

Anthropology III Term 3 2018

Ways of knowing: science, belief, and indigenous knowledge in anthropological and interdisciplinary context

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Introduction

This module explores different modes of knowledge production, comparing the dichotomous and hierarchical approaches that have tended to characterise western science and scholarship with more integrated and holistic perspectives such as those contained within bodies of indigenous knowledge and cosmology. We will consider the ways in which knowledge is shaped by the sociocultural, historical and ideological context within which it is created. We will look at some of the ways in which alternate modes of knowledge production have interacted with one another, noting to what extent such interactions have been confrontational and where they have involved attempts to achieve integration or some measure of mutual acknowledgment.

The module heeds calls for the decolonisation of scholarship in various ways. The interdisciplinary methodology utilises multiple epistemologies, including not only information accessed through advances in the biological sciences, but also modes of knowledge production other than those encompassed by western academic traditions. In particular, the relevance and validity of indigenous knowledge as contained in and transmitted by oral tradition is acknowledged. It takes account of various modes of knowledge production, with the understanding that differing accounts reflect alternative perspectives rather than 'more' or 'less' true versions of history. On a theoretical level, the course questions the utility of the nature/culture divide and related dichotomies.

Outcomes

By the end of this course you should have acquired:

- An understanding of the extent to which the western academic tradition has been premised on oppositional and hierarchical constructs.
- Insight into critiques of western science both from within the western academy (Science Studies) and without (Indigenous knowledge systems).
- An appreciation that western science is only one kind of knowledge system and that others offer different but not necessarily inferior perspectives.
- Particular focus on oral tradition as a mode of indigenous knowledge production.
- Knowledge about the holistic and incorporative character of traditional African religion.
- Insight into the growing trend for interdisciplinary scholarship and ways that indigenous knowledge systems can contribute to this.

Critical Cross-Field Outcomes

The module will encourage development of the following:

- Working effectively with others as a member of a group.
- Responsible and effective self-management and organisation.
- Collection, analysis, organisation and critical evaluation of information.
- Effective communication using language skills in the modes of oral and written presentation.

Course structure

In acknowledgement of the importance of the co-production of knowledge and decolonisation of education, this module will utilise a student-centred pedagogy. There will

be no formal lectures, and students will be required to present summaries and analyses of the key readings during lecture times. Students will also design the seminar topics.

Readings will be assigned to students prior to reading workshops and will be evenly distributed between class members. Reading workshops will be held on the following days:

Monday 14:15 – 15:55

Tuesday 16:05 – 16:50

Wednesday 14:15 – 15:00

Class discussions to formulate the weekly seminar topic will be held on:

Wednesday 15:10 – 16:50

The class will be divided into six groups, two of which will present their responses to the weekly seminar question one week after formulation of the topic. Only two groups will be required to present each week, with groups alternating from week to week. Weekly seminars will take place on:

Thursday 14:15 – 15:55

Reading

The required books have been placed on short loan in the library. Journal articles are available online and my readings will be available on RUconnected.

Seminar papers

Each group will submit TWO seminar papers (1500 - 2000 words), one for each of the topics they read for and presented in class. Seminar papers must refer to a minimum of FOUR readings from that week and any from other weeks that are relevant.

Essay

You will design your own essay topic. Pick any aspect from the course – culture, race, social constructivism, oral tradition, indigenous knowledge, the decolonisation of scholarship or any other of your choice. Identify additional sources that relate to a specific issue regarding the aspect you have chosen. Write a scholarly paper in which you refer to these additional sources, the concepts covered during the course, and relevant material drawn from that covered over the entire course. Model your paper on a journal article in which the issue in question is explained and contextualised, material is presented to further develop your argument, and the main points are reiterated in the conclusion.

Draft proposals must be emailed to me by Monday 30 July. These must include:

1. Paper title.
2. Outline of what you want to explore in your paper (750 words).
3. Bibliography of the key sources you intend to use, including at least FIVE from the course and an additional THREE identified by yourself.

Due date for essays: Monday 3 September (first day of 4th term).

Assessment

Your semester mark will count 40% of your final year mark.

It will be calculated as follows:

Group seminar presentations (peer assessed) – 10%

Group seminar papers (assessed by me) – 10%

Class participation – 20%

Essay – 60%

Exam

Your exam mark will count 60% of your final year mark.

