

Writing Religions and Cultures: Ethnographic Practice

Religion / Anthropology 699 Fall 2015
Th 12:30 - 3:15 504 Hall of Languages

Instructor: Ann Grodzins Gold HL 507 tel: 3-5717 / 3861; email: aggold@syr.edu
Office hrs.: Tu 10-12 or by appointment

Course description

Because so many aspects of religious experience are ineffable, invisible and inexpressible, to chronicle and analyze such experiences poses particular challenges to academic analysis. Yet anthropologists, sociologists and religionists prolifically produce ethnographies of religion. This seminar explores a range of aims, strategies and genres for writing religion in multiple contexts of culture, history and politics. Particular theoretical positions often inform and inspire ethnographic writings on religion; we attend to theory as a force not only shaping practice, but also evolving from it. Some of the authors on this syllabus acknowledge their own identities altered in the field, and many grapple in various ways with the implications of inexplicable experiences. If there is any commonality, it is an insistence that -- when writing religion -- conditions of knowledge and modes of representation are situated in social, political, economic, historical, hierarchical, colonial, and familial circumstances and often dependent on interpersonal relationships.

Readings

Eight books containing required readings should be available at the University Bookstore. They have been placed on 1-day reserve in Bird. In addition, a number of required articles and book sections (and a few recommended ones as well) will be accessible through Blackboard.

Books

- Bender, Courtney. 2003. *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dempsey, Corinne. 2011. *Bringing the Sacred Down to Earth: Adventures in Comparative Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gold, Daniel. 2015. *Provincial Hinduism: Religion and Community in Gwalior City*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, Michael. 2011. *Life Within Limits: Well-being in a World of Want*. Duke University Press.
- Singh, Bhargupati 2015. *Poverty and the Quest for Life: Spiritual and Material Striving in Rural India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stevenson, Lisa. 2014 *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Turner, Edith 1992 *Experiencing Ritual: A New Interpretation of African Healing*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- West, Harry. 2007. *Ethnographic Sorcery*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Articles

- Atay, Tayfun. 2008. "Arriving in Nowhere Land: Studying an Islamic Sufi Order in London," in *Taking Sides: Ethics, Politics and Fieldwork in Anthropology*, edited by Heidi Armbruster and Anna Laerke, 45-64. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Burdick, John. 2013. Chapters 2 & 4 from *The Color of Sound: Race, Religion, and Music in Brazil*. New York University Press.
- Engelke, Matthew. 2004. "'The Endless Conversation': Fieldwork, Writing, and the Marriage of Victor and Edith Turner," in *Significant Others: Interpersonal and Professional Commitments in Anthropology, History of Anthropology*, edited by Richard. Handler, 6-50. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Fisher, Gareth. "Riding with Monks in Airboats or Fieldnotes, June 8-15, 2015"
- Gold, Ann G. n.d. Preface and Chapter 3 from *Shiptown: North Indian Lives Between Rural and Urban*. Unpublished book manuscript.
- Ingold, Tim. 2011. "Culture on the Ground" and "Anthropology is *not* Ethnography" from *Being Alive*, 33-50 & 229-243. Routledge.
- Khan, Naveeda. 2012. Insect Trails Across My Field Notes. *The Yearbook of Comparative Literature* 58: 169-173.
- Kirksey, S. Eben and Stefan Helmreich. 2010. The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography. *Cultural Anthropology* 25(4):545-576.
- Kohn, Eduardo. 2007. How dogs dream: Amazonian natures and the politics of transspecies engagement. *American Ethnologist* Vol. 34 (1):3-24
- Lee, Jo and Tim Ingold. 2006. "Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing," in *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology*, edited by Simon Coleman and Peter Collins, 67-86. Oxford UK: Berg.
- Matsutake Worlds Research Group. 2009. A new form of collaboration in cultural anthropology: Matsutake worlds. *American Ethnologist* 36:380-403.
- Narayan, Kirin. 2002. "The God of Doorways," in *Mementos, Artifacts, and Hallucinations from the Ethnographer's Tent*, edited by Ron Emoff and David Henderson, 61-79. New York: Routledge.
- Narayan, Kirin 2012. Preface and Chapter 1 from *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Orsi, Robert A. 2006. "Have you ever prayed to Saint Jude?" Reflections on Fieldwork in Catholic Chicago," from *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 146-176. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Raffles, Hugh. 2012. Twenty-five Years is a Long Time. *Cultural Anthropology* 27(3):526-534.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2005. "The Last Commodity: Post-Human Ethics and the Global Traffic in "Fresh" Organs," in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, edited by Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier, 145-167. Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2007. "Ire in Ireland," in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, edited by Antonius C.G.M. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka, 202-215. Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Tsing, Anna L. 2015. Selections TBA from *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press.

