

COURSE OUTLINE

ETHNOGRAPHY: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

ANT 3142-A

Larisa Kurtović

FALL 2017

Class schedule:	Wednesdays, 14:30-17:30 (FSS) 1005
Professor's office hours:	Tuesday 15:00-16:00 Wednesday 17:30-18:30 Or by appointment
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On virtual campus:	Yes

OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION

Overview of debates about ethnographic writing through critical reading of classic and contemporary ethnographies with attention to narrative form and technique, contextualization, scale (local, global), location to subject (close, distant), and presence of ethnographer and research participants in text.

GENERAL COURSE OBJECTIVES

Welcome to ANT3142 "Ethnography: Comparative Perspective." This is an upper-division anthropology seminar focused on ethnography as a mode of inquiry and a way of making anthropological knowledge available to others. Our class is not a training module in ethnographic observation and interviewing—its focus, rather, is on ethnography as a form of writing and a means of substantiating anthropological claims. Ethnography is the bread and butter of anthropology—although anthropologists are not the only ones that practice it, ethnography has long been considered the central tool through which anthropologists "make strange familiar and familiar strange." Distinguished by its often immersive, thick descriptions of faraway places, ethnography can be an enchanting genre to both students and the general public. Early anthropological ethnography, which often emulated prior traditions of travel-writing, did much to constitute the figure of an anthropologist as hero, who endures noble suffering in far off and exotic lands, in the name of pursuit of scientific knowledge. Yet the geopolitical and practical aspects of early ethnographic investigations in remote places and the very endeavor of studying "exotic others" made anthropology complicit with the imperial conquest, earning it a not so pleasant nickname of "handmaiden of colonialism." Issues of power and privilege never quite disappeared from anthropology, even after many subsequent moments of crisis and collective reflection. Today, most anthropologists still write ethnographies; granted, these ethnographies nowadays look very different from Malinowski's

totalizing catalogues of “imponderabilia of everyday life.” But even while contemporary anthropological writing draws on different theoretical traditions, new aesthetic sensibilities, and novel ethical and political imperatives, most of ethnographies still rely on long-term engagement with specific groups of people and specific locations. Indeed, despite their many differences, ethnographies are a genre held together by a set of commitments about questions worth asking about the worlds we inhabit, and the most promising approaches to answering them. Our task this semester will be to figure out what anthropologists mean when they say “ethnographic” and how this mode of knowing the world distinguishes itself from others.

We begin with a series of book excerpts and articles that sketch out in broader brush strokes how ethnographic method and writing have changed over time. Much has been written about ethnographic methodology, both by anthropologists and their observers, hence the list provided is a limited one. Rather than giving you an exhaustive survey of the entirety of intradisciplinary debates, the first half of the syllabus flags a few formative moments that proved consequential for future trajectories. The second part of this class is dedicated to reading ethnographies and critically evaluating them. I have chosen three very different books for this purpose, each of which was written and published in the post-positivist (and some would even say, post-modern) era. Each one experiments with form, voice and object in its own unique way and opens a different set of anthropological and methodological questions. Occasionally, chapters from these books will be supplemented with additional readings on methodology and/or ethics and ethnographic films.

In addition to familiarizing you with anthropological ethnography this semester, we will also work on systematically developing and improving your critical reading and writing skills. A class on ethnography requires attention to the assigned readings and willingness to engage with different kinds of textual materials. Throughout the semester, we will experiment with different reading techniques and tactics—what is more, you will be required to routinely reflect on your own reading practices both in class and in writing. Such assignments are not there to torture you or create more busy work—rather, they are opportunities for you to work on your own writing in a rare, small-class setting. Do not be intimidated by that invitation—rather, think about it as a chance to learn something new about the stakes and possibilities of anthropological inquiry.

SPECIFIC COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Introduce students to the historical debates about ethnography as method, a style of writing and as a mode of disseminating anthropological knowledge
2. Advance students’ understanding of practical, ethical and political issues involved in conducting ethnographic work
3. Develop skills for critical reading and discussion of ethnographic texts
4. Encourage the development of students’ writing skills, voice and style

TEACHING METHODS

This is a small, seminar-style course, where most of learning happens through exchange and discussion. This means that much of the responsibility for the class’s success rests on your willingness to engage with the material and come to class prepared. I will very rarely lecture—instead, we will learn through class discussions, respectful disagreements and debate, close readings of text, analysis of news and online materials and exploration of complementary media forms, such as ethnographic film. Students are encouraged to take advantage of discussion forums on Brightspace, to post additional comments or materials that may be of interest to the class.

