Creativity and Method in Comparative Research: Political Science 514a  
Instructors: James C. Scott and Arun Agrawal

Class Meeting times: Tuesday, 10:00 AM to 12:00 noon

Office Hours  
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Tuesday: 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM  
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Course Description:

Assignments and Course Grade  
1. Research Proposal: (See session 1)  
2. Ethnography: What is the relation between what people say and political actions. (see session 4)  
3. Short writeup and presentation on observing political life (see session 5) OR Debate (see session 10)  
4. Translation of Baumann into rational choice terms (see session 7)  
5. Extract three or more propositions about political life from Tolstoy. For any two of them, outline how you would inquire into their validity (see session 9)

Readings to be purchased:  
(Available at Book Haven on York Street; also placed on reserve in the Social Science Library).  
7. Leo Tolstoy. War and Peace.  
11. Coursepak (Readings included in the coursepak are indicated by an asterisk).
Course Outline

Session 1: Looking Back
How would someone like Polanyi have gone about producing his great social and political history of the emergence of market economy and laboring peoples? His work constituted a novel account of change in human societies? Imagine yourself, as Polanyi, writing a proposal to produce *The Great Transformation*. What would your research proposal look like? This assignment will be due ..........


Session 2: Another Way to Ask and Answer Large Questions
Moore describes a number of different routes to the modern world. What are the major causal relationships in his comparative account? What kinds of additional comparisons would make his history of the modern world even more compelling? Additional readings, listed at the end of the syllabus, in section A may be helpful.


Session 3: A History of Numbers and Statistics in Social Representations
Numbers have become a favorite instrument through which to understand, represent, analyze, and explain the world. What explains them? Is there a politics of numbers? If there is a politics of numbers, can numbers measure politics? What does the relatively young field of the history of statistics and probability tell us about the illusions of safety that numbers give us? See also section B of additional readings.


Session 4: Ethnography
If numbers and statistics have a history and politics, so do ethnography and close observation. No other discipline obsesses as much about its central principle of method as does anthropology. There is a truly vast literature on ethnography: the approach and corollary methods, critiques, future visions... For a beginning, see section C of additional readings.

Session 5: Observing Political Life
It is all very well to talk about ethnography. How about doing it? We have arranged for you to
observe the flow of political interactions in three locations: Pick any one of them, and tell us
what you saw? Supplement your direct observations with additional research on the major actors
and institutions that played a role in the discussions that you observed. Your written observations
are due on ............

Session 6: Does Interpretation Happen Before or After Observation?
See Section D of additional readings as well.

Press.
   A. “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” pp. 3-32;
   B. “The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man” pp. 33-54;
   C. “Ideology as a Cultural System” pp. 193-233;

Session 7: Rational Choice?
From where do rational choice accounts of social and political life derive their power? What is
the explanatory structure of Modernity and Holocaust? How would a rational choice theorist
present the arguments and explanations in this book? For an introduction to some of the
conundrums of method and approach, see readings listed in section E at the end of the syllabus.

   Philosophy. 71-87.

Session 8: And Rational Choice Explanations
   Eastern Europe and Latin America. Cambridge University Press.

Session 9: Political Lessons from Non-Political Science
Session 10: Critical Junctures and the Longue Duree, Or What is the Role of Time in Political Explanations?

Debate:


Session 11: Power and Governmentality

What is the imaginative leap that lands Foucault on connections between his conception of the subject and macro-social processes related to capitalist development and liberal government? Government shapes conduct – the conduct of conduct. Does it make sense to talk about the conduct of conduct without the state? What would such erosion of categories do to the idea of political science? The lone lecture on governmentality that Foucault gave in 1979 has by now inspired more than 200 articles and books. For an illustrative list, see section F of Additional readings.


Session 12: Accounting for the Rise of Nationalism


Session 13: The Uses of Rhetoric in Comparative Research

Do political scientists write only for other political scientists? When and how can political scientists (safely) step out of the confines of disciplinary boundaries? What role does rhetoric play in persuading readers of the veracity of an argument?

*3. Larry Lohmann. CornerHouse Briefings.
A). #5 The Myth of the Minimalist State: Free Market Ambiguities;  
B) #10 Food?, Health?, Hope?: Genetic Engineering and World Hunger;  
C) #12 Internal Conflict: Adaptation and Reaction to Globalisation;  
D) #20 The Malthus Factor: Poverty, Politics, and Population in Capitalist Development  

4. Liana Vardi. 


**Additional Readings**  

Section A: Comparative Research  

Section B: Numbers and Statistics  
Section C: The Ethnographic Method and its Uncertainties

Section D: Interpretation and Positivism

Section E: The Methods of Rational Choice

Section F: Governmentality, Or the Conduct of Political Life