

Harvard University
Department of Anthropology

Anthropology A2650a
History and Theory of Social Anthropology: Proseminar

SYLLABUS
FALL SEMESTER, 2018

Instructor: Professor Michael Herzfeld

Office Hours: Mondays, 9-11 a.m. and by appointment
(Tozzer Anthropology Building 313; tel. 6-5190 (no messages);
e-mail herzfeld@wjh.harvard.edu)

Class meets Mondays, 12 noon-2:45 p.m., in Peabody Museum Room 12

About the course

This course is the first half of the foundational theory course for the doctorate in Anthropology (social anthropology program) at Harvard University. While obviously we cannot expect to cover the entire gamut of social theory, or even to agree on what such an endeavor would comprise, the course should give you a broad understanding of the ways in which disciplinary principles and practices have changed since its initial emergence (an event the charting of which is itself fraught with historiographical and conceptual complexity). This half-course is specifically focused on classic European social anthropology and its ramifications.

One key aim is to give you a sufficient sense of the field that you will be able to explore the most basic issues in anthropological theory independently. Another is to give you a thoroughgoing sense of the overall theoretical direction and dynamics of this field. Yet another is to build your confidence as you approach the task of assuming a recognizable and responsible theoretical position of your own.

Issues that will surface repeatedly are: the persistence of evolutionary and teleological assumptions in anthropological theory; the ethnocentrism inherent in much of its development; its historical links to colonialism and other political structures; the place of comparison and reflexivity in anthropological thought; and the contribution of informants to the construction of theory.

In order to understand what the “postmodern turn” in anthropology has been, it is necessary first to know something about the emergence of a distinctive modernism in the discipline’s trajectory. For that reason, we will briefly go back in time to ancient and medieval roots and will consider the contributions of key thinkers who were not themselves practitioners of the discipline in a recognizably modern form (Vico, Marx, Durkheim, Mauss, and Weber). Most of the focus, however, will be on the specific emergence of anthropology as such: we will ask what it means to claim a distinctive disciplinary identity, how this generates a canonical history (and how that might be resisted or modified), and what responsibilities and ethical entailments the specificity of anthropological practice produces in the present.

About the instructor

Michael Herzfeld, Ernest E. Monrad Professor of the Social Sciences in the Department of Anthropology, is the author of, among other works, *Evicted from Eternity: The Restructuring of Modern Rome* (Chicago, 2009), *Siege of the Spirits: Community and Polity in Bangkok* (Chicago, 2016), and *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics and the Real Life of States, Societies, and Institutions* (3rd edition, New York, 2016). He has conducted field research in Greece, Italy, and Thailand, and also is developing an active research interest in China and its European diaspora.

Policy on office hours and confronting difficulties

The instructor regards all graduate students as junior colleagues. The “junior” presupposes that experience may provide something worth teaching! The term “colleagues” means that the instructor expects a relationship of mutual respect and intellectual exchange. The class is indeed constructed to favor precisely that. If you run into problems, please come and see the instructor ***immediately*** – do not let problems fester. (I am much more perturbed by having to deal with serious difficulties after they have become less manageable than by being called, even at home if necessary, if they can thereby be avoided. Part of what I mean by “mutual respect” entails respecting privacy, but I am confident that you will not abuse this offer of emergency contact.)

Shape of the course sessions

The class sessions are long and intense. In addition, each student is required to arrange two half-hour intensive sessions with the instructor to explore theoretical gaps and concerns, these meetings to be scheduled on an individual basis.

Proseminar students will be required to write several brief (3-5 pp.) position papers in the course of the semester; to present works assigned to them for that purpose (see below) and to be prepared to submit written notes on those works; and to participate actively in class discussions. In addition, there is a term paper. The topic for this will be announced later.

Readings

These are listed below in the week-by-week analysis.

