

Department of Anthropology and Sociology (ANSO)

Academic year 2021-2022

Social Theory I: Classical and Contemporary Debates

ANSO104 - Autumn - 6 ECTS

[Schedule & Room](#)

Course Description

This course explores theory and theorisation - what they are, what they contribute to our understanding of the world, how they are deployed within anthropology and sociology - both historically and in the present - and what their limitations can be. The broad aim of the course is to foster critical thinking about the way theories are constructed and used, drawing on a range of both "canonical" and "non-canonical" examples - including in particular from the so-called "Global South" - in order to provide a more decentred and global perspective.

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Syllabus

Structure and Objectives

This course mixes lectures, seminar discussions, structured debates, and student presentations. It is a reading-intensive course, and has as objective to consider what theory and theorisation are within anthropology and sociology, and to explore how to identify and choose appropriate theories for empirical research. The course will introduce participants to both classic as well as contemporary theoretical debates, and will draw on examples from across the Global North and the Global South.

Evaluation and Grading

The course evaluation aims to encourage critical thinking and enhance students' ability to understand the relationship between theory and empirical research. It is based on class participation, demonstrating familiarity with the assigned readings, participating in collective activities, group presentations, as well as the quality and timeliness of the writing assignments. Students will:

- Actively **participate** in class and discussion of the **assigned readings**.
- Participate in a group debate in **week 5**.
- Participate in a monograph presentation in **weeks 12-13**.
- Write and upload to Moodle two days in advance of the sessions 400-word "Reading Response Paragraphs" (RRPs) reacting to the readings in **weeks 6-10**.

- Write a final 2,000 words essay, to be submitted by **19 December 2021**.

The course will be evaluated in the following manner:

- 30% - Student participation (including in group debate)
- 20% - Monograph presentations (sessions 12-13)
- 30% - Reading response paragraphs (sessions 6-10)
- 20% - Final 2,000 words essay

The course provides 6 ECTS. Attendance is mandatory (either in person or virtually, depending on circumstances).

Coursework

Monograph presentations

The monograph presentations are a shared assignment with ANSO081 “Research Methods in Anthropology and Sociology”, and will count towards both courses. All students will, in pairs, prepare a presentation that will critically dissect the theoretical and methodological frameworks of an anthropological or sociological monograph. The monograph is to be selected from a specially-curated list of ANSO staff recommendations (see appendix below). Presentations will be judged on both the quality of their content and of their exposition, including presenters’ ability to summarize the key issues coherently, and the extent to which they are able to answer questions in a reflexive manner and lead discussion after the presentation. 50% of the grade will be awarded for the individual performance, and 50% for the collective performance. Further instructions will be provided in class.

Reading response paragraphs

Prior to each session in weeks 6-10, students will have to write a 400-word paragraph responding to the assigned readings. These paragraphs should not try to summarise the readings, but rather highlight one or two issues that the specific juxtaposition of readings in that week raised for you, and which you think it would be interesting to discuss in class. The reading response paragraphs should be uploaded two days in advance of sessions via Moodle.

Final essay

The final 2,000 words essay is a shared assignment with ANSO081 “Research Methods in Anthropology and Sociology”, and will count towards both courses. Drawing on the monograph presentation and the critiques and comments received about it, this should go beyond just identifying the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the chosen monograph, but analyse their relationship to the way this presents its empirical data, analysis, and interpretations.

Course Policies

- Reading reaction paragraphs and final papers should be written in English or French, double-spaced, using standard 12-point font, with 1-inch margins. The student’s name, the paper’s title, the date, the course title, and page numbers must be included.
- Quotes and bibliography must follow the Chicago Manual of Style or Harvard Referencing System.
- Word limits must be adhered to within +/- 10%. Word limits exclude references but include all footnotes or endnotes.
- Students must hand in papers electronically as a PDF or Word file.
- Reading reaction paragraphs and final essays that are submitted with an unjustified delay, significantly exceed the word limit, and do not comply with the general guidelines will not receive a grade higher than 4.0.

