



Second cycle, 2005–2007

# Key concepts in social anthropology



CONFÉRENCE UNIVERSITAIRE  
DE SUISSE OCCIDENTALE

Triangle Azur



Université  
de Neuchâtel



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# Programme outline

## **Module 1: October 28–29, 2005**

Opening (Ellen Hertz, UniNe / Heinz Käufeler, UniZh)

## **Module 2: January/June 2006**

Kinship (Edouard Conte / Saskia Walentowitz, UniBe)

## **Module 3: April 27–28, 2006**

Ritual (Christian Ghasarian, UniNe)

## **Module 4: September 21–23, 2006**

Law/Rights (Isabelle Schulte-Tenckhoff, iued, Genève)

## **Module 5: October 2006**

Space (Walter Leimgruber, UniBas)

## **Workshop: November 24–25, 2006**

Research Presentation (Heather Murray, UniBe)

## **Module 6: January 2007**

Belief (Mondher Kilani, UniL)

## **Module 7: April 2007**

Trust (Christian Giordano, UniFr)

## **Module 8: June 2007**

Power (Shalini Randeria, UniZh)

## **Project responsibility**

Prof. Ellen Hertz, project director (UniNe)

PD Dr. Heinz Käufeler, coordinator (UniZh)

## **Board of Directors**

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Prof. Irene Maffi (UniL)

Prof. François Ruegg (UniFr)

Prof. Heinzpeter Znoj (UniBe)

## Module 1

# Introduction to the second cycle

**October 28–29, 2005**

Organizers: Prof. Ellen Hertz and Dr. Heinz Käufeler, Neuchâtel

This introductory module will be a first encounter between participating students and the Graduate School organizers. The participants will be asked to present their research on the basis of a one- to two-page summary to be distributed at the beginning of the module, and equal discussion time will be devoted to each topic. In addition, the organizers will propose one or two short articles to help generate a discussion, but the main emphasis is on the contributions of the participating doctoral students.

## Module 2

# Kinship

**January 27, 2006/June 2006**

Organizers: Prof. Edouard Conte, Dr. Saskia Walentowitz, Bern

### **The anthropology of kinship: from field to text**

Many think today that kinship has lost its social relevance. However, one should not forget that in most societies it remains at the centre of human action and therefore retains its importance for anthropological understanding. It is no coincidence that the anthropology of kinship has constituted the core of social anthropology since its beginnings as a scientific discipline. No other part of the discipline is as close to the universal claim of comparative anthropology as the study of kinship.



While these are reasons enough to give the anthropology of kinship our full attention, kinship also stands at the centre of current social debates. Consider the spectacular advances of reproductive medicine or the claims for recognition of marriage and parenthood by homosexuals. Finally, kinship studies allow us to understand the still lively exercise of male dominance, firmly grounded in the social and symbolic constructions of descent and alliance. The anthropology of kinship is a solid part of classical anthropology and will play an important role in the future, in our discipline as well as in other areas of the humanities and social sciences.

In the postgraduate programme, we would like to discuss the personal as well as scientific relevance of relations of kinship in the process of data collecting in the field as well as in the construction of the research in dissertation projects. The contributions (papers or chapters of theses) should be written with reference to classical and recent contributions to the anthropology of kinship.

A preliminary meeting is scheduled for January 27, 2006 for the two-day session to be held in June 2006.

## **Module 3** **Ritual**

**April 27–28, 2006**

Organizer: Prof. Christian Ghasarian, Neuchâtel

This module will reflect on the important anthropological question of rituals in general, including the ritualized expressions of the aspirations of a growing segment of the populations of Western societies on the one hand, and of certain social classes of non-western urbanized societies on the other hand (not necessarily recent developments, but generally stigmatized today by the vague and allusive notion “New Age”).

The participants in this module are notably invited to evaluate to what extent the notion of “ritual” can be related to that of the “sacred”, to “sacralization” and “re-sacralization”, to “structure” and “anti-structure”, not only in their “classical” form but also in different types of contemporary statements. Are there continuities, reformulations, ruptures? What social and existential significations enter these dynamics?

The reflections contributing to this module may be based on concrete case studies but should be related to the general issue of ritual, navigating between ethnography and theory.

## Module 4

# Law/Rights

September 21–23, 2006

Organizer: Prof. Isabelle Schulte-Tenckhoff, iued, Genève

An increasing number of issues addressed by anthropologists nowadays involve questions of (legal) rights, notably in the context of globalization (e.g. territorial and resource rights of non-state groups) and migration (e.g. multiculturalism, minority rights). The purpose of this module is to explore the contribution – but also the limits – of law with regard to current subjects of anthropological interest.