Turner, Victor. 1968. "A Performance of Ihamba Analysed," from *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia, 156-197*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Wadley, Susan S. TBA

Responsibilities

seminar process All participants should be committed to faithful attendance and diligent reading of all required materials. Responsibility for commenting and raising questions on each week's syllabus readings, and posting your "talking points" on blackboard, is shared by all seminar members. In class you will have a chance to recapitulate your thoughts as discussion starters. *Posts must normally be submitted by dusk on Wednesday nights.*

writing Every student will pursue a research topic related to the course content, but independently conceived, and produce a substantial paper. This may be a critical study via secondary sources of any issue related to the ethnography of religion. Alternatively, it may be based on fieldwork you have already conducted within the previous two years; or it may involve limited fieldwork undertaken in the course of the semester with a locally accessible religious group. The project will build, under the instructor's supervision, through stages of abstract (week 6), outline or preliminary draft with bibliography (week 10), oral presentation (weeks 10-15), and final product: at least 20 but no more than 25 pages (double-spaced) due one week after our last class meeting.

speaking Beyond regular participation through raising points and responding in our weekly conversations, each seminar member will give one coherent and succinct (about 10-minute) oral presentation – based on their individual writing before it is complete; this will allow you to discuss your ideas and benefit from group feedback.

<u>Week/Date</u>	<u>Topic/Readings</u>
1 Th 9/3	organization, introductions, opening questions <i>real / unreal: suspicions, encounters, adventures (4 weeks)</i>
2 Th 9/10	misunderstandings: shapeshifting and gamechanging West, <i>Ethnographic Sorcery</i> (all)
3 Th 9/17	certainties: writing visibility Turner, E. <i>Experiencing Ritual</i> (all); Turner, V. "A Performance of Ihamba Analysed" (PDF) Recommended: Engelke, "Endless Conversation . . ." (PDF)
4 Th 9/24	uncertainties: reimagining illness and suicide Stevenson, <i>Life Beside Itself</i> (all) •• <i>guidelines for research project distributed</i> ••

Special evening session Wednesday September 30, 5:30 - 8:00 pm 441 HL

Corinne Dempsey will join our class for dinner and discussion of her book. There will be **no** meeting Thursday morning!

- 5 **W** 9/30 adventures! meet the author
Dempsey, *Bringing the Sacred Down to Earth*
Talking points this week are due Tuesday evening (not Wednesday)!
I will forward them to our guest.

[Th 10/1 **no class** due to Dempsey event]

what makes good ethnographies?

arts (and crafts) of participation, description, reflection, interpretation (6 weeks)

- 6 Th 10/8 workshop 1: Fisher and Wadley
Fisher, "Riding with Monks"; Wadley, TBA
•• abstracts due ••
- 7 Th 10/15 marriage of rural fieldwork and European theory
Singh, *Poverty and the Quest for life* (all)
- 8 Th 10/22 affection as method, lucidity as style
Gold, *Provincial Hinduism* (all)
Daniel Gold will join us for an hour via Skype
- 9 Th 10/29 workshop 2: Burdick and Gold
Gold, *Shiptown* (selections); Burdick, *Color of Music* (selections)

• *student presentations to be slotted into weeks 10-15* •

- 10 Th 11/5 cooking, feeding and listening
Bender, *Heaven's Kitchen* (all)
• outlines / preliminary drafts due in class •
- 11 Th 11/12 returning
Jackson, *Life Within Limits* (all)

shifts in the works (3 weeks)

- 12 T 11/19 shifting methods and knowledges
Ingold, *Culture on the Ground*; Khan, *Insect tracks*; Kirksey and Helmreich, *Multispecies*; Kohn, *How Dogs Dream*; Matsutake Worlds, a new form of collaboration; Tsing, *Mushroom* selections; (PDFs)
Recommended: Lee and Ingold, "Fieldwork on Foot"

13 **THANKSGIVING BREAK!**

- 14 Th 12/3 identities, ethics and aftermaths
Atay, Nowhere Land; Orsi, Saint Jude; Raffles, Twenty-five years; Ingold,
Anthropology is not Ethnography; Scheper-Hughes, Ire in Ireland & Last
Commodity (PDFs)
- 15 Th 12/10 wrapping up: Ethnography and fiction: blurred genres
Narayan, "God of Doorways" and *Alive in the Writing* selections (PDFs)

•• Final papers will be due at noon on Thursday 17 December ••