Basically the readings can be divided into two segments. The first will be approximately one chapter per week of the instructor’s 2001 book, *Anthropology: Theoretical Practice in Culture and Society* (hereafter abbreviated as *Anthropology*). These chapters will give you an overview of the present state of play in a particular area of the discipline, and will thus provide a modern context for understanding the present significance of the week’s other, more historically oriented readings. The second group consists of weekly texts, to be supplemented by proactive searching for reviews and important critiques. “Additional readings” are recommended as useful for the discussions and should be consulted ahead of time; “additional assignment” will, as the name suggest, be assigned for presentation to individual students.

Requirements, exercises, and academic standards

Students will be expected to attend all classes. It is also a requirement of this seminar that you attend all Monday seminars during the year (these include dissertation defenses when they are scheduled for the Monday afternoon slot).

Each week, one student (usually without advance warning!) will be asked to present a brief summation of the week's reading from *Anthropology*. This will be followed by a brief Q&A session (about 20 minutes). Then a student will be asked to present the other main reading(s) for the week and another student will be invited to comment on the presentation. Where there are additional readings, students will be assigned these in advance, and should come to class with written notes suitable for being shared with the other members of the group.

There topics for the position papers will be written during the course of the semester. These will predominantly take the form of book reports; specific topics will be assigned during sessions. For the final paper, a certain amount of tailoring to personal interests is encouraged, but participants must consult the instructor about this.

All written work, however brief, must be properly referenced, using *American Ethnologist/American Anthropologist* style conventions (which you can find in the journal itself). You should make it a habit to insert citations at an early stage in writing so as not to find yourself desperately hunting for them at the end of the semester!

University policies concerning plagiarism and other matters of academic honesty will obviously apply. If unsure about these, please consult the instructor *before* you risk your entire career by taking an unacceptable short-cut! Graduate students are expected to be meticulous about such matters, and the penalties for plagiarism can ignominiously end a promising career – so don't risk it! (It's better to get a lower grade – but better to avoid both problems! *Plan ahead and make sure you are well equipped to manage your time.* Any student who shows serious signs of not managing time well will be referred to the Bureau of Study Counsel. That should not be a source of embarrassment. There are few worse enemies than panic and we aim to reduce that to the vanishing point.)

In addition, you may be called upon at any time to present some aspect of the current readings. Expect to stay permanently on your toes! In addition, your final grade will reflect the extent to which you are proactive in seeking out additional readings; we want to inculcate good research habits at an early stage!

Important warning: No Incompletes can be given to G1 students. Therefore, you cannot submit work late. I will also not give Incompletes to any other students (mostly, in all probability, Archaeology graduate students in post G1 years) taking this course. The **only** exceptions will be made for **documented** medical or family emergencies. Interim work that is submitted late may be given a significantly lower grade than it otherwise deserves. Failure to attend any class sessions or Monday seminars without prior permission of the instructor, which will only be given for extremely pressing reasons,

may also result in a grade reduction. Remember that the two-semester proseminar in social anthropology is the groundwork for your induction into the field. Treat it with respect and give it high priority!

Weekly sessions:

1. 10 September

This will be an introduction to the proseminar, with an exploration of key concepts and a discussion of major thinkers from outside the discipline, as well as an overview of major shifts in epistemology.

You will be expected to read the Introduction to *Anthropology* before the following session.

2. 24 September

Early Anthropology in the 17th through 19th Centuries – Part I

This session will be devoted to a quick examination of the background to the emergence of anthropological theory. Students will be assigned particular authors to investigate and discuss at this session and the following week's session: Giambattista Vico, Edward Burnett Tylor, James George Frazer, Friedrich Engels, Johann Jakob Bachofen, Max Müller.

Session key text: Margaret Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the 16th and 17th Centuries*

Additional reading: Michael Herzfeld, "Anthropological Realism in a Scientific Age," *Anthropological Theory* 18 (2018): 129-150.

Anthropology reading: chapter on Epistemologies

3. 28 September (Please note: this is a Friday and replaces 17 September, when the instructor will be out of the country.)

