GLOBALIZATION AND NEOLIBERALISM

Course Overview

Globalization is a fashionable buzzword, an unstable term that is prone to being hyped, malign, or acclaimed. For many anthropologists, globalization refers to accelerated flows or intensified connections—across national and other boundaries—of commodities, people, symbols, technology, images, information, and capital, as well as disconnections, exclusion, marginalization, and dispossession. Whether globalization is new or not—or how new it is—is the subject of much debate. Many find it useful to historicize the concept and to view the world economy as having passed through a globalizing phase from approximately 1870 to 1914, a deglobalizing period from about 1930 to 1980, and a renewed era of globalization since 1980. But since about 1990 one particular form of globalization—economic neoliberalism—has become dominant.

Neoliberalism is a doctrine that valorizes individual competition, entrepreneurship, free markets, and minimal state intervention in flows of goods, services, and finance. The underlying logic is that market competition ensures efficient production of goods and services, and that market deregulation stimulates productive economic activity that benefits all in the long term. In poorer nations neoliberalism often means imperatives by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reduce government subsidies for education and health care, privatize state-owned firms, liberalize trade, devalue currencies, emphasize production of primary goods for export, and deregulate financial and labor markets. But have neoliberal reforms produced their intended effects? It has become common for tests of market viability to be taken for granted or naturalized in domains as disparate as academia, journalism and art—leaving open the questions of why this particular conception of economy carries such force and what flaws may be embedded in its underlying assumptions. Whether one views the end of the 20th century and start of the 21st as a time of market tyranny or market triumph, there is little doubt about the contemporary force of neoliberalism.

This seminar explores the relationship of contemporary globalization processes to neoliberal ideology, and examines the cultural, political and economic logics of neoliberalism. For example, with what transformations in media, individual subjectivities, consumption, gender relations, governance and capital is neoliberalism associated? An earlier generation of scholars such as Karl Polanyi and E.P. Thompson saw the question of how market relations are extended to new domains and then naturalized as a defining feature of major historical transitions. How are ideological expressions of the “free-market” naturalized today, and how do they come to seem inevitable (if not necessarily legitimate)? Neoliberalism of course is not monolithic; why is the neoliberal camp itself divided, and what new debates about alternatives are emerging in centrist as well as more Left-leaning circles? Why does neoliberalism fuel highly energized social movements in many parts of the world? What are some limitations of conventional narratives about globalization?
**Textbooks**


**Other Readings:** articles and book chapters listed below (available on electronic reserve).

**Requirements:**

(1) Timely completion of assigned readings, regular attendance and participation in seminar discussions, and weekly informal response papers (1-2 pages) on assigned readings (due by email each Monday by 7:00 p.m.). These informal written remarks can be a mix of comments such as “The discussion of X led me to reconsider…,” reactions such as “I like/dislike the approach of this article/book because…,” and questions such as “What did the author mean by…?” I will use students’ written responses to the readings to structure the seminar discussion and my introductory remarks.

(2) Two short essays (8-10 pages/2,000-2,500 words) on themes drawn from required readings.

(3) Final essay (12-15 pages/3,000-3,750 words) that either focuses on course readings or that addresses course readings in relation to your dissertation research topic or a field statement. If you select the second option, please discuss it with me 4-6 weeks in advance of the May 2nd due date.

**Grades** will be based on students’ written and oral contributions to the seminar as follows: 2 short essays = 50% (25% for each); final essay = 30%; oral contributions and informal written responses to readings = 20%. [Late papers will be penalized (1/2 grade per day), except in unusual circumstances.]

**Attendance:** A productive seminar is a collective endeavor, so regular attendance by all members is important. Please notify the instructor in advance if you will miss a seminar meeting; absences should occur only in exceptional circumstances.

**Outline of Topics and Readings**

**WEEK 1 (1/17):** Introduction to the Seminar

**WEEK 2 (1/24):** What is Neoliberalism?


WEEK 3 (1/31): The Great Globalization Debate, I


Reference/Optional:

WEEK 4 (2/7): The Great Globalization Debate, II


**Essay #1 due Thursday, February 9, 3:00 p.m. in instructor's office mailbox.**

WEEK 5 (2/14): The Cultural Logics of Neoliberalism, I


WEEK 6 (2/21): The Cultural Logics of Neoliberalism, II


Reference/Optional:


WEEK 7 (2/28): Neoliberalism and Subjectification


**Essay #2 due Thursday, March 2, 3:00 p.m. in instructor's office mailbox.**

WEEK 8 (3/7): A Flashpoint of Globalization: The Apparel Industry


**SPRING BREAK, March 11-19**

WEEK 9 (3/21): Globalization and Mass Media


Reference/Optional

WEEK 10 (3/28): Social Movements, Counter-Movements to Neoliberalism, I


WEEK 11 (4/4): Social Movements, Counter-Movements to Neoliberalism, II


WEEK 12 (4/11): Alternatives?, I


WEEK 13 (4/18): Alternatives?, II


Reference/Optional:

WEEK 14 (4/25): Conclusions


**Final essays due Tuesday, May 2, 3:00 p.m.** in instructor's office mailbox.