The Ethnographic Imagination
IDSEM-UG 1577
Gallatin School of Individualized Study
New York University
Fall 2016

COURSE INFORMATION

Professor Ritty Lukose, Office 715 Broadway (1 Washington Place), room 610; email: ritty.lukose@nyu.edu.

Course Schedule: Mondays, 12:30-3:15pm, Silver, room 407.

Office Hours:
   Thursdays, 9-12:30 and Thursdays 2-3pm
   Please sign up here: http://goo.gl/Efb5Yi

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Ethnography has been narrowly construed as the research methodology that defines the discipline of cultural anthropology. But this course explores ethnography as a wide-ranging mode of inquiry and a genre of writing through which we grapple with the experience of Self and Other at the intersection of overlapping cultural worlds. We begin by linking modern ethnographic writing to early travel narratives, to missionary accounts, and to colonial reports serving evolving imperial formations. We then examine the consolidation of an "ethnographic" perspective in the emerging discipline of anthropology, as well as more recent critiques of this genre. Our own method will be reading classic and contemporary ethnographic works. These reveal ongoing tensions between the scientific and the literary; between abstract "theory" and ethnographic "practice"; and between the claim to truth-telling and the power and limits linked to the positioning of the author. In response to these tensions we also trace the textual experimentation that mixes ethnography, poetry, memoir, and travel writing, fiction, and film. Our goal is to develop a self-reflective ethnographic imagination, open to the possibilities and difficulties in cross-cultural understanding, as we consider the complexities in encounter and contact, looking and describing, representing and translating.
READINGS

All books are available from a variety of online sources. Also, I will put the books on reserve. Other reading materials will be available through the course course website at NYU Classes which everyone MUST be able to use.

The list of books are:

Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*

Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters*

Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*

Zora Neale Hurston, *Of Mules and Men*

Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women’s Worlds: Bedouin Stories*

Laurence Ralph, *Renegade Dreams: Living Through Injury in Gangland Chicago*

Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*

Amitav Ghosh, *In An Antique Land: History in the Guise of a Traveller’s Tale*

Also, this syllabus is a work in progress. There might be occasions during the course of the semester when readings might change and/or additional materials added and assignments shifted as well. While I don’t anticipate this happening very frequently (and of course, I will give you notice), I would like the course to be open to our evolving conversation.

ASSIGNMENTS

This is a seminar course. Therefore, punctuality, regular attendance and participation are important for this class to work well. Arrival in a timely way and regular attendance is a requirement.

*Weekly reaction/response papers* to the readings which must be posted to the discussion forum by *Monday noon*. In these responses of a page or two, you should pull out some sense of your understanding of the readings, an exploration of a concept or argument that you find compelling. You could also lay out what you do not understand or are wrestling with in the readings. You can use these responses to analytically clarify for yourself what the readings are saying. In addition, towards the end of this response, you might also raise questions that emerge for you out of the readings.
**Book Review of Ethnography:**
I would like you to submit a 4-5 page book review/discussion of one of the book-length ethnographies assigned in class. You can choose which book you want to write about but your **book review is due the day we discuss the book in class (before class).** In this review, I am not just looking for your opinion and reaction to the book but also an analytical summary of the book. I will explain this further.

**Ethnographic Project:**
1) By Oct. 3 I would like you to submit to me a proposal for a short-term fieldwork project that you will conduct throughout the semester. This should involve a site that is easily accessible to you, where it is possible to observe, participate perhaps, do some interviewing. This proposal should include why you feel this site is interesting and important.

2) By Dec. 5, I would like you to submit to me examples of fieldnotes, photographs, video, and other documentary materials you have collected related to your fieldwork and fieldsite. I will provide instructions on how to submit these materials.

3) By December 19, I would like you to submit a 7-10 page paper that reflects on the process of conducting this project. This is more of a reflective paper on the process itself. If you so desire, you may incorporate more of an analysis of the ethnographic materials you have collected.

Participation: 25%
Ethnographic Project: 25%
Book Discussion/Review: 25%
Weekly Responses: 25%

**SCHEDULE**

Monday, 9/12 -- Introduction

Monday, 9/19 *Possibilities and Pitfalls of the Ethnographic Imagination*

“Thick Description” by Clifford Geertz

“Balinese Cockfight” by Clifford Geertz

“Writing Against Culture” by Lila Abu-Lughod

Chapters 1, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Monday, 9/26 *Early Iterations of an Ethnographic Sensibility*

Bougainville, Louis A. de *A Voyage Around the World*

Diderot, D. *Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville* (selections)

Parry and Keith, “Letter of Michele Cuneo”

Hayden White, “The Noble Savage as Fetish”

Michel De Certeau, “Montaigne’s ‘Of Cannibals’: The Savage ‘I’”

Monday, 10/3

Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*

**DUE:** Proposal for Ethnographic Project

Monday, 10/10 NO CLASS

Monday, 10/17

Montesquieu, *The Persian Letters*

Chapter 2, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Monday, 10/24

Bernard Cohn, “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia” (BB)

Nicholas Dirks, selections from *Castes of Mind* (“The Ethnographic State”)

Laura Hostetler, “Qing Connections in the Early Modern World: Ethnography and Cartography in 18th Century China”

Mary Louise Pratt. “Scratches on the Face of the Country: Or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of Bushmen”

Chapter 3, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

*Modern Ethnographic Practice*

Monday, 10/31

Raymond Williams, “Culture,” in *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 87-93. (BB)
Franz Boas, selections from *Race, Language, and Culture* (New York: Free Press, 1940 [1887]). (BB)


George Stocking (ed), *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*, selections

Chapter 4, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*

Monday, 11/7

Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*

Monday, 11/14

Zora Neal Hurston, *Mules and Men*

Monday, 11/21

Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, selections


Clifford, James, “Introduction: Partial Truths”, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*


Monday, 11/28

Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women’s Worlds: Bedouin Stories*

Chapter 5, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*
Monday, 12/5

Laurence Ralph, *Renegade Dreams*

**DUE:** Submission of data materials for ethnographic project

Monday, 12/12

Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*

Monday, 12/13

Amitav Ghosh, *In An Antique Land: History in the Guise of a Traveller’s Tale*

**DUE:** 12/19, by noon, final reflective essay on ethnographic project