- Students who miss more than two classes overall without being excused by the instructor will not receive anything higher than a 4.0.
- Plagiarism constitutes a breach of academic integrity and will not be tolerated. Students who present the work of others as their own will receive a 0.
- All of the articles and book chapters indicated in the course schedule will be made available as electronic reserve on the course Moodle site.

Course Schedule and Reading List

Week 1 (21 September 2021) – What are theory and theorisation, and why are they important?

Assigned readings:

1. Abend, G., (2008), “The meaning of ‘theory’”, *Sociological Theory*, 26(2): 173-199.
2. Geertz, C., (1973), “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”, in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books, 3-30.
3. Lund, C., (2014), “Of what is this a case? Analytical movements in qualitative social science research”, *Human Organization*, 73(3): 224-34.

Week 2 (28 September 2021) – The historiography of anthropological and sociological theorisation (or, the history of 200 years of social sciences in 1.5 hours!)

Assigned readings:

1. Moberg, M., (2013), “Of politics and paradigms” and “Claims and critiques of anthropological knowledge”, in *Engaging Anthropological Theory: A Social and Political History*, London: Routledge, 1-45.
2. Connell, R., (2019), “Canons and colonies: The global trajectory of sociology”, *Estudos Históricos (Rio de Janeiro)*, 32(67): 349-367.
3. Jones, G. A., and D. Rodgers (2022), “Beyond the City Limits: Comparison, Global Urbanism, and the Chicago School of Sociology”, in P. Le Galès and J. Robinson (eds.), *Handbook of Comparative Urban Studies*, London: Routledge, in press.

Week 3 (5 October 2021) – The Gender of Theory

Assigned readings:

1. Alway, J., (1995), “The trouble with gender: Tales of the still-missing feminist revolution in sociological theory”, *Sociological Theory*, 13(3): 209–228.
2. Butler, J., (1986), “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*”, *Yale French Studies*, 72: 35-49
3. Lutz, C., (1995), “The Gender of Theory”, in R. Behar and D. Gordon (eds.), *Women Writing Culture/Culture Writing Women*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 249-266.
4. Haraway, D., (1988), “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, *Feminist Studies*, 14 (3): 575–99.

Week 4 (12 October 2021) – Debate: Global Theory vs. Theorisation from the South

This session will be (more or less) modelled on an Oxford style debate (see <https://www.intelligencesquaredus.org/news/blog/what-oxford-style-debate-format>). The class will be divided into two groups who will argue for and against the motion below, drawing on their collective reading of the assigned readings. Further instructions will be provided in class.

Motion to be debated: This house believes that global theory will inevitably be North-centric and that we cannot understand the Global South without theorising from the South.

General background reading (everybody):

- Glassey, E., (2018), "Decolonising Social Thought and Contemporary Social Discourse: The diversification and globalisation of sociology", LSE *Researching Sociology* blog, 18 March, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/researchingsociology/2018/03/01/decolonising-social-thought-and-contemporary-social-discourse-the-diversification-and-globalisation-of-sociology/>.
- Obarrio, J., (2012), "Theory from the South", *Theorizing the Contemporary*, *Fieldsights* blog, 24 February, <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/series/theory-from-the-south>.

Assigned readings (group reading):

