Anthropology 410:
Explanation in Anthropology:
Ethnographic Practice

Tuesday 12:35 -3:35, RAB 209B, Douglass Campus

Prerequisite: 6 credits of upper-level anthropology courses or permission of instructor

Instructor: Assaf Harel
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Office Hours: Tuesday, 4:00 – 5:00
Thursday, 12:00 - 1:00
or by appointment
Ruth Adams #313

Course Description:

Ethnography is the main practice and source of explanation within cultural anthropology. How is ethnography practiced and what does it mean to explain through ethnography? In this advanced seminar, we will engage with ethnography through practice. We will learn ethnographic practices such as data collection through observation and participation. We will conduct ethnographic interpretations, learn ethnographic theory, read and write ethnographic texts, and explore ethnographic possibilities beyond the text. We will do this with a critical attention to questions of ethics, reflexivity, and the politics of knowledge production. Throughout the course, students will be given the opportunity to conceive and develop new individualized projects or continue to work on their current projects. Overall, this course examines the complex relations between ethnography as an idea and ethnography as a practice, with the aim of providing the students with better intellectual and existential means of understanding and doing ethnography.

Course Objectives:

- To gain knowledge and understanding of central dimensions of ethnographic practice such as data collection, reflexivity, ethics and politics of knowledge production [CITE 1 see **http://anthro.rutgers.edu/undergrad-program/department-learning-goals**]
- To assist students' ability to employ analytical skills when evaluating key ethnographic challenges such as the tensions between universalism and particularism, objectivity and subjectivity, self and other [CITE 2]
- To develop students' proficiency in thinking and speaking critically and effectively about ethnographic practice as the central form of anthropological explanation [CITE 5]
- To develop students' ability to practice ethnography and thus anthropology through reading, writing and critical engagement with the existential fundamentals of the cross-cultural encounter [CITE 3 & 4]
- To encourage students to integrate ethnographic sensibilities into their thinking about their future lives and work

Required Texts:

All required readings can be accessed through Sakai . A few readings might be added, removed or replaced during the course. This syllabus is thus subject to a few minor changes

Assignments and Grading Structure:

Attendance and Participation 20%

Class attendance is required. *You are expected to attend all classes.* If you expect to miss a class, please use the University absence reporting website https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/ to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. Active participation entails contributing thoughtful comments regarding presentations, readings, films, and group discussions during each class meeting.

Weekly Questions 10%

Without a serious commitment to the readings, you will not learn as much about the history of anthropology as you hoped and deserve. Students are expected to complete *all of the weekly readings before class* and come to class prepared to discuss the material. In addition, students *must bring the weekly readings to each class*. Furthermore, to help your learning, each week you will prepare a list of *five questions* that engage with the weekly themes and text. These questions can probe into the author's arguments and methods, be more general in essence and more. These questions will be used to facilitate class and group discussion. *You are expected to bring the questions to class and submit them at the end of class.*

Ethnographic Reading 10%:

During the first few weeks of the course, you will identify one ethnography, which you will read, examine and present your findings to the class. I will help you identify and ethnography that matches your area of interest. More specific instructions will be handed out in class and posted on Sakai.

Exercises in Ethnography 30%

There will be five exercises (5 points each) that are meant to develop better awareness and understanding of informal and unstructured dimensions of ethnographic practice. Specific instructions will be provided ahead of time. The main purpose of these exercises is to learn how to think, sense and communicate ethnographically via informal and unstructured dimensions of human encounter; and their focus is on the acquisition of research skills, not on the pursuit of individual research projects. Students who wish to use the exercises for research projects they are already involved in (like senior theses) must: (1) have current IRB protocol approval for their specific projects; (2) furnish a copy of their protocol and the letter from the IRB Office granting

approval; AND (3) meet with me to discuss specific arrangements. In addition, you must complete by *01/31 the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Basic Course* (5 points) Go to https://orra.rutgers.edu/citi. The objective is to develop an awareness of the ethical issues and protection responsibilities that come with research involving human subjects, and know what IRB is and the role it plays in research oversight.