It will be an open-book exam in which you revise your essay according to the comments and suggestions that I have made on your essay.

Evaluation

You will have a chance to evaluate this module in the last week of term.

Week 1 (16 – 20 July) The western academic tradition

The genesis of western science is often directly traced to René Descartes' division of the human being into two distinct entities: an empirically observable physical body and an unknowable and untestable 'immortal soul'. This separation between physical and spiritual, commonly referred to as 'Cartesian dualism', was a theoretical device designed to enable understanding of what could be understood, while leaving aside what could not be as readily grasped or interpreted. This distinction between soul/body or religion/science spread beyond the realm of scientific method however, and came to permeate many aspects of western culture which has come to characterise itself and other parts of the world in similar oppositional manner, for example in terms such as civilised/uncivilised, Christian/pagan and so on. Thus, 'modern western science...mirrors the compartmentalised societies in which it is embedded' (Nader 1996).

This week we will look at the ways in which oppositional and hierarchical constructs have informed western culture and its academic endeavour, serving to legitimise colonial conquest and the undermining of other cultures and their modes of knowledge production.

Reading:

Tuesday 17 July:

Hayward (2018) Chapter 2 Conceptual issues (especially 2.1 Western knowledge & 2.2 Social constructivism (pp 24-42).

Wednesday 18 July:

Collingwood-Whittick (2012) Indigenous peoples and western science.

Marks (2009) Chapter 9 Racial and Gendered Science.

Marks (2009) Chapter 10 Nature/Culture.

Thursday 19 July:

Sharp and West (1982) Dualism, culture and migrant mineworkers.

Ehrenreich and McIntosh (1997) The new creationism: biology under attack.

Week 2 (23 – 27 July) The anthropology of science

This week we will look at the 'anthropology of science' as proposed by anthropologists such as Franklin (1995), Nader (1996) Martin (1998) and Marks (2002, 1996a&b) who have drawn attention to the hegemony of western science over other kinds of knowledge, calling for indigenous systems of knowledge to be recognised as part of the 'the scientific knowledge of mankind'. These 'anthropologists of science' have subjected western science to critical social scientific enquiry in a number of 'science studies'. They have challenged the allegedly neutral scientific stance of western science, characterising it instead as a primarily cultural construction. This has resulted in an angry backlash from within the scientific establishment and the ensuing exchange between natural and social scientists has subsequently become known as 'the science wars'.

Reading:Monday 23 July:

Snow (1959) The two cultures

Krauss (2009) Update on C.P. Snow's "Two cultures".

Marks (1996) The anthropology of science part 1: Science as a humanities.

Marks (1996) The anthropology of science part 2: Scientific norms and behaviours.

Tuesday 24 July:

Franklin (1995) Science as culture, cultures of science.

Wednesday 24 July:

Martin (1998) Anthropology and the cultural study of science.

Week 3 (30 July – 3 August) Indigenous knowledge

Foucault (1976) referred to the "subjugated or "marginalised" the bodies of knowledge held by non-western ascientific peoples, from medical to historical, that have been produced and transmitted over considerable periods of time, and continue to bear contemporary relevance, the knowledges of ordinary people that are seldom recognised or acknowledged by science. Malinowski was one of the first to acknowledge the value of knowledge obtained by modes other than those preferred and utilised in the west, though only to limited extent, when in Argonauts of the Western Pacific, he he observed that

'savage races' lack neither 'scientific attitude' nor science in that [...] no art or craft however primitive could have been invented or maintained, no organised form of hunting, fishing, tilling or search for food could be carried out without the careful observation of natural process and firm belief in its regularity, without the power of reasoning and without confidence in the power of reason; that is, without the rudiments of science (Malinowski 1925:21).

Since then, so called 'ethnoscience' such as Horton (1967) and Atran (1998) among others, have demonstrated parallels between indigenous knowledge systems and western science. More recently, scholars from within or on behalf of indigenous communities have called for the adoption of indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate means of understanding and explanation, as valid as those produced by western modes of knowledge production. This week we will consider calls by indigenous and other scholars to liberate thought from the binary oppositions that characterise European scholarship.

Reading:Monday 30 July:

Hayward (2018) Chapter 2 Conceptual issues (especially Other ways of knowing (pp 42-48).

Goduka (2012) From positivism to indigenous science.

