KEY ISSUES IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Prem Kumar Rajaram

2 credits MA course

Course description: The course examines key theoretical concepts and approaches in the history of anthropology, following two parallel paths. The first path focuses on the history of the discipline itself exploring the development of historical particularism, structural functionalism and structuralism. This path follows the early writings of Boas, Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss up to contemporary poststructuralist theories, including recent debates about culture, fieldwork and modernity. The second, parallel path is thematic and examines key themes and debates in anthropology, namely, nature and culture, myth and ritual, structure and function, culture and history, meaning and power. The course is designed to provide students with knowledge of the inventive traditions as well as a critical perspective on the creative process of theory building in socio-cultural anthropology.

Course Requirements and Learning Outcomes:

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

[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] Submission via e-learning on the day before class of a substantive discussion question on the then-current reading material for potential use in class discussion on Monday.

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”.

Class Format:
The course consists of lectures and seminar discussions. We will begin each class with an introductory lecture that treats the themes and readings for that week. The second part should function to promote class 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 TAKE HOME EXAM: You will have a choice of three questions which you should answer via a short essay (1000 words) which is meant to help you practice your ability to apply theory to empirical case
You will normally have 48 hours to do this, if you require longer because of any issues to do with using or accessing computer, please let me know.

**FINAL TAKE HOME EXAM:** You will have a choice of three questions which will encourage you to critically examine the strengths and weaknesses of the theories you have studied. The paper should be 1500-2000 words. You will normally have 48 hours to do this, if you require longer because of any issues to do with using or accessing computer, please let me know.

Reading and Participation: 15%
Discussion questions: 15%
Midterm Exam: 35%
Final Take Home Exam: 35%

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


Week 1: Different Visions of Anthropology


Week 2: From armchair to the field: social evolutionism and the concept of primitive society


Additional Readings:


Week 3: Historical particularism/ cultural relativism


Additional readings


Week 4. Structural Functionalism: Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown


Additional readings


Week 5. Structuralism


Additional Readings


Week 6: The Many Facets of Structural Anthropology


Week 7: History and Theory


Week 8. Symbolic and Interpretive Anthropology


MARY DOUGLAS, External Boundaries (1 9 6 6) 4 8 4


Additional Reading


Week 9. The Reflexive Turn: Writing Culture and Against Culture

RENATO ROSALDO, 1989. Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage  In Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History,  537

Additional Readings


Week 10. Power and Interpretation

Marshall Sahlins....

Week 10. The Locus of Culture: Body and Practice


SALLY SLOCUM, Woman the Gatherer: Male Bias in Anthropology (1975) 435

Additional Readings


Week 11. Naturalizing Culture: cognitive approaches


Week 12 Globalization, Power, Agency: Contemporary Anthropology and the Future of the Discipline


PHILIPPE BOURGOIS, F 1995. From Jibaro to Crack Dealer: Confronting the Restructuring of
Capitalism in El Barrio In *Anthropological Theory: An Introductory History*.