General Ethics Protocols & Procedures for Conducting Assignments

All students must abide by the following:

1. Students must complete *the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Basic Course*
2. All activities leading to assignments for this class must be conducted in a freely accessible setting (e.g., take place in a classroom, department, dormitory, or other campus setting, or in a public setting with generally unlimited access to the public, such as a shopping center, park, street, etc.)
3. Students must be transparent about the purpose of their interaction with people encounter while completing assignments for this course. They should identify themselves, state their goals, and provide the Instructor's contact information.
4. Students must obtain permission and informed consent.
5. Students will refrain from involving vulnerable populations, including minors, decisionally impaired persons, prisoners, and others. If in doubt, consult with the instructor.
6. Students will not collect, document, nor keep any information that may put any participant at risk.
7. Pseudonyms must be given to all people whom students involve in their completion of assignments.
8. If a student learns that a person incurs any harm or risk because of his/her participation in the student's assignment, I must be contacted immediately by phone, 732-500-4726. If instructed, the student must email her a description of the incident, assaf@rutgers.edu.

Final Project 20%:

Beginning in the first few weeks of the course, students are required to think about a final research project to be conducted during the semester. The final paper - which should be 10-15 double-spaced pages - is to be a written analysis of a specific ethnographic issue of interest to you. Topics can include, for example, the intellectual history of an ethnographic concept, an analysis of a contemporary issue using ethnographic theory, a critique of an ethnographic practice, an ethnography of ethnographic texts and more. You will also be able instead to work and develop current project. It is fine if you have no idea of what to explore. I will help you identify a topic that matches your interests. On *Tuesday, 02/07*, you will submit a brief research proposal, of no more than one or two paragraphs, in which you present a research topic. On *Tuesday, 03/07*, you will submit a preliminary draft, which should be no longer than 2 pages and will include a clear ethnographic goal, a rough outline, and an initial list of sources. In addition,

you are encouraged to meet with me at least once to review your research project. The final paper is due on *May 5th*.

Presentation 10%:

You will present in class your research project. The presentation assignment is aimed to allow you to share your project with the rest of the class, further conceptualize your research project, receive critical feedback, and gain the opportunity to develop your public speaking skills. The presentation needs to incorporate visuals or audiovisual elements that enrich and/or support the main argument. The topic of your presentation will be determined and approved along with your research project. More specific instructions will be handed out in class and posted on Sakai.

Course Policies:

Academic integrity: The work you submit must be your own. Cheating and Plagiarism will not be tolerated. It is the students' responsibility to be familiar with the rights and obligations associated with academic integrity. You are encouraged to read the full policy on academic integrity at the following website: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-at-rutgers and to consult these resources for guidelines on producing academic work: http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/resources.

In Class: Please arrive on time for all class meetings. While in class, all mobile phones, iPods, etc. must be silenced. Laptop usage is permitted only as long as it is not bothersome to other students. For example, do not surf through your private information while sitting in front of other students who may be distracted. If you miss a class, contact another student in the course to find out what you missed and how to prepare for the next meeting.

Submitting work for Evaluation: I will accept late work, but with a one grade reduction for each 24 hours period it is late.

Learning differences and support services: Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact me after class, during office hours or by email at the beginning of the semester. In addition, students will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.

Course Schedule

Week 1 – Introduction - 01/17

Week 2 – Introduction Continued – 01/24

Goffman, Erving. 1989. "On Fieldwork." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18(2):123-132

Nader, Laura. 2011. "Ethnography as Theory," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 1(1):211--219.

Week 3 – Ethics – 01/31

AAA Statement on Ethics 2012

Bourgois, Phillippe. 2007 [1991]. "Confronting the Ethics of Ethnography: Lessons from Fieldwork in Central America." In *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, edited by Antonious C.G.M. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka, 288-297. Blackwell Publishing

Fine, Gary Alan. 1993. Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22:267-293

- Complete the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Basic Course

Week 4 – Rapport – 02/07

Robben, Antonius. 1996. "Ethnographic Seduction, Transference, and Resistance in Dialogues about Terror and Violence in Argentina." *Ethos* 24:71–106

Saboo, Kartikeya. N.D. "The Box, The Stranger, and the Indian Shopkeeper: Nearness and Distance in Ethnographic Fieldwork."

