

Anthropology 83a
Anthropological Inquiry
Instructor: Elizabeth Ferry
Spring 2007

Class: Monday – Wednesday 2:10-3:30
Instructor: Elizabeth Ferry, Brown 220
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Office Hours: M 1-2, W 12-1 and by appointment
TA: Mrinalini Tankha
Peer Tutor: Lee Belew

Course Description:

This course is designed to expose serious students of anthropology to selected trends in contemporary sociocultural anthropology, as seen through the relationship between theory and ethnography. The course is divided into three sections. We begin by reading *Return to Laughter*, an anthropological novel that illustrates some of the particularities of anthropological fieldwork and the links between ethnography and theory, one of the main themes of the course and discussing ethnography as a genre of writing and the complex relationship between anthropologist, “natives” and audience. We will also spend two weeks discussing ethnography and other genres of anthropological representation.

After this we will address a series of theoretical trends and debates, drawing on ethnographic writings that express and demonstrate these theories. These include: 1. structure and practice through spirit possession 2. social construction through discussions of war; 3. “power” and “resistance” through colonialism and capitalism; 4 moral and epistemological problems in anthropology through headhunting.

The course will then shift to the reading of full-length ethnographies. These texts have been chosen as worthy (though not exempt from criticism) representatives of the genre that also demonstrate a broad range of methodologies and theoretical positions. Some will also pick up on themes discussed in the earlier section of the course. The course will introduce students to several key theoretical currents that inform cultural anthropology today, while enhancing students’ critical understanding of how anthropologists pose questions, provide answers, and relate theories to ethnographic evidence.

Grading:

The course grade will be based on four sources: attendance and participation (students will be allowed two unexcused absences from class and other absences will be deducted from this part of the grade). Students will also need to write 4 response papers during the second section of the course (between 2/12 and 3/14). These short (1-2) page papers will be graded on a check/check-plus/check-minus basis and will include comments by the TA and peer tutor. The midterm paper, which should be 4-6 pages in length, will revise portions of these responses

papers into a coherent essay on one more of the themes of the course so far. The final paper will address one ethnography read in class PLUS another ethnography chosen by the student (with the professor's guidance) to construct an anthropological argument. We will be discussing this assignment further in class.

Class attendance and participation: 25%
4 (1-2 page) response papers: 20%
Essay #1 (4-6 pages): 25%
Essay #2 (6-8 pages): 30%

Readings:

These books are available at the Brandeis bookstore and on library reserve:

Elenore Smith Bowen, 1964. *Return to Laughter: An Anthropological Novel*. New York: Anchor Books.

Beth Conklin, 2001. *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Adriana Petryna, 2002. *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Laura Ahearn, 2001. *Invitations to Love: Literacy, Love-Letters and Social Change in Nepal*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

All other readings are on WebCT; these readings will be indicated as such on the syllabus.

SCHEDULE:

Week One (Wed., Jan. 17) -- Introduction

PART ONE: METHOD, PERSPECTIVE and GENRE

Week Two – The Strange Familiar and the Familiar Strange

January 22:

Elenore Smith Bowen, *Return to Laughter*

January 24:

Elenore Smith Bowen, *Return to Laughter*

Bohannon, Laura, 1952. "A Genealogical Charter" *Africa*, v. 22, no. 4, pp. 301-315. Web-CT.

Week Three – the Genre of Ethnography

January 29:

No reading for today – in-class exercise

January 31:

Clifford, James, "On Ethnographic Allegory" in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. (Web-CT).

Week Four - Other Forms of Anthropological Representation

February 5:

Turner, Terence. 1992. "Defiant Images: The Kayapo Appropriation of Video" *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 8, No. 6. (Dec., 1992), pp. 5-16. Web-CT.

February 7:

Lassiter, Luke Eric, "Collaborative Ethnography and Public Anthropology" *Current Anthropology* 46(1), February 2005, pp. 83-106. (Web-CT).

PART TWO: ETHNOGRAPHIC THEORY AND PRACTICE

Week Five – Structure and Practice and Spirit Possession

February 12:

Rosaldo, Renato. 1993. Chapter 4, "Putting culture into motion", in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press. (Web-CT)

Ortner, Sherry, "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties" [selection] *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26(1), January 1984. READ ONLY PP. 144-157. (JSTOR).

February 14:

Lambek, Michael. 1980. "Spirits and Spouses: Possession as a System of Communication among the Malagasy Speakers of Mayotte." *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 7, No. 2. (May, 1980), pp. 318-331. (JSTOR).

Stoller, Paul. 1994. "Embodying Colonial Memories." *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 96, No. 3. (Sep., 1994), pp. 634-648. (JSTOR).

RESPONSE PAPER DUE

FEBRUARY 19-23 - MIDTERM RECESS

Week Six: Social Construction and War

February 26:

Rosaldo, Renato pp. 25-26 in *Culture and Truth* (Web-CT).

February 28:

Chagnon, Napoleon A. 1988. "Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population", in *Science* (Feb, 26), 985-992. (Web-CT).

Ferguson, Brian R. 1992. "Savage Encounter: Western Contact in the Yanomami War Complex", in *War in the Tribal Zone*, eds. Brian Ferguson and Neil Whitehead. School of American Research. (Web-CT).

RESPONSE PAPER DUE

Week Seven – Power, Resistance, Colonialism and Capitalism

March 5:

Comaroff, John and Jean, 1991, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in Southern Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Selection from the introduction. (Web-CT).

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1990. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women". *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 17, No. 1. (Feb., 1990), pp. 41-55. (Web-CT).

March 7:

Biolsi, Thomas. 1995. "The Birth of the Reservation: Making the Modern Individual among the Lakota." *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 22, No. 1. (Feb., 1995), pp. 28-53. (Web-CT).

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 1996. "Theft of Life: The Globalization of Organ Stealing Rumours." *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 12, No. 3. (Jun., 1996), pp. 3-11. (Web-CT).

RESPONSE PAPER DUE

Week Eight - Moral and Epistemological Problems for Anthropologists and Headhunting

March 12:

Rosaldo, Renato. 1993. Chapter 8, "Subjectivity in Social Analysis," (Web-CT)

D'Andrade, Roy. 1995. "Objectivity and Militancy: A Debate (Moral Models in Anthropology)" *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 36, No. 3. (Jun., 1995), pp. 399-408. (Web-CT).

March 14:

Rosaldo, Renato. 1993. Introduction, "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage", (Web-CT)

Needham, Rodney. 1976. "Skulls and Causality" *Man*, New Series, Vol. 11, No. 1. (Mar., 1976), pp. 71-88. (Web-CT).

RESPONSE PAPER DUE

PART THREE: ETHNOGRAPHIES

Week Nine

March 19:

Beth Conklin, *Consuming Grief*

March 21:

Beth Conklin, *Consuming Grief*

Week Ten

March 26:

Essay #1 due

Laura Ahearn, *Invitations to Love*

March 28:

Laura Ahearn, *Invitations to Love*

APRIL 2- 10 – PASSOVER AND SPRING RECESS

Week Eleven

April 11 – required writing workshop.

Week Twelve

April 16:

Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed*

April 18:

Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed*

Week Thirteen

April 23:

Paul Sullivan, *Unfinished Conversations* [selections] (Web-CT)

April 25:

Paul Sullivan, *Unfinished Conversations* [selections] (Web-CT)

Week Fourteen

April 30:

Ethnographic film workshop

May 2: conclusion

essay #2 due.