

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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511 Williams
Time: MWF 2:30-3:20
Office Hours: WF 3:30-5pm

Anthropology 225: Anthropological Theory

Course URL: <http://www.uvm.edu/~lvivanco/theory.html>

“...descriptions vary with the conceptual or theoretical framework within which they are couched. To evaluate a description properly one must know something about the theoretical framework that brought it into being” (Kaplan and Manners, *Culture Theory*, 1972, p. 22).

Course Description

Most anthropologists – especially American anthropologists – would agree that the study of “culture” is at the heart of the discipline. But vigorous debates over its definition, effective methods to study it, even the validity or utility of the whole exercise, characterize the discipline’s history. This course examines some major theoretical paradigms and debates in the anthropological study of culture, especially as they play out in ethnographic writing where, especially in recent decades, commitment to the culture concept and fieldwork as a means to know it have come under enormous critical scrutiny.

It seems that most college courses titled “Anthropological Theory” take a linear historical approach, beginning with the intellectual and political ferment in the 18th and 19th centuries from which the social sciences emerged. Moving along the way toward the present, they stop off at the major philosophical highlights, “isms,” and thinkers. But anthropological theories and debates cannot be intelligently understood as 1) progressive, moving along a single line from past to present; and 2) separately from the ethnographies – descriptions of people – that are their vehicles, even their reason for being. For these reasons, our approach here is organized around reading ethnographic monographs, and we will “mine” our way backwards and sideways (genealogically? ethnographically? anthropologically?) where appropriate in order to understand the kinds of questions, traditions, and debates about culture with which these authors are engaged. This approach, which is more selective than comprehensive in its coverage of debates and concepts, is primarily designed to expose you to compelling ethnographic descriptions and analyses – and the theoretical questions embedded in them – in order to help you understand some of the ways anthropologists have raised, treated, and re-evaluated certain enduring questions about culture and human experience.

We will examine the following major problems: where does “culture” fit into Euro-American intellectual history and socio-political thought? How do different theoretical and methodological positions on culture produce different representations of people? How should we evaluate the adequacy of those representations? To what extent do individuals share in a culture? What is the relationship

between power and culture? Are cultures and cultural processes autonomous and separate from each other? If not, then how might we think about their interconnections, overlappings, and hybridities? Who controls culture and its material and intellectual manifestations?

The following books are available for purchase at the University Store:

Brown, M. (2003) *Who Owns Native Culture?* Harvard University Press.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1940) *The Nuer*. Oxford University Press.

Jackson, M. (1995) *At Home in the World*. Duke University Press.

Martin, E. (1994) *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS*. Beacon Press.

Piot, C. (1999) *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa*. U. Chicago Press.

Course Requirements

The format of this course is participatory seminar, and therefore carries with it certain opportunities and obligations. Although we will periodically have lectures and guests, the in-class portions of this course are organized primarily around discussion of the readings and the broader themes raised by course materials. Therefore, it is essential that each of you comes to class prepared – this means having done the assigned readings *before* every class session and considered the issues you would like to contribute to discussion. **Needless to say, attendance is mandatory at all course activities, and the only excused absences are for family or health emergencies (with proof).**

You will be graded on the following:

ASSIGNMENT	% OF GRADE
Class Attendance and Participation	15
Ethnographic Dialogue Project	25
Midterm Essay	25
Final Essay	35

In this course, you will write two related papers: one a midterm essay and the second an expansion or redirection of your midterm paper. There will be several steps involved in producing this essay. **These steps are not optional:**

- 1) Initial 1 paragraph statement of topic/interest (September 24)
- 2) Midterm essay (October 25)
- 3) Revised 1 page statement of topic (November 10)
- 4) First draft of final essay (November 22)
- 5) Final draft (December 14)

You should work steadily on this research throughout the semester. We will discuss the requirements and subtleties of each step throughout the semester.

