Human Rights & Wrongs: Anthropological Perspectives
TANT 141-0001 (9678)
Tuesday & Thursday, 2:45 – 4:05
HU 108

Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Burrell  
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Office Hours:  
Tues 1:15-2:15, Thursday 4:15-5:15  
By appointment

Course Description:

This course is designed to provide an overview of human rights and anthropology from theoretical and historical points of view and from the vantage point of engagement and practice. Using a critical approach, we will move away from the notion of a set category or monolithic legal structure toward an understanding of a flexible and elastic set of conceptual frameworks used to accomplish transitions, make claims and gain access to resources. In doing so, we will consider the increasing transnationalization of rights discourse and the growing terrain in which claims, legal and otherwise, are made through it. A series of international and national case studies will be examined.

Throughout the course, we will consider human rights practice, broadly understood, in various forms. We shall do so with the premise that differential access to rights exists in the everyday lives of people and this is frequently addressed in ways that may not fit into our existing definitions of human rights. These nevertheless constitute the defense of a right that has been abused due to legal, political or structural violence.

More specifically, course objects include the following:

1. How anthropology’s colonialist heritage has led to a particular conception of rights
2. How anthropological concepts and theories contribute to contemporary human rights debates, and the underlying assumption of these theories
3. How human rights interact with local cultures?
4. How anthropologists grapple with ethical and activist dilemmas involved in human rights advocacy work and contribute to policy making

As an Honors course, this class offers the opportunity for in-depth consideration of and debate about moral, ethical, and disciplinary dilemmas involved in human rights theory, practice and advocacy through lectures, films, guest lecturers, focus groups, and presentations. The course includes a semester long research project that requires you to become human rights 'experts' using concepts from the course.
Required Texts: (available at the UAlbany Bookstore)

Nancy Scheper Hughes and Phillippe Bourgois, eds. Violence in War & Peace, Blackwell 2004 (VWP)


Zoe Crossland and Rosemary Joyce, Disturbing Bodies: Perspectives on Forensic Anthropology. SAR Press, 2015

Other readings downloadable from Blackboard.

Course Requirements, Assignments & Expectations:
(Please refer to the handout on writing assignments)

1 In-Class Midterm Exam: One in-class essay and short answer exam will be given during the semester. It will be based on films, readings and class lectures, and discussions. (March 9)

1 Commentary on Guatemala Case Study (April 13, 1-2 pgs)

FILM Discussion Boards: On the days in which a film (or films, in the case of April 18th, 2 films) are viewed, at least one contribution to the film discussion board is due by 8 PM. Please share thoughts, relationships to readings, difficulties, etc.

Country Expertise & Paper: Throughout the semester, you will be asked to become an expert on human rights issues in one country in the world. This means that as we work through, debate and discuss various issues, concerns and topics of human rights in class, you will be required to research how these are reflected or played out in the country you choose to focus on.

You should sign up for a country in which to become a human rights ‘expert’ by the end of the third week of class. I will have a sign-up sheet available in class and in my office. If you choose to develop your expertise in a country for which there are assigned readings and/or films, please make it clear how you will distinguish your case from the material covered in class.

You will be expected to participate in class discussions and to contribute contemporary or historical background information from the country in which you are building expertise that is relative to issues we touch upon in class.

Three written assignments will be required over the course of the semester:
   1. Initial country report and background to human rights situation (February 16)
   2. Anthropological perspectives on your case study (March 23)
   3. Topic of specialization, which will also be presented in class (see below)

Many human rights primary sources are found on the internet and I therefore require that you verify your facts and provide careful citations for data that you find on-line. It has become
painfully obvious that we live in a time of false news and massive propaganda. Therefore, I ask that you run your major sources by me and/or Jean McLaughlin, the Honors librarian, to ensure that they constitute what would commonly and widely be considered legitimate organizations and websites, before building your research. In your first paper, I require that you identify at least two anthropological studies related to your country. In addition, I require that each topic paper contain at least three citations from peer-reviewed academic sources. Final topic papers MUST grapple with themes and debates emanating from class discussions and include a bibliography of human rights and anthropological sources. (You will be provided with a separate hand-out detailing writing assignments and we will work with Jean McLaughlin to clarify how to find resources.)

Presentation & Final Paper: In the last weeks of the course, you will be required to make a formal presentation on rights and a theme such as health, gender, children/child soldiers, gender or indigenous issues. These presentations should offer a clear and effective summary of a general human rights situation pertaining to one of these in your country and an example of a particular human rights case. You should also be able to identify how anthropologists have grappled with this issue and if they haven’t, why you think this is so. Please sign up for a presentation during April. Two weeks after your presentation, your final paper (approximately 15 pages) will be due: this will consist of background from assignment one, anthropological issues from assignment two, and your case study.

Reading and Assignment Schedule

T    January 24: Introduction

Anthropology & Human Rights: History & Contexts/Tensions & Conflicts

TH    January 26:
   Who’s Got Rights? Human Rights and Human Rights Defenders
   Statement of Human Rights (1947) and commentaries (American Anthropological
   Association). Julian Steward, H.G. Barnett (Blackboard)
   Declaration on Anthropology and Human Rights (1999) American Anthropological
   Association http://www.aaa.net.org/committees/cfhr/ar95.htm (Blackboard)
   “Human Rights” by Richard A. Wilson, in A Companion to the Anthropology of
   Politics, Blackwell, 2004, pp. 231-247 (Blackboard)
   “Human Rights” in New Keywords, pp. 168-171 (Blackboard)

T    Jan 31: Modern Human Rights Frameworks
   FILM: The Nuremburg Trials

TH    Feb 2: Anthropology, Conquest and Colonialism
   Conrad, from Heart of Darkness, VWP 35-38
   Taussig, Culture of Terror, Space of Death, VWP 39-53
   T. Kroeber, from Ishi in Two Worlds, VWP 54-60
   Scheper Hughes, Ishi’s Brain, Ishi’s Ashes, VWP 61-68
Feb 7: Colonialism, Modernity and Human Rights
Ferguson, Tribal Warfare, VWP 69-73
Gordon, from The Bushman Myth: The Making of the Namibian Underclass, pp. 74-76

Feb 9: Cultural Relativism v. Universalism:
Cassese, Are Human Rights Truly Universal? pp. 149-165 (Blackboard)
An Na’im: Toward a Cross-Cultural Approach to Defining International Standards of Human Rights. 19-43 (Blackboard)
Donnelly TBA

Feb 14: Rights & Culture
Merry, Chs 1
FILM: The Anthropologist

Feb 16: Happy Anthropology Day!
Merry, Chapter 2-3

Due: First Assignment. Please submit an overview of the human rights situation in the country in which you have chosen to specialize. This should include an historic background of the situation, contemporary human rights problems and issues and the ways in which they are being addressed (or not.) Please identify anthropological work on human rights issues in your country.

Feb 21: Merry, Ch 4 & 5
FILM: Born Into Brothels

Feb 23: Meeting with Honors Librarian, Jean McLaughlin, LIBRARY 248

Feb 28: Merry, Ch 6 & Conclusion

March 2: Violence, Culture, War: Concepts & Anthropological Perspectives
Bourgois, The Continuum of Violence in War & Peace, VWP 425-434
Levi, The Gray Zone, VWP 83-90
Arendt, A Report on the Banality of Evil, VWP 91-100
Rosaldo, Grief and a Headhunters Rage, VWP 150-156
March 7: Structural Violence: Rethinking a Rights Framework Through Anthropological Insights
Farmer, On Social Suffering and Structural Violence: A View From Below, VWP pp. 281-289
Ho, Structural Violence as Human Rights Violation, Essex Human Rights Review 4:2, 2007:
http://projects.essex.ac.uk/ehrr/V4N2/ho.pdf

March 9: MIDTERM

March 21: Communal Violence/s
Litwack, Hellhounds, pp. 123-128
Malkki, from Purity & Exile, pp. 129-135
Gourevitch, We Wish To Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed, pp. 136-142
Das, Language & Body, VWP 327-333
Danner, From the Massacre at El Mozote, VWP 334-338

March 23: Compassion & Engagements
Binford, An Alternative Anthropology, Exercising the Preferential Option for the Poor, VWP, pp. 420-424
Fadlalla, The Neoliberalization of Compassion, pp. 209-228 (Blackboard)
Linke, The Limits of Empathy: Emotional Anesthesia and the Museum of Corpses in Post-Holocaut Germany, pp. 147-191 (Blackboard)

Due: Second Assignment: Building upon your first assignment, discuss the human rights situation in your country relative to anthropological perspectives on culture, power, and violence discussed in the past weeks. Please cite and engage with anthropological work on these topics (materials from class plus 1-3 articles from peer-reviewed academic sources on your topic.)

March 28: The Right To An Investigation
Doretti & Burrell, Grey Spaces and Endless Negotiations: Forensic Anthropology and Human Rights in Anthropology Put to Work, Berg Publishers, pp. 45-64 (Blackboard)
Chapters from Crossland & Joyce TBA

FILMS: Sacred Soil & Following Antigone: Forensic Anthropology and Human Rights

March 30: Forensic Anthropology and Human Rights
Chapters from Crossland & Joyce TBA

April 4 Genocide & Anthropology: Killing & Fearing
Milgram, Behavioral Study of Obedience, VWP pp. 145-149
Hinton, Why Did You Kill? The Cambodian Genocide and the Dark Side of Face and Honor, VWP, pp. 157-168
Green, Living in a State of Fear, VWP pp. 186-195
TH April 6 Guatemala: A Case Study
Burrell, Jennifer. Maya After War. Introduction, Chapter 1 & Chapter 6, University of Texas Press, 2013 (BB)

T: April 11
FILM: When The Mountains Tremble

TH: April 13
Half the class reads:

The other half of the class reads:

Writing (before class):
Write a 1-2 page commentary on the chapter you read (Sanford or Rodman.) You must bring a hard copy of your commentary to class.

