

MARXISM AND MATERIALISM

What is a materialist perspective? Discuss with examples.

What relevance does Marxism have to contemporary anthropology? Discuss.

Explain the concept of materialism and how it relates to an understanding of social relations and material culture.

(Philosophical) materialism:

- matter is the fundamental substance in nature
- all phenomena including mental and consciousness are the result of material interactions
- Marx is a materialist theorist
 - gap of reasoning between the ideal and the material
 - ideology is a 'false consciousness'
- emphasis that the social is in fact material

Historical materialism

- methodological approach to the study of society, economics and history
 - a materialist conception of history
- theory of socioeconomic dev. according to changes in material conditions are the primary influence on how society and the economy are organised
- **how do changes occur through production?**
- social classes and relationship between them/political structures are founded on economic activity
- stages of economic evolution
- primitive— feudal—capitalism—communism
- nature is acted upon by humans are acted upon by nature- dialectical relationship
- in production, people oppose themselves to nature by acting on the external world and changing it, but through dialectical relationship they are changing themselves too
- theoretical framework to understand human history as a systematic process of social production and reproduction
- empirical method used by Marx as a tool to understand history as a succession of processes which transform, develop and are interconnected and based around production

Infrastructure and superstructure

The base: all thing needed to produce (factories, material, land etc.)

- in between: base shapes the superstructure and the superstructure legitimises the base

The superstructure: things not to do with production (kinship, religion, politics, media etc.)

- mode of production= unity of forces of production and social/technical relations of production
 - thus, interrelated whole between people and nature- the way people relate to nature same as the way they relate to each other
 - thus mode of production in society is the force with mobilises social change
 - new modes of technology= more effective social relations
 - process of conflict, exacerbating class struggle
- to understand this better look at dialectical relationships/more specifically

Anthropology relevance/criticisms:

- goes against agency based theories in a nth
- for material culture, fits well, emphasis on agency of object
- goes against phenomenology, says: universal theories cannot be assumed, only through individual experience can one understand something
 - criticism: Marx tried to make a theory of everything

Foucault: post-structuralism rejects theories based on false premise of trying to find universal truth

Geertz: there is no general theory of culture that can be study in Anthro

Roseberry: Marx did not attempt grand model, just a materialist conception to events historically posing questions on class, structure, social relations etc.

- for social anthro, application is more convoluted
 - doesn't translate very well when looking at indigenous groups of people