

## Department of Anthropology and Sociology (ANSO)

Academic year 2020-2021

### Weaving the World: Exercises in Writing Evocative Ethnography

**ANSO136- Spring - 6 ECTS**

[Schedule & Room](#)

#### Course Description

The aim of this course is to introduce students to the fundamental features and essential practices of writing ethnography. The primary objective of the course is to show students how to sensuously describe ethnographic spaces, sounds and characters. In the course, students will also learn what distinguishes ethnography from other forms of academic and nonfiction representation.

Students will engage in writing exercises that enable them to “Weave the World,” a seamless linkage of ethnographic description and social analysis. Students will also be asked to read examples from the work of ethnographers who have, in various ways, successfully used « weaving the world » techniques to evoke places and spaces, develop dialogue and craft character. By the end of the course, students will have practiced writing strategies that they can use to ensure that their future readers come to know a people who live in a particular place.

During the course students will be asked to write culture evocatively. The instructor will outline ethnographic writing practices—the “tricks of the trade.” He will then ask the students to begin to “Weave the World” by writing (1) descriptions of space/place, dialogues, and character portraits and (2) combine those elements into a detailed ethnographic essay that captures, in prose, the texture of place/space, dialogue and characters in an ethnographic setting.

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## Syllabus:

### Evaluation will be based on the following objectives:

- Students will be expected to actively participate in all class activities; to read and discuss assigned readings; and to engage in constructive critiques of one another's draft essays.
- Students will complete a 5-10-page paper evoking space, presenting dialogue, and crafting a character portrait. At the end of the course they will submit 15-20-page ethnographic essay (in American Anthropological Association Format) that combines elements of place/space, dialogue, and character—a piece of evocative ethnographic writing.
- Students will write/produce an roughly 850 word blog or op-ed using their anthropological skills and expertise to reflect on issues of current concern (systemic racism, income and health inequities, religious intolerance, or climate change, among many others).

### Specific Evaluation Criteria:

1. Presentation/Discussion of assigned readings 10%
2. Essay that evokes space/place 10%
3. Ethnographic Dialogue Piece 10%
4. Ethnographic Character Portrait 10%
5. Blog 10 %
6. An evocative essay combining elements of space/place, dialogue, and character 50%

### Course Readings:

- Badkhen, Anna. 2018. *Fisherman's Blues : A West African Community at Sea*. Riverhead Books.
- Behar, Ruth 2008. *The Vulnerable Observer : Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*
- Chablon, Micheal 2008. *Wonder Boys*. Random House.
- Jackson, Michael 2004. *In Sierra Leone*. Duke UP
- Leonard, Elmore 1995. *Get Shorty*. Avon Books
- McGranahan, Carole. 2020. *Writing Anthropology*. Duke UP.
- Mosley, Walter, 2005. *Cinnamon Kiss*. Little Brown
- Shostak, Marjorie 2000. *Nisa: The Life and Words of a! Kung Woman*. Harvard UP
- Stoller, Paul 2014. *Yaya's Story : The Quest for Well-Being in the World*. U of Chicago Press
- Stoller, Paul 2002. *Money Has No Smell*. University of Chicago Press. Prologue, Chap 1 and Epilogue
- Stoller, Paul 2013. Anthropological Musings on Blogging Bliss. *Anthropology Now* 5(3) 92-96.
- Stoller, Paul 2014. *Yaya's Story: The Quest for Well-Being in the World*. University of Chicago Press.
- Vitebsky, Piers, 2005. *The Reindeer People*. New York: Knopf.
- Waterston, Alisse and Charlotte Corden 2020. *Light in Dark Times: The Human Search for Meaning*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

## Lecture Topics and Assigned Readings

**February 22.** *Introduction: Conventions of Representation and Plain Style*  
G. Marcus and M. Fischer 1985. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*  
Chapters 1 and 2.

**March 1** *Ethnographic Foundations and Reflexivity Reports on Readings*  
R. Behar (1996) *The Vulnerable Observer*. Chapter 1, The  
Vulnerable Observer; Chapter 2, Death and Memory; Chapter 5  
Going to Cuba; Chap 6, Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart.

Exercise: Transforming (1<sup>st</sup> paragraph on p. 482 from Bourdieu's  
*Distinction*) into Comprehensible Language. Writing Tips.

**March 8** *Writer's Feedback Session on Bourdieu and The Evocation  
of Space and Place*

P. Vitebsky (2005) pp. 151-79  
P. Stoller (1899 Chapter 1, Looking for Serici pp.1-19  
A. Badhen 2018, pp. 1-26.  
M D Jackson 2005, pp.1-32

**March 15:** *Exercise in the Evocation of Space/Place—Write a draft essay  
that evokes a space/ place*

**March 22:** *Writer's Feedback Session on Drafts Space/Place Essays.*

**March 29:** **Space/Place Essays Due.** *Craft in Ethnographic Writing.*

C McGranahan (ed.) 2020  
1. Introduction  
2. Chapter 1 pp23-28 (Jusionyte)  
3. Chapter 3 pp 34-37 (Stoller)  
4. Chapter 4 pp 37-41(Pandian)  
5. Chapter 5 pp 41-47 (Naryayan)  
6. Chapter 6 pp 47-54 (Behar)  
7. Chapter 7 pp.54-58 (Claus)  
8. Chapter 8 pp.58-62 (Ghodsee)

**April 05** Spring Break

- April 12.** *Storytelling and Narrative Construction*
- P. Stoller (2014) *Storytelling and the Evocation of the Social*  
 C. McGranahan 2020
1. Chapter 11 pp 73-78 (McGranahan)
  2. Chapter 12 pp. 78-83 (Goldstein)
  3. Chapter 13 pp 83-87 (Besky)
  4. Chapter 14 pp.87-93 (Narayan/McGranahan)
  5. Chapter 15 pp. 93-101 (Craig)
- Read and report on the use of dialogue in a books by Mosley, Leonard, or Anna Badkhen—true masters of dialogue. Walter Mosley 2005 *Cinnamon Kiss* (or any book by Walter Mosley), Elmore Leonard 1995 *Get Shorty* (or any book by Elmore Leonard), Anna Badkhen, *Fisherman's Blues*
- Contrast with dialogue representation in any standard ethnography i.e. *Nisa* or any other ethnography
- April 19<sup>th</sup>** Reports on Dialogue Writing in Standard Ethnography and in Fiction or Creative Non-Fiction
- Exercise: Based on your research or interactions write a draft dialogue. Pay attention to how Mosley, Leonard and Badkhen craft dialogue and use them as a model
- April 26<sup>th</sup>** Presentations of Dialogue—Writer's Session Feedback
- May 03** Dialogues Due...Construction of Character  
 Explore character development in  
 Michael Chablon, 2008 *Wonder Boys* Random House  
 Anna Badkhen, *Fisherman's Blues*  
 Elmore Leonard (various works)  
 Walter Mosely (various works)
- May 10 Student Reports on Character Development
- Exercise: Write a Character Portrait—what is a person's defining characteristic? (physical, linguistic and so on)
- May 17 Presentation of Draft character Portraits—Writer's Feedback Session
- May 24 No class. Character portraits due/ Begin Drafts of essays combining space/place, dialogue and character portraits
- May 31 Writer's Feedback Session on Draft Essays/ Public Anthropology  
 Waterston and Corden 2020 *Light in Dark Times*
- June 04. Final Essays Due: Blogging Workshop. Draft an 850 word blog providing Anthropological insights about systemic racism, income inequality, climate change, gender, ageism, or a political issue