

BROOKLYN COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY
ANTHROPOLOGY 1, MW9:
Introduction to Ethnography
Spring 2010

Instructor: Michael Polson

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Office Hours: Monday: 10:45-12:00 (Please make arrangements with me before or immediately after class. Some days I may be in and out.)

Office: 3301E

Class Meeting Times: 9:30 -10:45 Room 2302, James Hall

Course Description, Key Concepts, and Objectives

Ethnography is the cornerstone of cultural and social anthropology. It is the product of fieldwork, a written study of a people (ethnos/graphēin), and it is the conjuncture of these elements with an explicit or implicit knowledge framework. That is, the aim is to not only convey information about a grouping of people, but, arguably, to convey an approach on how to understand people. This course will introduce you to one (necessarily selective) trajectory of ethnographic treatments over time. Each piece encapsulates a particular moment, approach, and topic, yet the sum total will give you a sense of how anthropology has shifted over the years.

The goals of this course are:

- To introduce you to the development of cultural and social anthropology over the last century;
- To demonstrate the breadth of regional and topical interests represented in ethnography
- To explore how epistemological approaches and concerns can shape the type of knowledge that is produced

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Identify several ways that cultural anthropology has contributed to the study of human society
- Examine and critique ethnography as a research method, a knowledge source, and a literary genre

Required Texts (publisher and year are suggested to limit confusion over page numbers):

Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (W.W. Norton, 2000)

Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Mariner, 1989)

Claude Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community* (Cambridge, 1981)

Emily Martin, *Flexible Bodies: The Role of Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (Beacon, 1995)

Stephen Gregory, *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community* (Princeton, 1999)

Grading and Assignments

This course is a reading- and discussion-based course. As such, class participation and preparation will be key to the grade.

Panel Discussions (20% of final grade, 8.33% of final grade each): We will break into 6 groups at the beginning of class and each group will serve on 3 panels throughout the semester. This has a flexible format

- 1) Each member of the panel will be responsible for a 3-4 minute response on the reading for the day.
- 2) After each respondent speaks, there will be a second round of 1-2 minute responses, where each panelist will respond to the comments of the other panelists, pose questions to each other, or otherwise discuss the reading and what has been raised.
- 3) At this point, the conversation will open up to the class. Students are invited to pursue particular points or ask questions of the panelists. Similarly, the panelists may pose questions to the class.

You must come prepared to the panel with at least:

- 1 passage that you thought was the most rich, potent, or provocative.
- 1 question that you had about the book or the issues it raises.

When thinking through preparing for the panel, respondents might consider:

- What did you find provocative or problematic about the book?
- What passage, concept, or argument in particular would be helpful to think about more in depth as a class?
- What questions were left unresolved or confusing in the book? What might we clarify as a class?
- What critiques of the book do you have?

Exams (45% of final grade; 9% each): There will be 5 in-class exams—one for each book. These exams will be open book and will refer to themes discussed in class and raised in the book.

Symposium and Brief Report (35% total; Paper 30%, Presentation 10%): The “final” for this course will be participation in a symposium and a brief written report. Each student will pick an ethnography to read on their own and will write a brief 3-page summary of the book, analysis of the book’s argument, method, and its theoretical framework, and reflection on the book in relation to the course material (books and discussions) and your own critique.

Second, each student will then assume the identity of the author of the book they wrote and we will organize a symposium of the authors, during which a set of authors will discuss their book in relation to a broad theme. More information on this will be distributed in the semester.

Class Policies:

- 1) *Absences:* Only 3 unexcused absences will be allowed. More than this and your grade will suffer by approximately 2-3 percentage points each day absent. Technically, you may be dropped from the course after 3 unexcused absences, a technicality I reserve the right to use!
- 2) *Lateness:* If you’re more than 15 minutes late to class you will be marked late and will receive a half absence. That is, if you are late 6 times, this will equal 3 full absences.
- 3) *Academic Integrity:* The faculty and administration of Brooklyn College support an environment free from cheating and plagiarism. Each student is responsible for being

aware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both. The complete text of the CUNY Academic Integrity Policy and the Brooklyn College procedure for implementing that policy can be found at this site:

<http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/policies>. If a faculty member suspects a violation of academic integrity and, upon investigation, confirms that violation, or if the student admits the violation, the faculty member MUST report the violation.

- 4) *Class Conduct*: The number one rule in this course is respect. This course will ask that you relate to each other and the material not only as a student but as a full human being with a real stake in knowing the world. Because of this, respect for other people's opinions during discussion, respect for other people's learning time during class, and respect for the instructor by completing assignments and participating in class. I will come to class prepared and ready to engage, and I expect the same of you.
- 5) *Note on Disability Services*: In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations students must first be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services. Students who have a documented disability or suspect they may have a disability are invited to set up an appointment with the Director of the Center for Student Disability Services, Ms. Valerie Stewart-Lovell at 718-951-5538. If you have already registered with the Center for Student Disability Services please provide your professor with the course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with him/her.
- 6) *Note on Religious Holidays*: Please contact me regarding any religious holidays that would require you to miss class. Other arrangements may be made.

