

## **ETHICS, TACTICS AND TENSIONS IN HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTING**

**INSTRUCTOR: Shayna Plaut, ABD**

**604-817-0311 (cell phone) – if I do not answer please leave a message**

**[Shayna.plaut@gmail.com](mailto:Shayna.plaut@gmail.com)**

**OFFICE HOURS: Wednesday 1230-2pm, Wednesday, at the Liu Institute (2<sup>nd</sup> floor, across from the journalism school)**

### **Course description:**

The course, Ethics, Tactics and Tensions in Human Rights Reporting, focuses on the historical role of the media in addressing human rights abuses to “outside” audiences – from the Armenian Genocide to Rwanda to the current coverage of the “Missing Women”/“BC Highway of Teas”. We will look at the four “myths” that are often used as to why the coverage will not be interesting or relevant to the imagined reader/viewer/clicker (consumer). In addition, this course will focus on how media has been, and continues to be mobilized to combat human rights abuses *within* the communities such as: “alternative radio” in former-Yugoslavia, video production and distribution with Indigenous communities in Chiapas, graphic novels/humour and satire (*The Daily Show*, *Dead Dog Café*, *The Mercer Report*, *Persepolis*, *Regards from Serbia*) and the rich community of blogging and on-line media (including real-time and cell phone video) in Iran and other places in the Middle East. In addition special attention will be paid to the role diasporas play as audiences, sources and distributors of this information.

All of these are issues that reporters face but there are some particular concerns and sensitivities that become apparent when a journalist is engaged in covering a human rights issue, or when s/he chooses to approach a story or a person using a human rights framework. There is a moral weight and dimension that often permeates all people engaged in this work – the sources, the “victims,” the “perpetrators” as well as the reporter and the audience(s). There are often specific dangers that can arise from the relationships between human rights perpetrators, advocates (including well intentioned activist organizations), government officials and international institutions – relationships based on the perceived “role” of the media. This course will address those issues from historical, philosophical, cultural and practical perspectives but will also focus on how to work with what *is* an inherently complex situation.

This course is a unique opportunity to bring students from academic disciplines, such as political science together with the professional world of journalism while providing journalism students with the robust theoretical background. Students will be encouraged to work in pairs where their own skills and resources can complement one another. The

students in the class will have access to the technological resources and professional experience available within the journalism school.

There are seven main concerns that shape the design of this course:

- Identifying an issue that can be framed as a human rights abuse and the consequences of (not) doing so;
- the importance of cultural (at times linguistic) and historical context and various ways to acquire that information;
- Recognizing the impact (including the limitations) that media has as information, promotion and pressure on government and organizational policy;
- Basic international human rights law and terminology;
- The interdependent relationship between non-governmental organizations (NGOs), activists and the media and the mutual manipulation that takes place;
- Finding and maintaining safe relationships with informants;
- Possibilities of trauma and burn out.

### **Learning outcomes:**

- Students will leave the class with a basic literacy in international human rights laws (International Covenants) and the distinction between the guiding principles (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights Education). They will also learn what sources they can consult to access and interpret this information.
- They will have a basic understanding of some of the concerns and debates that surround the current discussion that human rights (cultural relativism, colonial/neo-colonial relations, real politick)
- The challenges that are inherent in the relationship between traditional conceptions of journalism and that of human rights: objectivity, presumed audience, cultural/linguistic barriers
- The challenges inherent in the practice of human rights focused journalism: fixers, sources of information, outreach, access to information, unforeseen impacts of their work
- Engaging in create a piece of human rights work thus bridging theory and practice.

### **Assessment (out of 100 points)**

- Students will keep an online journal for the class where they will respond to the readings and/or reflect on their own process of engaging in their own research process. Each student will need to post a response once a week at least 24 hours before our class meeting (10%)
- There will be a quiz on some of the basic human rights laws/mechanisms (10%)

- Each student will be responsible for leading a class discussion on a given work of journalism that engages in human rights reporting and/or a piece of a work that addresses the impact of journalism on human rights issues – the work will be from a predetermined list. We will decide as a class whether there should be a presentation at the beginning of every other class or choose a class period to devote to it. (15%)
- On February 14th, students will create a research/work plan where they outline their final topic for their final project, the sources they expect to reach and how (as well as back-up plans if that does not work). Students will be encouraged to work in pairs. As well as providing the background information and framing of the issue, the research/work plan will also attempt to predict some of the ethical, practical and conceptual dilemmas and strategies to respond/mitigate these possible obstacles. The student will be required to meet with the Instructor for feedback on the plan as well as to discuss background information and possible sources. Students will be expected to identify and interview, at a minimum, three sources. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the work students will also need to explain how they plan to negotiate any risks associated with interviewing and/or identifying these sources (25%)
- Students will create a final project that will be accessible to a general audience. Students can choose to present the final project via the medium(s) that work best for them (i.e.: radio spot, public advocacy campaign, magazine style written work, short documentary, multimedia or other creative workj) as long as it covers a human rights issue and will present this in a public forum on March 31st (40%)

