

## KEY ISSUES IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

(MA, 1 year and 2 year programs) (updated Nov '24)

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2 credits (4ects)

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Mondays 13:30-15:30 (after email)

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The course examines key theoretical concepts and approaches in classic and contemporary anthropology, following two parallel paths: the first follows on the history of the discipline and explores the development of the French, British and American schools of anthropology; while the second, is thematic and examines key themes and debates in anthropology, namely on the unity of mankind, cultural relativism, myth and ritual, structure and function, culture and history, meaning and power. These parallel reflections both start from questioning what anthropology is, and has been, and interrogating its canon and the project of decolonizing anthropology. The course is designed to provide students with knowledge of different traditions in anthropology as well as with a critical perspective on the creative process of theory-building.

### 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.

### 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).

- Careful preparation of the mandatory readings by the date on which they are to be discussed in class. Class discussion will require informed participation on the part of all. The readings will be available on Perusall, an annotation and reading software. Basically this will allow you to write notes on the text, both notes for yourself (that no one else will see) and others that will be visible to your peers. The idea is that through your notes, comments, doubts and questions we get to read together and develop a discussion directly in the text. This will be a very important part of class so you are expected to engage with our questions and with one another, which will be part of the final grade. (see below for info on how to use Perusall).
- Submit via e-learning **by Sunday 5 PM** a substantive discussion question on the then-current reading material for use in the class discussion. You are expected to choose 2 weeks in which to submit discussion questions.

*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.*

- **FINAL PAPER:** You will be provided 5 questions on the last days of class which explore some of the themes we discussed in class; you will choose one and write a long response using both the theories and material, which we discussed in class and specific examples from other texts - or your own research. Your answer should be between 1500 and 2000 words.

#### **GRADE COMPOSITION:**

Reading and Discussion questions on Perusall: 25%  
Class participation: 25%  
Mid Term Paper: 25%  
Final Take-home Exam: 25%

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#### **Working introductions and histories of anthropology**

- McGee, Jon and Richard Warms. 2004. *Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Barnard, Alan. 2000. *History and theory in anthropology*. Cambridge, U.K. New York: Cambridge U Press.
- Engelke, M., 2019. *How to Think Like an Anthropologist*. Princeton U Press
- Barth, Fredrik, Andre Gingrich, Robert Parkin, and Sydel Silverman. 2005. *One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French, and American Anthropology*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press.

### WEEK 1 What is anthropology – and why do we do it?

We begin by questioning the very foundation of anthropology—its purpose and practice. Key readings include Roy D'Andrade's "Moral Models in Anthropology," which critiques the role of moral judgments in the discipline, and Nancy Scheper-Hughes' "The Primacy of the Ethical," advocating for a militant anthropology that engages directly with social issues.

#### Required Readings:

- D'Andrade, Roy. 1995. Moral models in anthropology. *Current Anthropology*, 36(3), pp.399-408.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 1995. "The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology." *Current Anthropology* 36 (3): 409-440

#### Additional Readings:

- Da Col, G., Sopranzetti, C., Myers, F., Piliavsky, A., Jackson Jr, J.L., Bonilla, Y., Benton, A. and Stoller, P., 2017. Why do we read the classics? *Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 7(3), pp.138
- Harrison, Faye V. 1991. "Ethnography as Politics." In Faye Harrison, ed., *Decolonizing Anthropology: Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*, pp. 88-109.
- Feuchtwang, Stephan. 1973. "The Colonial Formation of British Social Anthropology." In Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, pp. 71-100. London: Ithaca P.
- Borneman, John. 1995. "American Anthropology as Foreign Policy." *American Anthropologist* 97 (4): 663-672.

### WEEK 2 Social Evolutionism and the Concept of Primitive Society – "The Psychic Unity of Mankind":

This week, we delve into the theory of social evolutionism, again by juxtaposing two texts: Edward Tylor's concept of the "psychic unity of mankind" and Adam Kuper's critique of the notion of "primitive society." This discussion highlights the historical context in which early anthropologists categorized and ranked cultures, and it sets the stage for subsequent critiques and re-evaluations of these concepts.

#### Required Readings:

- Tylor, Edward. 1871. The Science of Culture. In *Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History*, NY: McGraw-Hill, pp.41-55.
- Kuper, Adam. 1988. The Idea of Primitive Society In *The Invention of Primitive Society*.

#### Additional Readings:

- Ellingson, Ter. 2001. The Myth of the Noble Savage. Berkeley: U of California Press (Ch.7 "The Ethnographic Savage from Rousseau to Morgan" pp. 99-125)
- Fanon, Frantz. 1967 [1952]. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: GrovePress. (Ch.1 )

### WEEK 3 Cultural Relativism: The Early American School.

This week, we focus on the foundational principles of the American school of anthropology. Boas, in particular, rejected the unilinear cultural evolutionism of his time, advocating for historical particularism: the idea that each culture must be understood in its unique historical and environmental context.