ASSESSMENT METHODS

All written assignments are submitted through Brightspace. I will accept no printed or hand-written work, so plan accordingly. You will primarily be evaluated on the basis of two short essays, and two take home exams. Basic descriptions of assignments are listed below—as deadlines draw near, I will provide more specific instructions for each one of the assignments. In addition, a quarter of your grade (comprising the rubrics of participation and class reading notes) depends on your willingness and ability to come to class ready for work and keep up with your assigned reading.

Class participation is a crucial aspect of this small, seminar-style class and a necessary ingredient for its success. I will evaluate participation on the basis of class attendance and overall punctuality, and in-class discussion participation. Frequent absences and lack of engagement in class will impact your grade negatively. I also reserve the right to assign pop quizzes on the assigned readings, should the need arise.

Components of the Final Mark

Evaluation format	Weight	Date
Class Participation	10%	Ongoing
Reading notes	15%	Ongoing
Diagnostic analysis	10%	October 4
Take home midterm	20%	October 25, noon
Ethnographic experiments	15%	November 8
Final exam (book review)	30%	December 8, noon

ASSIGNMENTS

Class Reading notes

In order to facilitate class discussion and ensure everyone is keeping up with their reading, each student will be responsible for preparing a brief set of notes which are to be posted on Brightspace discussion boards (in the designated folder) the evening before our class meeting. The reading notes should be no longer than one double-spaced page, and should not take longer than a half an hour to complete. They will not be individually graded, but I will read them before class, and occasionally comment on them online or during class discussion. Many of our class meetings will begin with my summary of the key points raised by your reading responses. As a courtesy, you are allowed to not turn in your reading notes **once** during the semester—with no penalties and no questions asked. But when you do write them, they need to address all the readings assigned for that date, and should take one of the following formats:

- **ARGUMENT:** What is the author's argument? In other words, what is the larger point s/he is trying to make?
- **BACKGROUND:** In what context—intellectual or political—is the author making this argument? With whom is she or he engaging in conversation and why?
- **QUESTIONS:** What questions do you have about the reading or want to discuss in class? Provide at least 3.
- **QUOTES:** Locate memorable or confusing sections of the assigned reading so that we can look at them more closely in class. Provide at least three block quotes, retype and post them on Brightspace. Then explain why they are relevant or caught your attention.
- **CONNECTIONS:** Link concepts and themes from the assigned reading to those in earlier texts. Make at least three distinct points.
- **CURRENT EVENTS:** Tie concepts and questions raised by the reading(s) to an ongoing news story or controversy. Explain the author's ideas and how they relate to an ongoing event.

If the reading notes are submitted in a timely matter (before midnight on the day before the class meeting), if they are thoughtful and follow one of these formats, you will automatically receive the allotted number of points. This means that 15% of your total grade is already guaranteed, if you are willing to put in the work.

Diagnostic analysis:

Choose three articles from an anthropological journal focused on a topic or area of the world that interests you (you may use articles you have already read). Write a 2-3-page reflection, explaining what you liked or disliked about them, focusing especially on the form of ethnographic writing. Some of the questions you might want to discuss are: In what ways do these articles define the object and scope of their inquiry? How does the ethnographer position her/himself vis-à-vis the field and his interlocutors?

What are the theoretical and methodological orientations guiding each one of these articles, and how to they compare one against another? Finally, to what extent have these articles lived up to your notion of what anthropological research or knowledge is supposed to look like?

Midterm exam:

The class midterm exam will be a take-home assignment that will be distributed before the start of October reading week. It will consist of a combination of short answer questions (such as identification and explanation of concepts, quote analyses, or compare and contrast) and two longer, essay length responses (out of choice of three). All the questions will draw heavily on class readings and ask you to refer to concepts, examples and ethnographic vignettes from the texts—in proper form, with page numbers. This midterm accounts for 20% of your overall course grade. In order to do well on it, you will need to keep up with class discussions and assigned readings.

Experimental Practice Ethnographies:

Choose a vibrant public setting off or on campus, where you can easily people-watch for 2 hours. Take notes while observing what is happening around you. Write two different one-page (single-space) descriptions of the same material you've gathered. In two-to-three paragraphs explain the two different approaches you took in the assignments, and what you learned from both of them separately, and together. Tie these points to the class, using proper form. Finally, submit a copy of your notes along with the assignment.

