

Collaborative Ethnography/Ethnographic Theory and Research Methods

Winter 2021 | Thursdays 1.30-4 pm on Zoom

Instructors:

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As a collaborative teaching method made possible by the virtual format of distance learning in a time of COVID-19, this course explores what it means to do collaborative ethnography. We approach collaboration as the foundation of ethnographic work. Our relationships are literally the units from which our projects materialize, our methods grow, and our ethnographic forms flourish. We, thus, practice and teach collaboration at every level of ethnographic research design: from co-conceptualizing a project, to co-building methodologies, to co-writing fieldnotes, to co-analyzing data, to co-producing ethnographies. The collaborative pedagogy in this class stems from the instructors' own long-term collaborative research project in which we developed what we call "method-making in concert." For each of us, methodological creativity and accountability have been central to the research we have undertaken with our interlocutors in the field. Traditionally, methods have been treated as distinct from and instrumental to theory, and a means to an end, which is the final product of ethnography. However, we see methods as the center of conversations about theory, power, and coloniality. By working in collaboration, we aim to disrupt the hierarchies between university-based scholars and our co-locutors and related models of academic expertise, and to build instead the grounds of decolonial ethnographic work that can understand our world and also transform it. The students will engage in short-term virtual and in-person (in keeping with safety guidelines) fieldwork over the course of the semester. We will teach, and explore together with students, experimental methods and outcomes, and welcome multimodal ethnography projects that include experimental writing, drawing, visual, and sound recording. Students will be divided into virtual research pods/teams and will complete both classwork and research projects in tandem with one another. We, the instructors, also commit to completing a co-authored article as a final outcome of this course.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

1. Make friends! (we're not kidding!)
2. Practice and grow in these collaborative relationships as a foundation for ethnographic work;
3. Understand and put into practice the role of experimental ethnographic methods in theory-building;
4. Develop and implement a collaborative research plan: research questions, methods, and outcomes;
5. Produce an ethnography reflective of this course's invitation into collaborative and experimental work.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Cox, Aimee Meredith. *Shapeshifters: Black girls and the choreography of citizenship*. Duke University Press, 2015.

Gonzalez, Martha. *Chican@ Artivistas: Music, Community, and Transborder Tactics in East Los Angeles*. University of Texas Press, 2020.

Pérez, Elizabeth. *Religion in the kitchen: Cooking, talking, and the making of Black Atlantic traditions*. Vol. 9. NYU Press, 2016.

Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk interruptus: Political life across the borders of settler states*. Duke University Press, 2014.

**The rest of the materials (such as articles and book excerpts) will be uploaded to a shared Google Drive folder.*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Participation (30%)

You are expected to attend class having completed all of the required reading and ready to provide active, thoughtful contributions to seminar discussions and in-class activities. Each class meeting, we will spend the first half of class discussing the major themes from the week's readings, including the author's main points, what is at stake, who the author is writing for, and who the author is writing against. In the second half of class, we will workshop the weekly ethnographic assignment due for that day in order to refine the work completed and prepare for the next week's assignment.

Weekly Assignments (50%)

From weeks 3-12, you will complete a weekly writing assignment. These are cumulative and designed to support you in moving through each of the steps of collaborative ethnographic work in the course of our semester. Weekly writing assignments are due immediately before our class meeting. You will bring the assignment to seminar in order to receive feedback. Instructors will also periodically give you more detailed feedback. Peer and instructor feedback should be used to move you along to the next assignment. For example, feedback on your Week 3 Research Question/Project Idea should help you write your Week 4 Full Proposal, etc.

Final Ethnography (20%)

The final ethnography is a workshopped version of the ethnography you have been building collaboratively throughout the semester. Your ethnography should be 15-20 pages for prose. The length for experimental ethnographies will be determined in conversation with the instructors. *Final Ethnographies are due April 14.*

Course Schedule

PART I: MAKING FRIENDS

Week 1: January 14: Introductions

Week 2: January 21: Meet your professors! // Intro to Collaborative Methods

ASSIGNMENT: QUESTIONS FOR LAURA & YANA

- McTighe, Laura, and with Women With A Vision (WWAV). "Theory on the Ground: Ethnography, Religio-Racial Study, and the Spiritual Work of Building Otherwise." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88, no. 2 (2020): 407-439.
- Stainova, Yana. "Enchantment as Method." *Anthropology and Humanism* 44, no. 2 (2019): 214-230.

PART 2: DEVELOP A SHARED QUESTION

Week 3: January 28 - What's in a Question?

ASSIGNMENT: DRAFT RESEARCH QUESTION/ PROJECT IDEA + ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES

- First half of *Chican@ Artivistas*
- Emergent Strategy: <https://t.co/c9VNp6CziH?amp=1>
- Black Space Manifesto: <https://www.blackspace.org/manifesto>
- Selection from *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*

Recommended:

- Boellstorff, Tom, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and Tina L. Taylor. *Ethnography and virtual worlds: A handbook of method*. Princeton University Press, 2012.
- *to be expanded, based on student research projects*

Week 4: February 4 – Refine Question in Pairs

ASSIGNMENT: WRITE FULL PROPOSAL

- Second half of *Chican@ Artivistas*
- "Method-making in concert" grant text
- "Undocumented Activist Theory and a Decolonial Methodology" in Bejarano, Carolina Alonso, Lucia Juárez, Mirian García and Daniel Goldstein 2019 *Decolonizing Ethnography*. Duke University Press.

