

# ethnography of illicit worlds

ANG6930 Section 23HB / ANT4930 Section 23HC • Fall 2015

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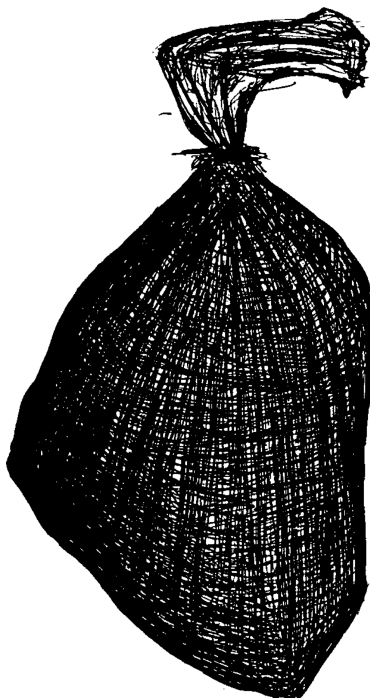
Mondays 7-9  
(1:55 - 4:55pm)  
TUR 1208H

Office Hours: Thursdays 2-5pm  
or by appointment

**Description:** This course asks how prohibition-infused phenomena, spaces and times can be approached ethnographically. It asks how an ethnographer's need for extended durations of proximity to what she or he studies can be made adequate—ethically and substantively—to social worlds that depend upon secrecy and aggressively defend the perceived boundaries of their activities from unwelcome revelation. If such worlds are never localized in one place but circulate across different kinds of landscapes, how then can ethnographers do justice to the manners in which they unfold, expand, retract or express resilience?

## Objectives:

1. to recognize and describe anthropological approaches to illicit phenomena
2. to demonstrate the relevance of classic social theories of negative reciprocity, debt, witchcraft and the uncanny for analyzing criminalized economies
3. to weigh the implications, potential and limits of ethnography—as research method and representational practice—for the ethical study of illicit worlds
4. to hone skills of textual analysis and interpretation
5. to become better writers



**Our ultimate goal is to attune ourselves to the empirical.** That's why when we speak of illicit circulations we will stress the timing of movement on paths and roads but also the obstacles and surprises confronted along the way. Following what flows will lead us, moreover, to consider the material specificity of particular terrains where multiple perspectives meet if only to diverge and transform.

To speak of *things* illicit is to put an accent on the threats that haunt and partially determine itineraries. It is to raise questions too of legality, which if rigorously pursued can open up a realm of paradox—where the clarity of logical distinctions and of practical objectives slips away. Contemporary scholars of criminality and state margins often struggle to conceptualize the ambivalences inherent to law, while underscoring how proscriptions imposed upon things shift as they move across of various types of social space. They refer to the “il/legal” and distinguish it from

the “il/licit” or even show how both are complicit with what individual communities and persons deem “il/legitimate.”

With that in mind, ethnographers of illicit worlds might begin with the question of how lines of (il)legal, (il)licit and (il)legitimate are continuously drawn and blurred, policed or disturbed. They might probe what counts as evidence for phenomena that enters in and out of vision and legibility. They might ask as well how the intensities of illicit times and trajectories leave their marks on attempts to study them. Here language matters a great deal, so much so that the aim of ethnography may prove to be less the production of verifiable knowledge than learning how to follow patiently behind the journeys that illicit worlds keep—so as to better sense, weigh and describe the distances traced in their wakes.

**Overview of Requirements:** This class is run as a seminar with active participation in all discussions expected. Each student will be asked to prepare and present a seminar report on one or more of the assigned readings at least once during the semester. There will be a term paper with a first draft due by mid-semester.

**Required Texts:**

Canetti, E. *Crowds and Power* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984)  
Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *Witchcraft, Oracles & Magic among the Azande* (Oxford University Press, 1976)  
Kluckhohn, C. *Navaho Witchcraft* (Beacon Press, 1962)  
Molloy, M. & Bowden, C. (eds.) *El Sicario* (Nation Books, 2011)  
Povinelli, E., *Economies of Abandonment* (Duke University Press, 2011)  
Serres, M., *The Parasite* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007)  
Siegel, J. *Naming the Witch* (Stanford University Press, 2006)  
Taussig, M. *Beauty & the Beast* (University of Chicago Press, 2012)  
Uexküll, J. *A Foray in the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010)

**The above books have been placed on reserve at Library West. However, I highly recommend that you obtain a copy for use during class. All remaining assigned and supplemental readings will be available to download from the Canvas course page.**

**Attendance:** Please arrive punctually and remain until the end of class. An attendance sign-up sheet will be circulated each session. If you must miss class, please inform me ahead of time (or as soon as possible) and provide appropriate documentation. In the event of an absence it is your responsibility to contact a classmate in order to obtain notes on the materials covered while away.