- Alatas, S. F., and V. Sinha, (2017), "Introduction: Eurocentrism, Androcentrism and Sociological Theory", in S. F. Alatas and V. Sinha (eds.), *Sociological Theory Beyond the Canon*, London: Palgrave, 1-16.
- Appadurai, A. (1990), "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy", *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 7: 295-310.
- Blaser, M., (2013), "Ontological Conflicts and the Stories of Peoples in Spite of Europe: Toward a Conversation on Political Ontology", *Current Anthropology*, 54 (5): 547–68.
- Brenner, N., and C. Schmid, (2015), "Towards a New Epistemology of the Urban?", *City*, 19(2-3): 151-182.
- Burawoy, M., (2000), "Introduction: Reaching for the Global", in M. Burawoy, et al., *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections, and Imaginations in a Postmodern World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1-40.
- Chakrabarty, D., (1992), "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?", *Representations*, 37: 1-26.
- Collier, S. J., and A. Ong, (2005), "Global Assemblages, Anthropological Problems", in A. Ong and S. J. Collier (eds.), *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, Oxford: Blackwell, 3-21.
- Guha, R., (1988), "The Prose of counter-insurgency", in R. Guha and G. C. Spivak (eds.), *Select Subaltern Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press, 45-88.
- Hannerz, U., (1989), "Notes on the Global Ecumene", *Public Culture*, 1(2): 66-75.
- Mignolo, W., (2008), "The geopolitics of knowledge and the colonial difference", in M. Moraña, E. Dussel, and C. A. Jáuregui (eds.), *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, Durham: Duke University Press, 225–58.
- Restrepo, E., and A. Escobar, (2005), "Other Anthropologies and Anthropology Otherwise: Steps to a World Anthropologies Framework", *Critique of Anthropology*, 25(2): 99-129.
- Robinson, J., (2002), "Global and World Cities: A View from Off the Map", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 26(3): 531-554.
- Santos, B. de Sousa, (2020), "Toward an Aesthetics of the Epistemologies of the South: Manifesto in Twenty-Two Theses", in Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses (eds.), *Knowledges Born in the Struggle: Constructing the Epistemologies of the Global South*, New York and London: Routledge, 117-125.
- Tsing, A. L., (2005), "Introduction", in *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1-18.

wa Thiong'o, N., (1987), "The Language of African Literature", in *Decolonising the Mind*, Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 4-33.

Week 5 (19 October 2021) – The temporality of theory: Fads, fashions, and forgetting

Assigned readings:

1. Law, A., and E. R. Lybeck, (2015), "Sociological Amnesia: An Introduction", in *Sociological Amnesia: Cross-currents in Disciplinary History*, Farnham: Ashgate, 1-15.
2. Bargheer, S., (2017), "The invention of theory: A transnational case study of the changing status of Max Weber's Protestant ethic thesis", *Theory and Society*, 46(6): 497–541.
3. Vigh, H. E., and D. B. Sausdal, (2018), "The anthropology of crime", H. Wydra and B. Thomassenin (eds.), *Handbook of political anthropology*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 441-461.

Week 6 (26 October 2021) – Theoretical endurance 1: Marx

Assigned readings:

1. Marx, K., (1986), "Historical materialism", in J. Elster (ed.), *Karl Marx: A Reader*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 170-221.
2. Amin, S., (2009), "Part 4: Towards a Non-Eurocentric View of History and a Non-Eurocentric Social Theory", in *Eurocentrism: Modernity, Religion and Democracy - A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism*, 2nd edition, New York: Monthly Review Press, 217-79.

Week 7 (2 November 2021) – Theoretical endurance 2: Weber

Assigned readings:

1. Weber, M., (1978), "The Types of Legitimate Domination", in *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich, Berkeley: University of California Press, 212-288.
2. Allen, A., (1999), "Introduction" and "Feminist Conceptions of Power: A Critical Assessment", in *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity*, London: Routledge, 1-29.

Week 8 (9 November 2021) – Theoretical endurance 3: Durkheim

Assigned readings:

1. Durkheim, E., (1972), "Forms of social solidarity" and "The division of labour and social differentiation", in A. Giddens (ed.), *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 123-54.
2. Turtledove, H., (2004), "Bluff", in *3xT*, New York: Baen, 156-77.

Week 9 (16 November 2021) – Theoretical endurance 4: Foucault

Assigned readings:

1. Foucault, M., (2013 [1976]), "Right of Death and Power over Life" and "17 March 1976", in T. Campbell and A. Sitze (eds.), *Biopolitics: A reader*, Durham: Duke University Press, 41-81.

2. Mbembe, A., (2013 [2003]), "Necropolitics", in T. Campbell and A. Site (eds.), *Biopolitics: A reader*, Durham: Duke University Press, 161-91.

