

ANTH 6916

# Development and culture—key concepts

A guide to the seminar



Hanuabada, the original village of Papua New Guinea's capital city Port Moresby inhabited by the Motuan people; with the CBD in the background, circa 2015. (Blades n.d.).

**Seminar coordinator**

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**Coordinator's office hours**

Mondays and Tuesdays, 11 a.m. to noon in Mills 169

**About this guide**

This is a guide to *ANTH 6916: Development and culture—key concepts*, a core seminar on social theory in the development studies program. It supplements the official unit outline prepared by the University. The unit outline describes the official policies on attendance, late work, grading, and other matters that we will follow in this class. This guide is meant to explain what we will do in this class, and what you can expect to get out of the class and your study of social theory. If you have any questions about the class, the class policies, the assignments, or about anthropology in general, please feel free to talk to Ryan or see him in office hours. (Last updated July 19, 2018.)



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# The weekly plan

Week	Dates	Readings and topics
1	July 31	Introduction to the class. The relevance of social science theory for development studies and related fields. Read the unit outline and guide.
2	Aug. 7	How does it feel to be a problem? Read Du Bois, "Of our spiritual strivings" and "The souls of white folk."
3	Aug. 14	Social facts. Read Lukes, Durkheim, chapters 1 and 2.
4	Aug. 21	Reciprocity as a social norm. Read Mauss, Piot.
5	Aug. 28	Social patterns as types of action and rationality. Read Weber, Ortnet.
6	September 4	Capitalism, class analysis, and the critique of modernity, part 1. Read Marx and Engels, "Manifesto" and Marx, "Capital."
7	Sept. 11	Capitalism, class analysis, and the critique of modernity, part 2. Read Marx and Engels, "Manifesto" and Marx, "Capital."
8	Sept. 18	Global capitalism and the production of differences. Read Tsing.
	Sept. 24–October 1	Midterm break.
9	Oct. 2	The embodiment of society. Read Swartz, chapters 5 and 6.
10	Oct. 9	Social remittances. Read Levitt and Levitt and Lamba-Nieves.
11	Oct. 16	Power as relationship and flow. Read Foucault, Schirato et al., McNay.
12	Oct. 23	Neoliberalism and the making of subjects. Read Gershon, Danaher et al., and (optionally) Rabinow.
13	Oct. 30	Social theory as a great conversation, a review of the semester
14	November 5	Reading period begins.
15	November 12	Exam period begins.

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## Assessments at-a-glance

Assessment	Length	Worth	Due
Weekly writing assignments	100–200 words	15%	Before class starting Week 2.
Essay	2000 words	35%	September 21 at 4:00 p.m.
Take-home writing assignment	2000 words	35%	November 9 at noon.
In-class presentation	500 words	5%	As assigned.
Seminar participation	n.a.	10%	Weekly in tutorial.

# Required and recommended readings

The required and recommended readings for each week are available in the unit reader and as PDFs on the library's e-reserve system.

## Readings

Danaher, Geoff, Tony Schirato, and Jen Webb. 2000. "Technologies of Governmentality" & "The Liberal Attitude." In *Understanding Foucault*, 1st ed., 89–95. London: Sage Publications.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1903. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings." In *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, 1–12. Chicago: A. C. McClurg.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1921. "The Souls of White Folk." In *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, 29–52. New York: Harcourt, Brace.

Durkheim, Emile. [1895] 1966. "What Is a Social Fact" and "Rules for the Observation of Social Facts." In *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, edited by George E. G. Catlin, translated by Sarah A. Solovay and John H. Mueller, 1–13, 14–46. New York: The Free Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1982. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 8 (4): 777–95. doi:10.1086/448181.

Gershon, Ilana. 2018. "Employing the CEO of Me, Inc.: US Corporate Hiring in a Neoliberal Age." *American Ethnologist* 45 (2): 173–85. doi:10.1111/amet.12630.

Levitt, Peggy. 1998. "Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion." *The International Migration Review* 32 (4): 926–48. doi:10.2307/2547666.

Levitt, Peggy, and Deepak Lamba-

Nieves. 2011. "Social Remittances Revisited." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37 (1): 1–22. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2011.521361.

Lukes, Steven. 1973. "Introduction." In *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study*, 1–36. London: Penguin Books.

