

AN238/439 Anthropology and Human Rights

Michaelmas Term 2003

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The tension between respect for local cultures and "universal rights" is a pressing concern within human rights activism. In the past decade, anthropologists have been increasingly involved in these discussions, which has often involved situating their understandings of cultural relativism within a broader framework of social justice. This course explores the contributions of anthropology to the theoretical and practical concerns of human rights work. We begin by reading a number of key human rights documents and theoretical texts. These readings are followed by selections in anthropology on the concepts of relativism and culture. Students will then be asked to relate human rights to the historical and cultural dimensions of particular cases, addressing such questions as the nature of humanity, historical conceptions of the individual, colonialism and imperialism, the limits of relativism, and the relationship between rights in theory and in practice. Case studies this year will include: gay rights in southern Africa, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and state violence in Guatemala.

Assessment Essays

Assessment essays are part of the examination for the course and are required from undergraduate students for all courses in anthropology. MSc students are not required to submit assessment essays.

Late assessment essays will NOT be marked. If an extension of an assessment essay deadline is required, application must be made in writing via your tutor to the Chair of Examiners BEFORE the deadline. Permission may not be given unless there are extenuating circumstances.

NO EXTENSIONS WILL BE GIVEN FOR REQUESTS RECEIVED AFTER THE ESSAY DEADLINE WHICH IS 4.00 PM ON 12 JANUARY 2004 (THE FIRST DAY OF LENT TERM). YOU ARE REQUIRED TO HAND IN 2 COPIES OF YOUR ESSAY TO ROOM A605.

A Note on Readings

*Readings marked with ** are required readings.
Suggested readings are also given for each week.*

Many of the readings in the first few lectures are taken from:

Micheline Ishay, ed.
1997 *The Human Rights Reader: Major Political Essays, Speeches, and Documents from the Bible to the Present*. London: Routledge.

Students with a longstanding interest in human rights may consider purchasing Ishay's book, although copies will be available in the Course Collections of the BLPES.

Students interested in web resources on anthropology and human rights may find the following sites helpful throughout the course. (This list is not exhaustive, but should give students an idea of the kinds of resources available; most of them contain links to other sites, and the AAA's site has files of reading lists on particular subjects.)

* <http://www.hrw.org/> (Human Rights Watch) *

* <http://www.amnesty.org/> (Amnesty International)

* <http://www.unhchr.ch/> (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights) *

* <http://www.cidh.org/> (Inter American Commission on Human Rights) *

* <http://www.icttr.org/> (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda) *

* <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/cfhr/index.htm/> (American Anthropological Association Committee for Human Rights) *

* <http://www.kubatana.net/> (Online Community for Zimbabwean Activists) *

* <http://www.sahrc.org.za/> (South African Human Rights Commission)

LECTURE 1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMAN RIGHTS

This lecture introduces some of the key human rights documents to emerge in the wake of World War II. The lecture and discussions will focus on a close reading of the UDHR, as well as the historical and political contexts in which it was produced.

Students need to familiarize themselves with the following human rights documents, which will be referred to throughout the course. These are available in literally hundreds of books and on hundreds of websites. The parenthetical citations here are for the Ishay volume referenced above (and available in the Course Collections):

* Universal Declaration of Human Rights (in Ishay, pp. 407-411)

* African Charter on Human and People's Rights (in Ishay, pp. 473-479)

* Vienna Declaration (in Ishay, pp. 479-490)

* Beijing Declaration (in Ishay, pp. 491-505) *

**Paul Lauren

1998 *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. [Read Chapters 7 & 8]

2001 A Critique of the UNESCO Concept of Culture. In *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives*. J. Cowan et al, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

LECTURE 2 RIGHTS BEFORE HUMAN RIGHTS: RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS

This lecture explores the concept of rights before the UDHR, and before the emergence of a "human rights culture." Readings are drawn from a number of seminal philosophical and religious texts, all recognized as important precursors to the modern articulation of human rights.

The following readings can be found in the Ishay volume:

* *Description of a Bodhisattva* (in Ishay, pp. 4-9)

* Excerpts from the Koran (in Ishay, pp. 41-55)

* Mahatma Gandhi, excerpts from "Passive Resistance" (in Ishay, pp. 349-351)

* Bartholomé de las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians* (in Ishay, pp.65-72)

* Thomas Paine, excerpts from *The Rights of Man* (in Ishay, pp. 134-137)

* **Immanuel Kant, excerpts from *Perpetual Peace* and *The Metaphysics of Morals* (in Ishay, pp. 160-174) [Also available in, among other places, Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*. H.S. Reiss, ed. H.B. Nisbet, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970] *

**Paul Lauren

1998 *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. [Read Chapters 1 & 2]

**Alan Wood

1998 Kant's Project for Perpetual Peace. In *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*. P. Cheah and B. Robbins, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Michael Perry

1998 Is the Idea of Human Rights Ineliminably Religious? In *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Eric Hobsbawm

1996 The Universalism of the Left. *New Left Review* May/June #21.

Alain Supiot

2003 The Labyrinth of Human Rights: Credo or Common Resource? *New Left Review* May/June #21. [Available on-line at NLR via BLPES catalogue.](#)

LECTURE 3 ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS (PART I)

This lecture focuses on classic debates in anthropology over universalism and relativism, which (particularly over the past decade) have helped set the stage for anthropological work on human rights.

