

Interdisciplinary Programmes

Academic year 2020-2021

Humanitarian Adventures: Actors, Institutions and Contemporary Issues

DE144 - Autumn - 6 ECTS

Tuesday 10h15 - 12h00

Course Description

This seminar focuses on humanitarian actors, institutions and contemporary issues. The title refers to "adventures" since humanitarians themselves referred to their experiences as "adventures". This has been the case decades ago as well as in recent years. Why adventures? What kind of adventures? The seminar will offer different levels of analysis, multiple units of analysis, diverse perspectives. Students will be encouraged to use their academic background and warmly invited to try new methodologies. The instructor will use a variety of sources, written, oral and audio-visual. The point of a seminar on the history and politics of humanitarian action is precisely not to exceptionalise humanitarianism but, rather to contextualise it. Sometimes, the work of humanitarian actors was (and is) central, valuable and makes a difference when natural- and man-made disasters occur. Sometimes humanitarian actors and institutions are an epi-phenomenon.

> PROFESSOR

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Syllabus

The seminar is primarily intended for MINT students willing to reflect on the usefulness of history to understand current politics and policies.

The seminar will develop a conversation with other disciplines taught at the Graduate Institute. It will inevitably reflect on the boundaries of humanitarianism, its entanglements with "development" ideologies and practices, with public health, with conflict and security issues as well as assumptions of neutrality and universalism. The seminar will also examine the role of various stakeholders including old and allegedly new (transnational, global and virtual) media. The pedagogic objective is to encourage participants to encompass *longue durée* when analyzing a phenomenon that nowadays has become pervasive and, to some extent, overwhelming. The seminar will be structured around lectures, discussion of readings and students' presentations.

Structure and Objectives

The seminar is structured in three parts. In the first part the instructor introduces participants to the history and politics of humanitarianism. Participants engage with a critique of this phenomenon. The second, central, part of the seminar intertwines actors, institutions and issues, via case studies. In the third part the floor is given to participants and their individual projects.

The research paper is demanding and participation is key. Participants have to make an effort and read compulsory readings before coming to class. They will all be available via Moodle or as e-publications.

Part I

Week 1 Introduction.

Week 2 to 5: humanitarianism, humanitarian actions and interventions; literature and critique. Participants will analyze and comment classic and recent scholarly texts, book chapters, essays, and articles. Participants are invited to compare and contrast different interconnections (or lack thereof) between the domestic, local, transnational or international scale, colonial and imperial, secular and faith based. These sessions discuss public and private actors, the role of the state, of the military and that of philanthropic foundations. Some of these actors have been accidental humanitarians, "also" humanitarian, "*humanitarians+*" or "part-time" humanitarians. One of the points we wish participants to take away from these sessions is that for some actors, humanitarianism coincided with welfare (social or otherwise), for others it included economic improvement, health and education betterment, "enlightenment" and "civilization"; some of them viewed humanitarian actions as short-term relief whereas some others interpreted it as a long-term all-encompassing endeavor. These sessions cannot cover everything, but should offer enough to allow participants some tools to deconstruct, critically engage and reflect on the fragmentation, plurality and contradiction of humanitarian meanings and practices as well as on Promethean ambitions and delusions of a variety of self-appointed humanitarians.

Part II

Week 6 to 10 The instructor will choose actor/s, institution/s and a specific context (time and space) to illustrate the purpose, ambitions and delusions of humanitarians. Case studies serve

as examples: they help engaging with the question of who were (are) the humanitarians; and answer the question of voluntarism and professionalization. It also offers a reflection on humanitarians' motivations. What did they mean by "suffering", by populations in need? Where did motivations to help strangers come from? What part, if any, did adventure play in their decision to help? How close was such an *adventure* to a higher moral, civilizational or religious mission? How did humanitarians imagine rescued societies when their mission was over? How did they perceive their place in the societies they belong to and in those they are supposed to help?

Part II

Week 11 to 14: reading weeks and final roundtable.

Requirements

Participants must fulfill three requirements:

- Write a research paper and briefly present it – orally – in class, 60% of the final grade.
- Written response to another student's paper, 30% of the final grade.
- Active participation in class, 10 % of the final grade. Participants must show familiarity with the assigned readings that will be discussed in the class every week.

The seminar provides 6 ECTS. Attendance is mandatory and represents 1 ECTS, the readings 2 ECTS, and the written papers 3 ECTS.

Final paper

Students will submit their final paper on **20 November 2020, at 8:00 am (Geneva time).**

Papers of all students must be submitted on 20 November, even if the oral presentation will be in mid-December! Students know about this deadline from day one.

The paper must not exceed 4,000 words (footnotes included, bibliography and appendixes excluded).

Students must meet the instructor and/or the TA during the office hours for a preliminary discussion on the topic of their paper, no later than Week 3. Office hours are on Mondays or on appointment, but preferably on Mondays or Tuesdays.

A tentative title and a 500 words outline must be submitted by 2 October 2020, 8:00 am.

The outline consists of the research question and problématique. Students are free to add a short, annotated bibliography. The outlines (and bibliography) **are not graded**. Since writing a paper is a time-consuming activity that cannot be improvised in the last three weeks of the semester, the outline is supposed to help students, ensuring they make consistent progress throughout the semester. Instructor and TA provide participants with an individual and thorough feedback.

Topic of the paper

The topic chosen must be related to humanitarian actors, institutions and issues, old and new, from North, South, East and West of Planet Earth. Papers are certainly not limited to topics addressed explicitly in the course and in the assigned readings. Students can use their

disciplinary backgrounds when writing their papers, though they have to be adequately contextualized.

