

## Decolonising the anthropology curriculum

Our aim overall is to include a greater diversity of scholars, without claiming that this will achieve decolonisation in itself. We focus on concepts and phenomena (relatedness, place, technology) and highlight the ways in which these are not just interesting subjects for anthropological enquiries or good frameworks for “thinking with”, but have been part and parcel of projects of power and domination as well and/or are embedded within those. Our reading lists include the work of diverse scholars from a range of backgrounds, but without assuming that someone's 'coloniality' or 'indigenous perspective' can be inferred from their name, skin colour, or stated race/ethnicity, since this rests on the kinds of pigeonholing logic that is at odds with the project of anthropology. The list below, while not exhaustive, gives a flavour of how certain courses embody a ‘decolonising’ approach.

During the course of our discussions with the student collective Seligman Must Fall, we reflected on our current teaching practice and, in consultation with members of a [Changemakers](#) project, restructured certain courses.

**1. Our first-year courses** emphasise how anthropology is a way of seeing and thinking, not about ‘us’ studying ‘them.’ We explore a history of anthropological thought situated in its historical context, including imperialism, nation-states, and capitalism. We discuss the entanglement of colonialism and anthropology, the politics of research on (rather than with) indigenous communities, the complex identities of those described as ‘native anthropologists’, race and ethnicity and identity politics. Key topics also include the politics of representation, the entanglement between the birth of visual media, colonialism and how modernist sensibilities underpinned the project of salvage anthropology (Haddon et al.). We consider how primitivist discourses are ubiquitous in Western perceptions of small-scale societies, and explore ethnographies of the colonial encounter by juxtaposing western anthropologists’ work with that of indigenous filmmakers to uncover the psychic traumas of colonialism. We emphasise from the get-go how the anthropological endeavour is embedded in, but not reducible to, broader power relations.

**2. Second-year courses** include some that share teaching with those in the MSc programme.

**AN200/405 Kinship Sex and Gender** explores the intersection of race and gender in the bodily performance of masculinity, the historical legacy, for understandings of kinship, of postcolonial nationalism and state-building, and the (possibly) neo-colonial practice of transnational adoption (which is placed in the context of the legacy of US wars in SE and E Asia). The work of Nigerian scholar Nkiru Nzegwu is used to rethink classic works of structural-functionalism on African kinship, but also more contemporary theories of patriliney, to examine how lineage dynamics were shaped by colonialism. We discuss attempts to complicate the universalism-relativism debate by examining how settler colonialism may have shaped indigenous people's relationship to and investment in their own 'cultural' and 'cosmological' uniqueness, and consider how colonial and plantation dynamics not only involved sexuality, but have come to structure various aspects of contemporary sexuality.

**An237/436 Anthropology of Development** addresses the legacy of colonialism, local power dynamics, non-western feminist perspectives, and effects and ethics of interventions that are designed in western environments.

**An277/477 Sub-Saharan Africa** explores questions about 'theory from the South'. It includes authors from Africa, several of them early career scholars, in an attempt to answer what that might be. It asks whether Mbembe's thoughts in *On the Postcolony* and the claims of the Comaroffs are useful in challenging conventional wisdom on Africa.

**AN223/420 SouthEast Asia** is explicitly framed by the question of how to write about Southeast Asia in a way that does justice to its apparent difference without reverting to Orientalism. Students actively interrogate the value of 'classic', but essentialising, culturalist anthropologies of Southeast Asia (Geertz, Anderson, Errington, etc), and later return to the question of how to figure Southeast Asia's 'place in the world' - something with which both anthropologists and Southeast Asians have to grapple. It advocates for a critical study of cartographies, arguing that all cartographies both reveal and conceal and showing how many of the cartographies associated with the 'decolonising' movement in fact contain assumptions about the stability of identities that are in tension with both historic and contemporary Southeast Asian worldviews. Southeast Asian materials point to ways in which decolonisation could itself be decolonised.

**AN280 Public Anthropology** Includes a week on world anthropology (to specifically focus on non-western authors in anthropology), one on racism in science and anthropological responses, and one on hostile publics (where we discuss the unintended consequences of being read by our informants).

**An275 Anthropology of Revolution** studies the Zimbabwe anti-colonial insurgency, the Indian Naxalite insurgency and the Nepali Maoist People's War. It tackles colonialism head-on with the Zimbabwe case and the Indian case (the latter claim that India is still 'semi-colonial') and compares these two cases with an insurgency in a country that was not colonised by Western powers but internally by Hindu dominant kingdoms. We explore the relationship between class/race/indigeneity and gender and how it has mapped out in these revolutionary struggles, and look at the politics of fieldwork (in which focusing on the indigenous perspective is crucial).

