan, Carole. 2014. "What is Ethnography? Teaching Ethnographic Sensibilities Without Fieldwork," *Teaching Anthropology* 4: 23-36.
- Harrison, Faye. 2016. "Theorizing in Ex-Centric Sites," *Anthropological Theory* 16(2-3): 160-176.
- Shah, Alpa. 2017. "Ethnography? Participant Observation, A Potentially Revolutionary Praxis," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7(1): 45-59.

Week 3      ETHNOGRAPHY & THEORY II: Ethnographic Arguments

- West, Paige. 2005. "Translation, Value, and Space: Theorizing an Ethnographic and Engaged Environmental Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 107(4): 632-642.
- Collins, John. 2008. "'But What If I Should Need to Defecate in Your Neighborhood, Madame?': Empire, Redemption, and the 'Tradition of the Oppressed' in a Brazilian World Heritage Site," *Cultural Anthropology* 23(2): 279-328.
- McGranahan, Carole. 2012. "Mao in Tibetan Disguise: History, Ethnography, and Excess," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2(1): 213-245.
- Lyons, Kristina. 2016. "Decomposition as Life Politics: Soils, *Selwa*, and Small Farmers under the Gun of the U.S.-Colombian War on Drugs," *Cultural Anthropology* 31(1): 56-81.
- Ralph, Laurence. 2017. "Becoming Aggrieved," in *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*, edited by João Biehl and Peter Locke, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 93-110.
- Astuti, Rita. 2017. "Taking People Seriously," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7(1): 105-122.

Week 4      ETHNOGRAPHY AS CRITIQUE

Mahmood, Saba. 2012[2005]. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 5      AFFECT AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Williams, Bianca C. 2018. *The Pursuit of Happiness: Black Women, Diasporic Dreams, and the Politics of Emotional Transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Week 6      GENRE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC AUTHORITY

Clifford, James. 1983. "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations* 2: 118-146.

Behar, Ruth. 1996. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 1-33.

Rosaldo, Renato. 2013. *The Day of Shelly's Death: The Poetry and Ethnography of Grief*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Week 7      ETHNOGRAPHY, EXPERIENCE, PAIN

Garcia, Angela. 2010. *The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Dispossession along the Rio Grande*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week 8      ETHNOGRAPHIC REFUSAL

Simpson, Audra. 2014. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Week 9      ON LIFE AND DEATH

De León, Jason. 2015. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Week 10      INDIGENEITY, MORE-THAN-HUMANS, & ETHNOGRAPHIC CONVERSATIONS

De La Cadena, Marisol. 2015. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Week 11      ETHNOGRAPHY, CAPITALISM, & THE ARC OF A CAREER

Tsing, Anna. 2017. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 12      ETHNOGRAPHY AS POLITICAL INSIGHT

Shah, Alpa. 2019. *Nightmarch: Among India's Revolutionary Guerrillas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week 13      DECOLONIZING ETHNOGRAPHY

Alonso Bejarano, Carolina, Lucia López Juárez, Mirian A. Mijangos García, and Daniel M. Goldstein. 2019. *Decolonizing Ethnography*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Week 14      NO CLASS—BREAK

Week 15      WRITING ETHNOGRAPHY

Narayan, Kirin. 2012. *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Week 16      DRAWING ETHNOGRAPHY

Causey, Andrew. 2016. *Drawn to See: Drawing as an Ethnographic Method*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.