IMPORTANT: Last year's class agreed to publish their ethnographic experiments online, on the site of uOttawa Multimedia Collaboratory: <http://www.cammac.space/introduction/>. I propose that we continue to experiment with informal publication, on a site dedicated to our class, as well as in a PDF document that can we can circulate more broadly, to help showcase what anthropology is, and what it means to be an anthropology major or minor at uOttawa.

However, given the public nature of this prospective website, I do want us to have a discussion about the manner in which to organize this, as well as offer a chance to hear dissenting voices, and your concerns, should you have any. More on this to follow on the first day of class.

Should we agree to do this, I will also make it a requirement that each of you submit a photograph or a drawing of your ethnographic site which we can include along with your essays.

Final take-home exam:

Your final exam will be a comprehensive book review of one of the three books we have read in the class. This 5-7 page long analysis will provide a summary of the book's key themes, its constitutive chapters, its methodological approach and theoretical framing. It will also discuss and evaluate these aspects in relation to other framing texts we have read this quarter, particularly those from the first half of the class. This exam will be due at 1pm on December 17, and should be submitted through Brightspace.

POLICY ON ATTENDANCE AND LATE SUBMISSIONS

Attendance is required for the successful completion of this course. Absences must be justified, and unauthorized late arrivals carry a penalty. Since our class meets only once a week for three hours, even one absence is a great loss.

Absences from exams and the late submission of assignments must be supported by a medical certificate. See the University policy on this matter.

<http://www.uottawa.ca/governance/regulations.html#r36>

Absences for any other serious reason must be justified in writing to the professor or to the academic secretariats of the Faculty within five business days following the date of the exam or the assignment deadline. The professor or the Faculty reserves the right to accept or refuse the reason put forward. Justifications such as travel, jobs or the misreading of the examination timetable are not acceptable.

We suggest that you advise your professor as early as possible if a religious holiday or a religious event will force you to be absent during an evaluation.

Late assignments

Late assignments will be penalized 10% for each subsequent day (including weekends) following the due date if justification is not acceptable.

SCHEDULE

Week I: Wednesday, September 6, 2017

WRITING CULTURE?

Introductions, rationalities & scope

Read: Clifford, James. 1986 "Introduction: Partial Truths" In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. James Clifford and George Marcus (Eds.) Berkeley: University of California Press. pg 1-27.

Politics of Representation

Week II: Wednesday, September 13, 2017

VOICE AND STYLE

Read (short excerpts):

Abu-Lughod, "Guest and Daughter" from *Veiled Sentiments*

Bourgois, excerpt from *In Search of Respect*

Hurston, Introduction in *Mules and Men*

Levi-Strauss, "Setting out" from *Tristes Tropiques*

Raffles, "The Deepest of Reveries" from *Insectopedia*

Stewart, "The Anthropologists" from *Ordinary Affects*

Taussig, "The Face of World History" from *What color is the Sacred?*

RECOMMENDED (especially if you have not read them yet!):

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. 'Introduction: The Subject, Method and Scope of this Inquiry". in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. p. 1-20.

Mead, Margaret. 1928. *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (foreword by Boas + Introduction, pp. xxi-xxii, 3-12) New York: Perennial Classics

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Notes on the Balinese Cock Fight." In *Interpretation of Cultures*

Rabinow, Paul. 1977. "Chapter 7: Entering." In *Reflections on the Fieldwork in Morocco*.

BOOK I: Renegade Dreams

Week III: Wednesday, September 20, 2017

Read: Ralph ix-pg. 55 (Preface, Intro and Chapter 1)

Week IV: Wednesday, September 27, 2017.

Read: Ralph pg. 55-118 (Chapters 2 & 3)

Week V: Wednesday, October 4, 2017.

***DIAGNOSTIC ANALYSIS DUE

Read: Ralph pg. 119-186 (Chapters 4, 5 and Conclusion.)

