

Course manual
Joint Master's Programme in
International Humanitarian Action

University of
Warsaw

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Anthropology in humanitarian action

Semester 1



Module coordinator:**Dr. Mateusz Laszczkowski**

e-mail: m.laszczkowski5@uw.edu.pl

phone: 22 553 16 11

office location: Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Zurawia 4, room 11.

office hours: per appointment

Lecturers:**Dr. Mateusz Laszczkowski**

e-mail: m.laszczkowski5@uw.edu.pl

phone: 22 553 16 11

office location: Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Zurawia 4, room 11.

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Credits awarded: 3 ECTS, equivalent to 125 work hours (1 ECTS = 25 hours)**Period:** First semester, block 1.**Venue & hours:** Old Library, room 107; Wednesday, 11.30-13.00**1. Introduction**

The course offers an introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology, outlining the discipline's key methods and central problems. It explores the possible relevance of anthropological perspectives and findings in international humanitarian action. It emphasizes the significance of cultural difference and social practice in areas of high relevance to humanitarian action, such as gender, human rights, development, migration and border control. The course also introduces theoretical and critical reflection on the logic and workings of humanitarianism.

2. Learning outcomes

In conformity with the learning outcomes set out by the NOHA network, students should achieve the following learning outcomes by the end of this module:

- familiarity with key problems and approaches in Social Anthropology;
- hands-on experience of ethnographic research methods: participant observation and in-depth interview;
- knowledge of theoretical and critical debates on humanitarianism from an anthropological perspective;
- knowledge of anthropological debates in areas relevant to humanitarian action.

3. Course material

The course material will include readings in anthropological theory, methodology, and ethnographic analyses of selected problems relevant to the field of humanitarian action. Please see the programme schedule below for details.

4. Teaching and learning methodology

The course is a reading-based seminar. Students are expected to read the required literature before the meeting every week (and in some cases, watch indicated videos available online). Additionally, there will be two practical exercises: one in ethnographic observation and field

notes; and one in in-depth interviewing.

5. Programme and training activities

Week 1

Introduction to Social/Cultural Anthropology.

Basic information about the course content and purpose. General introduction to anthropology.

Required reading:

Thomas H. Eriksen, 2004, *What Is Anthropology?*, London: Pluto Press, chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 3-41).

Week 2

Introduction to Anthropology, part 2.

Overview of central methods and major theoretical paradigms in anthropology.

Required reading:

Thomas H. Eriksen, 2004, *What Is Anthropology?*, London: Pluto Press, chapters 3 & 4 (pp. 42-81).

Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, 1995, *Ethnography. Principles in Practice*, London: Routledge, pp. 16-22.

Week 3

Suffering and Aid as Objects of Anthropological Reflection

Required reading and video:

Paul Farmer, 2002 (1995), 'On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below', in *The Anthropology of Politics: A Reader in Ethnography, Theory, and Critique*, Joan Vincent (ed.), Malden: Blackwell, pp. 424-37

Craig Calhoun, 2012, 'Human Suffering and Humanitarian Response':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbJXaXEjciQ>

Week 4

The Capacity to Aspire and the Will to Improve

Required reading:

Arjun Appadurai, 2004, *The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition*, in: *Culture and Public Action*, Rao Vijayendra and Michael Walton (ed.), Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 59-84.

Arturo Escobar, 1991, 'Anthropology and the Development Encounter', *American Ethnologist* 18(4):658-82.

Tania Murray Li, 2008, 'Social Reproduction, Situated Politics, and the Will to Improve', *Focaal* 52:111-18.

Week 5

Towards an Anthropology of Humanitarian Action

Required reading:

Peter Redfield and Erica Bornstein, 2011, *An Introduction to the Anthropology of Humanitarianism*, in: *Forces of Compassion. Humanitarianism Between Ethics and Politics*, Santa Fe: School of American Research, pp. 3-30.

Pierre Minn, 2007, 'Toward an Anthropology of Humanitarianism', *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, <https://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/51>

Week 6

Introduction to Ethnographic Methods, Part 1: Participant Observation

Required reading:

Kathleen M. Dewalt and Billie R. Dewalt, 2002, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*, Lanham: AltaMira Press, chapters 1, 2, 4 (pp. 1-34 and 67-82).

Week 7

Introduction to Ethnographic Methods, Part 2: Field Notes

Required reading:

Kathleen M. Dewalt and Billie R. Dewalt, 2002, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*, Lanham: AltaMira Press, chapter 8 (pp. 141-62).

Recommended further reading:

Roger Sanjek (ed.), 1990, *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Exercise: Before the meeting, but after having read the required pages from Dewalt & Dewalt above, please prepare ethnographic field notes describing one event you take part in (anything – a meeting, a conversation, a social gathering, a shopping scene...). The notes should be detailed and correspond to the standards described by Dewalt & Dewalt. Then please write a 500-word ‘meta-note’ (as per Dewalt & Dewalt, pp. 153-54), highlighting whatever you find interesting in the event you partook in, and relating to your field notes. We will read out and discuss some of these meta-notes in class. You will be also expected to email your field notes and meta-notes to the Instructor by 16.11.