#### Required Readings:

- Boas, Franz. 2004 (1920). The Methods of Ethnology. In: J. MgGee and R.Warms (eds). *Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History*. Pp. 132-140. NY: McGraw-Hill.

- Stocking, George (ed). 1974. The Basic Assumptions of Boas' Anthropology. In: *A Franz Boas Reader. The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911*. Pp. 1-20. Chicago/London: Chicago U Press.

**Additional Readings:**

- Hurston, Zora Neale, Franz Boas, Miguel Covarrubias, and Arnold Rampersad. *Mules and men*. Perennial Library, 1935, pp.1-19, 181-191
- Firmin, Joseph-Ant  nor. *The Equality of the Human Races (Positivist Anthropology)*. Taylor & Francis, 2000.
- Benedict, Ruth. 2004. (1930). Psychological Types in the Cultures of the Southwest. In MgGee, John and Warms, Richard (ed). *Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History*. Pp. 205-215. NY: McGraw-Hill.

**WEEK 4 Functionalism (British Social Anthropology I)**

We then move to British social anthropology, focusing on functionalism, which posits that social institutions and practices primarily exist to maintain the stability and cohesion of society. Key figures include Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown.

**Required Readings:**

- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. Introduction. The Subject, Method and Scope of this Inquiry. In *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Pp. 1-25. New York: Dutton.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 2004 (1922). The Essentials of the Kula. In: MgGee, John and Warms, Richard (ed). *Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History*. Pp. 157-172. NY: McGraw-Hill.

**Additional Readings:**

- R. Radcliffe-Brown. 1940. On Joking Relationships. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* Vol. 13 (3): 195-210
- Hsiao-t'ung Fei. *Peasant Life in China: A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley*. Routledge & K. Paul, 1939, Preface and Introduction

**WEEK 5 Structural Functionalism (British Social Anthropology II)**

Continuing with British anthropology, we look at structural functionalism, particularly the work of E.E. Evans-Pritchard. This approach, which emphasizes the structures that maintain social order, provides a deeper understanding of how the "golden era of British anthropology" had conceptualized social cohesion and conflict.

**Required Readings:**

- Evans-Pritchard, E.E.. "The Notion of Witchcraft explains Unfortunate Events." In *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*.
- Winch, Peter. "Understanding a primitive society." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1964):307-324

**Additional Readings:**

- Evans-Pritchard, Edward. 1940. The Nuer of the Southern Sudan. In *African Political Systems* edited by Meyer Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, London (et al). Oxford U Press.
- Zitelmann, Thomas. 2018. Kinship Weaponized: Representations of Kinship and Binary Othering in U.S. Military Anthropology. in *Reconnecting State and Kinship*, edited by Tatjana Thelen & Erdmute Alber. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 61–86.

### WEEK 6 French Anthropology: Structuralism

Structuralism proposed that universal cognitive structures underlie all cultural expressions. We will explore how this theory has influenced the study of myths, language, and kinship systems, discussing its limitations in accounting for cultural variation.

#### Required Readings:

- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1955. The structural study of myth. *The journal of American folklore*, 68(270), pp.428-444.
- Mauss, Marcel. 1990 [1950 (1925)]. *The Gift. The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London/NY: Routledge, 1-23 (Introduction and chapter 1).

#### Additional Readings:

- Leach, Edmund. 1976. The Logic of Sacrifice. in *Culture and Communication: The Logic by which Symbols are Connected*. Cambridge University Press, 81-97.
- Hénaff, Marcel. 1998. Chapter 4. Unconscious Categories and Universality of the Mind. in *Claude Lévi-Strauss and the Making of Structural Anthropology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 94-119.

### WEEK 7 Reading Week

#### MID-TERM PAPER IS DUE

### WEEK 8 In-Between Worlds: Structure and Anti-Structure

This week focuses on concepts such as liminality and anti-structure, with readings from Victor Turner and Mary Douglas. We will examine how rituals and symbols function to negotiate and challenge social boundaries, through discussing the dynamics of cultural change and continuity.

#### Required Readings:

- Douglas, Mary. 1992 (1966). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* London: Routledge, 1-29 (Read Introduction and Chapter 1).
- Turner, Victor. 1991 (1969). Liminality and Communitas. in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 94-130.