- Preliminary Proposal Due

Week 5 – Space and Place – 02/14

Allende, Isabel. 2002. ""A Home in 'Paradise'." In *A House Somewhere: Tales of Life Abroad*, edited by don George and Anthony Sattin, pp.11-16. Lonely Planet Publications.

Kuper, Hilda. 1972. "The Language of Sites in the Politics of Space." *American Anthropologist* 74(3):411-425.

Stewart, Kathleen. 1996. "The Space of Culture." In *A Space at the Side of the Road*, pp 13-40. Princeton University Press.

***** Exercise #1

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Week 6 – Time – 02/21

Borges, Jorge Luis. 1975. *The Book of Sand*. (Short Story).

Harding, Susan. 2005. Living Prophecy at Heaven's Gate." In *Histories of the Future*, edited by Daniel Rosenberg and Susan Harding, pp. 297-320. Duke University Press.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1966 [1962]. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 257-260.

***** Exercise #2

Week 7 – Things and Matter – 02/28

Tsing, Anna. 2013. "Sorting Out Commodities: How Capitalist Value is Made Through Gifts." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* l(3): 21-43.

Woodward, Ian. 2007. *Understanding Material Culture*. Sage Publications. (Chapter 1, pp. 3-16).

***** Exercise # 3

Week 8 – Senses – 03/07

Pink ,Sarah. 2010. "The Future of Sensory Anthropology/The Anthropology of the Senses." *Social Anthropology* 18: 331–340. (Read entire debate)

Stoller, Paul and Cheryl Olkes. 2007 [1989]." The Taste of Ethnographic Things." In *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, edited by Antonious C.G.M. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka, 404-416, Blackwell Publishing.

Film: *Leviathan*, 2012, Verena Paravel and Lucien Castaing

* Exercise #4

- Preliminary Draft Due

Spring Break

Week 9 – Image – 03/21

Berger, John. 2002[1982]. "The Ambiguity of the Photograph. In *The Anthropology of Media*, edited by Kelly Askew and Richard Wilk, pp. 47-55. Blackwell Publishers.

Sontag, Susan. 1977. "On Photography." pp 174-178.

Mead, Margaret. 1995[1977] "Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words." In *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, edited by Paul Hockings (ed.), pp. 3-10. Walter de Gruyer & Co.

* Exercise #5

Week 10 –Media – 03/28

Tobing, Rony Fatimah. 1996. "Introduction." *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle*. Duke university Press. Pp 3-17.

Boellstorff , Tom. 2015 [2008]. "Chapter 1."*Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press. Pp. 3-31.

Film: Bontoc Eulogy, 1995, Marlon Fuentes

Week 11 – Violence – 04/03

Ghassem-Fachandi, Parvis. 2009. "Introduction," and "Bandh in Ahmedabad," In *Violence: Ethnographic Encounters*, edited by Parvis, Ghassem-Fachandi. Berg Publishers. Pp. 1-9, 35-50.

Isbell, Billie Jean. 2009. "Written on my Body." In *Violence: Ethnographic Encounters*, edited by Parvis, Ghassem-Fachandi. Berg Publishers. Pp. 15-34.

Week 12 – The Good – 04/11

Robbins, Joel. 2013. "Beyond the Suffering Subject: Toward an Anthropology of the Good *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* 19(3): 447–462.

Engelke, Matthew. 2015. "'Good without God': Happiness and Pleasure among the Humanists." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5(3):69–91.

Week 13 – Fiction – 04/18

Bowen, Elinor Smith. 2007 [1954]. "Return to Laughter" In *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, edited by Antonious C.G.M. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka, 499-506, Blackwell Publishing

Naranyan, Kirin. 1999."Ethnography and Fiction: Where Is the Border?." *Anthropology and Humanism* 24(2):134–147.

Week 14- Conclusions – 04/25

Presentations

Final project Due May 5th