Anthropology emphasizes how law is embedded in social processes. Viewing formal (written) law as the product of social struggles and the dynamics of history, it seeks out the manner in which legal instruments are applied, more or less selectively, in particular contexts. Within this broad framework, the following three topics have tentatively been identified: the relationship between law, social process and social control; legal pluralism (including the colonial legacy); and the cultural dimension of law (with regard to human rights, the administration of justice, development, etc.). These topics will be specified further according to the research foci of those participating in the module.



## Module 5

# Space

**October 2006**

Organizer: Prof. Walter Leimgruber, Basel

Can space as such produce phenomena of integration or exclusion? If so, which mechanisms and processes can be described and analyzed? What is the influence of perception, appropriation and the structure of space on various actors in their everyday lives and ways of living?

In this module we will deal with these questions by discussing space as an anthropological category. Space is to be seen both as a local place and as a framework for living and acting in everyday life. This frame may be filled with physical actions, but also with the projections of human needs and ideas. In consequence, space becomes an entity with two main characteristics: It is the result of historical processes, but at the same time it is defined, valued and circumscribed by society and culture with regard to openness or restriction.

In the social and cultural sciences, an essentialist idea of space has been abandoned in favour of an approach that takes space as a construct which has constantly been historically adapted and socially and culturally formed (see Giddens, Löw, Elias, Foucault, Bourdieu, among others). This means that space, as physical foundation and as formed and constructed surroundings, provides the basic structures for life in all its forms. Martina Löw has been one of the researchers looking into the ways space is being defined and laid out in an interplay of actions and structures. She emphasizes that the construction of space should not be seen as limited to placing people and goods, or even to positioning symbolical markings (what is known as “spacing”), but that there is always some mental synthesis involved – meaning that only through processes of perception, imagination and memorization are persons and goods concentrated in and as a space.

Looking at space beyond its sheer physicality as a screen for all manner of visual and sensual perceptions, of ideas and memories, Stuart Hall shows that these mental processes are socially and culturally moulded. Space is charged with meaning and constantly judged – albeit individually by different actors. Naturally, these single and communal interpretations of space have a direct influence on the ways space is used and appropriated. Thus successful use of space presupposes a number of skills: a certain social and political knowledge as well as competence in spatial perception. Moreover, accessibility to space is dependent on the social status of the actors. Further restrictions derive from unequal authority for using space (as for example in property rights) and from social and political relations and claims.

# Workshop

November 24–25, 2006, in Bern

## Giving research presentations in social anthropology

This course provides a practical, model-based approach to presenting scientific information in English, both at conferences and in the classroom.

### Aims

Basically, the course aims to improve participants' spoken communication, build up confidence and fluency in participants' English, and help participants to design more effective talks.

### Contents

This workshop covers introductions, explanations, comparing results, summaries and conclusions, handling questions, and planning and referring to visual aids. If desired, a session on discussing and debating (as in panel discussions) can be included.

### Working methods

The course applies a variety of learning/teaching methods, including audio and written presentations, small-group exercises, whole-group simulations, written corrections, and video recording of participants will be used.

### Dates and place

Friday & Saturday, November 24–25, 2006; 9.00–17.30;  
University of Bern

### Language level

A solid but not brilliant knowledge of English is needed (e.g. Council of Europe level B2 or Cambridge First Certificate). cf. [http://www.dialang.org/english/ProfInt/sao\\_en.htm](http://www.dialang.org/english/ProfInt/sao_en.htm)

### Preparation

It is assumed that participants will introduce themselves with a short talk or presentation on what they want to work on and perfect. The text of this talk (two to three pages) may be submitted to the instructor for correction before the course starts.

### Instructor

Dr. Heather Murray, Lecturer in English for Academic Purposes at the University of Bern. Heather Murray has been teaching presentation and writing courses for Swiss researchers since 1984.

