Environmental Knowledge and Risk:

Ethnographic and Historical Approaches

STS 6534

Summer 2016, Tuesday 7:00-9:45pm, NVC

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Environmental knowledge is not only the result of applied methods, ecological models, and bio-sampling strategies that experts use for risk assessment, urban planning, and forecasting. Non-experts also learn about the environment through practice, experience, and processes of knowledge transmission that are central to the livelihood of local communities, and vital components of their socio-cultural systems. This graduate course explores historical and ethnographic approaches to the study of environmental knowledge and risk. The first part will be focused on historical and ethnographic studies of popular environmental knowledge, exploring the vast literature on bodily practices and experiences of the environment, and the construction of space, and place. The second part of the course will examine how scientists and experts produce and use knowledge about the environment, and assess risk (both from human activities and natural events). The last part of the course will focus on sociotechnical controversies about environmental risk and public health, and will give students the possibility to discuss concrete examples, such as the recent crisis of water contamination in Flint, Michigan.