#### Additional Readings:

- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo (2009/2014). *Cannibal Metaphysics*. Minneapolis: Univocal. Chapter 13.
- Turner, Terence. 1980. The Social Skin. in *Not work alone: A cross-cultural view of activities superfluous to survival*, edited by Jeremy Cherfas & Roger Lewin. London: Temple Smith, 112– 140. <http://www.haujournal.org/index.php/hau/article/view/236/244>.
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### Week 9 Historical Structuralism: A Synthesis

Building on structuralism, Week 7 introduces historical structuralism, primarily through the comparative discussion of Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere's work. We shall explore the integration of structuralist and historical approaches to understand cultural transformations and the interpretation of historical events.

#### Required Readings:

- Sahlins, Marshall. 2004 (c1981). Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, pp. 3-9 (History and Structural Theory) and 67-72.

- Obeyesekere, Gananath. 1992. "British Cannibals": Contemplation of an Event in the event of Death and Resurrection of James Cook, Explorer. *Critical Inquiry* 18 (4), 630-54.

**Additional Readings:**

- CA Forum on Theory in Anthropology: Cook, Lono, Obeyesekere, and Sahlins. *Current Anthropology* 38 (2), 255-282 (Apr. 1997).
- Kuper, Adam. 1999. Marshal Sahlins: History as Culture. In *Culture: the Anthropologists' Account*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. (Chapter 5), 159-200.
- Tambiah, Stanley Jeyaraja. *World conqueror and world renouncer: A study of Buddhism and polity in Thailand against a historical background*. Cambridge University Press, 1976, Introduction

**WEEK 10 Interpretative Anthropology and Writing for/against Culture**

This week introduces interpretative anthropology, particularly through the works of Clifford Geertz and Lila Abu-Lughod. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural meanings and the role of the anthropologist in representing other cultures. We will critically engage with the ethics and politics of ethnographic writing.

**Required Readings:**

- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. Writing against Culture. In: *Recapturing Anthropology. Working in the Present*. Ed. by Richard Fox. Santa Fe (New Mexico): School of American Research Press, 137-162.

**Additional Readings:**

- Introduction: Partial Truths. in *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Berkeley: U of California Press, 1-26.
- Kuper, Adam. 1999. Clifford Geertz: Culture as Religion and as Grand Opera. in *Culture. The Anthropologist's Account*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 75-121.
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**WEEK 11 Paradigms uprooted**

In this week, we explore the major theoretical shifts in anthropology since the 1980s. Sherry Ortner's discussion of "dark anthropology" and Joel Robbins' call for an anthropology of the good provide a framework for understanding contemporary debates and the discipline's engagement with issues of power, suffering, and hope.

**Required Readings:**

- Ortner, Sherry B. 2016. 'Dark Anthropology and Its Others: Theory since the Eighties'. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (1): 47-73.
- Robbins, Joel. 2013. Beyond the suffering subject: toward an anthropology of the good. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 19(3), pp.447-462.

**Additional Readings:**

- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1991. Anthropology and the Savage Slot In Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology*. Pp. 17-44. School of American Research Press.
- Ortner, Sherry. 1984. Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1), 126-166.
- Ortner, S.B., 1972. Is female to male as nature is to culture? *Feminist studies*, 1(2), pp.5-31.

## WEEK 12 Global Connections

This week we enter in the 1990s and conversations about globalization, flows, the limit of these terms and alternative way to conceptualizing them.

- Appadurai, Arjun. “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 7, no. 2 (1990): 295–310.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/026327690007002017>.
- Heyman, Josiah McC., and Howard Campbell. “The Anthropology of Global Flows: A Critical Reading of Appadurai’s ‘Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.’” *Anthropological Theory* 9, no. 2 (2009): 131–48.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499609105474>.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press, 2004.

## WEEK 13 : On Canon and Decolonization.

Our last week looks back at the colonial roots of anthropology and discusses the ongoing efforts to decolonize the discipline. Asad’s ‘Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter’ examines how colonial power shaped anthropological practices. Ntarangwi’s ‘Reversed Gaze’ critiques the representation of non-Western societies in American anthropology.

### Required Readings:

- Asad, Talal. 1973. “Introduction.” In Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, London: Ithaca Press, pp. 9-19.
- Ntarangwi, Mwenda. 2009. *Reversed Gaze: An African Ethnography of American Anthropology*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press. Chapter 2: “The Politics of Representation,” 35-56

### Additional Readings:

- Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. 2012. *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers. Chapters 1 and 4
- Chapter 1: “Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa,” 1-24.
- Aleksandar Bošković and Thomas H. Eriksen. 2008. Other People's Anthropologies. In *Other People's Anthropologies: Ethnographic Practice on the Margins*. New York: Berghahn, 1-19.

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