

070.418/615 – The Comparative Tradition in Anthropology

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Spring 2015, Mondays 1:30-3:50 PM, 401 Macaulay Hall

Anthropology is often imagined as the study of a particular place and people. But comparative methods date back to the beginnings of the discipline, efforts that are echoed in recent works of global and ambitious scope. In this seminar, we examine the theory and practice of comparison in anthropology, looking at the historical development of comparative methods, as well as contemporary attempts at comparative understanding. We will seek ways of making comparisons that don't clamp down on the essential nature of the entities being compared, and that don't insist upon a necessary gulf between them. In so doing, we will reflect critically upon the relationship between universal ideas and particular circumstances in anthropology.

Materials – The five required books (Levi-Strauss, Viveiros de Castro, Strathern, Latour, and Rosaldo) are available from the campus bookstore. All other required readings will be available on the Blackboard site for the course.

Requirements – This is a seminar class; attendance at all course meetings is expected, as is active participation in class discussion (20%). Each Monday morning by 8am, you will post a one-paragraph response to the week's reading on Blackboard, describing what you find most intriguing, puzzling, or frustrating about the reading (40%). Once, over the semester, you will help to facilitate class discussion by synthesizing essential themes and questions (10%). Lastly, you will write one final paper, project, or proposal (8-10 pp, 1.5 space) on a comparative theme, based either on the course readings or a topic of your choice (30%).

Policies – (1) *Email*. You will receive periodic notices and instructions concerning coursework on your JHU email account; you are responsible for ensuring receipt of these messages.

(2) *Attendance*. Unexcused absences from class will compromise your grade, so please ensure that your name is recorded during each session on the class attendance sheet.

(3) *Electronic devices*. Use of such devices is distracting and disallowed during class sessions. If this expectation will pose any significant problems for you, please talk to me about this individually.

(4) *Disability*. Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class should obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services.

(5) *Assignments*. Late assignments will be marked down 10% per day.

(6) *Academic integrity*. The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.

* Office hours Tuesdays 1:30-3:30 PM, Macaulay 111 / pandian@jhu.edu

Schedule

January 26	Introduction Philippe Descola, "On Anthropological Knowledge," 2005
February 2	James G. Frazer, "The Origin of Totemism," 1899, and "The Beginnings of Religion and Totemism Among the Australian Aborigines," 1905 Henrika Kuklick, "The Rise and Fall – and Potential Resurgence – of the Comparative Method, With Special Reference to Anthropology," 2007
February 9	A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Notes on Totemism in Eastern Australia," 1929; "Religion and Society," 1945; "The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology," 1951 Tim Ingold, "Anthropology is <i>Not</i> Ethnography," 2008
February 16	Claude Levi-Strauss, <i>Totemism</i> , 1963
February 23	Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, <i>A Thousand Plateaus</i> , 1987, chapters 1 & 10
March 2	Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, <i>Cannibal Metaphysics</i> , 2014
March 9	Viveiros de Castro, <i>Cannibal Metaphysics</i> , continued
March 23	Marilyn Strathern, <i>After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century</i> , 1992
March 30	Strathern, <i>After Nature</i> , continued
April 6	Bruno Latour, <i>An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns</i> , 2013
April 13	Latour, <i>Modes of Existence</i> , continued
April 20	Renato Rosaldo, <i>The Day of Shelly's Death: The Poetry and Ethnography of Grief</i> , 2013
April 27	No class
May 11	Final papers due by 4pm in Macaulay 404