**AN205/AN424 Anthropology of Melanesia** Issues of colonial encounter, decolonization, race, indigeneity, etc., are central to this course. The category 'Melanesia' (like 'Polynesia', 'Micronesia', etc) is based on early 19th century racial theories of culture. The first week of the course considers the history of the category, exploring whether it is problematic, thinking about what alternative categories we might use, and discussing how the peoples of the southwest Pacific respond to this category. We read and discuss the writings of Pacific intellectuals and anthropologists (specifically Bernard Narokobi and Epeli Hau'ofa) who have written critically about colonialism, development, and anthropology. We also consider how one anthropologist (Alex Golub) has responded, in turn, to Narokobi's writings.

**AN247/AN461 Questions of Being** includes a book, *Earth Beings*, written by a Peruvian-born academic, Marisol de la Cadena. It is an explicit analysis of race, colonialism, indigeneity, and decolonization. We also consider critiques of the 'ontological turn' by indigenous scholars.

**An240/444 Investigating the Philippines** includes many Philippine and Philippine-American authors. Discussion of positionality of scholars and the development of scholarship on the Philippines in context is an integral and explicit part of the course.

**AN243/458 Children & Youth** explores the politics and ethics of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as a 'universal' approach to childhood, and consider alternative rights frameworks such as the

African Convention on the Rights and Responsibilities of the Child. It has a diverse reading list with a lot of work by female anthropologists from Africa and South Asia. In the weeks on child labour, street children and child soldiers, we explore the consequences of the CRC for international and NGO interventions in the lives of children and families in the Global South.

**AN256/456 Economic Anthropology (1): Production and Exchange** Includes discussions of slavery and race, more generally, and includes a range of theorists from diverse backgrounds.

**AN276/476 Anthropology and the Anthropocene** emphasises aspects of decolonisation, indigeneity, and race.

**3. Third-year courses** include a core course as well as some that share teaching with the MSc programme.

**An303 Advanced Theory** aims at teaching students to acknowledge complexity and tensions in understanding, without resorting to reductive or quickly judgmental approaches. It shows how an ability to read history is crucially enabling for all kinds of creative projects, whether directly political or otherwise, and helps students see the difference between what is true and what is not. Gillian Feeley Harnik's work has material on Darwin and Morgan that can be read as a radical unsettling of stereotypical narratives about Western scientific modernity and knowledge regimes; it includes discussions about anthropology of/in America, Europe and other early-industrialised places. The course also includes a postcolonial study by a Philippine author.

**AN301/AN402 Anthropology of Religion** has Issues of indigeneity, alterity, and encounter as central. Several of the required readings concern the topic of decolonization. We also explore the claim that 'religion' is a category imposed on non-European, non-Christian others, and track the ways in which this claim has actually pushed the study of indigenous people outside the mainstream of the anthropology of religion.

**AN357/457 Anthropology of Globalisation** aims to trouble an economistic, deterministic and/or Marxist interpretation of globalisation. The prism for analysis is a focus on intimate economies in which race, gender and ethnicity are crucial to understanding accumulation. Alongside this the understanding of economic life is centred on challenging the usual concepts of labour and formalised economies. Long-standing theoretical themes in economic anthropology, such as production, labour, household economies and social reproduction, technology, consumption, migration and nationalism, state forms, markets, citizenship, financial circulation and debt, are refracted through this approach. The course is driven by attention to issues of the reproduction of inequality out of historical forms of exploitation.

**4. The MSc programme** has a dedicated core course. **An404 Ethnography and Theory** aims to examine the relationship between theory and ethnography in social and cultural anthropology in the context of colonial and post-colonial history. During the Michaelmas term the course focuses on the development of anthropology before circa 1980 in the British, French and American schools. It explores anthropological epistemology or the discipline's forms and methods of knowledge production. The course moves through time with a genealogical method or by tracing the 'birth' of concepts that shape the present and future of our discipline. It also brings from the margins forgotten ancestors and their heterodox ideas, which are not usually part of the canon. The emergence of key concepts is linked to intellectual projects, fieldwork encounters and historical events. The unique quality of anthropology is

that it is a qualitative social science committed to a 'radical empiricism' (Jackson) or 'realism' (Herzfeld). In other words its concepts are derived from dissonant encounters with the social and cultural world 'at home' and in 'the field.' Some of the key concepts we explore are: participant observation and evidence; culture and race; postcoloniality; relativism and surrealism; totemism and animism; magic, art and science, ritual; inequality; personhood, agency and ethics; kinship and gender.

Reflecting these aims, each week includes historical articles that show the emergence of knowledge from colonial encounters, theoretical pieces that engage with questions of fieldwork and representation, and research produced by black and female authors. There is direct discussion of the Rhodes Must Fall and Decolonisation movements.