**Clifford Geertz

1984 Anti anti-Relativism. *American Anthropologist* 86(2): 263-278. [Reprinted in *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000.] [Available on-line from PCI Full Text.](#)

**Ernest Gellner

1982 Relativism and Universals. In *Rationality and Relativism*. M. Hollis and S. Lukes, eds. Oxford: Blackwell.

**Steven Lukes

1982 Relativism in its Place. In *Rationality and Relativism*. M. Hollis and S. Lukes, eds. Oxford: Blackwell.

**Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah

1990 Rationality, Relativism, the Translation and Commensurability of Cultures. In *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Franz Boas

1920 The Methods of Ethnology. *American Anthropologist* 22(4): 311-321. [Reprinted in F. de Laguna, *Selected papers from the American Anthropologist*. Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1960] [Available on-line from PCI Full Text.](#)

Ruth Benedict

1934 *Patterns of Culture*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. [Read Chapter 1]

Clifford Geertz

1973 The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

George Stocking

1982 Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective. In *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Steven Lukes

2003 *Liberals and Cannibals: The Implications of Diversity*. London: Verso.

LECTURE 4 ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS (PART II)

This week, we turn to work that has explicitly addressed the concept human rights. Attention is drawn to historical shifts within anthropology as to the importance of relativism as a perspective. To show how anthropological concerns are connected to larger debates, we focus as well on the ways in which American pragmatism can be used to situate anthropological theory on human rights.

**American Anthropological Association

1947 Statement on Human Rights. *American Anthropologist* 49(4):539-543. [Available on-line from PCI Full Text](#).

**Julian Steward and H.G. Barnett

1948 Comments on the "Statement on Human Rights." *American Anthropologist* 50(2): 351-355. [Available on-line from PCI Full Text](#).

**American Anthropological Association

1999 Declaration on Anthropology and Human Rights. <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/humanrts.htm>

**Terence Turner

1997 Human Rights, Human Difference: Anthropology's Contribution to an Emancipatory Cultural Politics. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 53(3): 272-292.

**Sally Engle Merry

2001 Changing Rights, Changing Culture. In *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives*. J. Cowan et al, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Richard Rorty

1993 Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality. In *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures*. S. Shute and S. Hurley, eds. New York: Basic Books.

Marie-Bénédicte Dembour

2001 Following the Movement of a Pendulum: Between Universalism and Relativism. In *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives*. J. Cowan et al, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elizabeth Zechenter

1997 In the Name of Culture: Cultural Relativism and the Abuse of the Individual. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 53(3): 319-348.

Ellen Messer

1993 Anthropology and Human Rights. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22:221-249. [Available on J-STOR](#).

Karen Engle

2001 From Skepticism to Embrace: Human Rights and the American Anthropological Association from 1947-1999. *Human Rights Quarterly* 23(3): 536-559. [Available on-line from Project Muse](#).

Robin Fox

2001 Human Nature and Human Rights. *Harper's Magazine* April.

W. Penn Handwerker

1997 Universal Human Rights and the Problem of Unbounded Cultural Meanings. *American Anthropologist* 99(4): 799-809.

Adam Kuper

2003 The Return of the Native. *Current Anthropology* 44(3): 389-402. [Available on-line from the BPLES catalogue](#).

Nancy Scheper-Hughes

1995 The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology. *Current Anthropology* 36(3): 409-440. [Available on J-STOR](#).

Clifford Geertz

1968 Thinking as a Moral Act. *Antioch Review* 28(2). [Reprinted in *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000.] [Available on-line from PCI Full Text](#).

Richard Rorty

1989 *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Read esp. Chapter 3]

Bruce Robbins

1997 Sad Stories in the International Public Sphere: Richard Rorty on Culture and Human Rights. *Public Culture* 9: 209-232.

Derek Nystrom and Kent Puckett

2002 *Against Bosses, Against Oligarchies: A Conversation with Richard Rorty*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. [Read esp. Intro & pp. 21-31, 48-51]

LECTURE 5 VIOLENCE AND THE STATE IN GUATEMALA

This lecture introduces students to the history and anthropology of Guatemala, with a focus on state violence against Mayan peoples, the role of ethnic revivalist movements in human rights work, and the impact of colonialism.

**Richard Wilson

1999 *Maya Resurgence in Guatemala*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. [Read esp. Chapters 1, 2, 7 & 8]

**Linda Green

1994 Fear as a Way of Life. *Cultural Anthropology* 9(2): 277-256. [Available on J-STOR](#).

**Kay Warren

1993 Interpreting *la violencia* in Guatemala: Shapes of Mayan Silence and Resistance. *The Violence Within*. K. Warren, ed. Boulder: Westview Press.

Charles Hale

1997 CA Forum on Anthropology in Public: Consciousness, Violence, and the Politics of Memory in Guatemala. *Current Anthropology* 38(5): 817-838. [Available on J-STOR](#).

Rachel Sieder and Jessica Witchell

2001 Advancing Indigenous Claims through the Law: Reflections on the Guatemalan Peace Process. In *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives*. J. Cowan et al, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Victoria Sanford

2003 *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala*
New York: Palgrave.

Diane Nelson

1999 *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Judith Zar

1998 *Violent Memories: Mayan War Widows in Guatemala* Boulder: Westview Press.

Robert Carmack

1988 *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Angelina Snodgrass Godoy

2002 Lynchings and the Democratization of Terror in Postwar Guatemala: Implications for Human Rights. *Human Rights Quarterly* 24(3): 640-661. [Available on-line from Project Muse](#).

LECTURE 6 HISTORY, TRUTH, AND HUMAN RIGHTS: THE MENCHÚ CONTROVERSY

Building on the previous week's readings, this lecture focuses on the controversy over Nobel Peace Laureate Rigoberta Menchú's autobiography, sparked by the publication of a book by anthropologist David Stoll questioning the veracity of Menchú's account. Topics covered in this lecture include the politics of history, memory, and truth, and the intervention of anthropologists as scholars and activists into human rights debates.

**Elisabeth Burgos-Debray

1984 *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian woman in Guatemala*. London: Verso.

**David Stoll

1999 *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*
Boulder: Westview Press.

Arturo Arias, ed.

2001 *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. [Read esp. chapters by Arias, Pratt, Rodriguez, Warren, Smith, and Stoll]

Jennifer Schirmer

2003 Whose Testimony? Whose Truth? Where are the Armed Actors in the Stoll-Menchú Controversy? *Human Rights Quarterly* 25(1): 60-73. [Available on-line from Project Muse](#).

LECTURE 7 "HOMOSEXUALITY" IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

The connection between the anti-Apartheid movement and gay rights activism in South Africa was slow to come, and highlights a number of issues connected to the construction of sexuality, race, and discourses of imperialism. This lecture focuses on key texts documenting the rise of a gay rights movement in South Africa, situating the movement in broader relation to the politics of identity.

****Mark Gevisser**

1995 A Different Fight for Freedom: A History of South African Lesbian and Gay Organization from the 1950s to the 1990s. In *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*. M. Gevisser and E. Cameron, eds. London: Routledge.

****Hugh McClean and Linda Ngcobo**

1995 "Those Who Fuck Me Say I'm Tasty." In *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*. M. Gevisser and E. Cameron, eds. London: Routledge.

****Donald Donham**

1998 Freeing South Africa: The "Modernization" of Male-Male Sexuality in Soweto. *Cultural Anthropology* 13(1): 3-21.

****T. Dunbar Moodie**

1991 Migrancy and Male Sexuality in the South African Gold Mines. In *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*. M. Duberman et al, eds. London: Penguin.

Gerit Olivier

1995 From Ada to Zelda: Notes on Gay Language in South Africa. In *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*. M. Gevisser and E. Cameron, eds. London: Routledge.

Zackie Achmat

1995 My Childhood as an Adult Molester. In *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*. M. Gevisser and E. Cameron, eds. London: Routledge.

Mary Armour and Sheila Lapinsky

1995 Lesbians in Love and Compromising Situations. In *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*. M. Gevisser and E. Cameron, eds. London: Routledge.

Jeremy Sarkin

1998 The Development of a Human Rights Culture in South Africa. *Human Rights Quarterly* 20(3): 628-665. [Available on-line from Project Muse](#).

Michel Foucault

1978 *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. (Volume 1) R. Hurley, trans. London: Vintage. [Read esp. pp. 92-114]

LECTURE 8 "HOMOSEXUALITY" IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: ZIMBABWE'S BOOK FAIR

In 1995, a controversy erupted at the annual book fair in Harare, Zimbabwe over the participation of a group called Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ). The President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, called homosexuals "worse than dogs and pigs." This lecture continues the themes of last week, showing how anti-gay rhetoric has been used by the Zimbabwean state in its vision of nationalism.