### **Grading criteria**

Students will be graded based on based on the learning outcomes as demarcated with the following criteria:

- Understanding of basic international human rights instruments
- Understanding of the historical and current tensions that can take place when media becomes involved in highlighting various human rights problems and solutions to international and domestic audiences. Being able to situate this understanding within contemporary and historical case studies.
- The ability to frame their issue within international human rights laws and norms as well as domestic laws and norms of the countries where the abuses they are taking place and/or the countries selected for leverage.
- Being able to foresee and articulate the ethical and practical dilemmas that take place when engaged with human rights reporting including language and cultural differences, the use of fixers, the role of local reporters, funding trails, the evolving understandings of advocacy and journalism and incorporating these understandings in the design and implementation of the research/work plan and the final project
- Seeking out and incorporating a variety of sources and perspectives when conducting research and ensuring this is evident in the framing of the issues

- Creativity and persuasiveness of the final project for an educated but unformed audience.
- Active and engaged anticipation in class including attendance, submitting questions once a week and external research.

### **Grading system**

- 100-95 points A+
- 90-94 points = A
- 89-85 points= B+
- 84-80 points = B
- 79-70 points = C
- 69-60 points = D
- 59 points below = F

### **Attendance Policy:**

Attendance at all classes, including all films and guest lectures, is *mandatory*. Students are expected to attend all classes and read the assignments so as to be prepared for class discussion. Experience shows that there is a direct relation between attendance and performance in the course. **An excused absence means you contact the instructor, me, prior to your absence (barring an emergency and then you contact me as soon as possible) and I confirm your absence. You can reach me via email or phone. You are responsible for any class work or homework we go over/is due during your absence.**

### **Participation:**

Active involvement in this course is imperative. We will be discussing many volatile issues, and it is vital that students do the assigned readings before the class, as well as be prepared to talk intelligently about it with others.

**Syllabus is subject to change on based on the needs of the class and the assessment of the instructor.**

### Required texts:

- Power, Samantha (2002). *"A problem from hell" America and the age of genocide*. Harper Perennial: New York, NY.
- Gladstone, Brooke & Neufeld, Josh (2011). *The influencing machine*. W.W Norton & Company: New York, NY.
- King, Thomas (2003). *The truth about stories: A native narrative*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press

- Bob, Clifford (2005). *The marketing of rebellion: Insurgents, media and international activism*. Cambridge University Press: New York, NY.
- Zograf, Aleksander (2007). *Regards from Serbia*, Atlanta: Topshelf Productions.

Articles/excerpts will be available on Blackboard or at <https://go.library.ubc.ca/Cb6VF4>

- An-na'im, Abdullah Ahmed (1990). Human rights in the Muslim world. In Henry Steiner, Philip Alston & Ryan Goodman (Eds.) *International human rights in context: Law politics morals* (pp. 531-539). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baer, Madeline & Brysk, Alison (2009). New rights for private wrongs: Female genital mutilation and global framing dialogues. In Clifford Bob (Ed.), *The international struggle for new human rights* (pp. 14-29). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Bogert, Carroll (2011) Whose News: The changing media landscape and NGOs <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2011/whose-news>
- Carpenter, R. Charli (2007). Setting the advocacy agenda: Issue emergence and non-emergence in transnational advocacy network. *International Studies Quarterly*, 51(1), 99-120. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2478.2007.00441.x
- De Jong, Wilma; Shaw, Martin & Stammers, Neil (2005). *Global activism, global media*, London, UK: Pluto Press (Intro, Chapter 1, Chapter 6)
- El-Nawawy, Mohammed & Iskandar, Adel (2002). The minotaur of 'contextual objectivity': War coverage and the pursuit of accuracy with appeal. *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, 9. <http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall02/Iskandar.html>
- Harding, Sandra (1993). Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is "strong objectivity?" In Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (Eds.), *Feminist epistemologies* (pp. 49-82). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Herman, Edward & Chomsky, Noam (1998). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. Pantheon Books: New York, NY ( Chapter 2, pp. 37-86)
- Joachim, Jutta (2003). Framing issues and seizing opportunities. The UN, NGOs, and Women's Rights. *International Studies Quarterly*, 47, 247-74. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/3693544>
- Mamdani, Mahmood (2004). *Good Muslim, bad Muslim*. New York, NY: Three Leaves Press. (Introduction and Chapter 1, (pp. 3-62)
- Power, Samantha (2004). Dying in Darfur *The New Yorker* [http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/08/30/040830fa\\_fact1](http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/08/30/040830fa_fact1)
- Samuels, David (1995). At play in the fields of oppression. *Harpers Magazine* May 1995 (pp. 47-54). <http://harpers.org/archive/1995/05/0002056>
- Tait, Sue (2011). Bearing witness, journalism and moral responsibility. *Media Culture Society* 33:1220 DOI: 10.1177/0163443711422460
- Wade, Lisa (2001). Journalism, advocacy and the social construction of consensus. *Media Culture Society* 33:1166 DOI: 10.1177/0163443711418273
- Zandberg, E., & Neiger, M. (2005). Between the nation and the profession: Journalists as members of contradicting communities. *Media, Culture & Society*, 27(1), 131-141. doi: 10.1177/0163443705049073

