The second semester of the graduate proseminar explores the political economy of anthropological knowledge production. It examines anthropology’s relation to alterity and sociality in different historical contexts, in the colony and in the metropole, in the socialist East and the capitalist West, at the center and at the periphery. Anthropology has long been seen as a quintessentially “Western discourse” problematically aligned with the ideologies of power. Rather than approach the discipline as a unified whole, however, this seminar revisits key moments, figures, and events that demonstrate how important anthropological concepts emerged as expressions of—and reflections upon—complex historical conjunctures. Various attempts to conceptualize society, culture, race, hegemony, value, commodity fetishism, the state, ontology, and alterity have resonated with, but also beyond, their immediate contexts. Informed by a desire to de-center “the canon” (without losing sight, that is, of the effects of its normative centrality) or to decolonize the discipline, we pursue a set of theoretical and ethnographic detours through and around key anthropological moments and concepts, all along seeking to understand how idioms, objects, and events of theoretical and ethnographic attachment shape and are shaped by historical context. Thus, students are encouraged to think anthropologically about anthropology, its concepts, practices, potentialities, and futures. This presupposes not only reading texts closely but also identifying how the assigned readings resonate with one another; what potentialities they have for understanding the present and anticipating the future; and how such potentialities are to be activated, pursued, actualized.

Course Requirements

Grades will reflect students’ level of engagement with the readings and assignments of this seminar as well as the extent to which they will have acquired critical knowledge and analytical skills throughout the semester.

- Attendance and participation. Attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to participate in class discussions by formulating questions, responses, and critiques relevant to the assigned readings. To help you participate actively in class discussions, I would like you to write as you read. For each class, please prepare a short review question concerning one or more of the assigned readings. A good review question should very briefly sum up a selected argument of the reading(s). Then, it should unpack the argument critically, either by treating it on its own terms or by comparing it to issues emerging in discussions, lectures, and other readings covered for this class. To make your time in class a productive and pleasant experience for everyone, I ask that you do not use phones, laptops, or tablets.
In-Class Presentation: Introducing the Readings. Each week two students will initiate discussion by raising a set of issues and questions related to the readings. Students will briefly introduce some of the main points of the readings assigned for that day and pose some questions for class discussion. Then, they will contribute to the discussion by raising new questions and critical points. Students will be graded according to how well they prepared to discuss the readings. The goal of this exercise is to encourage you to engage rigorously with the readings, unpack their arguments, and discover their significance. A sign-up sheet is circulated during the first and second week of classes.

Writing Assignment (Four Short Response Papers). Response papers must deal with a concept or question that has emerged in the readings of each part of the seminar. You are encouraged to choose no more than three authors and, through a close reading of each, make an argument about their respective perspectives on a specific concept and—most importantly—on what we can learn from comparing/contrasting them. Each paper must be 5-7 pages, double-spaced. Papers are due: February 28, March 28, April 18, and May 8. Please drop off your papers in the professor’s mail box in Tozzer 205. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Required Texts

The following texts are available for purchase at the Coop Bookstore and for consultation on a three-hour reserve at the Tozzer Library.


Books marked with a star symbol (*) above are available online through the Hollis website. All other readings will be available on the course website (on Canvas).
WEEKLY SCHEDULE

WEEK 1
January 31

INRODUCTION – method, politics, potentiality


PART I
LOCATING THE SOCIAL – colonial encounters, political utopias

WEEK 2
February 7

UTOPIAS OF ‘SOCIETY’ – order, organization, and the ‘other’ on the colonial frontier


WEEK 3  
February 14  

ENCOUNTER – mimesis, alterity, and authorship on the ethnographic frontier


  *Film: “Les maitres fous” (1955) by Jean Rouch [36 min]*

WEEK 4  
February 21  

THE SOCIAL – totemism, totality, effervescence


PART II  POLITICIZING CULTURE – race, hegemony, ethnographic authority

WEEK 5  February 28

CULTURE, RACE, HEGEMONY – intersections, coincidences, contradictions


Recording: “James Baldwin and Margaret Mead: A Rap on Race” (1971) [1h45 m]

WEEK 6  March 7

NATIONALISM – the authority of culture and the invention of tradition


WEEK 7

March 14

THE ATLANTIC – diasporic cultures and the politics of blackness

- Zora Neal Hurston. 1938. Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica. New York: Harper. [Read Ch 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, 15]


March 16-24 Spring Break

PART III

THE POWER OF VALUE – political economy & cold war anthropology

WEEK 8

March 28

VALUE – exchange, conversion, and space-time


WEEK 9
April 4

COMMODITY FETISHISM – exchange value, labor, and the occult


WEEK 10
April 11

THE STATE – surveillance, governmentality, ethnography


PART IV

THE VALUE OF DIFFERENCE – alterity, late capitalism, social theory

MULTICULTURALISM – indigeneity, difference, and the politics of liberalism

WEEK 12
April 25

OTHER ONTOLOGIES – objects, posthumanism, and the ‘ontological turn’

☐ Kohn, Eduardo. 2013. *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley: University of California Press. [Read Introduction, Ch 1, 2]


WEEK 13
May 2

DECOLONIAL DIALECTICS – grounded theory, poor theory, theory from the south


