ETHNOGRAPHY OF REPRODUCTION

Course Syllabus

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Reproduction is a central issue in theories of gender stratification cross-culturally. Reproduction is both a most intimate topic for individuals, and one of great concern for states and international organizations formulating population policy. This seminar explores the meanings of reproductive beliefs and practices in comparative perspective. Our comparison focuses on (but is not limited to) ethnographic examples from North America and from sub-Saharan Africa (contrasting societies with relatively low fertility and high utilization of technology with those exhibiting mostly high fertility and low utilization of technology). Two themes run throughout the course to best examine the role of reproduction in social and anthropological theory. On the one hand, we explore how reproductive beliefs and practices produce and transform the multiple identities that define persons and groups (regarding gender, sexuality, culture/ethnicity, citizenship, and class). On the other hand, we investigate the relationship between reproductive beliefs and practices and the concept of agency. We look at the social construction of “choice” and choosers regarding decisions to conceive or not to conceive, to bear or not to bear children, and the timing of these events. We examine the topics of abortion activism, social vs. biological entry into motherhood, birth practices and symbolism, infancy and sociability, indigenous theories of procreation and belonging, reproductive insecurity, infertility, assisted fertility (new reproductive technologies), pre-natal diagnosis, coming of age in the neo-liberal sexual economy, stratified reproduction, and medical citizenship.

The class will be run as a seminar. A small amount of lecturing will accompany professor and student-led discussions. There is a lot of room for student input into the shape of daily class sessions. We will also benefit from guest lectures. Prior experience in anthropology and either gender studies, medical anthropology, or African studies is assumed. Pre-requisites for the course are an entry-level SOAN course, and at least one upper-level SOAN or WGST course addressing issues related to women’s health, particularly one of the following: SOAN 226, 262, 260, 150, 229, or WGST 205, 250.
II. COURSE MATERIALS

A. Required Texts (available at bookstore)
   Cole, Jennifer (2010) Sex and Salvation: Imagining the Future in Madagascar
   Davis-Floyd, Robbie (2003) Birth as an American Rite of Passage (2nd ed).
   Feldman-Savelsberg, Pamela (1999) Plundered Kitchens, Empty Wombs:
   Threatened Reproduction and Identity in the Cameroon Grassfields.
   Community (2nd ed).
   Infancy in West Africa.
   African Crisis.

B. Reserve Readings and Research Guide
   All required article-length readings are on e-reserves at Gould Library. Access
   them using the password SOAN. To help you with all your papers, and particularly with
   your final project, a research guide for our course is available at the following URL:
   http://gouldguides.carleton.edu/soan395.
III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Attendance and Participation: This is a seminar class. Attendance is important because your very presence adds something to class. More importantly, the way you are present and participating makes a difference in how both you and other members of this seminar learn. There are many ways of participating: questioning, commenting, listening carefully when other students ask questions or propose a new or different way to think about the materials we are studying, eye contact, nodding. We should all honor and encourage these different forms of participation in each other. I hope and expect that everyone will participate verbally by at least the second week of class. Please let me know before class, if possible, if and why you will be absent. (10%)

B. Discussion Starters: Based on your reading of assigned texts and the way you relate these to other readings or issues, prepare a small set of questions to start class discussion for a day. Each student will do this around four times, depending upon the size of the class. (15% total)

C. Topic Statement and Preliminary Bibliography for Final Project: Hand in one paragraph describing the topic you have chosen for your final project (see F., below). Attach a ca. 10-item preliminary bibliography, written in anthropological citation style. Bibliographies should include both books and research articles from scholarly anthropological (perhaps also sociological, demographic, gender studies, and medical social science) journals Please indicate which option you plan to choose for the final project. Due Apr 26 (Wk 4). (10%)

D. Book Reviews: After examining some examples of book reviews in professional anthropological journals, you will write a two to three page book review worthy of submission to a journal. I will give you a letter of request (as do journals) and a set of criteria to follow. The book you review should be a recent and meaningful anthropological work related to your final project. Due May 17 (Week 7). (20%)

E. Theoretical Focus Statement for Final Project: Hand in a one page discussion of the theoretical focus you will use in your final project. What key questions regarding reproduction and social theory will you address? What is the relation between these questions and the empirical materials you are using in your project? At this time you should also finalize, in writing, your final project option. Due May 25 (Week 8). (10%)

F. Final Project: Your final project should be on a topic of your choice relating to the ethnography of reproduction. If you wish, feel free to reach beyond the cultures and geographic areas dealt with in this syllabus. Keep in mind your own experiences and interests; I hope the work you do on this project will help you in other endeavors both at Carleton and beyond (e.g. comps, Fulbright applications, graduate school, non-profit work). While using sources from other disciplines is fine, and in many cases desirable, the project must use contemporary anthropological writing from prominent professional journals and presses. In evaluating the final project, I look for thoroughness and imagination in both topic development and library research skills, synthesis of materials, critical analysis, and use of anthropological concepts.