You will need to choose from one of the books to facilitate a class (you are free to work with a partner):

- Annabelle Srebrency and Gholam Khiabany, *Blogistan*
- Romeo Dellaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil*
- Sarah Hussain, *Voices of Resistance Muslim Women on War, Faith and Sexuality*
- Ishmael Beach - *A Long Way from Home*
- Alex Kotlowitz, *There are no children here*
- Tram Ngyuen, *We are all Suspects Now*
- Linda Polman, *The Crisis Caravan*
- Lorna Roth, *Something New in the Air*
- Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart *Global Indigenous Media*
- Jeremy Harding, *Border Vigils: Keeping Migrants out of the Rich World*
- Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror*

We will watch:

- Standard Operating Procedure
- Closer to Home
- No Man's Land

We listen/watch to the excerpts of:

<http://www.theworld.org/2012/01/zahras-paradise-iran/> - why the authors chose to use comics to talk about what is happening in Iran

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/story/2012/01/06/q-martyn-burke-under-fire.html> - real trauma facing war correspondence

<http://www.cbc.ca/strombo/mobile-video/interview-brooke-gladstone.html> - Strombo interviewing Brooke Gladstone

[http://www.ted.com/playlists/21/media\\_with\\_meaning.html](http://www.ted.com/playlists/21/media_with_meaning.html) - understanding the business side of "media with meaning"

[http://www.ted.com/talks/alisa\\_miller\\_shares\\_the\\_news\\_about\\_the\\_news.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/alisa_miller_shares_the_news_about_the_news.html) - the politics and business behind the scope and swath of news

Guest speakers (TBC)

- Sheryl Lightfoot
- Andrea Wenzel
- Deirdre Kelly
- Nicole Latham
- Panel: Four Vancouver based people involved in advocacy

## **JANUARY 3 – DISCUSSIONS ON THE USE AND DEFINITION OF TERMS**

- Overview of class
- Human Rights Squares
- What's a human, what's a right

**Homework:** Read: Joachim, Jutta (2003). Come in with three examples of a “good story” about human rights and three of a poor coverage of human rights issues, or where the frame didn't seem to hold.....

## **JANUARY 10 - COVERAGE AND CONFUSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES**

- Questions
- Go over lists of human rights news coverage generated by class – how is HR being defined? Domestic/International
- Review the coverage of the BC Missing women's inquiry in class – examples of coverage and framing: <http://womensenews.org/story/crime-policylegislation/120417/advocates-blast-canadian-probe-missing-women> and <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2011/12/13/pol-un-aboriginal-women.html> and [http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/News\\_Releases/UBCICNews04101201.html#ixzz1rsZd5cxY](http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/News_Releases/UBCICNews04101201.html#ixzz1rsZd5cxY) and <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/inquiry-on-missing-vancouver-women-slams-police-failures-public-blindness/article6477651/> (for more information please go to: <http://www.missingwomeninquiry.ca/>)
- Possible screening of Elle-Maija Tailfeather's *A Red Girl's Reasoning*
- Discussion of class led book discussion

**Homework:** Herman, Edward & Chomsky, Noam (1998). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*, Chapter 2 (pp. 37-86), Read preface of *Power* (pp. 1-16), Identify two issues you may be interested in doing a final project on and email them to instructor.

