

Globalization, Transnationalism, and Subjectivity

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We live in a world of increasingly open and interrelated cultural, social, and economic systems: This interconnectedness takes many forms, including: large-scale immigration and social movement; flows of ideas, institutions, and ideologies across national and ethnic boundaries; the spread of high speed digital networking and telecommunication; religious evangelization, conversion, and the paradoxical rise of fundamentalism; the spread of global corporate capitalism; and the simultaneous resurgence and elision of ethnic differences. This course examines these global transformations from an anthropological perspective, focusing on their role in shaping novel forms of subjectivity and social identity. Three broad questions organizing the course: 1) How are novel and/or emergent cosmopolitan subjectivities formed under conditions of globalization and transnationalism?; 2) How do people define themselves, and how are their lives and social relations structured (in terms of nation, culture, ethnicity, religion, race, class, gender, sexuality and age) in this highly interconnected moment in human history?; and 3) how do these shifts influence more complex dimensions of human subjectivity, such as fantasy, wish, desire, motivation, and the everyday experience of self?

Throughout, the course will emphasize a diachronic and comparative perspective. We will begin with an examination of the early small-scale “transnationalisms” of premodernity—as manifested in various Colonial projects—focusing on their role in shaping the psychologies and consciousness of the colonized. We will then shift to an examination of “supermodernity”—large-scale postcolonial processes which bind local communities into global networks of meaning, power, and influence. Linking these explorations is a concern with the ways in which this increasing global interconnectedness gives rise to new senses of self, relationship, community, morality, and worldview. Carefully selected ethnographic case studies of transnational ethnic communities will serve to illustrate the complex intercalation of globalization and subjectivity. In seeking to draw out the psychological dimensions of transnational flows across time, this course will deepen students’ understanding of the shifting relationship between the subjective and the social, elucidating the complex human questions of identity, meaning, and motivation that are produced by (and in turn condition) the experience of globalization.

Possible Texts:

Appadurai, Arjun. 1996 Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Inda, Jonathan and Renato Rosaldo (eds.) 2002. The Anthropology of Globalization. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Auge, Marc. 1995. Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity. Translated by John Howe. London & New York:: Verso.

Elliot, Anthony. 2004. Subject to Ourselves: Social Theory, Psychoanalysis, and Postmodernity. London: Paradigm Publishers