Anthropology 220
The Politics of Food and Sex

Department of Anthropology

Class Time: Mo/Thurs 10:55am-12:15 am
Instructor: Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi
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Office: RAB 309, DC
Hours: Mo/Thursday 12:30pm-14:00 pm
Phone: 848-932-24104
Location of Course: RAB 206, DC

What to eat? Who to marry? This seminar examines food and sexuality in its relation to society in a comparative perspective. One strong regional focus will be South Asia, in particular India, while other regions of the world will be included. Students must be able to oscillate between different cultural and national contexts, confronting familiar phenomena inflected by unfamiliar frames of reference. The human body is frequently employed as a symbol of society. This seminar follows the contours of this symbol intuitively by investigating the ways in which food and sex form part of the formation of community boundaries. It focuses on how food and sex are internal to forms of rejection, circulation of stigma and in occurrences of ethnic conflict. The investigation includes an analysis of the role played by the moral and humoral classification of food substances at work in ritual mechanisms and symbolic procedures such as pollution, purification, and defilement, which frequently become inscribed onto individual and collective bodies. The seminar will place a strong emphasis on the analysis of foundational experiences, phenomena such as ingestion, incorporation, disgust, revulsion; as well as the facts of procurement, production and consumption of food substances such as animal slaughter and its logical inversion, the renunciation of meat, namely vegetarianism. The class will traverse several fields of knowledge while retaining a strong focus in cultural anthropology and ethnographic accounts. The reading materials consist of a wide array of texts of different genres, including ethnographic exposition, religious treatises, semiological analysis, psychoanalysis, analysis of ritual and exchange, cultural materialism, as well as philology, sociology, and history. Besides scholarly texts the reading materials include contemporary religious manuals, autobiography, journalistic accounts, documentary and feature movies, as well as travel literature.

Course objectives:
To provide students with concrete knowledge of diverse cultural practices, beliefs, and life-ways in a range of cultural contexts, paying attention to the relationship of this knowledge to how groups are represented in scholarly and popular writing, as well as commercial film.
To help students gain proficiency in the use of critical thinking skills in their assessment of articles, ethnographic writing, autobiography, history, philology, and documentary film.
To provide students with an understanding of various aspects of Indian society, social
structure, ritual, religion, identity, gender, and politics.
To provide students with the training of reading and presentation skills, the use of a
foreign language glossary, and a comparative approaches to cultural and social difference.

**Readings:** All readings will be electronic reserve (sakai.rutgers.edu).

**Course Requirements and Grading Criteria**

Take Home Mid Term Exam (30%), 4-5 pages. Take Home Final Exam (30%), 4-5
pages. Students have to complete all the reading and participate actively in class
discussion (30%). There will be an oral class presentation of reading materials (10%).
While attendance in each class is required. **No more than two absences will be accepted!**
Students found cheating on exams, handing in exams containing plagiarized passages, or
otherwise violating academic integrity policies will be turned in to the appropriate Dean
for punishment. Please familiarize yourself, therefore, with the Rutgers academic integrity
policy, posted online at [http://ctaar.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html](http://ctaar.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html).

Students are expected to attend all classes; if you expect to miss one or two classes, please
use the University absence reporting website [https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/](https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/) to indicate
the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me.

**1. Theme:** Introduction (Thursday Jan 22 – first class)

- **Jack Goody.** The high and the low: culinary culture in Asia and Europe, *In*
  Cooking, Cuisine, and Class. A Study in Comparative Sociology, 1982, pp. 97-153
  (esp. 114-127)
- **Roland Barthes.** Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food
  47-59

**2. Theme:** Defilement and Remainders Mo 26/Thurs 29)

- **Abbé J.A. Dubois.** External Defilements, Chap. III, Part II, and Internal
  Defilements, Chap. IV, Part II, pp. 181-196 and The Kinds of Food expressly
  forbidden to Brahmins, Chap. IX, Part II, pp. 284-290. *In* Hindu Manners,
  Customs, and Ceremonies, 1897 (1999)

**3. Theme:** Purity and Pollution (Mo Feb 2/Thurs 5)

- **Mary Douglas.** Secular Defilement, Chap. 2, pp. 36-50, and External
  Boundaries, Chap. 7, pp.141-159 (esp. 152-9), *In* Purity and Danger. An analysis
  of concept of pollution and taboo, 1966
- **Burkhard Bilger.** Nature’s Spoils: The underground food movement ferments
4. **Theme**: The City and the Senses (Mo Feb 9/Thurs 12)

- **Dominique Laporte**. History of Shit. TBA

5. **Theme**: Food and Sexuality (Mo Feb 16/Thurs 19)


6. **Theme**: Exchange (Mo Feb 23/Thurs 26)

- **Nur Yalman**. On the Meaning of Food Offerings in Ceylon, In *Social Compass* XX, 1973/2, pp. 287-302

**Mid Term Take Home Exam**

7. **Theme**: Love, Death, Festival (Mo March 2/Thurs 5)


8. **Theme**: Community Boundaries (Mo March 9/Thurs 12)

- **Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty**. The dismemberment of the cosmic Person, Rig Veda, *In Textual Sources For the Study of Hinduism*, Wendy Doniger O’ Flaherty with Daniel Gold, David Haberman, David Shulman (ed.), 1988, pp. 27-28
- **Josiane Racine and Jean-Luc Racine**. High and Low Castes in Karani,

SPRING RECESS, March 14-22

9. **Theme:** Violence and Animals (Mo March 23/Thurs 26)


10. **Theme:** Comparative Excursus: Papua New Guinea (Mo March 30 /Thurs April 2)


11. **Theme:** The Celibate Body (Mo April 6/Thurs 9)


12. **Theme:** Ingestion and Devotion (Mo 13/Thurs 16)


13. **Theme:** The Obscure Object of Sexuality (Mo 20/Thurs 23)


14. **Theme:** Ingestion and Conflict (Mo 27 April/Thurs 30)


TBA Frontline Magazine

15. Theme: Conclusion and Exam (Monday May 4th, last class)

Final Class and Take-Home Exam!