

Humanitarianism: the politics of sacred life

LSJ 510/490

Spring 2019

Meeting Time: Thursdays 3:30 - 6:20

Room: Smith 109

Credits: 5

Instructor: Arzoo Osanloo

Office Hours: M, 4 - 5:30

Office: M256 Smith Hall

Course Description

What makes us care about the suffering of others? When, as a society, do we decide to extend our compassion and benevolence to those in pain, those living *precarious lives* (Butler 2004)? What ethical principles guide these commitments? And finally, what institutions and mechanisms comprise the social governance of pain? To answer the questions above, this course takes an anthropological and socio-legal approach to understanding humanitarianism, this “ethic of kindness,” that guides much social, political, and moral debate around how to address the suffering of groups and individuals, especially those far-away and bearing little resemblance to us, either physically or culturally. Through an interdisciplinary approach, we will trace the underlying moral and political considerations that lead us to care about the suffering of others. Humanitarianism has no single definition; indeed, its genealogies are numerous and can be traced to charity, hospitality, and compassion (and to religion, secular thought, or morality, more broadly), law (specifically the laws of war), cosmopolitanism, and empire and its aftermath.

Our readings will take up the issues of which lives we, as an international community, see as worthy of saving, and why. In this context, we will consider the meaning of ‘caring’ about others. This exploration into the meanings and expressions of humanitarianism begins with an examination of the political and anthropological theories underlying our social concern with suffering. We then move on to consider legal instruments and historical foundations of international humanitarian action. As we do, we will explore contemporary acts of humanitarianism in different upheavals, emergencies, and conflict situations. Throughout, there will be a focus on the politics that affect and shape humanitarianism as a response to human suffering.

AIMS

This advanced seminar aims to develop critical thinking, writing, and speaking skills. On a substantive level, this course aims to introduce students to varied genealogies of humanitarianism and to trace their effects through critical engagement with the scholarly literature. The conclusion will be a deeper understanding of contemporary humanitarianism crises.

REQUIREMENTS

This is an advanced grad/undergrad seminar. There are five requirements and an optional assignment: (1) weekly reading responses, (2) discussion facilitation, (3) vigorous participation, (4) book review, (5) an analytical paper, and an optional annotated bibliography.

Discussion is the primary avenue of instruction. Readings, assignments, and class meetings are designed to inspire you to elaborate new ideas and to engage in critical thinking, discussion, and writing. Active and engaged discussion is critical to our overall success.

While I will provide parameters for discussion and context for the course design and its topical trajectory, the substantive discussion of the readings is left primarily to students.

Reading Response Posts (RRP) – Prior to each class meeting, you should post a 1- 2 page (500 word minimum) RRP. These responses should contain an ‘annotation’ of the text. By this I mean a discussion of the key points, main argument, and especially, your critical reflection on the major themes of the book. RRP’s are aimed at prompting inquiry, analysis and discussion, both in class and on-line. RRP’s are due by 2:00 p.m. on the day of class. Please print your RRP and bring it to class for reference and circulation. You should try to read one another’s RRP’s before coming to class. RRP’s will be submitted through the Discussions tab on the course CANVAS site.

Discussion Facilitation – At the start of each class, students introduce the material by offering background, key arguments and questions for discussion. The main goal of discussion facilitation is to enhance the overall intellectual experience of the class. Facilitators may provide theoretical depth, historical background, or a different point of view. This will also help us all develop a better sense of the intellectual ‘genealogy’ of this field. I am happy to work with you to develop your facilitation. Additional guidance will be provided.

Participation – This course aims to encourage and enhance critical thinking and analytical skills. For this reason, discussion is a crucial component of learning in this class. While you will not be graded on the quality of statements made, ‘vigorous’ discussion is required. The last half of the final session is reserved for students to present and workshop their individual work as it relates to this course. Participation in this session is mandatory. No absences, please.

Book Review – A 1000-1500-word book review is required by the **fifth week of the course, on May 2nd**. The book review assignment is intended to give you an opportunity to trace the intellectual trajectory of one aspect of this field that will be useful for your future research. It is intended to allow you to begin building a body of literature on a topic of your choice. The book review can be a book we read in the course, one of the companion books or suggested readings listed in the syllabus, or something of your choosing as befits your research. Additional guidance will be provided.

Paper – A 15-20-page analytical paper is required. Papers should focus on a specific issue and contain analysis, but they might also include analysis of a theme from the course. Ideally this paper should be a part of your own research investigations. I am quite flexible about the nature of the writing requirements and will be interested in your suggestions for critically engaged papers.

(Optional) Annotated Bibliography – As a step in the process of writing the analytical paper, I am happy to work with you to develop an annotated bibliography, a synthesis of a particular sub-topic in this field. The bibliography ideally organizes the topic of your research into its component parts as you see it. You will annotate the bibliography to illuminate the research and findings of a specific sub-field that you seek to learn more about. The bibliography will allow you to sketch a logical argument about some aspect of this field and hopefully provide the foundations for your research paper.

Papers are due in hard copy to Smith M256 by Wednesday, June 12, 2019 at 5:00 p.m.

GRADING – Grades will be based on reading response posts (20%), discussion facilitation (10%), book review (20%), analytical paper (30%), and participation (20%). For students who choose to do the annotated bibliography, it will be graded as part of the final paper.

TEXTS – The texts for this course are primarily books. All should be easy to find through online bookstores. On most weeks, we have one additional article, which I will provide on the course CANVAS site. The “companion” books listed in the syllabus are *not* required reading. Rather, they are books that share a similar genealogy with the book that we will read and thus make good pairings with them. Those listed as “further reading,” provide more insight into the topic and may be useful references for those seeking to delve deeper into a particular subject.

Please obtain the following books, listed in the order we will read them (you should be able to procure at least some of them from online book sellers at a discount from the list price):

- **(WK 2)** Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).
- **(WK 3)** Helen M. Kinsella, *The Image Before the Weapon: A Critical History of the Distinction between Combatant and Civilian* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).
- **(WK 4)** Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).
- **(WK 5)** Erica C. James, *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010).
- **(WK 6)** David Gibbs, *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009).
- **(WK 7)** Feldman, Ilana, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018).
- **(WK 8)** Saida Hodzic, *The Twilight of Cutting: African Activism and Life after NGOs* (University of California Press, 2017).
- **(WK 9) TBD: Reader’s Choice [See Below]**

EXCELLENCE IN DIVERSITY – In this course, as with the rest of the University of Washington, we consider diversity to be integral to excellence in education and seek to learn from one another’s unique perspectives. As such, we value diverse experiences and strive to create welcoming and respectful learning environments, while promoting access, opportunity, and justice for all.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE & LAPTOP/TABLET/SMART PHONE POLICY – This course is a seminar and relies on the focused efforts of all to engage with the materials and to be respectful to one another. Please plan to come to class on time, stay for the entire session, and leave when excused. On the rare occasion when you may have to come to class a bit late or leave early, please provide a note ahead of time. Only absences due to serious illness as documented by a physician will be counted as ‘excused’ and thus emails regarding absences for other reasons are not needed. Please also be considerate with your food and drink, keeping them to a minimum. If you must eat or drink, do so quietly and discreetly.

Recent studies show that students learn better when they take hand-written notes on paper. Others confirm that reading content on tablets leads to skimming and interferes with understanding complexity. That said, this is the 21st century, and laptops and tablets will be permitted, but only for taking notes and consulting PDFs of the readings. Smart phones are not allowed in class and should be turned off and kept out of sight throughout the session.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS (may be revised to enhance learning)

Week 1, April 3: Introduction

Judith Butler, "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 26, 2 (2012): 134-151.

Liisa Malkki, "Citizens of Humanity: Internationalism and the Imagined Community of Nations," *Disapora* 3 (1994): 41-68.

Further Reading:

Talal Asad, Reflections on Violence, Law, and Humanitarianism, *Critical Inquiry Online Features*: http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/reflections_on_violence_law_and_humanitarianism/#_ftn78
Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2005).
Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003).

Genealogies of Humanitarianism: Morality, Law, and Empire

Week 2, April 11: Sacred Life and Humanitarian Reasoning

(No class meeting. Response posts will be due, but discussion will take place the following week)

Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Richard A. Wilson & Richard D. Brown, "Introduction." In *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*, Wilson & Brown, eds. Pp. 1-28. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Further Reading:

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media & Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
Craig C. Calhoun, "The Imperative to Reduce Suffering: Charity, Progress and Emergencies in the Field of Humanitarian Action." Pp. 73-97. In Michael N. Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).
Thomas Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility," (Parts I and II). *The American Historical Review*, 90(2): (1985) 339-361 and 90(3): 547-566.

Week 3, April 18: International Humanitarian Law: Protecting the Civilized

Helen M. Kinsella, *The Image Before the Weapon: A Critical History of the Distinction between Combatant and Civilian* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

Didier Fassin, "Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life," *Public Culture*, 19, 3 (2007): 499-520.

Companion: Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

Further Reading:

Rajan Menon, *The Conceit of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Week 4, April 25: History of Empire, Humanitarianism and the Post War World Order

Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

Companion: Kenneth David Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (University of California Press, 2015).

Further Reading:

Gary J. Bass, *Stay the Hand of Vengeance: The Politics of War Crimes Tribunals* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), Chapters 1-4.