The midterm essay assignment is to take an ethnographic monograph or other major work by an anthropologist on a topic that interests you, and to write a critical commentary on it. Edited volumes and single essays do not count.¹ In this writing, you should engage other commentators and perspectives, and therefore I expect you to draw from *at least three commentary sources* on your chosen work (critical reviews, discussions of it in other works, etc.). You should deal with the following questions: what is the major argument of this text, and what kinds of examples does the author draw on to illustrate his or her argument? With what and whom is this text arguing, and what are the major outlines of the debate? What are some of the limitations of this theoretical stance? It should be **between eight and twelve-pages** in length.

The final research paper for this course is an expansion or redirection of your midterm paper. Your options for this assignment are quite open and flexible, but keep in mind that the intention of this assignment is for you to build upon what you've already written in your midterm essay, **so don't plan on totally changing your topic**. Possibilities include exploring in greater detail a debate in which your author has been engaged; expanding upon and deepening your discussion of a particular theme your author writes about; comparing and contrasting your author's approach with another major author or approach; exploring the intellectual history and/or socio-political context of this author's general approach; assessing the broader impact of his or her ideas in and/or beyond the discipline; using his or her approach to explain a contemporary event or situation; showing the limitations of this author's approach for a certain issue; elaborating on a theme or theoretical issue this author raises somewhere in his or her works; or to apply a particular critique to their works (for example, a feminist critique of your author, a Marxist critique of your author, etc.). It should be **between eighteen and twenty-two-pages** in length.

The other course assignment is to jointly write an **eight-page fictional "ethnographic dialogue"** with one other student related to a course reading or theme. You and your partner will then perform this dialogue, providing a dramatic reading of the script to the rest of the class. The goal of these dialogues is to provide us with a fuller sense of ethnography as lived phenomenon, experiencing it as an oral, aural, even kinesthetic encounter. After your performance, you and your partner will each – independently of each other – write a **5-page process paper** that explains how the plot, characters, and dialogue relate to the basic thesis and central concepts presented in the book, chapter, or article that is the basis for this dialogue and performance. You will not be graded on the artistic qualities of the dialogue and performance *per se* (although I will take them into account, especially if they are creative). Rather, you will be assessed on how well you: 1) in your performance as a duo, engage in the important thematic and conceptual elements of the reading or theme in question; 2) summarize the reading in the process paper; and 3) explain in your process paper the goals of the dialogue in relation to the central issues raised in the original reading or course themes. Your process papers will be due **one week** after you have performed your dialogue. *Please bring a copy of your performance dialogue for me on the day you perform in class.*

Policies on writing papers:

¹ Under most circumstances, writing about a single essay doesn't count. In some cases, the essay may be so influential that you could justify it; however, plan on finding one of their books or essay collections.

In these days of computer-mediated writing, there are no excuses for the two following problems: 1) late papers due to “computer crashes,” and 2) poor spelling and grammar. Regarding the former, claiming a computer crash is basically the same as telling me that your dog ate your homework. **This is not a valid excuse** if you are backing up your materials on diskettes or the UVM mainframe. If indeed this has happened, I expect you to provide a note from a computer specialist explaining the problem; otherwise your late paper will be evaluated in terms of my late paper policy. Regarding the latter problem, use your spellcheck option and proofread - **I will mark you down for poor spelling and grammar.**

My policy on late papers is that I do not accept them, although I will make an exception if you are willing to receive a lower grade. **For every 24 hour period your paper is late, you drop a full grade from the grade I feel your paper would receive if it were not late.** For example, if your ‘A’ paper is not turned in when it is due, you will receive a ‘B’ if it is turned in within the next 24 hours. The next day, your grade drops to a ‘C.’ The day after that, it is a ‘D.’ If you turn in a paper late and expect to receive a non-reduced grade, you must provide evidence of an emergency.

If you have not already, you should familiarize yourself with the UVM Writing Center. Tutors will not write or edit your papers for you. However, they will offer advice on developing ideas, finding a thesis, seeing a draft from a reader’s point of view, strengthening an argument, and advise on style and correctness. It is located in Room 244 Commons of Living/Learning, and their phone is 656-4075.

Schedule of Readings

READINGS WITH AN (‘R’) NEXT TO THEM WILL BE ON RESERVE. Reserve articles are available online through Bailey-Howe’s Voyager. A hard copy of every reserve reading will always be available in the Anthropology Department office – 509 Williams Hall, open 8:00am-4:30pm. The reading should be done *before* the class date under which they are listed.