## Module 6

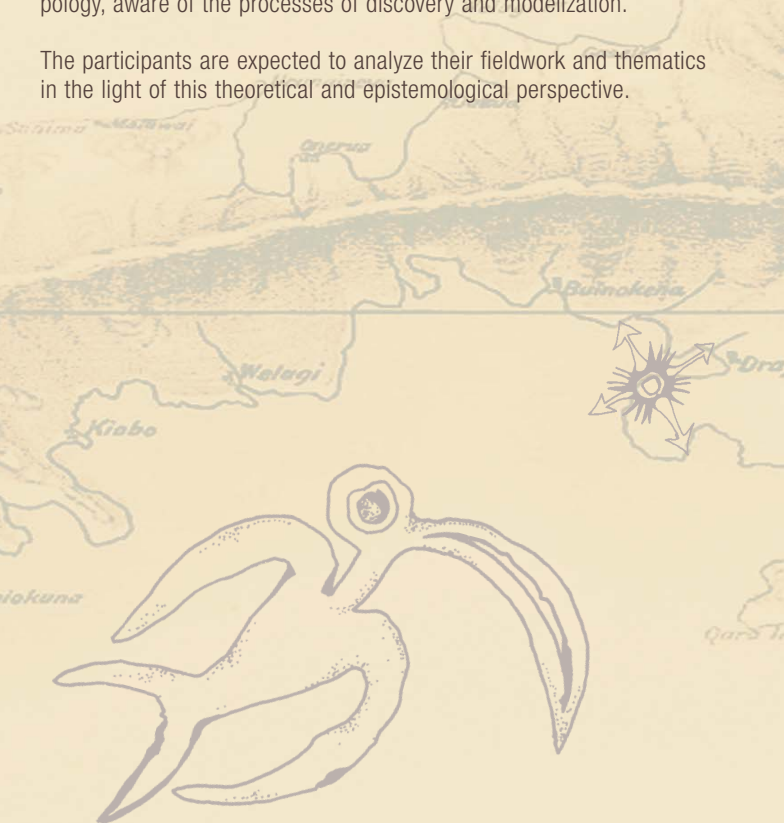
# Belief

January 2007

Organizer: Prof. Mondher Kilani, Lausanne

The anthropologist is a “non-believer who believes that the others believe”. In this module we will focus on the paradox of the category of “belief”, which is central in anthropological discourse. It is central for the social actor who builds active strategies in relation to the universe of belief (we refer not only to the traditional fields of belief – witchcraft, magic, religion – but also to other components of social activity such as the economy, politics and science). The category of belief is also important for the anthropologist who uses the rhetoric of belief in order to build his or her artefacts. The seminar will propose a critical re-examination of the classic intellectualist approach (“belief – or religion – is a content”). It will promote a dynamic conception of belief as a symbolic performance for action. The examination of the use and abuse of the category of belief (and religion) will lead us to a reflexive anthropology, aware of the processes of discovery and modelization.

The participants are expected to analyze their fieldwork and thematics in the light of this theoretical and epistemological perspective.





## Module 7

# Trust

April 2007

Organizer: Prof. Christian Giordano, Fribourg

Trust, especially within the public sphere and as most authors have stressed, is a fundamental premise of cooperation among individuals and organizations, one of the pillars of collective social cohesion, even in segmentary formations, as Ernest Gellner aptly pointed out. Niklas Luhmann likewise points out that trust is a crucial element of social order that helps to anticipate the future, avoid chaos, and ultimately reduce social complexity. No wonder, therefore, that several social science theoreticians deem trust a constitutive and inalienable element of a collectivity's social capital, be it of a *Gemeinschaft* or a *Gesellschaft* type. In very broad terms, Diego Gambetta summarizes the concept as follows: "Trust ... is a particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses that another agent or group of agents will perform a particular action."

In actual fact, we can say that trust is the expectation (but not the guarantee) of not being betrayed, deceived, cheated, swindled, etc. in the future. Though not totally risk-free, this expectation is based on direct or mediated past experiences. By definition, therefore, trust is a commodity in short supply and too much of it can become a drawback and an indication of personal incapacity. The module is structured by three themes; a) the notion of trust: different theoretical approaches in the social sciences; b) types of trust in different societies; and c) the relevance of the notion of trust for anthropological fieldwork.



## Module 8

# Power

June 2007

Organizer: Prof. Shalini Randeria, Zurich

This module will be concerned with different approaches to power in recent debates on the (post)colonial state, public policy, and governance in social and cultural anthropology. Students are invited to discuss the challenges presented by various theoretical perspectives on power against the background of their own research projects and reflect critically on their own ethnographic material in the light of these debates. Our discussions will address the issue of the adequacy of older ways of conceptualizing power relations in a globalizing world and in “multi-sited fields”, as well as seek to understand the power relations that shape our professional identities and practices as anthropologists and our relation to “the field”.

Despite being central to most ethnographies, conceptions of power were usually implicit in much anthropological writing and were rarely the subject of explicit reflection. Often western state-centred models and understandings of power were applied rather uncritically to “stateless societies”, which were represented as being at an earlier evolutionary stage. Spatial distance was thus translated into temporal distance constructing “other cultures” that were seen as “traditional” i.e. as lagging behind and lacking modern western rational-bureaucratic forms of organization and authority. Such an approach eclipsed, on the one hand, the colonial state apparatus and, on the other hand, applied *étatist* notions of power to societies often determined by quite different logics. Anthropologists influenced by Marxist approaches were sensitive to the role of the colonial state in the transformation of non-western economies and societies. They focused on unequal relations of power in the world system and on local practices of resistance, negotiation and appropriation.

Recent anthropological studies draw on Foucauldian conceptions of power and governmentality in order to shift attention away from domination and coercion. Power in this view is no longer conceived of as an external force appropriated or resisted by an autonomous subject. Instead, subjectivities are seen to be an effect of the operation of power. Ethnographies using this perspective focus on bureaucratic practices and formation of subjectivities in the context of global assemblages of governance. Lately there also seems to be a renewal of interest in violent and repressive aspects of power, within and beyond the state.