UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Cultures and Societies of The Pacific

2425-2-F0101R029

Course title

Pacific cultures and societies

Topics and course structure

The Pacific Islands is a region of contrasts and continuity. Original forms and practises as well as shared patterns characterise this compostite set of societies. Historically, the Pacific islands societies constitute a privileged reaserch field for anthropologists, attracted by that same heterogeneity and complexity. Pacific societies have contributed to the development of Anthropology as an academic discipline and, more recently, to the profound revision of the discipline on an epistemological and methodological ground.
In the past centuries, colonialism, evangelization, and assimilation processes were the main challenges for Pacific islands societies. Today, these societies are facing new issues: the consequences of climate change, of social and demographic change, the effects of nuclear testing and the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources, to name a few. These factors have contributed to renew the interest towards Pacific Islands societies and indigenous responses to change.
The course aims at providing an overall frame of the socio-cultural complexity in the contemporary Pacific Islands. The students will be provided with the instruments to decodify this complexity, by means of an approach interested in connections and interdependencies between the local and global, as well as the dialectical relationship between creativity and resilience.
In the first part of the course, the different geografical and cultural areas will be described, as well as the settlement of Oceania and the colonial encounter dynamics. In the second part, the course will introduce the history of anthropology *of* and *in* the Pacific, retracing the ongoing process of methodological decolonisation in the Pacific studies.
A special in-depth section will be dedicated to the Anthropology of Oceania in Italy that, starting from a theoretical perspective on flows, changes, and rewording, suggests an alternative to the stark postcolonial dichotomy (subjugation/resistance) and enhances indigenous local agency.
A particular attention will be given to the French Pacific Territories (New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna and French

Polynesia), which will be investigated - focusing on some ethnographic cases - on the background of the broader theoretical perspective of the European Overseas.
The course also aims at presenting the oceanian perspectives on wider themes - such as gift's economies and reciprocity; political and leadership systems; colonialism, evangelization and reconstruction of tradition (kastom/coutume); mobilities and diasporas; indigeneity and practices of coexistence; historical memory, identity awakenings and heritage processes. These themes will be reinterpreted in the light of the latest theoretical perspectives focused on cultural creativity (connections and reactions to modernity) and interested in the different forms of sovereignity in the postcolonial Pacific.

Objectives

The course aims at promoting the following learning objectives:

Knowledge and comprehension:
Students will acquire in-depth knowledge on the main authors, concepts, theoretical considerations, and contemporary research methods of the anthropology of Oceania.

Capacity to apply knowledge and comprehension:
Through the study of ethnographies and of the works of indigenous scholars, students will be able to identify and describe the Pacific Islands from a geographical, cultural, social and political perspective.

Ability to apply knowledge and models:
The course also aims at strengthening communication skills, critical thinking, proposing comparative analysis and reflections on current issues which go beyond the Pacific area.

Methodologies

Lectures, class work, viewing of audio-visual documents

Online and offline teaching materials

Materials properly presented in the classroom will be uploaded online.

Programme and references

1. Lesson notes

2. Gnecchi Ruscone E., Paini A. (a cura di), 2009, Antropologia dell'Oceania, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano.

3. One book to be chosen among the following:
   Aria M., 2007, Cercando nel vuoto. La memoria perduta e ritrovata in Polinesia, Pacini Editore, Pisa.
   Borgnino E., 2022, Ecologie native, Elèuthera, Milano.

Carbone C., 2021, Voci indigene e saperi sovversivi. Le donne maori innovano le coscienze, Mimesis Edizioni, Sesto San Giovanni.
Cottino G., 2022, Il peso del corpo. Un'analisi antropologica dell'obesità a Tonga, Unicopli, Milano (nuova edizione).
Favole A. (a cura di), 2020, L'Europa d'Oltremare, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano (Introduzione + cap. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12)
Favole A., 2010, Oceania. Isole di creatività culturale, Laterza, Bari-Roma.
Gallo M., 2023, I saperi della foresta. Giovani e trasmissione della memoria in Nuova Caledonia, Prospero Editore, Novate Milanese.
Gentilucci M., 2022, La montagna e il capitale. Il cammino kanak del nichel, Prospero Editore, Novate Milanese.
Maggio R., 2019, I Kwara'ae di Honiara. Migrazione e buona vita alle Isole Salomone, Meltemi, Sesto San Giovanni.

4. A short essay (provided by lecturer depending on the book chosen)

Assessment methods

Final exam:
oral
Evaluation criteria:
The students will be asked to examine some aspects discussed in the book and in the short essay, with regard to the issues faced during the course. The lecturer will verify the acquired knowledge and critical thinking skills with further questions.

In order to ensure an adequate preparation for the exam, non-attending students are urged to contact the lecturer for information.

Office hours

On appointment, online

Programme validity

Programs have a two year validity

Course tutors and assistants

Sustainable Development Goals

CLIMATE ACTION