Marx, Karl. 1972. "Capital, Vol. 1 [Selections]." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker, 309–43. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. [1848] 2000. "The Communist Manifesto [Parts I, II, and IV]." In *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, edited by David McLellan, 245–55, 270–71. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mauss, Marcel. [1925] 1990. "Selections from Introduction, Chapters 1-2, and Conclusion." In *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, translated by W. D. Halls, 1–14, 39–46, 78–83. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

McNay, Lois. 1994. "Introduction." In *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*, 1–12. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Ortner, Sherry B. 1973. "Sherpa Purity." *American Anthropologist* 75 (1): 49–63. doi:10.2307/672339.

Piot, Charles. 1999. "Exchange: Hierarchies of Value in an Economy of Desire." In *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa*, 52–75. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rabinow, Paul. 1984. "Introduction." In *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, 3–23. New York: Pantheon Books.

Schirato, Tony, Geoff Danaher, and

Jen Webb. 2012. "Glossary of Theoretical Terms." In *Understanding Foucault: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed., xvii–xxviii. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Swartz, David. 2012. "Chapter 5: Habitus: A Cultural Theory of Action." In *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, 95–116. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Swartz, David. 2012. "Chapter 6: Fields of Struggle for Power." In *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, 117–42. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tsing, Anna. 2009. "Supply Chains and the Human Condition." *Rethinking Marxism* 21 (2): 148–76. doi:10.1080/08935690902743088.

Weber, Max. [1922] 2004. "Basic Sociological Concepts." In *The Essential Weber: A Reader*, edited by Sam Whimster, 312–20, 327–34. London: Routledge.

## Other references

Blades, Johnny. n.d. (circa 2015). "Hanuabada, the Original Village of Papua New Guinea's Capital City Port Moresby Inhabited by the Motuan People; with the CBD in the Background." Photograph. Radio New Zealand International News. [https://www.radionz.co.nz/assets/news/19784/eight\\_col\\_IMG\\_6922.JPG](https://www.radionz.co.nz/assets/news/19784/eight_col_IMG_6922.JPG).

Hobsbawm, E. J. 1962. *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848*. New York: New American Library.

Polanyi, Karl. 1947. "Our Obsolete Market Mentality." *Commentary* 3 (February): 109–17.

## About this seminar

Welcome to *Development and culture: Key concepts*, a seminar covering the foundational theories of society and culture. This class was developed to serve as a required unit in theory for students of development and has since grown into an all-purpose survey of theories of society. As I am a social and cultural anthropologist, I have a tendency to bring the anthropological curiosity about the diversity and comparative differences among societies as well as an interest in the subtle and imponderable aspects of peo-

ple's social existence. Yet ultimately, and like all social scientists, I want to ask big questions about the human condition. I invite you to join with me and your fellow students in various social sciences in a discussion about what it means to be human and what concepts we can use to illuminate human societies and their logic.

Like many classes at the postgraduate level, this class is organized as a seminar, and thus centers on an open discussion among students. I provide guidance to

the discussion. I will not, however, give any lectures in this class.<sup>1</sup> Each week we will come together to help each other understand a set of readings better. Each week's readings represent the work of one important scholar whose ideas have influenced the way people in many social sciences formulate and seek to answer questions about social life. Our job is to find out all the different ways that these ideas can be interpreted and applied. This means we all have to contribute something to the discussion each

<sup>1</sup>And since there are no lectures, there are also no lecture recordings for this class either.

week, so that we discover as many different perspectives as possible.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, in many cases we will be reading the original works of these key thinkers. Since their work is foundational, it is also often quite old, and speaks in a voice which can be unfamiliar. More to the point, when they were writing, these authors were arguing for ideas which many people found hard to understand and hard to accept. They were breaking new ground. The authors themselves often had to struggle to figure out what they wanted to get across because it was new. This means that they often present their ideas in dense prose. Some of them write very detailed, heavily qualified and nuanced statements which can be hard to follow. Others use evocative yet ambiguous metaphors in a literary style. These works will not be clear on the first reading, or even after several readings, since they are open to interpretation. After decades of debate, the scholarly community has arrived at several possible interpretations, but we can always find others.

Our job in this class is to enter into this kind of discussion, and thus become part of this scholarly community ourselves. Every week, we will know if we have done a good job if:

- (1) students have done most of the talking, and
- (2) everyone in the class has had a chance to ask questions and contribute their ideas.

Your participation in discussion is, in that sense, something you do for your

fellow students. By offering your views, especially to people who disagree with you, you help them to reflect critically on their own reasoning. Likewise, when you seek out the perspectives of other people, you are able to become aware of your own thought processes. This is ultimately what you will take away from this class: an understanding of your own perspective, rather than familiarity with the ideas of major theories.

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Many students are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with speaking in public, or with participating in a class discussion. Discussion is important to this class, and it is a part of your grade, but I am not assuming that it will come easy to everyone. What I expect is that each person try their best, and keep trying.

What you can expect from me and from your fellow students is that we will all help make the class comfortable and welcoming to everyone's participation. One way we can achieve this is by using various formats for class discussion, including small work groups, discussion with a partner, and in-class writing. If your active verbal class participation is not possible, you can also talk to me about other ways you can participate in class.

To help each student prepare for their participation in class discussion, each week you will submit a short reflection on an open question about the week's topic. While each of these are graded, they are not meant to be tests and the questions do not have a single right answer. You receive points for doing a good,

thorough job of reflecting on your own ideas and elaborating them in a paragraph or two. If you write in complete sentences and show that you have put some effort into developing your thinking (for example, by citing relevant information in the week's reading and including a correct reference), you will be doing well. You have space to go out on a limb and say something that you are not entirely sure about.

To make sure that everyone has a chance to take the floor, students will take turns leading the discussion each week. Each student will sign up to get the ball rolling on the discussion with a five-minute presentation, and then ask questions for the class to discuss for the first part of class. Students do not have to prepare a lengthy presentation or act as a lecturer. A good presentation will simply consist of one's own views of what is important, interesting, and worthy of discussion in a particular reading. The purpose of the presentation is to prepare the ground for discussion and the discovery of different points of view.

Our discussions in class will also help prepare you to develop arguments about social theory and its application to social analysis. Your first major assignment is an essay of 2000 words in which you analyze the theoretical perspective underlying a scholar's argument in an academic journal article. This will be due before the midsemester break. Your other major assignment is to answer a series of writing prompts that ask you to compare and synthesize the different ideas from the theories discussed in class. This will be due at the end of the semester.

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## Anthropology: People are talking

If you want to know what anthropologists talk about with other anthropologists, and want to hear about the latest ideas in the field, please come to the University of Sydney anthropology department seminar this semester. Visiting speakers and members of the department will be presenting current work in progress for discussion. The department seminar is held most weeks during the

school term on Thursdays at 3 p.m. in Mills 148.

The seminar presentation usually lasts for an hour, and is followed by another hour of questions and answers. After this there is a light reception for the speaker. This is a great opportunity to get to know your anthropology teachers and hear what they are working on in their research. All are welcome, and there is

no need to RSVP. Just be sure to come early to get a seat.

The schedule of talks is posted online the department's web site. For more information, and to be added to the seminar announcement email list, contact Ute Eickelkamp at [ute.eickelkamp@sydney.edu.au](mailto:ute.eickelkamp@sydney.edu.au).

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<sup>2</sup>But see below.

# The practice of social theory

This is a difficult time to study questions of culture, development, and the politics of the global order. It seems that everything people take for granted about the nature of the contemporary world and contemporary societies is being called into question.

Generally speaking, the social sciences developed in the West in a period in which Western societies were very confident in their future. It had become common to assume that human history, and especially the West's own history, was a story of progress toward a better, happier, and more secure existence. For many, this lay in the progressive transformation of society itself. It was the job of social scientists to understand and explain why this transformation happens. Theories of society developed, then, in the context of a faith in modernity. Indeed, the development of a theory of society was itself often taken as an expression of this modernity. Scientific social theory was a sign that society was becoming conscious of itself and thus able to transcend its own original conditions and take command of its destiny.

Lately, many have voiced their fear that the liberal international order is in retreat, and progress is being reversed. For myself, I wonder if our modernity was real in the first place. While the end of the Cold War and the rise of a global system of free trade made it seem as though a liberal international order would become permanent, hysteria over immigration—often heavily inflected with xenophobia and racism—have fueled a resurgence in far-right nationalism. Even before Brexit and Trump, finding broad political consensus in democratic societies had become elusive; now it seems impossible. The present mood is one of anxiety rather than confidence. Is it possible to theorize society anymore?

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As social scientists, our purpose is to explain society, and to arrive at a better theory of society and culture. Development, as a project to improve the human condition, is usually driven by the question: “How?” How can we solve the problems of poverty, hunger, and disempowerment? How should policy be made and implemented? How can development workers help others improve their conditions of existence? In this class,

however, we take a step back from particular policy debates to ask “Why?”, not why do we seek to improve, but why there is poverty, inequality, hunger and domination. To ask these questions is also to ask why there is any form or order human lives. So we also must ask: “Why do we have this society?” and “Why do we find so many societies, with both much in common and much that is different?” In asking these questions, we take part in a great conversation which began many centuries ago. This class is your invitation and your introduction to the terms of this conversation.

The classical social theorists Durkheim, Weber and Marx were each interested in explaining why European, industrialized, capitalist societies came into being. Each of these people lived, more or less, at or near the end of the “long nineteenth century,” or from the French Revolution to the First World War (Hobsbawm 1962). During this time, many revolutionary social changes took hold and created the world we basically live in today. We have learned to call this “modernity.” For Durkheim, Weber and Marx, one of the main questions of the social scientist was “Why modern society?” In different ways, they come to see the modern revolution as a rupture, a break with the past and the birth of a new era. In different ways, each of these thinkers have also contributed to the modern Western faith in history as progress. To an extent, the legacy of these classical theories has been to create a profession of social science whose findings are embraced by elite institutions, and which thus enjoy an aura of expert authority. In this way, the social scientist has also become a bearer of modernity itself, a heroic figure who has transcended society and stands outside of it, as if a doctor diagnosing a sick patient. When a theory of society is pronounced in this voice to answer our questions about social problems, it can seem as though we are being told that this is only possible way things can work.

Yet the history of social inquiry offers us with another way to make use of theory. In the eleventh and last of his Theses on Feuerbach, Karl Marx states:

Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it. (Marx 1972

[1845], 123)

Social inquiry is also a form of social practice, and it has concrete effects on the social world. We see these effects when certain conceptions of society become dominant and foreclose the possibility of alternatives. We can also use theories of society to challenge what people take for granted by raising questions which they have learned not to ask. This potential to challenge dominant ideas exists to a degree in all of the classical sociological theories. In their own ways, they each also forced people to confront “the reality of society” (Polanyi 1947: 115) or the fact that society is a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts.

In this regard, Marx's social theory is the most relevant to understanding our task as theorists. In his eleventh thesis, Marx emphasizes that the scholar of society can never transcend the social context in which she works. As such, she has a duty to engage with this social reality and recognize her role in changing it. If social theories are in fact expression of a society's coming into consciousness of itself, Marx is reminding us that we as practitioners of theory must also become conscious of the consequences of theory on society. Marx calls on his fellow social thinkers to use the reality of society as a basis for a critique of ideological representations of social relations, and I would add, including those which appear as scientific expertise.

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Theories of societies are themselves products of the social conditions under which people devise them. In this sense, any one social theory occupies a particular standpoint with respect to the world which enables one to see certain kinds of patterns clearly but also hides others. Western social theories for instance often take the legacies of European history for granted. More than simply being biased and partial, though, the practice of theorizing always involves excluding other histories from considering society and social forces in the abstract. If social theory is in fact a society coming into consciousness of itself, then this also entails the production of what Du Bois calls “double-consciousness”:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness,

this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (Du Bois 1903, 3)

When dominant groups in society interpret the world, they necessarily change it to suit their interests; Double-

consciousness, "two-ness" (ibid.), or alienation from oneself, is the result for everyone else. While Du Bois says that double-consciousness is "not true self-consciousness" (ibid.), I would like to argue that the experience of "two-ness" can also be the basis for another kind of social theory. This would mean, of course, that we can potentially find new insights into how societies work out-

side of the usual institutional locations for this activity, namely the university and academe. Instead, people's own everyday lives and practices can be seen as the basis for theoretical conceptual tools. Rather than seeking to transcend its conditions, theories coming from below are also accountable to the ways in which a theory can change the world. —Ryan Schram, July 2018