



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Anthropology of The Contemporary

2324-3-E2001R027

Course title

Anthropology of contemporaneity

Topics and course structure

Contemporary anthropology aims to gain a critical approach in the study of the present time. In their first year of the bachelor's degree in Intercultural Communication, students have already come in touch with the fundamental elements of the discipline, that is, the theories and methodologies developed since the second half of the 19th century to grasp the processes of identity building and social differentiation in the contemporary world.

The course is an in-depth study of a specific topic in cultural anthropology: **the transformation of the body as a cultural construction. It will therefore deal with growth, affliction, sport, and care.** The course has two parallel strands.

On the one hand, the study of Philippe Bourgois's book ***In Search of Respect: selling crack in the Barrio*** and of the articles in the **Course Handout** will allow students to get acquainted with some important theories concerning the study of the body as a matrix of cultural transformation. Notions such as habitus, structural violence, symbolic violence, anthropopoiesis, gynecopoiesis, self-care, somatic modes of attention, social suffering, imagination, and others will be analysed and shown in the concreteness of specific ethnographies. Bourgois's text has become an indispensable reference for those studying the "drug economy" (drug dealing and consumption, urban ghettoization, discrimination, incorporation of hierarchy, stigma, class relations, colonial legacy) and, partly because the author's long ethnographic research took place in the late 1980s of the 20th century, a contemporary classic.

On the other hand, **two ethnographies (see Reading List)** will be presented, respectively, on the growth of adolescents in a post-disaster environment (Vignato) and on the construction of self through sport (Nardini). If the number of attendees permits, it will be possible to conduct a small ethnographic exercise on these two topics. The exercise is organized in the first part of the course and later discussed in the classroom.

The course has a strong focus on translating analytical concepts into practice. Ethnographic exercises are part of classroom training but also involve independent engagement. Students not attending will pay special attention to

the methodological aspects of the texts being examined.

Objectives

Through regular and participatory class attendance, this course features the following targets:

Knowledge and understanding: the course aims to provide students with an understanding of a fundamental area of cultural anthropology, namely the study of the transformation of the body, through the analysis of some discipline-specific notions such as habitus, structural violence, symbolic violence, anthropopoiesis, gynecopoiesis, self-care, somatic modes of attention, social suffering, and imagination. More precisely, the course aims to delve into the theoretical paradigm of symbolic violence and anthropopoiesis and the methodological specificities of anthropology such as field research, decolonisation of gaze, data collection and its restitution.

Ability to connect different models and ideas: Through the proposed lectures and readings, students will be provided with the disciplinary tools necessary to understand the processes of construction of bodily identities and to develop the ability to confront cultural diversity in its contemporary expressions: diversity of appearance, class, gender, ability and health.

Ability to apply knowledge and models: Students will acquire knowledge useful for critical reflection on the complexity of the contemporary world. The practice of ethnography and in-depth study of technical aspects such as interviewing, dialogue and restitution will enable them to develop skills of observation and interpretation of everyday life contexts.

Autonomy of judgment and communication skills will be strengthened during the lectures, and stimulate students to formulate their own opinion and argue it effectively. Learning skills will be encouraged through active participation in lectures and classroom discussion.

Methodologies

A variety of teaching methods is used in the course. Classical lectures with use of Power Point will cover the main topics, followed by in-classroom debates (online in the unlikely event of pandemics policies). Case-studies drawn from the history of the discipline are side-by side with those illustrated in the reading list. Audio-visual materials will be shared during the course. Data collection and writing exercises and classroom discussion of the results.

Online and offline teaching materials

All teaching and learning materials will be specified during the course and uploaded to **the course page**, which both attending and nonattending students are required to control regularly.

Programme and references

Reading list

1. Bourgois, P. (2003). *In search of respect: Selling crack in El Barrio*. Cambridge university press.
2. Vignato, S.(2012): 'Men come in, men go out': single Muslim women in Malaysia and Aceh, *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 18:2, 239-257

- Vignato, S. (2020). "Ganja in the Mountains, Sabu in the Sea": The Rural Drug Landscape in Aceh, Indonesia. In *Living with Drugs* (pp. 109-123). ISTE.
- Vignato, S. (2017). Orphans, victims and families: An ethnography of children in Aceh. *Antropologia*, 4(2 NS).
- Vignato, S. (2020). Motherly Landscapes: Matrifocality, Marriage, Islam and the Change of Generation in Post-Conflict, Post-Tsunami Aceh, *East And west* 1, 29-98.
- 3) Nardini, D. (2019). "Living the dream': Surfing as cultural heritage on Australia's Gold Coast." *International Journal of the History of Sport* 36 (6): 592-610.
- Nardini, D. (2020). "Between Tatami Mats and Sawdust: The Ambiguity of Breton Wrestling Sites." *Anthropological Quarterly* 93 (2): 5-26. ISSN: 0003-5491.
- Nardini, D, and Èpron A. (2021). "Being Bretons through wrestling. Traditional gouren and identity in Brittany, France." *Ethnography* 22(3): 372-395. ISSN: 1466-1381.

4. Handout texts (available on the course web page beginning of next term).

Assessment methods

Grading criteria: course attendance and active participation to in-classroom debates; knowledge of the texts mentioned in the Reading List.

Final evaluation: oral interview where the student will be required to be able to present and resume the contents of the lessons in classroom; the comprehension of the texts detailed in the Reading List; the ability to connect the different aspects of the theories and ethnographic examples.

Non-attending students will be required to be able to present and resume the contents answer on the comprehension of the books and articles detailed in the Reading List; the ability to connect the different aspects of the theories and ethnographic examples will be evaluated as well as the connections to other aspects of the bachelor's degree..

Office hours

Appointment requested via written email to the teachers.

Programme validity

Syllabus is to be held as good for the academic year of the first inscription and the following year (2 years in all).

Course tutors and assistants

Daniele Coccia
 Patrizia pertuso
 Roberto Rizzo

Sustainable Development Goals

REDUCED INEQUALITIES
