

Active Learning Exercise: “The Individual is Always in Opposition to the Collective”

From SOAN 70822 Contemporary Debates in Social Anthropology, (MA) Prof Karen Sykes

The aim: In this exercise you will discuss what would constitute a good ethnographic example to oppose or support the debating motion written at the top of this project sheet. The exercise is both a teach in – focusing on strike action – and a means to advance your understanding of how to create a good anthropological argument for this debating position.

The activity: In this exercise you will work with two others (in a group of three) first to prepare the theoretical underpinnings of the activity, and then to collate your ethnographic examples from the strike action to illustrate your debating position. Finally, in your second meeting you will rank the quality of your several ethnographic examples drawn from the immediate strike action and discuss what makes a good example for the debating motion.

Guidance and organisation: You should meet once to discuss the readings that support the theoretical background to the motion. These readings are found on BB at Topic 2, the society and the individual. You should then carry out the activity of collecting and writing down an example. You should meet the second week to consider the at least three of the strongest insights that you have taken from the readings (perhaps come to your group meeting with two each and select from these).

Week One

1. Discuss how you would think about these key points about the nature of the concept of the person as an ethnocentric notion, or how it differs as a cross cultural notion. Note that the notion of the person is inseparable from the notion of society. Today culture cannot be neglected because as a matrix it moves political, social, economic, and legal relations into more intense configurations than ever before.
 - a. Discuss the relation of the individual to the collectivity as marked by superior value of the individual; (the individual is above the collective; the individual is the building block of the collective)
 - b. Versus the ‘oppositional’ or ‘alternative’ value of the individual (the individual exists only as a construct or social form in any society).
2. Discuss how you would think about these key points in the very specific context of the current

Preparation for Week 2

1. During the week leading up to the meeting in week two of topic two, each group member will carry out an independent activity to bring to the meeting for Week 2.
 - a. Each member will collect one good example each from the strike action and write about it in no more than 300 words. This is a scoping exercise in which you are observing and looking around to try to understand the intellectual field of topic in this time and place.
 - b. Relate that example to the theoretical readings in no more than 200 words.
 - i. How would you rate the quality of the evidence that you have assembled? Consider the course guidance on what is a good debate.

Week 2

2. Share the ethnographic examples with each other prior to meeting during the class time on Monday 28 February.
 - a. Each person should rank the full compilation of ethnographic examples from groups collective activity.
 - b. Reveal the ranking to each other.
 - c. Explain why you would choose the top ranked example for your debating position.
 - d. What helps you to come to a group decision about the best ethnographic example for your debating position for or against the motion.
3. Reflection
 - a. What insights on the strike action might be drawn from your examples?
 - b. What insights can you draw about the putative individual and collective features of the exercise that you carried out when collating examples of the strike action.

All question are welcome, please contact Karen.Sykes@manchester.ac.uk by email.