Week 8

Introduction to Ethnographic Methods, Part 3: In-depth Interviews

Required reading:

Kathleen M. Dewalt and Billie R. Dewalt, 2002, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*, Lanham: AltaMira Press, chapters 7 (pp. 120-40).

Exercise: Before the meeting, in teams of two, you will be required to conduct an interview with a humanitarian NGO worker or volunteer (contacts will be provided by the Instructor). Please transcribe the interview and prepare a 5-minute classroom presentation in which you will outline the profile of the person interviewed, the context and content of the interview, and highlight what you consider the most interesting findings from the interview. The presentations will be discussed in class. You will be also expected to email the interview transcripts to the Instructor by 23.11.

Week 9

Politics and Power in Humanitarian Action

Required reading:

Didier Fassin, 2010, ‘Moral Commitments and Ethical Dilemmas of Humanitarianism’ in: Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin (eds), *In the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 238-56.

Recommended further reading:

Antonio Donini, 'Humanitarianism, Perceptions, Power',
<http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/humanitarianism-perceptions-power>

Week 10

Refugees, Border Control and Humanitarianism

Required reading:

Nicolas P. De Genova, 2002, 'Migrant "Illegality" and Deportability in Everyday Life', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31:419-47.

Nick Vaughan-Williams, 2015, *Europe's Border Crisis: Biopolitical Security and Beyond*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. TBA.

Week 11

Cultural Difference, Immigration and Human Rights

Required reading:

Unni Wikan, 2001, *Generous Betrayal: Politics of Culture in the New Europe*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. TBA.

Recommended further reading:

Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others', *American Ethnologist* 104(3):783-90.

Homa Hoodfar, 2001, 'The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: The Persistence of Colonial Images of Muslim Women' *RFR/DRF* 22(3/4):5-18.

Week 12

Development and Its Effects

Required reading:

James Ferguson, 1994, *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. xiii-xvi, 3-21, 25-30, 55-73, 74-88 and 255-77.

Recommended further reading:

Arturo Escobar, 2011 (1995), *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Thord World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Week 13

Disasters, Humanitarian Aid and Anthropology

Required reading:

Anthony Oliver-Smith, 2002, 'Theorizing Disasters: Nature, Power, and Culture', in *Catastrophe and Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*, Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (eds), Santa Fe: School of American Research, pp. 23-47.

Anthony Oliver-Smith, 2009, 'Anthropology and the Political Economy of Disasters', in *The Political Economy of Hazards and Disasters*, Eric C. Jones and Arthur D. Murphy (eds), Lanham: AltaMira Press, pp. 11-28.

Week 14

The Militarization of Humanitarian Action

Required reading and video: Antonio Donini, 'Civil-military interaction: the future of humanitarian aid?', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jOizkJ4Fxw>

David H. Price, 2010, 'Soft Power, Hard Power, and the Anthropological "Leveraging" of Cultural "Assets" Distilling the Politics and Ethics of Anthropological Counterinsurgency', in *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*, John D. Kelly et al. (eds), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 245-60.

Anthony Oliver-Smith, 2011, 'Anthropology in Disasters: Local Knowledge, Knowledge of the Local, and Expert Knowledge', in *Disasters, Development and Humanitarian Aid: New Challenges for Anthropology*, Mara Benadusi, Chiara Brambilla and Bruno Riccio (eds), Rimini: Guaraldi, pp. 25-38.

Amalia Signorelli, 2011, 'Natural Catastrophes and Cultural Responses', in *Disasters, Development and Humanitarian Aid: New Challenges for Anthropology*, Mara Benadusi, Chiara Brambilla and Bruno Riccio (eds), Rimini: Guaraldi, pp. 15-23.

Recommended further reading and video:

Sam Beckwith, 2012, 'The Militarisation of Aid in Afghanistan: Implications for Humanitarian Actors and the Way Ahead', <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2167857>

David Chandler, 2001, 'The Road to Military Humanitarianism: How the Human Rights NGOs Shaped a New Humanitarian Agenda', *Human Rights Quarterly* 23(3):678-700.

Additionally, for Italian-speakers, it is highly recommended to watch the documentary film *Comando e Controllo*, http://www.shockjournalism.com/blog/?page_id=182

Week 15

Wrapping Up: The Critique of Humanitarian Action

Required reading and video:

Nicolas de Torrenté, 2013, 'The Relevance and Effectiveness of Humanitarian Aid: Reflections about the Relationship between Providers and Recipients', *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 80(2):607-34.

Didier Fassin, 2012, 'The Critique of Humanitarian Reason', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDT2mYg6mgo&feature=player_embedded#

Additional video (to be watched in class):

Linda Polman, 2011, 'What is wrong with humanitarian aid?' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gWdTQ84IEM>

6. Workload

Class attendance – 30 hrs

Readings – 55 hrs

Practical exercises – 20 hrs

Exam preparation – 20 hrs

7. Assessment methods

Written exam – 40%;

Practical exercises – 30 %

Participation in discussions – 30 %

Presentations – bonus (one good presentation equals half a grade up on the final score).

8. Assessment criteria

Students' active participation in class discussions based on the required readings; the quality of students' work in practical exercises; written exam (mix of open and multiple-choice questions).