

Dr. Tricia C. Bruce  
SOC 325 / REL 325: Sociology of Religion  
Maryville College

### ETHNOGRAPHY PANELS\*

*Points possible for your combined contributions to both panels: 75 (15% of final grade)*  
*Panel dates: Monday, March 7 and Wednesday, March 9*

Described as “writing culture,” “thick description,” or “a way of seeing,” ethnography has long been used as a tool to understand the world as it is lived. Ethnographies are valuable because they give us a firsthand account and detailed information about the particular group or people being studied. They provide insight into what people *do*, not just what they *say* (on a survey, for example). More than just a method, ethnography is therefore an *epistemology*: a way that we come to know.

You and a third of your classmates have been assigned an ethnography to read for this class (*Mama Lola*, *Heartwood*, or *Bible Believers*). This assignment is designed to elicit common sociological themes across multiple religious traditions. You need to have read your ethnography in its entirety by the date of our first panel. Although others will have also read this book, this is *not* a group presentation: you do not need to coordinate your efforts as a group prior to the panels. If, however, you have questions regarding your reading, I would recommend finding time prior to the panels to discuss this with others who have read your ethnography. On panel days, we will rearrange our chairs to form a triangle and generate discussion around the questions posed below, applied to each of the ethnographies read by the class.

#### Panels, Round One: Monday, March 7

For panel round one, be prepared to describe your ethnography based on the following:

1. Who are these people? What are their central beliefs and practices?
2. What is the research goal or focus of the author?
3. What are some potential methodological issues for a sociologist studying such a group?
4. Why should we seek to understand these people’s religious expression and experience?

#### Panels, Round Two: Wednesday, March 9

For panel round two, be prepared to describe your ethnography based on the following:

1. What kinds of conversion and commitment techniques do these groups use?
2. What is the importance, for these religions, of members’ ethnic identities?
3. What were their family role expectations and how were members socialized into these roles?
4. What connections do you see between roles and/or how power and authority works in these groups and larger society (e.g., gender)?

Use these questions as a reading guide. Arrive prepared to respond to all questions, but also with the conversational etiquette to gauge when and how much to contribute. Draw also upon class readings, terms, and discussions related to these themes. You may bring notes. Keep in mind that our goal here is not presentation, but conversation about similar sociological themes across diverse religious experiences.

**GRADING:** You will receive a maximum of 75 points for your panel participation. This includes the quantity and quality of spoken contributions, familiarity with the text and course concepts, and ability to pose questions and professionally interact with panelists from all three ethnographies.

\*Assignment inspiration drawn from Meredith McGuire