Class Schedule

Jan 28: Introduction	Mar 23: Martin: Preface – Part II (choices for final book due)
Feb 2: Mauss: Introduction - Ch.2	Mar 25: Martin: Part 3, Ch 1-4
Feb 4: Mauss: Ch 3-4	Mar 29-Apr 6: SPRING BREAK
Feb 9: Exam #1	Apr 7: Martin: Part 4 and Part 5, Ch 5-11
Feb 11: Benedict: Ch. 1-2	Apr 13: Martin: Part Six and Appendices
Feb 16: Benedict: 3-5	Apr 15: Exam #4
Feb 18: NO CLASS	Apr 20: Gregory: Intro – Ch.2
Feb 22: Benedict: 6-9	Apr 22: Gregory: Ch 3 –Ch 4
Feb 24: Benedict: 10-11	Apr 27: Gregory: Part 2, Ch 5-6
Mar 2: Benedict: 12-13	Apr 29: Gregory: Part 3, Ch 7
Mar 4: Exam #2	May 4: Gregory: Ch 8-9
Mar 9: Meillassoux: Part I, Intro – Ch 2	May 6: Exam #5
Mar 11: Meillassoux: Ch 3 – Ch 6	May 11: Symposia
Mar 16: Meillassoux: Part II, Ch. 1-9	May 13: Symposia
Mar 18: Exam #3	May 18: Symposia and Conclusion

Recommended Books for Symposia:

- Polly Hill: *The Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Ghana: A Study in Rural Capitalism* (1963)
Richard Salisbury: *Stone to Steel: Economic Consequences of a Technological Change in New Guinea* (1962)
Marilyn Strathern: *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (1988)
Kaushik Sunder Rajan: *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life* (2006)

Aihwa Ong: *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999)

Pem Davidson Buck: *Worked to the Bone: Race, Class, Power, and Privilege in Kentucky* (2001)

Jagna Sharff: *King Kong on 4th Street: Families and the Violence of Poverty on the Lower East Side* (1998)

Eve Weinbaum: *To Move a Mountain: Fighting the Global Economy in Appalachia* (2004)

Bettylou Valentine: *Hustling and Other Hard Work: Life Styles in the Ghetto* (1980)

Bruce Kapferer: *Strategy and Transaction in an African Factory: African Workers and Indian Management in a Zambian Town* (1972)

Fernando Coronil: *The Magical State: Nature, Money and Modernity in Venezuela* (1997)

Leslie Gill: *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas* (2005)

Katherine Verdery: *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania* (2003)

Adrian Petryna: *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens After Chernobyl* (2002)

Clifford Geertz: *Peddlers and Princes: Social Development and Economic Change in Two Indonesian Towns*

Michael Watts: *Silent Violence: Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria* (1983)

Michel-Rolph Trouillot *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995)

Paul Farmer: *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (1992)

Nancy Scheper-Hughes *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (1993)

James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucracy in Lesotho* (1990)

Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (1983)

Sidney Mintz: *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*

Uli Linke, *Contact Zones: Rethinking the Sensual Life of the State* (2006)

Lawrence Cohen, *No Aging in India: Alzheimer's, the Bad Family and Other Modern Things* (1998)

Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (1979)

Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (1997)

Joseph Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico* (2006)

Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (1986)

Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (1988)

Marvin Harris, *Cannibals and Kings* (1977)

Linda Anne Rebhun, *The Heart Is Unknown Country: Love in the Changing Economy of Northeast Brazil* (1999)

Brett Williams, *Debt for Sale: A Social History of the Credit Trap* (2004)

Jane Collins, *Threads: Gender, Labor and Power in the Global Apparel Industry* (2003)

Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (1996)

Ara Wilson, *The Intimate Economies of Bangkok: Tomboys, Tycoons, and Avon Ladies in the Global City* (2004)

Carla Freeman, *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work and Pink-Collar Identities in the Caribbean* (2000)

Charis Thompson, *Making Parents: The Ontological Choreography of Reproductive Technologies* (2006)

Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (2004)

John Hartigan, *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*, (1999)

Robin Sheriff, *Dreaming Equality: Color, Race and Racism in Urban Brazil* (2001)

Ernesto Segas, *Race and Politics in the Dominican Republic* (2000)

Patty Kelly, *Lydia's Open Door: Inside Mexico's Most Modern Brothel* (2008)

Erzen, Tanya *Straight to Jesus : sexual and Christian conversions in the ex-gay movement.* (2006)

Franklin, Sarah *Dolly mixtures : the remaking of genealogy.* (2007)

Hayden, Cori *When nature goes public : the making and unmaking of bioprospecting in Mexico* (2003)

Charles L. Briggs, and Clara Mantini-Briggs. *Stories in the time of cholera : racial profiling during a medical nightmare.* (2003)

Nazia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israel* (2002)

Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (2006)