



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Fundamentals of Political Anthropology

2627-1-F0102R005

Course title

Political Anthropology: the foundations

Topics and course structure

The course provides an in-depth understanding of political anthropology as a research field in the making, which builds on a history of anthropological engagement with power and politics. It develops in two parts. Part 1 addresses the beginnings and crucial developments of political anthropology, within the broader context of the history of the discipline. The interest for politics and power is a development of the period between the two World Wars, that takes traction with the end of colonialism and the emergence of a new world order in the 1950s and 1960s. A focus on the trajectory of Georges Balandier, and on his pioneering analysis of colonization, paves the way to understand the entanglements between political and historical anthropology typical of this field of knowledge.

Part 2 focuses on a contemporary research theme: energy. Driven by the debate on decarbonization and by the urgency of the climate crisis, anthropology has increasingly turned to energy as a privileged lens for examining the material foundations of political power. Building on Boyer's analysis of energopower, we will learn how to deepen a current topic through bibliographic research, and will consider — through ethnographic examples — the socio-political and cultural dimensions of energy and electricity, exploring how infrastructures of extraction, distribution and consumption produce relations of dependency, citizenship and sovereignty, and how energy transitions reshape the boundary between the political and the technical.

Objectives

By attending classes, actively participating in the discussions, and carefully studying the materials assigned, students will:

- ACQUIRE solid and systematic knowledge in the field of social and cultural anthropology, and of political anthropology in particular
- IDENTIFY the theoretical and methodological specificities of anthropological approaches to power and politics, and the relevance of interdisciplinary connections
- UNDERSTAND the specificities of political phenomena beyond a state-centred approach, with a focus on grassroots dynamics and politics from below.

Ability to apply knowledge and understanding:

- ARTICULATE the dialogue between scientific literature and research in an innovative way
- EFFECTIVELY APPLY the skills acquired to concrete problems, situations and contexts
- KNOW HOW TO CONVEY the sense of open-mindedness and the capacity for intercultural dialogue that are fundamental to social and cultural anthropology.

Independence of judgement:

Understand the complexity of cultural processes from a plurality of points of view, and deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices. Assess the social consequences of individual actions and decisions and adopt a reflective and responsible attitude.

Communication skills:

Express ideas, knowledge and arguments clearly. Make informed judgements by integrating information from different reliable sources.

Learning skills:

Develop and refine individual learning methods and independently identify and construct objects and topics of research and study.

Methodologies

The course is taught in Italian.

1. The first and the last lesson serve as an introduction and as a critical assessment of the results achieved together.
2. Three asynchronous lectures introductory to the field of political anthropology will be uploaded on the moodle platform by the end of the course. These lectures will be in Italian, and are a support to the individual study that follows the end of the course.
3. Fourteen lessons will develop through the combination of classic lectures and interactive learning, averaging 60% and 40% of the total hours, respectively. Interactive sessions will include, for example, presentation and discussion of ethnographic cases; viewing, analysis and discussion of multimedia materials and documentaries; cooperative learning sessions; discussion with invited guests.

Online and offline teaching materials

Attending classes is a dynamic experience. The course will develop thanks to the collaboration between professor and students in the reading and analysis of the texts selected for discussion as much as through proposals of integration. The course moodle platform is a point of reference for both attending and not-attending students.

Additional teaching materials may be uploaded to the e-learning platform during the course for students to study independently.

Programme and references

Classes are in Italian. If you understand and speak it fluently, consult the program in the Italian section of this syllabus; if not, contact me for a personalized reading list.

THIS IS MEANT ONLY FOR STUDENTS WHO DO NOT SPEAK ITALIAN (*solo per studenti che non parlano l'italiano*)

Assessment methods

Oral examination.

Assessment criteria

The choice of the oral examination as the assessment method is consistent with the objectives of the course, as it allows, in a dialogic situation, to verify students' knowledge of the texts and their ability to develop a reflective, analytical and critical argument around the conceptual themes that the assigned texts bring to the fore.

The final assessment will depend on:

- Consistent and active participation in discussions and activities proposed in class.
 - Oral examination on the topics covered in class and on the assigned texts. The assessment will evaluate comprehension of the texts, the ability to present their contents clearly and concisely, and the capacity for critical analysis and independent reworking through connections between the assigned texts.
- There are no in-itinere assessments.

Students who are unable to attend classes and participate in the activities proposed during the course will be assessed exclusively on the basis of the oral examination.

The assessment will be expressed in thirtieths, based on the following grading scale:

1. High level (25–30/30): Distinguished – Excellent

Knowledge and understanding: the student demonstrates in-depth and solid knowledge of the texts and topics covered, and analyses them without hesitation.

Ability to apply knowledge: the student identifies general considerations on the authors and topics with confidence and offers effective personal observations; with sound argumentative skills, is able to analyse, summarise, interpret, contextualise and compare the assigned texts, including across disciplines.

Independence of judgement: the student demonstrates excellent critical skills, autonomy of judgement and originality in the analysis and interpretation of texts.

Communication skills: the student expresses themselves clearly, rigorously, fluently and appropriately, and is fully aware of the need to use different registers depending on the communicative situation

Learning skills: the student demonstrates excellent independent learning skills, is able to rework knowledge effectively and connect it to their own experience, and is fully aware of the usefulness of the discipline.

2. Average level (18–24/30): Sufficient – Good

Knowledge and understanding: the student demonstrates a general understanding of the texts and topics covered. Although there are some minor inaccuracies or uncertainties regarding non-essential details,

overall the student shows sufficient comprehension and a reasonable ability to analyse the texts.

Ability to apply knowledge: the student has some difficulty connecting general points to the examples provided in the texts. The summary of the content is sometimes not very effective, and the contextualisation and comparison of authors and themes could be further developed.

Independence of judgement: the student demonstrates a fair degree of independence in forming critical assessments, although sometimes tending to rely on the opinions of others.

Communication skills: the student expresses themselves clearly and with sufficient precision, with a reasonable command of the specific language of the discipline.

Learning skills: the student demonstrates a reasonable ability to apply knowledge and relate it to personal experience; an awareness of the practical value of the discipline is present, though still developing.

3. Basic level (0–17/30): Still consolidating

Knowledge and understanding: the student demonstrates only a partial understanding of the texts and topics covered; their grasp of the content is sometimes uncertain and requires further exploration and greater precision in interpretation.

Ability to apply knowledge: the student finds it difficult to link general considerations to the examples in the texts and to summarise the content effectively; contextualisation and comparison between authors and themes still need to be developed.

ERASMUS students can do the exam in english.

Office hours

E-mail appointment

Programme validity

Two years

Course tutors and assistants

Raul Zecca Castel

Sustainable Development Goals

NO POVERTY | GENDER EQUALITY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES
