Overview

This seminar will discuss the many dimensions of Ireland. In the popular imagination, Ireland continues to be a place out of time. Ireland has had to contend with its image, culture and people being shaped and defined by global forces for centuries, from initial contacts with European travellers, to English colonisation and contemporary stereotypes. Anthropology has played its role in these representations, challenging some tropes but confirming others.

Beyond the images of Ireland in anthropology and the wider imagination, it is a place where people live as we all do. This seminar aims to look beyond representation and stereotypes, and explore Ireland's economic, social and cultural challenges, and how its present and future look in the twenty-first century. We will look at how Ireland’s present-day multiplicity intersects with the traditional image of rural, monocultural and Catholics, examining recent trends such as multiculturalism and LGBT+ activism. We will explore manifestations of Irish culture such as dance and language, seeing how they are reproduced and what meaning they hold to their practitioners. Ireland has multiple and often conflicting identities, most obviously with Northern Ireland. We will look at the outline of division there, but also how gendered and class divisions shape these dynamics in the North and elsewhere.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the module:

- Students will have been introduced to the development of anthropology in Ireland and its main themes that continue to be of concern.
- Students will be familiar with shifting ethnographic approaches and methods to the study of communities, notions of tradition, and distinct shades of nationalism.
- Through a variety of case studies, students will understand functionalism, structural functionalism, interpretative anthropology, political economy, and postmodern approaches to anthropology.
- Students will have engaged in critical thinking.
**Topic One - Ireland as an Idea (5th July)**

This week will introduce the course, the idea of anthropology, and the idea of Ireland. Like many former colonies, Ireland has had to negotiate its identity through dominant frames of understanding, and furthermore, as a small Anglophone country with a large diaspora, has also dealt with emigrant stereotypes and reduction (leprechauns basically).

**Topic Two – Anthropology and Ireland (7th July)**

We then continue to explore the idea of Ireland, moving onto anthropology. This class outlines the history of anthropology as a discipline, and its understanding of ‘exotic’ cultures. Anthropological studies of western societies leaned towards the exotic too, studying Native American reservations in the US, and isolated communities in Europe. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the problems of representation and authenticity made anthropology rethink its approach to engaging with other cultures and the dangers of speaking about people rather than to them. In Ireland this pattern played out spectacularly in the case of Nancy Scheper-Hughes’ research on mental illness in Ireland. I want to briefly examine anthropology’s history of Irish research as another form of external representation and how challenges to this reflected Irish concerns over stereotyping and anthropology’s response to this challenge.

**Topic Three – Irish Gaelic (10th July)**

Languages are not just a form of communication, they are symbolically resonant. Irish Gaelic holds a complicated place in Irish society, a language very few speak but most have some sort of affection for. This class discusses the symbolism of language before turning to contested ideas of language-shift and language-use in Ireland.

**Topic Four – Dance and Sport (12th July)**

Along with music, Irish dance has been noted as a distinct feature, playing into tropes of the Irish as musical/cultural/(feminine?) rather than practical. We will explore the ways that dancing is used to promote a form of identity. (Sport too, offers an interesting insight into authentic Irish values and the role of masculinity in creating identity)

**Topic Five – Northern Ireland (17th July)**

This week, we examine how Northern Ireland offers a refracted glimpse at Irish society, merging British, Irish and localised forms of identity (and politics). We will discuss the ‘Troubles’, focusing particularly on the experiences of women in the republican movement in Belfast. Then we turn to the interplay between regional and local identities in rural Northern Ireland, as explored I William Kelleher’s discussion of a worker’s strike in a small town.

**Topic Six – Belfast (19th July)**

This class discusses contemporary relationships between class, ethnic group and space. We will discuss Belfast’s evolution from a ‘conflict’ city to a commercial city, and how new forms of social exclusion are created and experienced.
Topic Seven – Religion in Ireland (24th July)
As we have seen, religion has played a key role in Irish identity, defining the island’s politics and playing a central role in local society. Today I want to expand further on rural understandings of religion, drawing on Larry Taylor’s work on Catholic practices. Then we will move on to exploring the relationship between contemporary Ireland and Catholicism. Is Ireland a secular state? Is it multi-religious?

Topic Eight – Contemporary Ireland (26th July)
This session concludes by summing up the tropes of Irish culture, how the representations and reality mingle, and determine how representative they are of a multi-faceted society. We will conclude by looking at how Ireland fits into transitional identities, specifically European and/or British identities. We will also continue our discussion of minority communities in Ireland, how does Ireland address multiculturalism, racism and the idea of the ‘new-Irish’?