T April 18: What Difference Can A Trial Make?
Oglesby & Nelson, Guatemala’s Genocide Trial and the Nexus of Racism and Counterinsurgency, Jnl of Genocide Research 18:2-3: 133-42
Burt, From Heaven to Hell in Ten Days, Jnl of Genocide Studies, 143-69
Ross, The Rios Montt Case & Universal Jurisdiction, 361-76

FILMS: Granito: How to Nail a Dictator and Dictator on the Dock

TH April 20: What Difference Can A Genocide Trial Make II?
Vanthuyne & Falla, Surviving in the Margins of Genocide Case, 207-24
Crosby, Lykes & Caxaj, Carrying A Heavy Load: Mayan Women’s Understandings to Reparation, 265-83
Olson, Waging Peace, 343-59
T  April 25:  Presentations (Paper due May 10)

TH  April 27:  Presentations (Paper due May 10)

T  May 2:  Presentations (Paper due May 16)

TH  May 4:  Presentations (Paper due May 16)

T  May 9  Wrap Up

Final Paper due May 10 or May 16
Class Policies:

Attendance is mandatory. Class lectures and discussion are based not only on the readings, but also on points raised by them. Although attendance may not be taken on a regular basis, it will be taken randomly throughout the semester. If you’re not present you will lose attendance points. If you sleep in class, you will be asked to leave.

Participation: In addition to your required presence in class, participation entails the following:

1. All assigned materials must be read by the day on which they are assigned. If materials are assigned for two sessions, they must be read by the first class meeting.
2. Actively engaging the materials by asking questions and making relevant comments and critiques during class.
3. You should prepare at least two questions or comments for each reading – something you liked or disliked (and why), something you didn’t understand, additional information you are curious about – in order to contribute to and stimulate class discussion. I will collect these at random and they will contribute to your participation points.

Respect for one another, the professor and the teaching assistants is a MUST in this course.

Timely arrival to class is essential and you must remain in class until it is officially adjourned.

No cell phones, laptops, beepers, conversations or eating: turn off all cell phones and pagers while in class. Your attention must be focused on the lecture, and the comments of your colleagues.

Timely completion of Assignments: Assignments must be completed on the day they are due for full credit. Each day an assignment is late, it loses one full letter grade. Assignments more than three days late will not be graded. PLEASE KEEP COPIES OF ALL GRADED MATERIAL.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is not tolerated and I am particularly sensitive to this given that you are allowed to use internet resources for your semester-long research projects. I follow the general procedures for Academic Integrity: Policies and Procedures, Penalties and Procedures, and Faculty Course Sanctions adopted by the University Senate. I suggest that everyone take the tutorial so that you are very clear on what constitutes plagiarism: http://library.albany.edu/usered/plagiarism/index.html.

Grading Scheme: Grades will range between A – E, based on a scale of 100.

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**Reading Strategy**

Keep up with the readings as scheduled. It is the only way that you can participate in class discussion and debate. Doing so will allow you to go through the material gradually and connect it to relevant themes and issues as they come up. Lectures will complement readings, not duplicate them.

**Paper Expectations and Formatting Instructions**

Criteria for Evaluating Papers and Other Written Work
A: clear mastery and understanding of material demonstrated through active engagement and critical analysis; demonstration of interrelationships among various theories, ideas, concepts, paradigms and modes of practice that are used accurately; the synthesis of all course material in a concise, cogent and creative manner.
B: active critical engagement of ideas, concepts theories, but is occasionally vague or imprecise; probing arguments that usually utilize precise language and clear narrative statement and supporting evidence, but do not explain contradictions and counter-arguments; generally well-written with an attempt to engage concepts in intellectually creative and unique ways.
C: Basic understanding of substance of course material; while essentially correct, comprehension and arguments do not stretch beyond the superficial application of concepts and ideas; imprecise erroneous use of language and concepts in the presentation of ideas.
D: incomplete grasp of the substance of course material; insufficient awareness of the interrelationships between various concepts and modes of practice; failure to address topic of the assignment.

**Formatting Instructions:**

(Note: My ability to comment on your work hinges on your adherence to these!)

1. Papers must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all four sides.
2. Proofread
3. Page numbers must be included. *****
4. Refer to authors by last name. Referring to an author by first name is not acceptable in academic writing.
5. Book titles in italics and article/chapter titles in “quotation marks.”
6. Sources should be cited within the body of the paper, parenthetically (Scott 1985:304-305)
7. A list of ALL references cited must be included at the end of the paper.

If you are unsure of how to format a paper, please consult http://www.aresearchguide.com/ or the Honors librarian, Dr. Jean McLaughlin, jmclaughlin@uamail.albany.edu

Additional resources are available online: http://library.albany.edu/honorscoll/