Book II: The Life of Cheese

Week VI: Wednesday, October 11, 2017

Read: Paxson, (Preface, Chapters 1, and 2)

Week VII: Wednesday, October 18, 2017

Read: Paxson, (Chapters 3, 4 & 5)

Midterm

Week VIII: Wednesday, October 25, 2017: READING WEEK; NO CLASS

***TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DUE (upload via Brightspace by noon)

Week IX: Wednesday, November 1, 2017

Read: Paxson, (Chapters 6, 7 and 8)

INTERLUDE: Arts of noticing and the craft of writing

Week X: Wednesday, November 8, 2017

(NOTE: This week is prep for the ethnographic exercise)

Read:

Pandian, Anand, Stuart McLean, and Paper Boat Collective, eds. 2017. "Introduction: Archipelagos, A Voyage in Writing." In *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*. School for Advanced Research Advanced Seminar. 11-28. Durham: Duke University Press.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 2015. Pages 1-25 in *Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press.

Moretti, Cristina. 2017. "Chapter 5: Walking." In *A Different Kind of Ethnography: Imaginative Practices and Creative Methodologies*, edited by Dara Culhane and Denielle Elliott. North York, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Recommended: "How I write" –transcript of an interview with anthropologist Renato Rosaldo at: http://web.stanford.edu/group/howiwrite/Transcripts/Rosaldo_transcript.html

BOOK III: Life Beside Itself (or "Coming 'home'")

Week XI: Wednesday, November 15, 2017

Read: Stevenson, Life Beside Itself, Intro, Ch.1 & 2

Recommended: Simpson, Audre. 2007. "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice,' and Colonial Citizenship." *Junctures* 9: 67–80.

Week XII: Wednesday, November 22, 2017

Read: Stevenson, Life Beside Itself, Ch.3 & 4

****ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPERIMENTS DUE

Week XIII: Wednesday, November 29, 2017

Read: Stevenson, Life Beside Itself, Ch.5 & 6, and Epilog

FINAL EXAM: December 8, at noon (due via Brightspace)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books (available for purchase at Octopus Books @ 116 Third Ave):

Paxson, Heather. 2013. *The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America*. California Studies in Food and Culture, v. 41. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ralph, Laurence. 2014. *Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Stevenson, Lisa. 2014. *Life beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Recommended Books

Causey, Andrew. 2017. *Drawn to See: Drawing as an Ethnographic Method*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Culhane, Dara, and Denielle Elliott, eds. 2017. *A Different Kind of Ethnography: Imaginative Practices and Creative Methodologies*. North York, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Narayan, Kirin. 2012. *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Short texts (available on the class Brightspace site in PDF):

Additional readings include book excerpts and journal articles (see class schedule)

RESOURCES FOR YOU

FACULTY MENTORING CENTRE - <http://www.sciencessociales.uottawa.ca/mentor/fra/>

The goal of the Mentoring Centre is to help students with their academic and social well-being during their time at the University of Ottawa. Regardless of where students stand academically, or how far along they are in completing their degree, the Mentoring Centre is there to help them continue on the path to success.

A student may choose to visit the Mentoring Centre for very different reasons: talking to older peers to gain insight into programs and services offered by the University, or to simply brush up on study skills (time management, note-taking, exam preparation, etc.).

In sum, at the Mentoring Centre, you can discuss all things academic and everything about life on campus with mentors who are social science students themselves and trained to answer all your questions.

ACADEMIC WRITING HELP CENTRE - <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/writing/>

The Academic Writing Help Centre provides free, individualized help and advice for writing academic assignments. With the help of our advisors, you learn to correct your errors, to write well independently, to improve your critical analysis and to sharpen your argumentation skills—everything you need to master the official language of your choice.

CAREER SERVICES - <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/careers/>

This unit provides an array of career-development services and resources designed to help students identify and put forward the critical skills they need to enter the work force.

COUNSELLING-SERVICE - <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/personnel>

There are many reasons to call on the Counseling Service, including:

- personal counselling
- career counseling
- study skills counseling

ACCESS SERVICE - <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/acces/>

The University has always strived to meet the needs of individuals with learning disabilities or with other temporary or permanent functional disabilities (hearing/visual impairments, sustained health issues, mental health problems), and the campus community works collaboratively so that you can develop and maintain your autonomy, as well as reach your full potential throughout your studies. You can call on a wide range of services and resources, all provided with expertise, professionalism and confidentiality.

If barriers are preventing you from integrating into university life and you need adaptive measures to progress (physical setting, arrangements for exams, learning strategies, etc.), contact the Access Service right away:

- in person at the University Centre, Room 339
- online at <http://www.sass.uottawa.ca/access/registration/>
- by phone at 613-562-5976

Deadlines for submitting requests for adaptive measures during exams

- midterms, tests, deferred exams: seven business days before the exam, test or other written evaluation (excluding the day of the exam itself).
- final exams:
 - November 15 for the fall session
 - March 15 for the winter session
 - Seven business days before the date of the exam for the spring/summer session (excluding the day of the exam itself).

