Jacob Copeman and Lotte Hoek
Proposed Postgraduate course

KEYWORDS in SOUTH ASIAN PUBLIC CULTURE
Credit: 20 units
SCQF Level 11

Please note that this is a postgraduate variant on an existing Honours option (South Asian Public Culture: Keywords SCAN10054) in School of Social and Political Science. The postgraduate course is distinctive in: (1) its mode of assessment, (2) having additional tutorials and readings, and (3) expecting higher levels of attainment of learning outcomes.

Short Description & Aims
This course aims to provide students with a solid understanding of important contemporary debates in the study of South Asian public culture. Introducing key themes through critical and current ethnographic work, this course focuses on the tangible public forms that global cultural flows, political economies and social formations take. This emphasis on contemporary public culture allows a concrete consideration of abstract and changing social and cultural forces that define the region. The course will be informed by the existing concerns in the anthropology of South Asia but focuses on areas largely neglected by it. Inspired by Raymond Williams’ ‘keywords’ approach to culture and society, this course examines the subcontinent from unexpected and innovative angles by gathering key ethnographic readings under conceptual keywords to be explored empirically and theoretically. The course will approach the region as an integrated socio-cultural whole, rather than a set of self-contained nation-states.

The postgraduate component will require students to engage in-depth with selected key texts, both theoretical investigations and empirical studies, and to reflect on the relevance of these for their own dissertation research.

Summary of Intended Learning Outcomes
By the end of this course, students will have a thorough and critical understanding of key debates in the anthropology of South Asia and South Asian public culture and will be able to synthesise these and new developments in the field. They will have a solid grip on sophisticated theoretical approaches to South Asian ethnography and be familiar with its main themes, theories and principles. They will understand how important anthropological themes crystallize in contemporary ethnographic explorations of the region. They will learn to approach South Asia theoretically and empirically as an integrated socio-cultural and historical space, rather than as made up of radically separated nation-states.

With this knowledge, students will be able to critically reflect on and write about South Asian ethnography and popular culture. The assessments are designed to highlight two genres of scholarly writing and give students practice in them. Their critical reading and discussion skills will be trained in the tutorials. They will develop their writing and researching skills through the two assessments.
Teaching Methods
This course will consist of lectures and additional MSc tutorials in which students will be asked to critically approach contemporary South Asian ethnography. Lectures will be interactive and provide space for discussion and collective work.

There will be 10 PG tutorials in 9 of which PG students will be asked to lead discussions on the assigned reading. They will also be asked to address a piece of South Asian public culture within the conceptual frame provided by the keyword of that particular week.

Components of Assessment
Students will be assessed by two pieces of writing. The first piece of writing, due around week 6 will be a short 1,500 word essay (worth 20%) in which students will be asked to find and discuss a piece of South Asian public culture (images from Tasveer Ghar, articles from Tehelka, a South Asian film or magazine for example) and analyse this in an effective and accessible manner. This piece of work emphasises creative scholarly work and will look at innovative analysis, accessible writing and creative thinking.

The second piece of assessment is a more formal 4,000 word essay (worth 80%) on a topic addressing key debates in the anthropology of South Asia and South Asian public culture, and agreed with the course convenor. This may concern either a general approach to the theorisation of a particular theme or debate, or their investigation in a particular regional context. Students will be expected to show initiative in going beyond the set readings for the course. The development of bibliographic and literature skills will be emphasised.

Format
The course will encourage an innovative and engaged approach to South Asian ethnography by gathering key readings under keywords. These keywords not only define current scholarly concerns in South Asia but are also the concrete manifestation of abstract social and cultural flows in the region. As concerns change, so can the keywords, thus allowing a flexible course format. The first keywords are: publics, leaders, city, digital, sex, violence, fake, display, materials, economy.

Week 1 Publics
The introductory lecture sets out Raymond Williams’ keywords approach and weds this to the founding texts by Appadurai and Breckenridge of the journal Public Culture. What is public culture and why is it at the heart of contemporary ethnographic approaches to South Asia?

Williams, Raymond. 2010 [1976]. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. London: Fontana Press

Week 2 Leaders
What are the public cultural resources out of which leadership is fashioned and challenged? How is sovereignty produced and challenged? What does politics look like in Technicolor?


**Week 3 City**

South Asian cities provide a conceptual challenge to many of our most cherished social scientific categories. What is the place of the city in contemporary South Asia and how do megapoles relate to villages and small towns, so crucial to nationalist imaginings across South Asia? Of what is the urban experience fashioned?


**Week 4 Digital**

The promise of a Digital Bangladesh, the working of E-governance in India and the mimicry of drones above Pakistan set out the digital as a complex domain of aspiration, control and materiality. What does the digital mean in the context of South Asian public culture?


Week 5 Sex
Sex and sexuality have largely been described as a site where struggles unfolding elsewhere have come to be projected. Sexuality as a site of ethnographic research brings out the irreducible aspects of sexual affectivities in the public sphere. How can sexuality be rethought beyond a colonial trope for control?


Week 6 Violence
How does violence as a repertoire found institutions as the state, as well as provide the most affective trope for its interrogation? What is the place and work of public death in South Asia?

Chatterjee, Partha. 1999. Modernity, Democracy and a Political Negotiation of Death South Asia Research; 19; 103.

Week 7 Fake
Process of authentication and practices of fakery define a complex terrain of South Asian public life. From questions about the ‘true’ nature of structures in Ayodhya, the veracity of Bangladeshi democracy or the originality of Bollywood plots, the question of authenticity sits at the heart of a range of politically volatile contestations in South Asia.

Week 8 Display
What is the nature of ‘display’ in the production of collectivities? How does the circulation of images and the circulation of people along displays instatiate communities and conflicts? How are the senses caught up in these displays and interwoven with socio-cultural forms?


Week 9 Materials
What is the stuff of public culture? What does a materialist analysis add beyond economic considerations? What is the infrastructural bliss and despair that fuels people’s love and hate for roads, housing projects, dams, dresses and shrines? How are these material objects caught up in everyday experiences of governmental logics, affective dispositions and awe?


Week 10 Economy.
What is neoliberalism as a domain of public culture? Where beyond the planners books do the new and not-so-new economic logics of neoliberalism make themselves felt? What are the rhetorics and practices of trade, profit and loss that accompany the rise of the Indian economy and the continuation of rougue capitalism across the region?

**Course Ownership & Cross-listing**

This course will be owned by Social Anthropology and can be listed by the following programs:
MSc in Social Anthropology
MSc (R) in Social Anthropology
MSc in Global and International Sociology
MSc in South Asia and International Development
MSc (R) in South Asian Studies
MSc (R) in Sociology
MSc in the Anthropology of Health & Illness

Possibilities of listing the course for students from other schools, specifically LLC and ACE may be explored.