Week 10 (23 November 2021) – Theoretical endurance 5: Bourdieu

Assigned readings:

1. Bourdieu, P., (2000), "Social Being, Time, and the Sense of Existence", in *Pascalian Meditations*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 206-45.
2. Auyero, J., (2021), "Taking Bourdieu to the Shantytown", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 45(1): 176-85.

Week 11 (30 November 2021) – Deconstructing theoretical analysis

Assigned readings:

1. Asad, T., (1972), "Market Model, Class Structure and Consent: A Reconsideration of Swat Political Organisation", *Man (N. S.)*, 7(1): 74-94.
2. Brandel, A., and S. Bagaria, (2020), "Plotting the Field: Fragments and Narrative in Malinowski's Stories of the Baloma", *Anthropological Theory*, 20(1): 29-52.
3. Jensen, S., and D. Rodgers, (2021), "Comparison through collaboration: Dilemmas and opportunities of joint ethnographic research on gangs in Nicaragua and South Africa", mimeo (submitted to *Current Anthropology*), 1-18.

Week 12 (7 December 2021) – Monograph dissection presentations

Student presentations (also on 9 December 2021 in Research Methods class)

Week 13 (14 December 2020) – Monograph dissection presentations

Student presentations (also on 16 December 2021 in Research Methods class)

Week 14 (21 December 2020) – Theory and theorisation in the real world

Assigned reading and viewing:

1. D'Andrade, R., and N. Scheper-Hughes, *et al.*, (1995), "Objectivity and Militancy: A Debate", *Current Anthropology*, 36(3): 399-440.
2. Carles, P., (2001), *La Sociologie est un Sport de Combat*, available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrCRRHxn42Y> (in French; English sub-titled version available in the Graduate Institute Library's DVD collection, call numbers 2.3SOC & HEIDVD 2565).

Appendix: List of ANSO staff recommended monographs

- Abu-Lughod, Lila, (2016), *Veiled sentiments: Honor and poetry in a Bedouin society*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Anand, Nikhil, (2017), *Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai*, Durham: Duke University Press.

- Aretxaga, Begoña, (1997), *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Biernacki, Richard, (1996), *The Fabrication of Labor: Germany and Britain, 1640-1914*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bourgois, Philippe, (1995), *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clastres, Pierre, (1972), *Chronique des Indiens Guayaki: Ce que savent les Aché, chasseurs nomades du Paraguay*, Paris: Plon.
- De Leon, Jason, (2015), *The Land of Open Graves; Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dua, Jatin, (2019), *Captured at Sea: Piracy and Protection in the Indian Ocean*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Edwards, David B., (2017), *Caravan of Martyrs: Sacrifice and Suicide Bombing in Afghanistan*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Essed, Philomena, (1991), *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*, London: SAGE.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E., (1940), *The Nuer: A description of the mode of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ferguson, James, (1994), *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development", Depoliticization, and Bureaucracy Power in Lesotho*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gabiam, Nell, (2016), *The Politics of Suffering: Syria's Palestinian Refugee Camps*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lancaster, Roger, (1992), *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Latour, Bruno, (1993), *The Pasteurization of France*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lavie, Smadar, (1991), *The Poetics of Military Occupation: Mzeina Allegories of Bedouin Identity Under Israeli and Egyptian Rule*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mojola, Sanyu, (2014), *Love, Money and HIV: Becoming a Modern African Woman in the Age of AIDS*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nguyen, Vinh-Kim, (2010), *The Republic of Therapy: Triage and Sovereignty in West Africa's time of AIDS*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Paschel, Tianna S., (2016), *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Petryna, Adriana, (2011), *Life Exposed: Biological Citizenship after Chernobyl*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Piot, Charles, with Kodjo N. Batema, (2019), *The Fixer: Visa Lottery Chronicles*, Durham: Duke University Press (open access at: <http://oopen.org/search?identifier=1005204>).
- Rivera, Lauren A., (2016), *Pedigree: How Elite Students get Elite Jobs*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Siu, Paul C., (1987), *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation*, New York: New York University Press.
- Small, Mario Luis, (2009), *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Strassler, Karen, (2010), *Refracted Visions: Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Tsing, Anna, (2015), *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.