Absences for reasons of religious holiday, illness, and official university business are excused; however, proper notification must still be provided. **Please note:** More than one unexcused absence will undermine performance in the course. After the *second* unexcused absence the final grade will be



reduced a full letter. Students with *four or more* unexcused absences will fail. On the other hand, bonus credit will be granted for perfect (or near perfect) attendance.

**For official UF Policy on attendance and absences please consult:**

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

**Evaluations** – Final course grades will be calculated according to a combination of four criteria:

**Participation (20%):** A grade for participation will be assessed at the end of the semester based on the degree to which you play an active, informed role in class discussions, and in so doing contribute to the course's overall success. This requires that you arrive at each session on time with the assigned materials in hand and prepared to share your impressions, questions and interpretations. You are also highly encouraged to meet with me in office hours two or three times during the semester to talk about your progress in the course and your on-going work on the final project.

**Seminar Report and Presentation (25%):** You will be responsible for the preparation and presentation of one seminar report on the assigned readings of a particular week. The seminar report should not merely summarize but offer a well-crafted, spirited interpretation that situates the readings within the ideas and concepts of the course. It should also outline specific concerns and hone questions. Student(s) in charge of the coming week's presentation must circulate a list of discussion points and questions *at least 24 hours* prior to class (that is, no later than 2:00 pm on Sunday) via Canvas.

**Mid-term paper (25%):** The midterm is a first draft of the final paper. The required length for undergraduate students is 2000 words; for graduate students 4000 words. An initial project abstract (250-words approx.) is due *three weeks ahead of the mid-term deadline*.

**Term project paper (30%):**

For undergraduate students – The final paper should be an interpretative essay that critically examines one of the class themes in depth. The specific topic must be elaborated in close consultation with me. Length: 3000 words.

For graduate students – The final paper should be an original, persuasive and creative engagement with one or more of the class concepts. Of approximately 5500-7000 words in length, it should contribute directly towards the development of a conference paper, journal article or dissertation chapter.

From all students – A concise 250-word abstract that clearly outlines the objectives of the project is due on September 21. **The term paper itself must be handed in no later than the last day of class.**

All papers handed in for a grade should be typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins. *Please staple and number the pages.* In addition to a hard copy of the assignment, *you are also required to submit an electronic version via Canvas*, using the Turnitin review service.

Written assignments will be judged on content (the extent to which they succeed in explicating course material and relevant themes) but also in terms of style (coherence, persuasiveness and creativity).

**Assignment Deadlines:**

- 1) seminar paper: TBA
- 2) term paper abstract: 9/21
- 3) mid-term paper: 10/12
- 4) final paper: 12/7

**Late policy:** Assignments are due at the beginning of class of the calendar deadline. Mid-term papers and seminar reports handed in late but still within one week of the original due date will be docked the equivalent of a full letter grade. After that they will no longer be accepted. Except for extreme, extenuating circumstances, no extensions will be granted for the term paper.

**Academic Honesty:** As you are well aware, plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses. All work submitted for a grade must be free from unauthorized assistance or deliberate misrepresentations of one's own effort. The penalty for plagiarism or cheating is a grade of zero points on the assignment in question. In such cases an incident form will also be sent to the Office of the Dean of Students.

If you have questions about what constitutes academic misconduct, please consult the UF Honor Code as well as the UF Policies on Academic Honesty, Student Rights and Responsibilities. These are available online at

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/student-honor-code.aspx>

also

<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/seminars-modules/academic-integrity-module>

**Accommodations for students with disabilities:** The University of Florida is committed to providing academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, a student should present his/her accommodation letter to me supporting a request for accommodations. The University encourages students with disabilities to follow these procedures as early as possible within the semester.