STUDENT RESOURCES CENTRE - <http://www.communitylife.uottawa.ca/en/resources.php>
These centres strive to meet all sorts of student needs.

BE AWARE OF ACADEMIC FRAUD

Academic fraud consists of dishonest and wrongful acts on exams, tests or assignments, resulting in flawed grades and assessments. The University does not tolerate academic fraud, and anyone found guilty of this behaviour is liable to severe penalties.

Here are some examples of academic fraud:

- Plagiarizing or cheating in any way;
- Presenting falsified research data;
- Submitting an assignment of which you are not the sole author ;
- Presenting the same work from another course without written permission from the professors concerned.

With the development of the Internet these past years, it has become much easier to detect plagiarism. Indeed, given the powerful tools now at their disposal, your professors can, by typing a few simple words, readily trace the exact source of a text on the Web.

For more information on fraud and how to avoid it, you can refer to the Faculty web page, which offers tips to help you with your studies and the writing process for university-level projects at the following address: <http://www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/undergraduate/student-life-academic-resources>. You can also refer to the Faculty web page for information on plagiarism in university assignments: <http://web5.uottawa.ca/mcs-smc/academicintegrity/home.php>.

Persons who commit or try to commit academic fraud, or who are accomplices in fraud, will be penalized. Here are some of the possible sanctions:

- a grade of F for the assignment or course in question;
- the imposition of three to 30 more credits as a condition of graduation;
- suspension or expulsion from their faculty.

To consult the regulation, go to: <http://www.uottawa.ca/governance/regulations.html#r72>.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASMENT

The University of Ottawa does not tolerate any form of sexual violence. Sexual violence refers to any act of a sexual nature committed without consent, such as rape, sexual harassment or online harassment. The University, as well as student and employee associations, offers a full range of resources and services allowing members of our community to receive information and confidential assistance and providing for a procedure to report an incident or make a complaint. For more information, visit

www.uOttawa.ca/sexual-violence-support-andprevention.

Comparative Politics is an international journal containing articles devoted to comparative analysis of political institutions and behavior. Articles range from political patterns of emerging nations to contrasts in the structure of established societies. Comparative Politics communicates new ideas and research findings to social scientists, scholars, and students. ASIAN PERSPECTIVE. A Biannual Journal of Regional and International Affairs. published by The Institute for Far Eastern Studies Kyungnam University Publisher: Jae Kyu Park Editor-in-Chief: Manwoo Lee. Titles of Recent Articles: The Evolution of U.S.-China Security Relations and Its Implications for the Korean Peninsula. Military Capabilities of South and North Korea: A Comparative Study. Comparative Perspective. Related terms: Gender Equality. Ethnographies of violence and suffering are still needed to add a dimension of experience to the (legal) language of rights, and thus contribute to a shared understanding of those sufferings that a universally accepted standard of human rights may help alleviate. Not only ethnography, but also our regained confidence in anthropological theory will contribute to the achievement of human rights, because anthropology's theoretical language can embrace cultural differences within a single (scholarly) discourse. Leaf-cutting ants (*Acromyrmex echinator*) preferentially use the right mandibles in the leading position when cutting leaves (Jasmin and Devaux, 2015). To uncover emic perspectives, ethnographers talk to people, observe what they do, and participate in their daily activities with them. Emic perspectives are essential for anthropologists' efforts to obtain a detailed understanding of a culture and to avoid interpreting others through their own cultural beliefs. Etic perspectives refer to explanations for behavior by an outside observer in ways that are meaningful to the observer. For an anthropologist, etic descriptions typically arise from conversations between the ethnographer and the anthropological community. These explanations tend Ethnography is a scientific written account detailing the lives of a society in depth through observation of their customs. Fieldwork, on the other hand, is an attempt to understand what it means to view the world from another cultural perspective through immersing oneself in the society in question for a prolonged period of time (Heil, Macdonald and Nettheim: Forthcoming). These local specialists unravel the complexities of understanding tribal customs to foreign ethnographers. In that sense, it may be said that ethnography could be deemed as less invasive as it may not always be necessary to conduct fieldwork utilising techniques involving a higher level of personal involvement, in order to produce an ethnographic account.