

University of California Berkeley

The Anthropology of Human Rights

Fall 1997 Anthro 250

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In the post-Cold War era the discourse of human rights has come to assume great prominence in foreign policy debates, the struggles of social movements, and in wider debates over globalization and transnational legal processes. Therefore the time is ripe for anthropologists and other social scientists who have traditionally under-emphasized the study of human rights to begin studying the contexts of the various debates over human rights. Until very recently the debate on human rights within the anthropology profession has tended to remain at the level of discussions over universalism/relativism of human rights. This polarized discussion of the topic has contributed very little to our understanding of how and why diverse groups of people mobilize (or downplay) the discourse of human rights in different contexts. In fact, the tendency of anthropologists to consistently emphasize collective rights neglects the various meanings attached to human rights by different groups and may only contribute to the 'othering' of these peoples.

This course will draw upon numerous approaches to the study of human rights that have appeared in recent years by anthropologists as well as other social scientists. We will study the current position of human rights in debates on globalisation and how to conceptualize the relationship between local and global discourses and the interlinking of different contexts where human rights have become the site of contested struggles with the state, majorities, or transnational entities. How have different agents' experiences been translated into human rights narratives, what forms of power operate under these conditions, and how does the language of rights relate to other forms of power in these struggles? How as social scientists do we come to understand the local meanings of rights and how they become involved in the processes of social categorization and the creation of legitimacy?

In addition to examining a variety of ethnographies which have focused on human rights, we will examine numerous methodological issues such as oral histories, the question of narrative and social histories.

Syllabus

Week 1

Introduction: Anthropological Perspectives on Human Rights

- Preis, Belinda (1996). "Human Rights as Cultural Practice: An Anthropological Critique." *Human Rights Quarterly*, 18:286-315.
- Wilson, Richard ed. (1997). "Human Rights, Culture & Context." *Anthropological Perspectives*. Pluto Press, London.

Week 2

State Violence in the 'European Elsewhere'

- James, Joy (1996). *Resisting State Violence. Radicalism, Gender and Race in US Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Week 3

Terror and Healing

- Taussig, Michael (1987). "Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man." *A Study in Terror and Healing*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Week 4

Post-colonialism and the Colonial Transition

- Das, Veena (1995). *Critical Events. An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Week 5

Gender, Work and Environment in Multinationals

- Pena, Devon (1997). "The Terror of the Machine. Technology, Work, Gender and Ecology on the US-Mexico Border." Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Texas at Austin.

Week 6

'Humanitarian' Relief

- Keen, David (1994). *The Benefits of Famine. A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983-1989*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Recommended: Macrae, Joanna and Anthony Zwi (1994). "War and Hunger. Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies." Zed Books, London. Especially Mark Duffield.

Week 7

Refugees, Memory, and Violence

- Malkki, Liisa (1995). *Purity and Exile. Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Week 8

Trauma and Memory

- Antze, Paul & Michael Lambek (1996). *Tense Past. Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*. Routledge, NY.

Week 9

Memory, Violence and Reconciliation

- Osiel, Mark (1995). "Ever Again: Legal Remembrance of Administrative Massacre." *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 144:309.

Week 10

Human Rights Activism and (Mis)understanding Conflict

- Stoll, David (1993). *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*. Columbia University, NY.

Final Weeks

Students' options---These weeks are open to the interests of students participating in the course. Individual research topics can be presented or we can choose topics such as gender violence and war, the death penalty, agricultural policies and technology, the internet and human rights, molecular biology, the School of the Americas and technologies of terror, etc