Sociology/Anthropology 395
ETHNOGRAPHY OF REPRODUCTION
Fall 2009, Carleton College
T/Th 1:15-3:00, Leighton 303

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, stratified reproduction, medical citizenship, infancy and sociability, indigenous theories of procreation and belonging, reproductive insecurity, infertility, assisted fertility (new reproductive technologies), pre-natal diagnosis, contraception, “bodily husbandry,” and “retirement” from childbearing.

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 SOAN 110 or 111, and one of the following: SOAN 226, 262, 260, 130, or WGST 205.

II. COURSE MATERIALS

A. Required Texts (available at bookstore)
Davis-Floyd, Robbie (2003) Birth as an American Rite of Passage (2nd ed).

B. Reserve Readings

All required article-length readings are on e-reserves at Gould Library. Access them through the library webpage, using the password SOAN.
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 **Oct. 8 (Week 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 **Oct. 29 (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, which option you have chosen for your final project.* Due **Nov. 5 (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, Nov. 18, at 3:00 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/) and do not plagiarize (see http://webapps.acs.carleton.edu/campus/doc/honesty/).

I. **Citation norms:** A brief guideline for anthropological citation style is included in this syllabus. You are required to follow it. 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. ANTHROPOLOGICAL CITATION STYLE

In papers for this and other anthropology classes, you should use the correct citation style, following the major professional journals, American Anthropologist and American Ethnologist. **Following this style is a requirement.** An online guide is available via the SOAN Department website (use the American Ethnologist style found at [http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/soan/resources/citation/](http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/soan/resources/citation/)). An even more complete guide is available from the American Anthropological Association: [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; this is the most up to date source for citation style). 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 (N.B.: Only the first word of the title, and first word after a colon, are capitalized):
   Becker, Gay

2) for an **article in a book of collected essays** (Except for first words and proper nouns, article title is lower case, book title is capitalized):
   Harding, Susan

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
Birth, Medical Citizenship, and Stratified Reproduction—aspects of belonging
Reincarnation, Reproducing the Culture of Infancy
Reproductive Insecurity: Worrying about Human and Social Reproduction
New Reproductive Technologies
Contraception, Aging, and the Contingent Life Course

DAY BY DAY

Week 1
T Sep 15  Introduction

Th Sep 17  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?
[Highly recommended for those with an interest in anthropological demography:]

Week 2
T Sep 22  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?
Short presentation by prof on her own work on abortion strategies of elite vs. non-elite women in urban Cameroon.
Th Sep 24  **Medical Anthropology at the Intersections:** Society for Medical Anthropology 50th Anniversary Meeting, Yale University
(Professor absent ®)

Guest speaker: Kristin Partlo, Social Science Reference Librarian
Films: choice/selections from: Abortion Stories, When Abortion Was Illegal, I Witness

Please use this early hiatus to get ahead in your brainstorming and reading toward your final projects, and to read ahead (very much reading between Tuesday and Thursday for next week, when SOAN comps proposals are also due!).

**Week 3**
T Sep 29

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?


Th Oct 1  **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 Cameroonians 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)?


**Week 4**
T Oct 6

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?

Th Oct 8   Birth
Topic statement and preliminary bibliography due!
Fieldtrip & Discussion with Annette Sheldon, director, First Touch Birth Center,
Northfield Hospital
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.
Davis-Floyd, R. (2003 [1992]) Birth as an American Rite of Passage. Berkeley: University of
California Press. (Preface to the Second Edition, Introduction, Chs 1-4) N.B. I will try to indicate parts to
skim and parts to read more thoroughly, since there is little time between Tuesday and Thursday.
However, reading chapter 4, with its explanation of three birth models, is important. Parts of chapter 2
could be skimmed.

Week 5
T Oct 13   Birth
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;
Chs 5, 6 and Conclusion are absolutely required).
Film: Hope Reborn: Empowering Families...; All My Babies
Authoritative Knowledge in Pujehun District, Sierra Leone. In Childbirth and Authoritative Knowledge: Cross-
Cultural dimensions of pain, virtue, and control among the Bariba of Benin. In W.P. Handwerker, ed. Births and
Power: Social Change and the Politics of Reproduction, pp. 69-80; Fraser, G. (1995) Modern bodies, modern minds:
Midwifery and reproductive change in an African American community. In G&R, pp. 42-58, and many more, e.g.
by Jordan, Michaelson, etc.]

Th Oct 15   Birth, Medical Citizenship, and Stratified Reproduction
Guest Speaker: Kate Golda, University of Minnesota
If birth is a rite of passage for both mother and child, what are the social and legal consequences of
where a baby is born? 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?
Workers and Employers in New York. In Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of
...and we will divide the following articles among class members:
Bledsoe, C., R. Houle, and P. Sow (2007) High fertility Gambians in Low Fertility Spain: The


Midterm Break

Week 6
T Oct 20 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?


Th Oct 22 Infancy
Why is stranger anxiety so rare in Bengland? What do “memories” of wrugbe tell us about the colonial and post-colonial experience? How do mundane activities of caring for infants shape multilayered visions of belonging, through time and space?


Week 7
T Oct 27 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 Oct 29 Reproductive Insecurity
Book reviews due!
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)?


**Week 8**

T Nov 3  **New Reproductive Technologies: IVF**

*How do institutions shape the personal experience of “searching for babies” in Egypt and the U.S.? Do personal experiences have the potential to shape institutional arrangements in medicine? Can they make us rethink notions of agency and choice? Do new technologies for assisted reproduction revolutionize kinship and gender ideologies by liberating gender from the constraints of the body (sex)? Or, do they preserve the status quo of gender-sex and biology-kin prescriptions even in the absence of “cooperating” reproductive biology?*


Th Nov 5  **New Reproductive Technologies: Pre-natal diagnosis**

**Theoretical focus statement due!**

*What roles do culture, gender, and collective memory play in pre-natal diagnosis in these three case studies from California, New York, and Germany? How do these cases relate to the concepts of stratified reproduction, vital conjunctures, and horizons?*


**Film: Baby, It's You; Maybe Baby**


**Week 9**

T Nov 10 **Contraception, Maternal Morbidity, and Aging I**

*When and why do women contracept in high fertility societies? How is the concept of choice, with regard to whether to conceive and when, socially constructed? What interests are at stake regarding local, national, and international social relations? What local interpretations exist regarding contraception and reproductive biology?*


Th Nov 12 **Contraception, Maternal Morbidity, and Aging II**

*How does the concept of bodily husbandry revolutionize demographic and medical concepts of natural fertility, reproductive life span, and aging? Can it also revolutionize notions of culture and agency with regard to reproduction? What is the value of looking at extremes and exceptions in rethinking maternal morbidity and mortality?*


**Week 10**

T Nov 17 Final Project Presentations

W Nov 18 **Final Project Due**, no later than 3:00 p.m. in my office, Leighton 233.

♀️Have a Wonderful Break ♀️