Early Anthropology in the 17th through 19th Centuries – Part II

Session text: George Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888-1951*

Additional reading: Michael Herzfeld, "Purity and Power: Anthropology from Colonialism to the Global Hierarchy of Value," *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* (forthcoming).

Anthropology reading: chapter on Histories

At this point, please start reading **well ahead** for Week 4 AND Week 5 – there's a lot of advance work to do!

4. 1 October

Sociological Inventions and Fieldwork

Week's key text: Marcel Mauss, *Essay on the Gift*

Anthropology reading: chapter on Economies

Additional assignments: Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*; Emile Durkheim, *Rules of the Sociological Method*; *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* and *The Andaman Islanders* (both by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown)

5. 15 October

Week's key text: E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*

Additional assignments: J.K. Campbell, *Honour, Family, and Patronage*; Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience*.

Additional readings: Renato Rosaldo, 'From the Door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor', in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1986), pp. 77-97; Ivan Karp and Kent Maynard, "Reading *The Nuer*," *Current Anthropology* 24 (1983); Michael Herzfeld, "Textual Forms and Social Formation in Evans-Pritchard and Lévi-Strauss," in Richard Harvey Brown (ed.), *Writing the Social Text: Poetics and Politics in Social Science Discourse* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991), pp. 53-70; Henrika Kuklick, 'Tribal Exemplars: Images of Political Authority in British Anthropology, 1855-1945', in George W. Stocking, ed., *Functionalism Historicized: Essays on British Social Anthropology*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 59-82 (1984): 481-503. [I will assign each of these additional readings to one student, and expect each to produce a brief summary of the key arguments in written form but also ready for oral presentation.]

Anthropology reading: chapters on Borders/Nodes/Groupings and Environmentalisms

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22 October

Week's key text: E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*

Additional readings: Marilyn Strathern, "New Accountabilities: Anthropological Studies in Audit, Ethics and the Academy," in Marilyn Strathern, ed., *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1-18; Michael Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy* (Oxford: Berg, 1992), pp. 5-7, 127-157; Stanley J. Tambiah, "A Performative Approach to Ritual," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979): 113-169; C.R. Hallpike, *The Foundations of Primitive Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979); Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958); Malcolm Crick, *Explorations in Language and Meaning: Towards a Semantic Anthropology* (New York: John Wiley, 1976).

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Anthropology reading: Developmentalisms

6. 29 October

Week's key text: Edmund Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*

Additional assignments: Stanley J. Tambiah, *Edmund Leach: An Anthropological Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) (selected chapters); E.R. Leach, *Pul Eliya, A Village in Ceylon: A Study of Land Tenure and Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961)..

The Leach book on Lévi-Strauss (see below) also furnishes some interesting insights into how Leach situated himself in the history of the discipline.

Anthropology reading: chapter on Politics

7. 5 November

Week's key text: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*

Additional reading: Michael Herzfeld, "Textual Forms and Social Formation in Evans-Pritchard and Lévi-Strauss," in Richard Harvey Brown (ed.), *Writing the Social Text: Poetics and Politics in Social Science Discourse* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991), pp. 53-70.

8. 12 November

Week's key text: Edmund Leach, *Lévi-Strauss*

Additional reading: "Lévi-Strauss, Claude, "The Story of Asdiwal," In Edmund Leach, ed., *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism* (ASA Monographs in Social Anthropology, 5) (London: Tavistock, 1967), pp. 1-48

9. 19 November

Week's key text: Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*

Anthropology reading: chapters on Senses and Sufferings and Disciplines

10. 26 November

Week's key text: Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*

Additional assignment: Please consult Richard Fardon, *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Anthropology reading: chapter on Cosmologies

11. 3 December

Week's key text: Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and Deborah E. Reed-Danahay *Locating Bourdieu*

Additional readings: Sherry B. Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology in the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1984): 126-166; Karp, Ivan. 1986. Agency and Social Theory: A Review of Giddens. *American Ethnologist* 13: 131-137..

-- and wrap-up discussion.