Michael N. Barnett & Thomas G. Weiss, "Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present," in *Humanitarianism in Question*. Barnett & Weiss, eds. Pp. 1-48. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

Gary J. Bass, "Humanitarian Impulses," *New York Times*, August 15, 2008.

Adam Curtis, "Goodies and Baddies: A History of 'Humanitarian Intervention,'" March 28, 2011 (orig. BBC blog, not found; try this link instead): <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article27818.htm>

Humanitarianism and New Logics of Intervention

Week 5, May 2: Humanitarianism, Democracy, and the Cold War

Erica C. James, *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010).

Michael Barnett and Jack Snyder, "Grand Strategies of Humanitarianism." In *Humanitarianism in Question*. Barnett & Weiss, eds. Pp. 143-171. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

Week 6, May 9: Military Humanism and the New Logic of Intervention after the Cold War

David N. Gibbs, *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009).

Craig C. Calhoun, "The Idea of the Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order." In *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi, eds. Pp. 29-58. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).

Further Reading:

Giorgio Agamben, *State of Emergency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Jean Bricmont, *Humanitarian Imperialism: Using Human Rights to Sell War* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006).

Noam Chomsky, *The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2002).

Ayça Çubukçu, "The Responsibility to Protect: Libya and the Problem of Transnational Solidarity," *Journal of Human Rights*, 12, 1 (2013): 40–58.

Alex de Waal, "Darfur and the Failure of the Responsibility to Protect," *International Affairs*, 83, 6 (2007): 1039-1054.

Emma Gilligan, "Redefining Humanitarian Intervention: The Historical Challenge of R2P," *Journal of Human Rights*, 12, 1 (2013): 21-39.

Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors & Survivors: Darfur, Politics & the War on Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2009).

Glenn Mitoma and Kerry Bystrom, "Humanitarianism and Responsibility," *Journal of Human Rights*, 12, 1 (2013): 1-20.

Peter Redfield, "Doctors, Borders, and Life in Crisis," *Cultural Anthropology*, 20, 3 (2005): 328-361.

Arundhati Roy, "Come September," Lensic Performing Arts Center Santa Fe, New Mexico, September 18, 2002. <http://www.lannan.org/events/arundhati-roy-with-howard-zinn/>

Kim Lane Scheppele, "Law in a Time of Emergency: States of Exception and the Temptations of 9/11," *Journal of Constitutional Law*, 6, 5 (2004): 1001-1083.

Humanitarian Aid and its Discontents

Week 7, May 16: *Protracted Conflicts: Humanitarian Predicaments*

Feldman, Ilana, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018).

Michel Agier, "Humanity as an Identity and Its Political Effects (A Note on Camps and Humanitarian Government)," *Humanity*, 1, 1 (Fall 2010): 29-45.

Further Reading:

Alex de Waal, "The Humanitarians' Tragedy: Escapable and Inescapable Cruelties," *Disasters*, 34 (2010): S130-S137.

Diana Tietjens Meyers, "Two Victim Paradigms and the Problem of "Impure" Victims," *Humanity*, 2, 2 (Summer 2011): 255-275.

Kristin Bergtora Sandvik, "The Physicality of Legal Consciousness: Suffering and the Production of Credibility in Refugee Resettlement." In *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*, Wilson & Brown, eds. Pp. 223-244. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Week 8, May 23: *Liberal Fantasies of Care: Activism, Armed Love, and the Hazards of Compassion*

Saida Hodzic, *The Twilight of Cutting: African Activism and Life after NGOs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017).

Erica Bornstein, "The Impulse of Philanthropy," *Cultural Anthropology*, 24, 4 (2009): 622-651.

Companion: Liisa Malkki, *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

Further Reading:

Erica Bornstein and Peter Redfield, eds., *Forces of Compassion: Humanitarianism Between Ethics and Politics* (Santa Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press, 2011).

Mark Schuller, *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

Miriam Ticktin, *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Week 9, May 30: *When Sovereignties Collide: Borders of Humanitarianism*

Reader's Choice:

Maurizio Albahari, *Crimes of Peace: Mediterranean Migrations at the World's Deadliest Border* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend But the Mountain: Writing from Manus Prison* (Picador Press, 2018).

Jason De Leon, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

Luis Alberto Urrea, *The Devil's Highway: A True Story* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, [2004]2014).

Week 10, June 6: *Faith in Aid or Aiding Faith*

Selections: Michael Barnett and Janice Gross Stein, *Sacred Aid* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Further Reading:

Jonathan Benthall and Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

Arzoo Osanloo, "The Measure of Mercy: Islamic Justice, Sovereign Power, and Human Rights in Iran," *Cultural Anthropology*, 21, 4 (2006): 570-602.

Week 10, June 6: Final Thoughts/Project Workshop

Final Papers Due June 12, 2019

At 5:00 p.m.

M256 Smith Hall

Have a Great Summer!!