Re-imagining Social Movements: Activism, Resistance, and Cultural Change

GENS 5375
MA Level Class
Winter 2016

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Office: Zrínyi
Office Hours: TBA

Class Time: TBA
Place: TBA

Course Description:

Social movements and social activism are critical to political engagement and social transformation. Traditional social science approaches to social movements and social change have tended to frame forms of collective resistance and protest primarily as either irrational, spontaneous reactions to oppression, or as rational expressions of reasoned dissent. In this course, we will challenge such views, employing an anthropological perspective which takes cultural practice as analytically central in order to see social movements instead as practical struggles over cultural meaning. We will first critically review the dominant theoretical frameworks which have shaped interpretations of social activism and social movements. We will then explore more recent theories of power, politics, and social change, in order to locate social movements within complex cultural structures of power, domination, and transformation. For each segment of the class, we will first examine a specific theoretical framework from which questions of social actions, movements, and change have been addressed. We will then go on to explore, through concrete ethnographic examples, the ways in which these perspectives enable - and foreclose - particular understandings of the nature of social movements, and of their implications.

Student Responsibilities

This is a discussion-based course, not a lecture course. It will, therefore, require a great deal of responsibility on the part of all of you. For each class, I will first introduce and contextualize the week’s topic. We will then, as a class, map out the central theoretical and analytical moves presented by the day’s readings, their specific arguments, and the relationships between them. The remainder of the class will be an open discussion of these arguments and their implications – in which I will occasionally mediate or intervene. Thus, all of you will be expected to analyze, express your opinions about, and debate the assigned materials in depth.
Requirements:

Papers:

1) Critical Comments.

During the course of the term, each of you will write two (2), 2-3 page Critical Comments, each for a class of your choice. The Comment may focus on a single reading, or compare more than one reading from that day’s assigned materials.

These Comments are meant to stimulate your/our thinking and questioning of specific issues, and to enable all of us to address the topic more effectively; they are therefore critical to successful discussion in the class. In this sense (as, indeed, in all others), a great deal of responsibility for the success or failure of this course lies in your hands. The two comments together will be worth 40% of your final grade for the course.

Each Critical Comment should contain (but need not be limited to) the following elements:

1. CORE QUOTATION. You should quote a sentence or short passage from the text that you think is central to the main argument of the piece. Be sure to always cite the quotation properly.
2. ARGUMENT. Briefly, summarize the author’s main argument.
3. QUESTION. Raise a question about a point (not a fact!) you feel is not adequately accounted for, or supported, in the argument.
4. PERSONAL CONNECTION. Consider briefly how the argument made in the article fits or challenges your previous thinking about social movements/politics.
5. ANALYTICAL RELATION. Compare this argument with another you have come across, either in this course or in your previous study. Summarize briefly this previous argument (citing it properly), and explain how the present piece’s argument contrasts with it, or casts new light on the issues they have in common.
6. IMPLICATIONS. Discuss the potential implications that you see the current argument to have for our more general understanding of society and social change.

Critical Comments should not exceed three typed, double-spaced pages.

Critical Comments should be sent to me via email by midnight the night BEFORE the relevant class.

2) Final Paper

The final paper for the class will be a 10-12 page (double-spaced) critical review paper. Each of you will pick a recent rebellion, revolution, or social movement – whichever has interested or inspired you most in the last several years. You will then select 3-4 key examples of current scholarly literature on your movement, and conduct a critical analysis of the ways the diverse theories and assumptions about the basis and nature of social movements we will explore in this course are manifest in, or challenged by, their interpretations – and the potential implications this
has for our understandings of the causes and consequences of such movements. The Final Paper will be worth 30% of the total course grade.

Around the middle of the semester, each of you will meet with me in order to choose your topic and discuss the determination of the most appropriate readings for and approaches to the paper.

*N.B.: The paper will be due on the last day of class; late papers will not be accepted.*

**Grading:**

General participation in class discussions will count for 30% of your grade. Reaction papers (together) will be worth 40%, and the final paper 30% of the total course grade.

**Class Schedule:**

**Part One - Background: Traditional Approaches to Social Movements and Social Change**

**Week 1. Class-based Politics and Movements**

**Day 1 Theory:**


**Day 2 Application:**


**Week 2. Collective Action and Mass Psychology**

**Day 1 Theory:**


Day 2 Application:


Week 3. Civil Society, Agency, and the Politics of Intention

Day 1 Theory:


Day 2 Application:


Week 4. New Social Movements and the Politics of Identity

Day 1 Theory


Day 2 Application:


Part Two - Re-imagining: Social Movements as Emergent Cultural Practices

Changing Understandings of Power/Politics

Week 5

Day 1  Theory:


Day 2  Application:


Week 6


Challenges to Identity

Week 7

Day 1  Theory:

Day 2  Application:


Week 8


Politics as Practice/Performance

Week 9

Day 1  Theory:


Day 2  Application:


Week 10

Day 1  Kenney, Padraic. 2002. Ch 5 “‘How the Smurfs captured Gargamel, or, A Revolution of


*film: “Dübörög a nemzeti rock” [Rocking the Nation] (2007)*

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**Movements and Borders: Globalizing Culture/Politics**

**Week 11**

**Day 1** Theory:


**Day 2** Application:


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**Week 12**


**Day 2** Summary Discussion