There are two options for your final project, both of which require similar, and extensive, library research. Option One is a fifteen to twenty page term paper. Option Two is an eight to ten page research proposal (submittable to a major funding source, such as the Social Science Research Council or the National Science Foundation, accompanied by an extensive
annotated bibliography. Specific guidelines for the research proposal will follow early in the term. Due **Wednesday, June 5, at 4:00 p.m.** (30%)

**G. Oral Presentation of Final Project:** The last class session will be devoted to oral presentations of the final projects. We will run this session as a professional workshop. Paper writers will “teach” their topic to the class, through formal presentation followed by Q/A discussion. Proposal writers will similarly present their topics in a mock research funding interview. The rest of the class will serve as a panel of NSF, SSRC or Fulbright reviewers, generating a Q/A discussion. (5%)**

**H. Academic honesty:** Cite correctly (see style sheet below, or use the American Ethnologist option found at: [http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/soan/resources/citation/](http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/soan/resources/citation/)) and do not plagiarize (see [http://webapps.acs.carleton.edu/campus/doc/honesty/](http://webapps.acs.carleton.edu/campus/doc/honesty/)).

**I. Citation norms** You are **required** to follow anthropological citation style (guideline in )syllabus. This is part of **professional practice**; since this is an anthropology seminar, you will write like an anthropologist.

**J. Deadlines and accommodations:** Students with **disabilities or other concerns** that affect their ability to participate fully in class or to meet all course requirements are encouraged to bring this to the attention of the instructor at the beginning of term so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged. **Deadlines are deadlines,** including presentations for which you have signed up. Nonetheless, if you talk to me **beforehand** about extenuating circumstances, I am not an ogre and will accommodate your needs by negotiating a new due date within the realm of fairness. **Departmental policy is to subtract one letter grade per assignment for each day that assignment is late.**

**IV. STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

**Student Learning Objectives** include learning to: 1) Connect information about historical and contemporary socio-cultural phenomena; 2) Formulate appropriate anthropological research questions; 3) Select appropriate anthropological research methods and 4) Apply anthropological theory to analyze socio-cultural phenomena. For more on SOAN student learning outcomes, see: [http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/soan/major/slos/](http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/soan/major/slos/).

**V. ANTHROPOLOGICAL CITATION STYLE**

In papers for this and other anthropology classes, you should use the correct citation style, following the major professional journals published by the American Anthropological Association, including **American Anthropologist.** **Following this style is a requirement.** An online guide is available via the SOAN Department website ([https://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/soan/resources/citation/](https://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/soan/resources/citation/)). Click on **AAA Style Guide,** which will bring you here: [http://www.aaanet.org/publications/style_guide.pdf](http://www.aaanet.org/publications/style_guide.pdf) (reference style is on pp. 10-14 of the AAA document). Ask if you have questions. A summary of this citation style is below:

**In the course of your text,** you should cite authors whose ideas you use with their last name and the date of publication, and can even include more than one citation if you got the idea from more than one source (Ginsburg 1989; Ginsburg and Rapp 1991). If you **quote** an
author, e.g. that “the powers of village women... [do not] provide women with the last word,” (Harding 1975:308), you include the page number(s). It is preferable to include page numbers for specific ideas, even if you are not quoting. Note the placement of punctuation, and that the citation and period/comma are outside of the quotation marks.

References Cited (not “Bibliography”), placed starting on a new page at the end of your text, does not include any publication not cited in the text. All entries must be listed alphabetically by last name of author, and chronologically arranged for two or more titles by the same author. Nothing, except “in,” is underlined in References Cited. The layout should be as follows:

1) for a journal article, showing the volume and issue numbers, and page numbers:
Becker, Gay
If the journal article is in a theme issue, include information as follows:
Heriot, M. Jean

2) for a chapter in a book with editors (“in” is italicized, book title comes before editors’ names, page numbers come before the place of publication and publisher; this one shows how to cite co-authored works):
Bledsoe, Caroline H. and Papa Sow

3) for a book (title is capitalized; date, place of publication [use the first one listed], and publisher all included):
Riedmann, Agnes

4) for internet sources: include the entire URL as well as as much author, date, and publisher information as possible. The point is to let the reader find what you have found, and to let the reader assess the quality and context of the source:
United Nations.
SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