## **JANUARY 17 – WHY THE MEDIA WILL SHY AWAY FROM REPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES**

- Questions
- The political economy of news – and the (assumed) importance of audiences
- Screening of Ted Talk by Alisa Miller  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/alisa\\_miller\\_shares\\_the\\_news\\_about\\_the\\_news.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/alisa_miller_shares_the_news_about_the_news.html)
- The four myths: it's so far away, it's so political, they have always hated each other, it doesn't matter anyway
- Sovereignty, complementarity, sanctity of law
- Armenian genocide (short video) – isolationism, off the radar screen
- Forsaken Cries (video) – Rwanda, wasn't strategically important

**Homework:** *Power* (Chapter 2-10);

## **JANUARY 24 – HOW TO GET CONTEXT WITHOUT BEING OVERWHELMED IN DETAILS: POSITIVE EXAMPLES, NEGATIVE EXAMPLES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

- Questions
- Group work -- how would you try and make a story about the making of the Genocide Convention? Read “Dying for Diamonds” (by Gaber and Willson in De Jong, Shaw and Stammers) in class (pp. 95-109) – what skills/tips could you take for assisting you in this exercise?
- Guest lecture Dr. Sheryl Lightfoot (TBC) -- Basic HR Law and structures lecture (including distinction of HR law/declaration, UN system/signing ratification etc.)

**Homework:** Mamdani, Mahmood (2004). *Good Muslim, bad Muslim*. New York, NY: Three Leaves Press. (Introduction and Chapter 1, (pp. 3-62), Power pp. 391-474; An-naim (will be distributed)

**Must have met with me to discuss final project!!!**

## **JANUARY 31 – THE ROLE OF “CULTURE TALK”**

- Quiz
- Questions
- Women’s Rights are Human Rights video exercise
- Diversity within cultures “we are the Serbs”
- De/Re

**Homework:** Brooke Gladstone’s *Influencing Machine*, Harding (1993) in Alcoff and Potter (pp. 49-82)

## **FEBRUARY 7 – SO WHAT ABOUT OBJECTIVITY?**

- Questions
- Review <http://www.cbc.ca/strombo/mobile-video/interview-brooke-gladstone.html>
- Guest lecture by Deirdre Kelly (TBC) about objectivity and facilitated group discussion
- Interview each other about “what is a journalist?”

**Homework:** El-Nawawy and Iskander (2002). De Jong, Shaw, Stammers Intro (pp. 1-14), Wade, Lisa (2011), Tait, Sue (2011)

## **FEBRUARY 14 – THE DEBATES ABOUT OBJECTIVITY AS IT MANIFESTS IN STORY SELECTION, SOURCE SELECTION AND OUTREACH**

- Last minute questions about midterm/project
- Watch “Standard Operating Procedure”



- With Gladstone and Wade's pieces in mind -- discuss notions of perspective, role of journalism, photographic evidence as it played out in Standard Operating Procedure – what angles/perspectives were taken? Assumed? Left out?

**Homework:** Bob (2005) pp. 1-53; <http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/story/2012/01/06/q-martyn-burke-under-fire.html>; Must read Bogert, Carroll (2011) "Whose News", for class! Research/workplan to be submitted HARDCOPY and emailed;

## **NO CLASS ON FEBRUARY 21 – READING BREAK -**

### **FEBRUARY 28 – THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NGOS AND THE MEDIA: A MUTUALLY DEPENDENT (BUT NOT ALWAYS TRANSPARENT) RELATIONSHIP: THE ROLE OF FRAMING**

- In class discussion of Bogart's piece regarding the relationship between NGOs information/agenda and journalists -- how is this manifesting in your work?
- Guest lecture of Peter Klein and/or graduate of the International Investigative Reporting program

**Homework:** Bob (2005) pp. 54-177; Samuels, David (1995). At play in the fields of oppression; Zandberg and Niger (2005); Find the funding of the three NGOs discussed and bring information to class. Send questions for panel

### **MARCH 7 – HOW ACTIVISTS (DON'T) ENGAGE WITH MEDIA**

- Panel discussion of various HR advocates who use media

**Homework:** Carpenter (2007); Baer and Brysk (2009) in Bob (pp. 14-29), Bring in a list three NGOs that you are using as sources

### **MARCH 14 – FOLLOW THE MONEY TRAIL – THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE PROBLEM WITH CREATING ALTERNATIVES**

- Debrief panel
- Guest lecture by Andrea Wenzel
- Group discussion regarding the role of funding, NGOs, commercial interests and how to research this; how is this becoming evidenced in your work

**Homework:** King, *The Truth about Stories*; watch [http://www.ted.com/playlists/21/media\\_with\\_meaning.html](http://www.ted.com/playlists/21/media_with_meaning.html) and listen to <http://www.theworld.org/2012/01/zahras-paradise-iran/>

### **MARCH 21 – POSITIVE EXAMPLES OF OTHER MEDIUMS: BLOGS, "FICTION", FILM**

- Discussion on the role of mediums in terms of credibility and complexity

- Screening of No Man's Land

**Homework:** Intro and Chapter 1 of Zograff's *Regards from Serbia*;

**MARCH 28 – FINAL PRESENTATION**