KEY ISSUES IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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2 credits (MA, 1 year and 2 year programs)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: The course examines key theoretical concepts and approaches in past and contemporary anthropology, following two parallel paths. The first focuses on the history of the discipline and explores the development of the French, British and American schools of anthropology. The second and parallel path is thematic and examines key themes and debates in anthropology, namely, on myth and ritual, structure and function, culture and history, meaning and power, gender, capitalism and neoliberalism. The two trajectories start from a questioning of the anthropological canon and some reflections on the project of decolonizing anthropology. During this course, therefore, we will read some parts of this canon but also reflects on its relation to the colonial encounter, its short-comings and potential alternatives. The course is designed to provide students with knowledge of the inventive traditions in anthropology as well as with a critical perspective on the creative process of theory-building.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES:

As this is an introductory course there are no previous requirements. Students are expected to critically engage with the intellectual history of the discipline, address the strength and weakness of different theories and employ the conceptual paradigms in their own research projects (see mid-term paper and final paper).

[1] Careful preparation of assigned readings by the date on which they are to be discussed in class. Class discussion will require informed participation on the part of all.

[2] Submit via e-learning by Wednesday 5 PM a substantive discussion question on the then-current reading material for potential use in the class discussion on Thursday.

NOTE: A discussion question, to stimulate discussion, not to close it off, is concise; it is not just a declaration of a (= your) position, though in its formulation you probably reveal a positioned perspective on issues. A discussion question properly emerges, in reading, from your perceiving that there is an issue needing exploration or clarification, perhaps to resolve or at least confront problematic concepts or analyses in one or another of the current week’s readings. It can involve as well the concurrent or contrastive positions on an issue you may see in two of the readings, the nature of that concurrence or contrast being perhaps in question in some way. A (very!) short quotation or citation (with page reference) is generally useful to orient discussion of the point, since it gives a textual location to the issue. The text of the question as formulated should make clear what is being sought in the way of responses; avoid such formats as: “[Quote].’ Discussion”.

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CLASS FORMAT:

The course consists of lectures and seminar discussions. We will begin each class with an introductory lecture that grounds the themes and readings for the week in their historical, intellectual, and political context. The second part will instead be based on discussion and student-led conversation about the various reading assignments and other materials.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADE:

Each student will have to prepare at least 3 discussion questions throughout the term, in response to texts discussed in class.

MID-TERM PAPER: a short essay (1500 words) which is meant to help you practice your ability to apply theory to empirical case studies. The paper should consist of 3 parts: part one provides a description of a social phenomenon, a cultural practice, a political development or a historical event of your choosing. Part two details one theory you find appropriate. Part three applies the theory to the case study and points to the limitations and advantages of your choice. The paper should be written in an essay format and include an introduction and conclusion, title and subtitle.

FINAL PAPER: Take the case study you discussed in the mid-term paper and analyse it through one of the theories covered in the second part of the course. Compare with the first approach you chose and discuss critically by referring to the monographs, particular field sites and the more general context in which the respective anthropologists developed their ideas. This will allow you to bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the theories you have chosen in relation to the empirical case. The paper should be 1500-2000 words.

Reading and Participation: 15% Discussion questions: 15%
Midterm paper: 35%
Final Paper: 35%

Working introductions and histories of anthropology (available on the e-learning site or in the CEU Library):


Week 1

Why we read the classics? On Canon and Decolonization.


Additional Readings:


Week 2

“The Psychic Unity of Mankind”: Social Evolutionism and the Concept of Primitive Society


Additional Readings:


**Week 3**

**The Early American School: Cultural Relativism**


**Additional Readings:**


**Week 4**

**British Social Anthropology (I): Functionalism**


**Additional Readings:**


**Week 5**

**British Social Anthropology (II): Structural Functionalism**


**Additional Readings:**


**Week 6**
French Anthropology: Structuralism


Additional Readings:


**Week 7**

**Historical Structuralism: A Synthesis**


**Additional Readings:**


**MID-TERM PAPER**

**Week 8**

**Structure and Anti-Structure: Liminality, Hybridity and Boundaries**


**Additional Readings:**


**Week 9**

**Interpretative Anthropology and Writing for/against Culture**


**Additional Readings:**


Week 10

Re-reading the Nuer (I): Gender and Anthropology


Additional Readings:


Week 11

Re-reading the Nuer (II): Global Capitalist History and the (Colonizing) State


Additional Reading:


Week 12
Re-reading the Nuer (III): War, Transnational Livelihoods, & the Neoliberal Global


Additional Readings:
