

Geography 605:03
Critical Ethnographies of Power and Hegemony

D. Asher Ghertner

Tuesdays 1-4pm, LSH-B120

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Course Introduction

This course takes the ethnographic examination of social power as its central object. Our key concern is with the production of consent; the exercise of resistance, counter-conduct, and disagreement; and the institutional and cultural apparatuses that limit or facilitate transgressions of hegemonic norms. Why does the working class participate in forms of economy that reinforce their subordinate status? How do popular opinion, ideology, and doxa produce socialized norms for guiding behavior and thought? What are the mechanisms that lead subjects to “do as they ought,” even when it seems against their interest to do so? How are subjectivities fashioned so as to conform with social norms, even while retaining the capacity to exist otherwise?

To address these broad questions, we will follow a model of pairing a canonical social theory of power or hegemony one week with an ethnographic text that builds on or draws from that theory in the week that follows. While avoiding the sense that ethnographic texts can or should be slotted into neat theoretical camps, we begin with more paradigmatic ethnographies that allow us to interrogate how the deployment of different theories of power carry with them different analytical and political stakes. In other words, these texts help us ask how, for example, a Marxian method of moving, as Marx calls it, from the abstract to the concrete differs from what Foucault calls an “ascending analysis of power,” or how Gramsci’s approach to studying the cultural production of hegemony differs from Bourdieu’s theory of how external structures are internalized among agents. In this sense, our focus will be methodological as much as it is theoretical, and it begins from a theory of praxis that holds that method and theory are inseparably fused: which social agents are highlighted, and what forms of agency are revealed and concealed, are at once political and methodological concerns.

We follow this model of pairing theory with ethnography not to suggest that ethnography descends from “T”heory, but rather to consider how “E”thnography provides a critical infrastructure for confronting the limits of theory, identifying new social problematics, and opening up lines of thought for understanding and advancing concrete possibilities for political

change. The final weeks of the course are left open for seminar participants to choose ethnographies related to our collective interests.

Requirements

This course will be run as a reading-intensive seminar. Each week we will systematically discuss the argument, method and implications of the texts; present ideas and questions to each other; and generally learn from the diverse backgrounds and perspectives we all bring. Accordingly, it is imperative that everyone comes fully prepared to participate.

Each participant will be expected to undertake the following:

(i) During our “theory” weeks, seminar participants should identify 1-2 key passages from the text that they consider central to the author’s argument, or central to a key concern or concept from the seminar. Participants will introduce these passages in seminar, offer a critical reading of the passage, and relate the passage to the larger argument of the book or broader themes of the course.

(ii) During our “ethnography” weeks, seminar participants should prepare a short one page **critical commentary** on the week's readings and post this commentary on the Sakai forum for that week by the Monday evening (no later than 8 pm) prior to the Tuesday class. Critical commentaries should be more than a summary of the argument of a text; they should be “critical” in the sense of seeking to identify the text’s evidentiary limits or strengths, epistemological presumptions or innovations, or strategic utility or weakness. Because they will address specific ethnographies, this is also the place to think through the nature of the field research conducted and the way that the ethnographic encounter is presented. What did the field research that went into the production of the text likely look like, and how was it transformed into the text? How do authors make analytical claims on the basis of observations and texts? What theories are enrolled to mobilize these claims?

(iii) During our “ethnography” weeks, a pair of participants will **lead/chair class discussion**, which involves a short (5-10 minute) presentation of the key theoretical and conceptual issues in the readings. I will circulate a sign-up sheet during week 1 for you to choose the week you’d like to present.

Course papers

The main assignment for this course consist of three papers, approximately 5 pages in length each, that are to engage the readings from the preceding weeks. Given that some seminar participants are preparing for their written qualifying exams, while others will be doing so in the near future, I’d like to think of these papers as mini-field statements that aim to capture the key arguments and differences between authors. In this sense the papers – while not requiring a single, overarching argument – should aim to identify key fault lines in scholarly debate, or key resonances between authors often treated as belonging to distinct camps. It is expected that you will incorporate supplemental texts into your papers.

Assessment

Students will be assessed according to the following scheme:

Critical commentaries & presentations	20%
Classroom participation	20%
Course Papers (20% x 3)	60%
Total	100%

Readings

Required course texts:

Karl Marx: Selected Writings. London: Hackett Publications.

Willis, Paul (1977). *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Forgacs, David (Ed.) (2000). *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*. NYU Press.

Gregory, Steven (1998). *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*. Princeton University Press.

Yeh, Emily (2013). *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development*. Cornell University Press.

Foucault, Michel (2003). *The Essential Foucault*. The New Press.

Gupta, Akhil (2012). *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence and Poverty in India*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Wacquant, Loic (2006). *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford University Press.

All additional readings will be posted on the course website on Sakai or placed on reserve in the Kilmer Library.

Seminar Outline

Week 1 (September 2nd) – Introduction

Readings:

Burawoy, Michael (1998). “The Extended Case Method,” *Sociological Theory* 16(1): 4-33.

Week 2 (September 9th) – Marx’s Method

Readings:

Marx, Karl (1845), “Theses on Feuerbach,” from *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*

Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels (1846), “The German Ideology, Part I” from *Karl Marx:*

Selected Writings.

Marx, Karl (1857). Introduction to *Grundrisse*. In *Karl Marx: Texts on Method*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Hall, Stuart (2003), "Marx's Notes on Method: A 'Reading' of the '1857 Introduction'," *Cultural Studies* 17(2).

Additional readings:

Ollman, Bertell (2003). "Putting Dialectics to Work: The Process of Abstraction in Marx's Method," from *The Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method*, University of Illinois Press, pp. 59-114.

Wise, J. Macgregor (2003), "Reading Hall Reading Marx," *Cultural Studies* 17(2).

Week 3 (September 16th) Critical ethnography of class

Readings:

Willis, Paul (1977). *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Willis, Paul (1981). "Cultural production is different from cultural reproduction is different from social reproduction is different from reproduction," *Interchange*, 12(2-3), 48-67.

Week 4 (September 23rd) - Gramsci

Readings:

Santucci, Antonio (2010). *Antonio Gramsci*. Monthly Review Press, "Introduction," and "The Prison Notebooks." (This provides an introduction to Gramsci and his writings and thought).

The Antonio Gramsci Reader (edited by David Forgacs). NYU Press (selections).

Additional Readings:

Anderson, Perry (1997). "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci." *New Left Review* 100: 5-78.

Week 5 (September 30th) – Critical ethnography of the state

Readings:

Yeh, Emily (2013). *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development*. Cornell University Press.

Week 6 (October 7th) – Determination, articulation and dominance

Readings:

Althusser, Louis (1968). "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press.

Williams, Raymond (1977). *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, Part II.

Hall, Stuart (1985). "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance,"

Critical Studies in Mass Communication 2(2): 91-114.

Hall, Stuart (1986). "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10: 5-27.

Additional readings:

Hall, Stuart (1985). "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2(2): 91-114.

Week 7 (October 14th) – Paper 1 Due via Sakai

No class – Asher travelling for a talk in Singapore

Week 8 (October 21st) – Critical ethnography of race

Readings:

Gregory, Steven (1998). *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*. Princeton University Press.

Week 9 (October 28th) – Foucault

Readings:

Foucault, Michel (2001). *Society Must be Defended*. Palgrave, Lectures 1-3.

Foucault, Michel (1984). "Truth and Power" and "Questions on Geography," from *The Foucault Reader*. Vintage.

Foucault, Michel (2003). *The Essential Foucault*. The New Press.

- What is Enlightenment?
- Nietzsche, Genealogy, History
- Madness and Society
- Panopticism
- Questions of Method
- Lecture 1 and Lecture 4 ("Governmentality") from *Security, Territory, Population*
- The Birth of Biopolitics (course summary)
- Preface to the History of Sexuality, Vol 2
- The Subject and Power

Additional Readings:

"Politics and the Study of Discourse," from *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p. 53-72.

From *The Essential Foucault*:

Technologies of the Self
Foucault by "Maurice Florence"

Week 10 (November 4th) – Critical ethnography of development

Gupta, Akhil (2012). *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence and Poverty in India*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Li, Tania Murray (2007). "Introduction," from *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development and the Practice of Politics*. Duke University Press.

Week 11 (November 11th) – Bourdieu

Readings:

Bourdieu, Pierre (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Additional reading:

Bourdieu, Pierre (1999). "Part II: The Social Institution of Symbolic Power," in *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press, pp. 105-162.

Week 12 (November 18th) – Critical ethnography of practice

Readings:

Wacquant, Loic (2006). *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford University Press.

Burawoy, Michael (2012). "The Roots of Domination: Beyond Bourdieu and Gramsci," *Sociology* 46(2): 187-206.

Week 13 (Nov 25th) – Paper II due via Sakai

No class due to Thanksgiving break

Week 14 (December 2nd) – Other hegemonies

Butler, Judith (1993). "Gender is Burning," from *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Routledge.

Mahmood, Saba (2001). "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16(2): 202-236.

Yurchak, Alexei (2003). "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (3): 480-510.

Ghertner, D. Asher (forthcoming). "World-Class Detritus: The Sense of Unbelonging," from *Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi*. Oxford University Press.

Weeks 15 (December 9th) – Final book TBA

Some options:

Tsing, Anna (2005). *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press.

Scott, James (1991). *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale University Press.

Yurchak, Alexei (2006). *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton University Press.

Mahmood, Saba (2005). *The Politics of Piety*. Princeton University Press.

Paper III due via Sakai on December 15th