** - Indicates class in which an ethnographic dialogue performance will take place.

Introduction: “Culture” and its (Re)Contextualizations

Course Introduction

Mon. 8/30: Introduction to the course, instructor’s expectations, requirements, etc.

Exercise: If the shoe fits...

No reading

Wed. 9/1: Musings on “Culture”

Reading: 1. Kuper, A. (1999) “Introduction: Culture Wars.” In *Culture: The Anthropologists’*

(R) *Account*, pp. 1-20.

Fri. 9/3: Some Moments in Intellectual History Regarding "Culture"

Reading: 1. Kuper, A. (1999) "Culture and Civilization: French, German, and English

(R) Intellectuals, 1930-58." In *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*, pp. 23-46.

2. Kuper, A. (1999) "The Social Science Account: Talcott Parsons and the American

(R) Anthropologists." In *Culture: The Anthropologists's Account*, pp. 47-72

Mon. 9/6: Labor Day (no class)

Wed. 9/8: E-P and the Nuer

Reading: 1. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, Introductory and Chapter I

2. Handout from first day: "Introduction" in *Reading Ethnography*, D. Jacobson, SUNY Press, 1991, pp. 1-25.

Fri. 9/10: E-P and Meaning

Film: "Strange Beliefs"

Reading: 1. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, Chapters II and III

Mon. 9/13: Nuer Political and Lineage Systems

Reading: 1. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, Chapters IV and V

Wed. 9/15: Nuer Age-Sets

Reading: 1. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, Chapter VI

Fri. 9/17: (Re)contextualizing Evans-Pritchard

Reading: 1. Geertz, C. (1988) "Slide Show: Evans-Pritchard's African Transparencies." In *Works*

(R) *and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, pp. 49-72.

2. Johnson, D. (1982) "Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer, and the Sudan Political Service."

(R) *African Affairs* 8(323): 231-46.

Optional: 1. Marcus and Fischer (1986) "A Crisis of Representation in the Human Sciences"

(R) Chapter One from *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, Chicago: U Chicago Press, pp. 7-16.

** Mon. 9/20: (Re)contextualizing "The Nuer"

Reading: 1. McKinnon, S. (2000) "Domestic Exceptions: Evans-Pritchard and the Creation of

(R) Nuer Patrilineality and Equality." *Cultural Anthropology* 15(1): 35-83.

2. Free, T. (1991) "The Politics and Philosophical Genealogy of Evans-Pritchard's *The*

(R) *Nuer*." *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* 22(1): 19-39.

Optional: 1. Karp, I. and K. Maynard (1983) "Reading *The Nuer*." *Current Anthropology* 24(4):

(R) August-October 1983, pp. 481-503.

** Wed. 9/22: Nuer Dilemmas

Reading: 1. Hutchinson, S. (1996) "Orientations" In *Nuer Dilemmas: Coping with Money, War, and the State*, pp. 21-55.

Optional: 1. Jok and Hutchinson (1999) "Sudan's Prolonged Second Civil War and the Militarization of Nuer and Dinka Ethnic Identities." *African Studies Review* 42(2): 125-45.

Science and/as Culture: *Flexible Bodies*

Fri. 9/24: Cultures of Science

Reading: 1. Harding, S. (1994) "Is Science Multicultural? Challenges, Resources, Opportunities, (R) Uncertainties." In Goldberg, *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 344-70.

2. Latour, B. (1986) "Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands." (R) *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*. Vol. 6, pp. 1-40.