Recommended:

- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Zed Books Ltd., 2013.

PART 3: PLAN AND PRACTICE YOUR METHODS

Week 5: February 11 – Sensory Beginnings, Ethnographic Emplacement

ASSIGNMENT: FIRST VISIT + FIVE SENSES FIELDNOTES

- Part I: *Shapeshifters*
- “Ethnographic Ableism: Structural Silencing of Physical Disability in Anthropological Research”
<https://www.thenewethnographer.org/the-new-ethnographer/2018/08/20/ethnographic-ableism-structural-silencing-of-physical-disability-in-anthropological-research>

Recommended:

- Causey, Andrew. Chapter. *Drawn to See: Drawing as an Ethnographic Method*. University of Toronto Press. 2016.
- Malkki, Lisa. “Tradition and Improvisation in Ethnographic Field Research” 162-189 in *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork* (Cerwonka and Malkki)
- “Writing Tips” from AnthroWrites website (<https://www.anthrowrites.com/writing-tips>)
- Besky, Sarah. 2015. “Can’t Get There from Here? Writing Place and Moving Narratives.” *Savage Minds / anthro{dendum}*. March 23. <https://savage minds.org/2015/03/23/cant-get-there-from-here-writing-place-and-moving-narratives/>

BREAK: February 18

Week 6: February 25 – Deep Listening

ASSIGNMENT: SECOND VISIT + FIELDNOTES TO SELF

- Part II: *Shapeshifters*
- Berry, Maya, Claudia Chávez Argüelles, Shanya Cordis, Sarah Ihmoud, and Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada. 2017. “Toward a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field.” *Cultural Anthropology* 32: 537-565.

Recommended:

- Cavarero, Adriana (2005) “Introduction”, in *For More Than One Voice*.
- Calvino, Italo (1988) “A King Listens”, in *Under The Jaguar Sun*. (Translated by William Weaver). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Week 7: March 4 – Reflections on Collaborative Note-Taking

ASSIGNMENT: THIRD VISIT + FIELDWORK CORRESPONDENCE

- Part III: *Shapeshifters*
- Excerpts from letters between Yana and Laura
- “Fieldwork Correspondence” in Cerwonka, Allaine, and Liisa H. Malkki. *Improvising theory: Process and temporality in ethnographic fieldwork*. University of Chicago Press, 2008

PART 4: ANALYZE YOUR DATA

Week 8: March 11 – Making-Meaning Together

ASSIGNMENT: BRAINSTORM/ SWAP NOTE-TAKING WHILE OTHER TALKS

- Introduction + Part I: *Religion in the Kitchen*
- Stewart, Kathleen (2008) "Weak Theory in an Unfinished World," *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2008.

Week 9: March 18 – Concept-Making in Concert

ASSIGNMENT: COME UP WITH KEY CONCEPTS (JOY, ETC)

- Part II: *Religion in the Kitchen*
- Introduction + Selections from "An Otherwise Anthropology":
<https://culanth.org/fieldsights/series/an-otherwise-anthropology>

Week 10: March 25 – Sharing the Load

ASSIGNMENT: ETHNOGRAPHY OUTLINE + ROLE DISTRIBUTION

- Part III: *Religion in the Kitchen*
- Johanna Hedva, "Sick Woman Theory" <http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory>

PART 5: PRODUCE AN ETHNOGRAPHY

Week 11: April 1 – Finding a Genre

ASSIGNMENT: CHOOSE AND IMPROVISE WITH A FORMAT

- Introduction + Chapters 1-3: *Mohawk Interruptus*
- Hamdy, Sherine, Coleman Nye et al. 2017. *Lissa: A Story About Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution*. North York, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press. Pp. 72-135; 222-235.

Recommended:

- Excerpt from "Liquor Store Theatre"?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPmJD6gNT3A&feature=emb_err_woyt
- "Undocumented Theater: Writing and Resistance" in Bejarano, Carolina Alonso, Lucia Juárez, Mirian García and Daniel Goldstein 2019 *Decolonizing Ethnography*. Duke University Press.
- "Fieldnotes to First Drafts" from AnthroWrites website
(<https://www.anthrowrites.com/fieldnotefirstdraft>)

Week 12: April 8: Imagining the Social Life of Your Work

ASSIGNMENT: REVISE ETHNOGRAPHY THINKING ABOUT AUDIENCE AND WORK IT DOES IN THE WORLD

- Chapters 4-6 + Conclusion: *Mohawk Interruptus*
- Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Getting the Story Right, Telling the Story Well: Indigenous Activism, Indigenous Research," in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.

FINAL ETHNOGRAPHY DUE APRIL 14

PARTY: APRIL 15

On Stress, Wellness, Justice, and Mutual Aid:

It is important to recognize and name the different pressures, burdens, and stressors you may be facing, whether personal, emotional, physical, financial, mental, academic, or political. At no time has this been truer than now. In the coming months, we urge you to make yourself—your own health, sanity, and wellness—a priority, and to extend that same care to your friends and fellow community members. We all know that sleep, exercise, and eating well can be a part of a healthy regimen to cope with stress. These are also essential ways of sustaining yourself amid the many systemic and intimate attacks with which we are bombarded constantly. Resources exist to support you, and our movements for justice are deeply and widely felt. We encourage you to make use of all the tools and resources you can. We will talk about many of these strategies throughout the semester. Most of all, please know that our doors are always open.