**Grading:** The following scale will be used for grades on all assignments and exams: 94-100=A; 90-93=A-; 87-89=B+; 83-86=B; 79-82=B-; 76-78=C+; 72-75=C; 69-71=C-; 66-68=D+; 62-65=D; 59-61=D-; 58 and below=E (failing).

Regarding university grading policies, be advised that a grade of C- is not valid for major, minor, Gen Ed, Gordon Rule, or for college basic distribution credit. For questions about minus grades, please see <http://www.isis.ufl.edu/minusgrades.html>

You may consult current UF policy on how grade point averages are calculated at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx#calculating>

**Additional UF Resources:**

The Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall (864-1138) <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/for-students/>

Career Resource Center, Reitz Union (392-1601) <http://www.crc.ufl.edu/>

Student Health Care Center (392-1161) <http://shcc.ufl.edu/>, and

University Counseling & Wellness Center, 3190 Radio Road (392-1575)  
<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/>

**Please note:** I may make minor adjustments to class readings during the course of the semester. Any and all modifications will be announced ahead of time.

### Course Schedule

#### **week 1            introductions**

8/24            Kernaghan, "Cocaine's Minor Destinies"

Canetti, "Judgment and Condemnation"

film: *The Curious Life of Piter Eustaquio Rengifo Uculmana* (dir. Annichini)

#### **week 2            of secrecy, stories and different ways of telling**

8/31            Simmel, "Secrecy"

Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, pp. 284-296

Silko, "Long time ago"

Benjamin, "The Handkerchief"

Hoffman, "The Sandman"

Molano, *The Dispossessed*: "The Defeat," "Ángela"

supplemental:

Benjamin, "The Storyteller"

#### **week 3            no class**

9/7            Labor Day... but please view the film *Biutiful* (dir. González Iñárritu)

**week 4                   witches, or the uncanny - take 1**

9/14                   Taussig, *Beauty and the Beast: "Gift of the Gods"*

Kluckhohn, *Navaho Witchcraft*

Jentsch, "The Psychology of the Uncanny"

supplemental:

Freud, "The Uncanny"

**week 5                   animals and illicit terrains**

9/21                   Silko, "Estoy-eh-muut and the Kunideeyahs"

Canguilhem, "The Living & its Milieu"

Uexküll, *A Foray in the World of Animals and Humans*

**project abstract due**

**week 6                   foundations of debt**

9/28                   Kleist, "The Beggarwoman of Locarno"

Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, Essay II

Sahlins, "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange"

Graeber, "Cruelty and Redemption"

Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, pp. 298-299

film: *Hana-Bi* (dir. Kitano)

**week 7                   reciprocal topographies**

10/5                   Jusionyte, "States of Camouflage"

Alarcón, "Life among the Pirates"

Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia"

Caillois, *Mask of Medusa*: pp. 55-101.

**week 8                    treasure, transformation**

10/12                    Kernaghan, "Lucky Black Sack"

Molano, "The Mule Driver"

Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, pp. 337-384

Pine, "Economy of Speed"

Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure"

Caillois, "Myth of Secret Treasures in Childhood"

mid-term paper due

**week 9                    "abuse appears before use"**

10/19                    La Fontaine, "The City Rat and the Country Rat"

Serres, *The Parasite*: Sections I & II

**week 10                  bodies sublime**

10/26                    Hertz, "The Preeminence of the Right Hand"

Bataille, "The Big Toe"

Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry* (excerpt)

Taussig, *Beauty and the Beast*

**week 11                  "at the mercy of encounters..."**

11/2                    Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*: chapters 1-4

Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, pp. 301-333

Brighenti, "Did We Really Get Rid of Commands?"

Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*: "the Three Orders & the Problem of Evil"

**week 12            witches, or the uncanny – take 2**

11/9                Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*: chapters 8-10

Siegel, *Naming the Witch*

**week 13            the noise of the assassin**

11/16              Serres, *the Parasite*: Sections III & IV

Molloy & Bowden (eds.), *El Sicario*

film: *El Sicario: Room 164* (dir. Rosi & Bowden)

**week 14            exclusions of late liberalism**

11/23              Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"

Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Introduction*, Chapters 1 & 4

Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*: "The Ethical Vision of the World"

**week 15            ethnographic projects**

11/30              presentations

**week 16            ethnographic projects**

12/7                presentations

**final paper due**