SOAN 221 - Political Anthropology

Fall Semester, 2008-9
Dr. Kirsten Scheid*
9:00-9:50, Monday, Wednesday, & Friday

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*(The last name rhymes with “side” – and please don’t call me “Miss.”)

Required texts:
1) The Anthropology of Politics – A Reader in Ethnography, Theory, and Critique, edited by Joan Vincent, 2002
2) Ambiguities of Domination – Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria by Lisa Wedeen, 1999
Both texts are available at the University Bookstore and on Reserve at Jafet Library.

Course Description:
This course delves into the everyday practices and overarching superstructures that create and perpetuate power, as well as provoking awareness about means to confront power. It will tie the understanding of power students have gained in their own lives to theories of prominent thinkers such as Marx, Foucault, Taussig, Scott, and Spivak. The course will expand students’ understanding of the state apparatus, non-state political systems, and other differencing schemes by which power is experienced. Students will also gain an overview of anthropological theory and method. In all, the course will encourage students to develop critical thinking and to empower themselves.

Case studies will be examined from around the world but extended attention will be given to Syria under Hafez al-Asad.

Pre-Requisites:
There are no pre-requisites for this course, but it is strongly recommended that you have completed your junior year. The course requires regular reading, ability to take analytical notes, and essay-writing. It does not make for an “easy grade.”
Course Objectives:
1) To learn how to evaluate information and assertions
2) To understand an academic field historically and critically
3) To articulate concepts of “power,” “resistance,” “agency,” “citizen/state/government,” “desire/subjectivity/consciousness”, “punishment/discipline/ritual/spectacle,” “deviance/marginality/difference”
4) To discover your potential role as subjects AND agents of power
5) To employ cross-cultural findings that make the normal strange and open new avenues of thought and action

Course Requirements:
1) Reading and discussion of assigned texts.
   a. As “questioner” (once the semester and in a pair), you must bring to class a set of points to be raised. You will write these on a paper and submit them to me at the beginning of class.
   b. As “presenter” (once the semester and in a pair), you will come to class prepared to share an issue or event that relates to the reading and lecture of the week. Your presentation can involve multi-media material and should entail planned articulation of your ideas.
2) Leading a discussion through prepared questions and contribution of examples.
3) Two mid-terms (not cumulative), Final exam (not cumulative), possible pop quizzes.
4) Final paper analyzing an ethnography of power from multiple perspectives.

Evaluation of Your Participation and Learning:
1) Questioner = 10%
2) Presenter = 10%
3) Mid Term 1 = 20%
4) Mid-Term 2 = 20%
5) Final Exam = 20%
6) Final Essay = 20%

Readings:
You cannot develop a critical take on common notions and current theories of power unless you read their articulation carefully, considering the data used to support the arguments and the ideas deliberately absented from the text. Regular reading is essential to your ability to participate in this seminar.

Give yourself advance time to find the texts, and PLAN FOR PROBLEMS: Inform me immediately so that you still have time to complete the assignment. Not finding the text at the last minute will not be an acceptable excuse for failing to do the work.
Class Participation and Attendance Policy:
By attending class and participating in discussion you contribute to the learning atmosphere. Your absence diminishes from the intensity of classroom thinking, just as your silence contributes to a sense of passivity. Raise a ruckus – but an informed one! Your active participation will be evaluated as part of your final grade in terms of:

- Your arriving on time
- Your sharing your ideas based on assigned texts and course concepts
- Your listening attentively and respectfully to others in class
- Your taking notes on lectures, discussions, and presentations
- Your not answering cellular calls or text messages
- Your not eating
- Your not leaving the room unnecessarily

Academic Integrity:
Formulating your own response to ideas presented in texts or class is a fundamental component of the learning process. It also provides the main medium by which your instructor can evaluate your skills acquisition and intervene where necessary to ensure your success. Therefore, your resorting to copying others’ words or thoughts demonstrates a breakdown in the learning process.

AUB offers an on-line tutorial that explains exactly what plagiarism involves and how to avoid committing it. You are required to take this tutorial and pass its test. Once you have taken it you will be held responsible for your commitment to academic integrity. Turn-It-In may be used to verify the integrity of your work. Plagiarism will be dealt with severely.
SOAN 221 POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
Fall 2008
Course Schedule and Assignments:


1. M 9/29 Introduction
2. F 10/3 Singing Power: “My Name is Lisa Kalvelage”

UNIT 1: POLITICS & ANTHROPOLOGY

3. M 10/6 Exercise: Cannibals & the Civilized
   Reading: “Introduction” in TAP, pp.17-25
5. F 10/10 Discussion of Political Anthropology & Ethics
   • Asad, Talal. 1991. “From the History of Colonial Anthropology to the Anthropology of Western Hegemony,” in TAP. pp.133-142