SUMMARY OF TOPICS

Theorizing Reproduction
Abortion: Reproductive Rights and Choices
Entry into Social vs. Biological Motherhood
Birth, as a Rite of Passage and as Site of Control and Resistance
Reproductive Insecurity: Worrying about Human and Social Reproduction
Reincarnation, Reproducing the Culture of Infancy
Coming of Age/Imagining the Future in the Neoliberal Sexual Economy
New Reproductive Technologies
Birth, Medical Citizenship, and Stratified Reproduction

DAY BY DAY

Week 1
T Apr 2  Introduction

Th Apr 4  Theorizing Reproduction

*In what ways are human and social reproduction distinctive, and in what ways do they relate to each other? What is the relationship between human reproduction and social identities? What is the relationship between human reproduction and gender stratification? With what different perspectives have anthropologists approached the issue of reproduction?*


Week 2

T Apr 9 Abortion

Abortion has been the focus of women's struggle for reproductive choice and reproductive rights in the U.S. in recent years. This book focuses particularly on the role of personal life histories in becoming a "pro-choice" or "pro-life" activist. What links can you discern between the reproductive life stories of these Fargo activists and broader issues regarding the relationship between human reproduction and social reproduction? Does anthropology offer any tools in seeking a middle ground in this increasingly polarized debate?


Th Apr 11 Abortion II

What different voices can we discern regarding the risks of reproduction and women's disproportionate burden? How is gender stratification differently construed by activists on both sides of the abortion rights debate? How does the issue of abortion bring the relationship between human reproduction and assumptions about gendered roles in social reproduction into sharp relief? Can we fruitfully connect abstract and aggregate notions such as social reproduction to the concrete particulars of Ginsburg’s life history approach?


In class T or Th: Short presentation by prof on her own work on abortion strategies of elite vs. non-elite women in urban Cameroon; Possible Film Selections: Abortion Stories, When Abortion Was Illegal, I Witness.

Week 3

T Apr 16 Entry into Social vs. Biological Motherhood

Culturally ideal life courses as well as an individual's reproductive goals are often quite different from the messiness of actual life histories, which nonetheless get patterned into demographic "facts" and "reproducible" social structures. What are the contingencies that shape young Cameroonian women's entry in social motherhood? How do the concepts of vital conjunctures and horizons help us understand not only the relationship between education and fertility in Cameroon, but also pathways to becoming an activist in the U.S. abortion debate (cf. Ginsburg)?


Th Apr 18 Entry into Social vs. Biological Motherhood II

Guest speaker: Kristin Partlo, Social Science Librarian, Gould Library
In what ways can ethnography best be used to address political and policy implications of demographic "facts," such as the relationship between education and fertility? In what ways can quantitative demographic work (e.g. on patterns of spacing between first and second births, or on contraceptive use and abortion) inform ethnographic work on the locally-bounded lived experience of reproductive processes?


N.B. Professor must leave class 15 min. early; Kristin Partlo will take over.

Week 4

T Apr 23 Birth

In what ways do the experience and social organization of birth serve as a rite of passage? In this segment we explore the role of birth, especially first births, in the creation and transformation of identities. Please come to class with questions for our guest speaker, and with open eyes about Labor and Delivery at Northfield Hospital’s First Touch Birth Center.


Possible Film Selections: The Business of Being Born; All My Babies

Th Apr 25 Birth II

Fieldtrip to First Touch Birth Center, Northfield Hospital

Continuing our exploration of the role of birth in the creation and transformation of identities, what other identities—cross-cutting with gendered identities—are formed through the birthing process? How is birth a site of control, hegemony, and resistance? Does this change when alternatives to hospital birth are created within the American context?

Davis-Floyd, R. (2003 [1992]) Birth as an American Rite of Passage (try to finish the entire book; Ch.s 5, 6 and Conclusion are absolutely required).

F Apr 26 Topic statement and preliminary bibliography due, 9:00, electronic submission

Week 5

T Apr 30 Reproductive Insecurity: Worrying about Human and Social Reproduction

What are the relationships between theories of human reproduction and such basic aspects of social identity as kinship? Do these theories reflect or create gender relations?

Th May 2  Reproductive Insecurity II

How is insecurity concerning human reproduction related to insecurity regarding the reproduction of particular social and cultural forms, of a sense of cultural distinctiveness and group identity? What are the dimensions contributing to reproductive insecurity? What are the fault lines in society when members of a group debate these topics? Can the anthropology of reproduction be fruitfully related to political anthropology (e.g. the politics of belonging/primary patriotism)?