Mon. 9/27: Methods and Problems for a Cultural Study of Science

Reading: 1. Martin, *Flexible Bodies*, Part One

Wed. 9/29: Immune Systems and Metaphors

Reading: 1. Martin, *Flexible Bodies*, Parts Two and Three

Fri. 10/1: Complexity Thinking

Reading: 1. Martin, *Flexible Bodies*, Part Four

** Mon. 10/4: Training Bodies

Reading: 1. Martin, *Flexible Bodies*, Part Five

** Wed. 10/6: A New Darwinism?

Reading: 1. Martin, *Flexible Bodies*, Part Six

Fri. 10/8: Fall Recess (no class)

** Mon. 10/11: Conclusions

Reading: 1. Handout (Latour's Harper's article on critique)

Requalifying Ethnography (...at the Expense of Theory?): *At Home in the World*

Wed. 10/13: Reflections on Home

Reading: 1. Jackson, *At Home in the World*, Chapters One to Three

Fri. 10/15: Walpiri Geographies

Reading: 1. Jackson, *At Home in the World*, Chapters Four to Six

Mon. 10/18: Walpiri Social Organization

Reading: 1. Jackson, *At Home in the World*, Chapters Seven to Ten

Wed. 10/20: Representing Aboriginal Lives (and Thinking About Media and Indigeneity)

Film: "Babakiueria"

Reading: 1. Ginsburg, F. (1994) "Embedded Aesthetics: Creating a Discursive Space for Indigenous (R) Media." *Cultural Anthropology* 9(3): 365-82.

2. Langton, M. (1993) "The Politics of Aboriginal Representation." *Well, I Heard it on the (R) Radio and I Saw it on the Television*. North Sydney: Australian Film Commission, pp. 22-43.

** Fri. 10/22: Intersubjectivity

Reading: 1. Jackson, *At Home in the World*, Chapters Eleven to Fourteen

** Mon. 10/25: On the Relevance of John Dewey for Anthropology

Reading: 1. Jackson, *At Home in the World*, Epilogue and Postscript

** Wed. 10/27: Reprise: On the Search for Intercultural Spaces

No Reading (but bring your book to class)

Between the Global and Local, Tradition and Modernity: *Remotely Global*

Fri. 10/29: Contexts for an Anthropology of Globalization and Localization

Reading: 1. Tsing, A. (2000) "The Global Situation." *Cultural Anthropology* 15(3): 327-60. (R)

Mon. 11/1: "Cosmopolitans in the African Savanna"

Reading: 1. Piot, *Remotely Global*, Chapter One

Wed. 11/3: Kabre Exchange

In class exercise TBA

Reading: 1. Piot, *Remotely Global*, Chapters Two and Three

Fri. 11/5: Kabre Personhood

Reading: 1. Piot, *Remotely Global*, Chapters Four and Five

Mon. 11/8: Kabre Communities

Reading: 1. Piot, *Remotely Global*, Chapter Six

** Wed. 11/10: Rethinking Diapora

Reading: 1. Piot, *Remotely Global*, Chapter Seven

** Fri. 11/12: A Kabre Modernity?

Reading: 1. Piot, *Remotely Global*, Chapter Eight

Culture and the Dilemmas of Rights: *Who Owns Native Culture?*

Mon. 11/15: Life Beyond Anthropology's Abstractions of "Culture"

Film: "White Shamans and Plastic Medicine Men"

Reading: 1. Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?*, Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1.

Wed. 11/17: Can Culture be Copyrighted?

Guest: Brian Gilley

Reading: 1. Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?*, Chapters 2 and 3

Fri. 11/19: Contested Environments

Reading: 1. Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?*, Chapters 4 and 5

** Mon. 11/22: Fluid Identities and Land Claims

Reading: 1. Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?*, Chapter 6

** Wed. 11/24-Fri. 11/26: Thanksgiving Break (no class)

Mon. 11/29: Dilemmas of Protecting Culture as a Resource

Reading: 1. Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?*, Chapters 7-8

Wed. 12/1: "Te Rua," Part One

Film: "Te Rua"

Reading: 1. Barclay, B. (1999) "The Vibrant Shimmer" *The Contemporary Pacific* 11(2): 390-
(R) 413.

Fri. 12/3: "Te Rua," Part Two

Film: "Te Rua"

Reading: 1. Handouts on *Whale Rider*

Course Conclusion: Reconsidering Ethnography and Theory

** Mon. 12/6: Discussion and Course Conclusions

No Reading

Wed. 12/8: Discussion and Course Conclusions

No Reading

Final research essay due Mon. 12/14, Anthro Dept. Office (509 Williams Hall)