Course Description

Human rights is a global conception that has produced many and varied impacts, has been adapted and reworked in local contexts worldwide, and has become the object of as well as a resource for popular struggle, state policymaking, and transnational movements – all of which makes it a perfect subject for anthropological analysis. But anthropology has a long and complicated relationship with human rights, as this course explores. We will examine the origins and expansion of human rights thinking, and the impacts this has had on national formations and local contexts. We will go on to consider the conflicts between culture and rights that have emerged in this process, and the question of universality in the application of human rights around the world. The course will also consider the ways in which rights conceptions have been mobilized in local struggles, with a particular geographical focus on Latin America. We will look at specific manifestations of rights as captured in ethnographic writing, including issues of indigenous rights, women’s rights, the relationship between security and rights, and the rights of transnational migrants. Students will develop one particular theme from among those studied in their final research paper for the course.

Books


Course Requirements and Grading

1. Weekly reading and active participation (20% of course grade)– Students who attend without participating actively each week will not receive A grades for the course.
2. Discussion leadership – (% included in participation) Each student will have at least one opportunity to assist me in facilitating the seminar, preparing questions and activities to help explore the readings for that week’s class.
3. Weekly critical memos (20% of course grade) – 1-2 pages maximum in length, double-spaced. These should be posted to the course Sakai site (in the appropriate “Memos” folder, under “Resources”) by 5:00 pm every Tuesday. Everyone in class should read each other’s memos prior to class, and come prepared to debate, critique, and query.
4. Critical essay (60% of course grade)– All seminar participants must write a critical essay of NO MORE THAN 20 double-spaced pages of text (not including endnotes and bibliography). The essay should develop a particular theme related to seminar readings and discussion through critical analysis and/or comparisons of materials read for class, using additional materials where desired. Seminar participants will make short oral presentations based on work in progress, during the last class session. Due dates are as follows:
   a. paper topic proposal (one paragraph): by Fri 17 Feb
   b. paper abstract (one page) and preliminary bibliography (7-10 sources) due: Fri 1 Mar
   c. rough draft due (at least 50% of the text, plus outline of the remainder): Fri 12 Apr
   d. in-class presentation: Wed 1 May
   e. final draft due (electronic copies only; late papers marked down one letter grade): Wed 8 May
Course Schedule

W 23 Jan – Introduction to the course

W 30 Jan – The politics and philosophy of human rights

Ignatief, Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry
Plus, review some of the more important International Agreements (esp. UDHR, ICESCR, etc); on Sakai

W 6 Feb – The history of human rights

Moyn, The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History

W 13 Feb – Culture and/of/versus rights


W 20 Feb – Anthropology and the human rights debate


http://www.aaanet.org/stmtst/humanrts.htm


W 27 Feb – Can anthropology make a difference? Anthropology and human rights activism


Goldstein, Outlawed, chapter 2.


W 6 Mar – Ethnographies of rights 1: Human rights and security in Bolivia

Goldstein, *Outlawed*.

W 13 Mar – Ethnographies of rights 2: Genocide, horror, aftermath

Nelson, *Reckoning*.

W 27 Mar - Indigenous rights as human rights


W 3 Apr – Immigrant rights as human rights


W 10 Apr – Ethnographies of rights 3: Immigration and regimes of care

Ticktin, *Casualties of Care*.

W 17 Apr – Women’s rights as human rights


W 24 Apr – Ethnographies of rights 4: Human rights and gender violence

Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence*.

W 1 May – Presentations of student research