****Mai Palmberg and Chris Dunton**

1996 *Human Rights and Homosexuality in Southern Africa*. (Second edition) Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

****Matthew Engelke**

1999 "We Wondered What Human Rights He Was Talking About": Human Rights, Homosexuality, and the Zimbabwean International Book Fair. *Critique of Anthropology* 19(3): 289-314.

****Marc Epprecht**

1998 The "Unsayings" of Indigenous Homosexualities in Zimbabwe: Mapping a Blindspot in an African Masculinity. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24(4): 631-651. [Available on-line via BLPES](#).

Marc Epprecht

1998 "Good God Almighty, What's This?": Homosexual Crime in Early Colonial Zimbabwe. In *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*. S. Murray and W. Roscoe, eds. New York: St Martin's Press.

Marc Epprecht

1999 The Gay Oral History Project in Zimbabwe: Black Empowerment, Human Rights, and the Research Process. *History in Africa* 26.

Oliver Philips

1997 Zimbabwean Law and the Production of a White Man's Disease. *Social and Legal Studies* 6(4): 471-491.

Stephen O. Murray

1998 Sexual Politics in Contemporary Southern Africa. In *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*. S. Murray and W. Roscoe, eds. New York: St Martin's Press.

Terence Ranger

2001 Democracy and Traditional Political Structures in Zimbabwe, 1890-1999. In *The Historical Dimensions of Democracy and Human Rights in Zimbabwe: Pre-colonial and Colonial Legacies*. (Volume 1) N. Bhebe and T. Ranger, eds. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press.

Welshman Ncube

2001 *The Courts of Law in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe: Guardians of Civilisation, Human Rights, and Justice or Purveyors of Repression, Injustice, and Oppression? In The Historical Dimensions of Democracy and Human Rights in Zimbabwe: Pre-colonial and Colonial Legacies.* (Volume 1) N. Bhebe and T. Ranger, eds. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press.

Martin Meredith

2002 *Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe.* New York: Public Affairs.

Philip Gourevitch

2002 Letter from Zimbabwe: Wasteland. *The New Yorker* June 3 (pp. 59-68).

LECTURE 9 RACE, ETHNICITY, AND GENOCIDE: RWANDA, 1994

In 1994, the Hutu majority in Rwanda killed an estimated one million of their Tutsi compatriots. This lecture situates the genocide in a discussion of race and ethnicity in Africa, with a particular focus on the extent to which the genocide can be explained in terms of the (post)colonial political situation in Rwanda and Burundi.

**Mahmood Mamdani

2001 *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. [Read Chapters 1 & 3]

**Christopher C. Taylor

1999 *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994.* Oxford: Berg. [Read Chapters 1 & 2]

Luc De Heusch

1995 Rwanda: Responsibilities for a Genocide. *Anthropology Today* 11(4): 3-7. [Available on-line from J-STOR.](#)

Philip Gourevitch

1999 *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda.* New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux.

Mahmood Mamdani

2001 A Brief History of Genocide. *Transition* 10(3): 26-47. [Available on-line from Project Muse.](#)

Philip Gourevitch

1996 After Genocide: An Interview with Paul Kagame. *Transition* 72: 162-194. [Available on-line from J-STOR.](#)

René Lemarchand

1998 Genocide in the Great Lakes: Which Genocide? Whose Genocide? *African Studies Review* 41(1): 3-16. [Available on-line from J-STOR.](#)

Alex de Waal

1994 Genocide in Rwanda. *Anthropology Today* 10(3): 1-2. [Available on-line from J-STOR.](#)

LECTURE 10 THE COSMOLOGY OF TERROR

What can anthropological research tell us about the Rwandan genocide? How can this research be used, if at all, in human rights work? Using Taylor's study as a point of departure, this lecture explores answers-however provisional-to these questions, and ends with a reflection on how such questions can relate to the course as a whole.

**Christopher C. Taylor

1999 *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994.* Oxford: Berg. [Read Chapters 3 & 4]

**Mahmood Mamdani

2001 *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. [Read Chapter 7]

**Johan Pottier

2002 *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival, and Disinformation in the Late 20th Century.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Read Chapter 1]

Todd Howland

1999 Mirage, Magic, or Mixed Bag? The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' Field Operation in Rwanda. *Human Rights Quarterly* 21(1): 1-55. [Available on-line from Project Muse.](#)

Jeremy Sarkin

1999 The Necessity and Challenges of Establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Rwanda. *Human Rights Quarterly* 21(3): 767-823. [Available on-line from Project Muse.](#)

Shiva Eftekhari

2001 International Criminal Justice, Rwanda and French Human Rights Activism. *Human Rights Quarterly* 23(4): 1032-1061. [Available on-line from Project Muse.](#)

Farah Stockman

2000 The People's Court: Crime and Punishment in Rwanda. *Transition* 9(4): 20-41. [Available on-line from Project Muse.](#)

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