Sarah Besky is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and International and Public Affairs at Brown University. She is the author of *The Darjeeling Distinction* (University of California Press, 2014).

**Monday**
**March 19, 2018**
**4 PM / ANT 206**

**SARAH BESKY**

**CHEAP TEA AND THE PROBLEM OF QUALITY: MASS MARKETS AND INDUSTRIAL REFORM IN THE DOOARS, WEST BENGAL**

The Dooars region of West Bengal produces some of the world’s cheapest tea, most of which is sold on the domestic Indian market. Across the Dooars, however, tea plantations are closing at a high rate. On these plantations, no formal lock-outs have been declared. Instead, management has simply stopped paying wages, leaving plantation workers stranded, awaiting a possible re-opening. Over the last five years, as the number of closed plantations in the Dooars has increased, journalists have reported an alarming increase in starvation deaths across the region. But cheap tea endures in the Dooars. Amid the plantation closures, tea industry leaders have been pushing for the expansion of tea cultivation to small farms. The abandonment of tea plantations and the parallel expansion of smallholder production have raised new questions about the importance of quality here at the bottom end of the global tea market. This talk uses the case of the Dooars to examine how quality in three senses—quality of life for plantation workers and farmers; the quality of the things they produce; and the quality of the market—inform one another in contemporary capitalism.