Scott (1996) Science for the west, myth for the rest?

Tuesday 31 July:

Crossman & Devisch (2002) Endogenous knowledge in anthropological perspective.

Pitika Ntuli (2002) Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the African Renaissance.

Wednesday 1 August:

Green (2012) Beyond South Africa's indigenous knowledge – science' wars.

Hountondji (2002) Knowledge appropriation in a post-colonial context.

Week 4 (6 – 10 August) Oral tradition

'Pre-literate' cultures possess rich and diverse sources of knowledge and lore that have been preserved in memory and transmitted between generations across time as part of the body of oral tradition. This week we will consider the extent to which oral traditions function as accurate repositories of knowledge, while at the same time being embedded in a dynamic social process that is rooted in the past but meaningful in the present.

Reading:

Monday 6 August:

King (2006) The role of oral traditions in African history.

Cohen (1989) The undefining of oral tradition.

Campbell (2006) Who are the Luo? Oral tradition and disciplinary practices in anthropology and history.

Tuesday 7 August:

Belcher (2018) Oral traditions as sources.

Muraina (2015) Oral tradition as a reliable source or historical writing.

Wednesday 8 August:

Hayward (in press) Orality in the digital age.

Week 5 (13 –17 August) Ideological hybridisation

Just as the compartmentalised, hierarchical and oppositional nature of western science has become embedded in the dualistic western worldview, the undivided soul/body continuum is discernible in African belief systems where no such artificial division exists between the two domains. According to the Xhosa worldview, family history, family life, religious belief and practice, good and bad health and fortune are all inextricably bound up with one another in an immediate lived context which does not exclude those whose physical presence has been removed by death. In the west by contrast, issues concerning health, religion and family relations occupy distinct or only marginally over-lapping categories.

The holistic and integrative tendency implicit in the African worldview is also evident in the way that western imports such as medicine and religion are neither wholly rejected nor accepted without change, but modified so as to become compatible with existing traditional forms. Conversion to Christianity for example, may involve an identification with certain western aspirations and value systems, but it does not necessarily include an assumption of the dualist perspective. For example, in the rural areas of the former Transkei, some have retained the traditional ancestor religion and belief in witchcraft and magic, which others have converted to Christianity. This week we will consider the ways in which ideological perspectives not only shape the ways in which individual understanding is constructed, but are simultaneously shaped by the contexts in which they develop and are made meaningful.

Reading:Monday 13 August:

Marks (2002) Science, religion and worldview.

Hayward (2018) Chapter 8 Traditional ritual practice.

Westerlund (1989) Pluralism and change. A comparative and historical approach to African disease etiologies.

Tuesday 14 August:

Edwards (1983) Healing and transculturation in Xhosa Zionist practice.

Xaba (2007) Marginalized medical practice: The marginalization and transformation of indigenous medicines in South Africa.

Wednesday 15 August

Hayward (2018) Chapter 12 "White people from across the sea": Combining the sources of evidence and drawing conclusions).

Week 6 (20 – 24 August) Integration of knowledge systems

During our final week, we will compare the epistemologies of indigenous knowledge systems and western science, especially in so far as these elaborate on the distinction already observed between the generally holistic and integrative nature of indigenous culture and knowledge production, as against the polarisation and compartmentalisation that characterises western science and culture. We will also explore ways in which the concept of interdisciplinary scholarship can be expanded to include not only collaborations between different scientific or social scientific disciplines, or between science and social science, but with indigenous knowledge systems too, as valuable and powerful tools both for understanding the world, and as expressions of the wealth and diversity of human philosophy and science. In this respect, we will briefly consider how the integration of different research methodologies can be seen 'not so much to investigate phenomena from various discrete perspectives, but rather to seek ways in which collaboration between different disciplines can lead to the multi-layered interpretation of data and a more nuanced analysis' (Newell and Green, 1982).

Reading:Monday 20 August:

Neis & Lutz (2008) Conclusion.

Hayward (2018) Chapter 2 Conceptual issues (especially Issues for the present study pp 48-54).

Ommers et al (2008) Knowledge, uncertainty and wisdom.

Tuesday 21 August:

Fatnawa & Pickett (2002) Indigenous contemporary knowledge development through research.

Wednesday 22 August

Goduka (2005) *Eziko: Siphiko sisophula*. Nguni foundations for educating/ researching for sustainable development.

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