UNIT 2: COLONIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

6. M 10/13 Exercise: Kinship Chart
   Following the model provided in class, draw your family diagram back 4 generations. Think about who counts today in your family decision-making. Who do you see regularly? Who do you see only at formal occasions? Whose opinion matters? What are your ways of addressing the different family members? Can you think of other options that would be appropriate for addressing them? Bring your diagram – or, if you can’t figure out how to diagram it, bring the material for doing so – to class.
   Questioners: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

7. W 10/15 Lecture on “The Politics of Relations”

8. F 10/17 Application: “I’m My Own Grandpa!”
   Bring your completed kinship chart to class. Be prepared to talk about who is on there, who is NOT, and how the relatives are differently reckoned from various positions in your kin network.
UNIT 3: WHAT IS A “HEADLESS STATE”? |

9. M 10/20 Exercise: Consensus Rules

Questioners: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

10. W 10/22 Lecture on “Power in Parts (Segmentary Theory)”

11. F 10/24 Discussion: Consensus Unravels

Presenters: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

UNIT 4: THE POWER OF BELIEF

12. M 10/27 Exercise: If you knew a witch…. 

Questioners: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

13. W 10/29 Lecture on “Power in Belief (Cultural Falsifiability)”

14. F 10/31 Discussion:
   - Gluckman, Max. 1940. “‘The Bridge’: Analysis of a Social Situation in Zululand,” in *TAP*, pp.53-58.

Presenters: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

UNIT 5: THE POWER OF CAPITAL & POSSIBILITY OF REVOLUTION

15. M 11/3 Mid-Term on Units 1-4
16. W 11/5 Lecture on “Hegel on His Head”


Questioners: 1) __________________________ 2) __________________________

17. F 11/7 Discussion:


Presenters: 1) __________________________ 2) __________________________

UNIT 6: POWER OUTSIDE STRUCTURE?

18. M 11/10 Discussion: Suffering from Structure


Questioners: 1) __________________________ 2) __________________________


20. F 11/14 Application:

What are the “outsides” that make your cultural, economic, political inside? What structural suffering can you trace from a commodity you use in daily life to its waves of impact? Try to take one and trace it out, using media/internet sources, or consider what type of information would be necessary to do so, and what the reasons for your not accessing it are.

Presenters: 1) __________________________ 2) __________________________

UNIT 7: RESISTANCE OR ROMANCE?


Questioners: 1) __________________________ 2) __________________________
22. W 11/19 Lecture on “Powerfully Dragging Feet”

23. F 11/21 Application:


Presenters: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

UNIT 8: VOICE AS POWER, SILENCE AS

24. M 11/24 Exercise: Learning to Be Heard


Questioners: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

25. W 11/26 Lecture on “Speaking Power”


26. F 11/28 Application:

• Simmons, Rachel. 2002. “She’s All That,” in The Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, pp.103-128. (Course Packet)

Describe in detail a scene in which you or someone you know was silenced by the social setting or sense of hierarchy. Be prepared to share this with the class, though we may do this anonymously. One or two paragraphs in length. Send to me by e-mail an hour before class at the latest, and bring your printed copy to class.

Presenters: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

UNIT 9: SUBJECTS OF POWER

27. M 12/1 Second Mid-Term on Units 5-8


29. F 12/5 Application:
Bring to class a picture or news-clipping of a spectacular or specular aspect of your own society that can be analyzed as a “power field.”

Presenters: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

UNIT 10: AMBIGUOUS DOMINATION

30. M 12/8 Exercise: Consent

Questioners: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

31. W 12/10 Lecture on “Spectacular Belief?”

32. F 12/12 Application:
   Consider the ways consent is engineered by and for believing subjects in your society. Bring an example to discuss in class. Be prepared to weigh Wedeen’s analysis in comparison to others we have used this semester.

Presenters: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

33. M 12/15 Discussion:
   • Wedeen, chapters Four and Five

Questioners: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

34. W 12/17 Lecture on “Complicating Compliance”

UNIT 11: THE POWER TO RECONSTRUCT & RECONCILE

35. M 1/12 Discussion:

Questioners: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________
36. W 1/14 Lecture on “The Power to Erect National Truths”

37. F 1/16 Application: Debate
Be prepared to debate the statement “A TRC in Lebanon would heal enough wounds to prevent further conflict.” From the readings, you must extrapolate how one could argue both “for” this statement and “against” it. In class, I will call on you randomly to take up one or the other side.

UNIT 12: POWER AND THE ACADEMY

38. M 1/19 Exercise: Speaking Up and Out

Questioners: 1) ___________________ 2) ___________________

39. W 1/21 Lecture: Review

40. F 1/22 Application: Your Own Singing Power
Bring a song on a CD or MP3/ iPod to play for the class. It should be a song that helps you understand power. Be prepared to explain why, using the concepts and terminology we have acquired this semester.