Midterm Break

Week 6

T May 7  Infancy

Moving our focus from mothers to babies, how does birth, quite literally, serve as a "passage" between different identities? How do religion and practical action combine to reproduce Beng identities?


N.B.: Public reading from Braided Worlds by Alma Gottlieb and Philip Graham, WCC 236, 5:00 pm, Wed. May 8. One point extra credit for attending!

Th May 9  Infancy II

Guest speaker: Alma Gottlieb
Week 7
T May 14  Comming of Age/Imagining the Future in the Neoliberal Sexual Economy
These five chapters provide the macro-level context of Malagasy society and historical change without which the central arguments of Cole's book cannot be understood. How does Cole's concept of "disembedding" differ from more familiar stage theories of modernization? How do the categories "youth" and "jeunes" differ in Malagasy usage? How can we connect Johnson-Hanks' concepts of vital conjunctures and horizons, and Ginsburg's approach to life histories to Cole's analysis of the changing social economy of the female life course and imagined futures?


Th May 16
What was/is your emotional reaction to Cole's materials on love, maternal sentiments, and money? How do you understand them intellectually, thinking of such phenomena as the globalization of companionate marriage, the political economy of marriage migration, and the concept of stratified reproduction? How does love link human and social reproduction? What does love mean, anyway?


F May 17  Book reviews due, 9:00 a.m., electronic submission

Week 8
N.B.: Professor on Family Leave for this week
T May 21  Assisted Reproductive Technologies: IVF
Guest Speaker: Elizabeth Ciner, Director of Student Fellowships
For today's class session, Carleton's Director of Student Fellowships will guide you in a discussion of professional grant writing highly relevant to your final projects. Your final projects ask you to imagine yourselves as newly-minted anthropology PhDs, about to embark on post-doctoral field research, and applying for funding from the National Science Foundation. There may be time remaining for peer-editing, discussion, or viewing the film, "Made in India." Specifics TBA. Prof. Liz Raleigh will lead the class in a discussion of ARTs and surrogacy on Thursday.
Last week's reading on the globalization of desire, love, and the marriage market, this week's topic of assisted reproductive technologies, and next week's readings are unified by the concept of stratified reproduction. This week we will mainly focus upon the globalized market for gametes and gestational bodies. How are people's gametes differentially valued, and by whom? How does the personal experience of "searching for babies" in the U.S. and abroad reproduce or challenge stratified reproduction? How do personal experiences of surrogates reproduce, transform, or even revolutionize kinship and gender ideologies? In what ways do the institutional arrangements of assisted reproductive technologies help us to rethink issues of choice and agency on both local and global scales?

Marcia Inhorn has become an iconic figure in anthropological studies of infertility, starting with her work in Egypt, and continuing with her work on male infertility in Lebanon, Syria, and Dubai. For Tuesday, please read this co-authored chapter that is perhaps less ethnographically rich than Inhorn's other work, but does make an active link between stratified reproduction and ARTs as practiced in the U.S. The readings for Thursday address global medical markets for gametes, as well as negotiations and emotions of kinship in the globalizing, stratified world of assisted reproduction.


Th May 23 Assisted Reproductive Technologies: Surrogacy
Guest speaker: Prof. Liz Raleigh, Sociology/Anthropology Dept., Carleton College


Film: Made in India

F May 25 Theoretical focus statement due! 9:00 a.m., electronic submission

Week 9
T May 28 Birth, Medical Citizenship, and Stratified Reproduction
Given that many Malagasy youth, among others, are now seeking their fortunes and salvation through migration, what are the social and legal consequences of where a baby is born? What are the social and legal consequences of the "migration" of wombs and gametes? To what extent (and how) do mothers (and fathers) strategize the lived intersections between global migration and reproductive events? On the flip side, what strategies and accommodations do mother-employers and their nannies make in divvying up reproductive labors? To what extent do the concepts of stratified reproduction and medical citizenship help us sort out the global, national, and personal politics of birth?


Recommended:


Th May 30 Final Project Presentations

Week 10

T June 4 Final Project Presentations

W June 5 Final Project Due, by 4:00 p.m. in my office, Leighton 233, and electronically.

♀♂Have a Wonderful Summer♀♂
Selected Supplemental Recommended Readings

Theorizing Reproduction

Abortion

Entry into Social vs. Biological Motherhood

Birth
Infancy

Reproductive Insecurity

Assisted Reproductive Technologies: IVF, Pre-natal Diagnosis, Surrogacy...there is much more!

**Birth, Medical Citizenship, and Stratified Reproduction**