Students are very warmly encouraged to narrow down the topic of their paper, to contextualize it adequately. Therefore we invite them to reflect on the time and space of their research. Ditto with the protagonists and the perspective of their research. Possibilities are very numerous indeed. Papers can take the perspective of those who were supposed to be helped, as long as literature can be found. Students can work on civilian populations or on the way the latter are categorized by humanitarians. Participants can write their papers on single individuals, on humanitarian institutions, on their visions or on their *modi operandi*, on governments and their policies or state-led interventions. It would be possible to imagine papers whose protagonists are technological devices, papers focusing on engineering imperatives, on logistics, on military history, on geography or geopolitics, on the social consequences of a specific humanitarian action. It would certainly be possible to work on the uses and abuses of surveys, of statistics and accountability, on transparency and neutrality, on the language and discourses of humanitarian organizations. It would also be possible to work on fund-raising, finance, on specific programs as well as on more conceptual papers.

We reiterate that in the previous paragraph we mentioned some examples. We expect students to exchange with the instructor and the TA in the first 2-3 weeks of the semester to find the most adequate methodology, discuss about the use of primary sources and agree on the feasibility of a specific project.

Written Response

Students use the reading week of 24 November to read one assigned paper of a colleague and prepare a 1-page written assessment. The assessment must cover formal and content aspects of the assigned paper. The student has to express her/his view on the clarity and written style, on the coherence and consistency of the paper, on its originality, on the quality and quantity of the readings, on the originality of the research question.

The TA and the instructor determine what paper will be discussed.

Written responses should reflect on strengths and weaknesses. The critique does not influence the final grade of the paper discussed (this is the responsibility of the instructor). The allotted time for the discussant will depend on the number of students. Keeping the allotted time will be part of the grade. The discussant is not supposed to summarize the contents of the critiqued paper.

Course Policies

- Papers should be written in English or French, double-spaced, using standard 12 point font, with 1 inch margins. The student's name, the paper's title, the date, the course's title and page numbers must be mentioned.
- Quotations and bibliography must follow the Chicago Manual of Style or the Harvard Referencing System.
- Students must hand in papers on time electronically as a Word file (not PDF and no need to provide hard copies).
- Papers that are submitted with an unjustified delay, significantly exceed the word limit and do not comply with the general guidelines will not receive a grade higher than 4.0.
- Students who miss more than two classes without being excused by the instructor will not receive anything higher than a 4.0.
- Plagiarism constitutes a breach of academic integrity and will not be tolerated. Students who present the work of others as their own will receive a 0.

WEEKLY READINGS

Week 1, 15/09 The instructor and the TA will introduce the seminar to all participants.

Week 2, 22/09 Meanings of humanitarianism-s

A Discussion on the Global and Universal, *Grey Room*, Fall 2015, 66-127.ⁱ

Axelle Brodiez et Bruno Dumons, Faire l'Histoire de l'Humanitaire, *Le Mouvement Social*, 227, 2, 2009, 3-8.

Craig Calhoun, The idea of emergency: humanitarian action and global (dis)order, See Fassin & Pandolfi 2010, *Contemporary States of Emergency: the Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*. (New York: Zone Books), p. 29–58. (Alternatively: Craig Calhoun, The imperative to reduce suffering: charity, progress and emergencies in the field of humanitarian action. See Barnett & Weiss 2008, 73–97.)

Daniel Laqua, Inside the Humanitarian Cloud: Causes and Motivations to Help Friends and Strangers, *Journal of Modern European History*, 12, 2, 2014, 175-185.

Rob Skinner and Alan Lester, Humanitarianism and Empire: New Research Agendas, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40, 5, 2012, 729-747.

Bertrand Taithe, The “Making” of the Origins of Humanitarianism, *Contemporanea*, 18, 5, 2015, 485-492.

Miriam Ticktin, Transnational Humanitarianism, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 43, 2014, 273-289.

Week 3 29/09 Meanings of humanitarianisms, continued

Readings

Ryan Burns, Rethinking big data in digital humanitarianism, practices, epistemologies, and social relations, *GeoJournal*, 2014.

Kevin Grant, The British Empire, International Government and Human Rights, *History Compass*, 11, 8, 2013, 573-583.

Patricia J Lopez, Clumsy Beginnings: from 'Modernizing Mission' to Humanitarianism in the US occupation of Haiti, *Environment and Planning*, 47, 2015, 2240-2256.

Suggestions for further readings

Humanitarianism and Suffering. The Mobilization of Empathy. Edited by Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard Brown, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Zoë Laidlaw, Investigating Empire: Humanitarians, Reform and the Commission of Eastern Enquiry, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40, 5, 2012, 749-768.ⁱⁱ

Mark Mazower, An International Civilization? Empire, Internationalism and the Crisis of the Mid-Twentieth Century, *International Affairs*, 82, 3, 2006, 553-566.

Patrick Meier, *Digital Humanitarians. How Big Data is Changing the Face of Humanitarian Response* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2015).

Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, The (de) Militarization of Humanitarian Aid: A Historical Perspective, *Humanities*, 3, 2014, 232-243.

Amalia Ribi Forclaz, *Humanitarian imperialism: the politics of anti-slavery activism, 1880–1940*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Kevin Rozario, “Delicious Horrors”: Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism, *American Quarterly*, 55, 3, 2003, 417-455.

Tom Scott-Smith, The Fetishism of Humanitarian Objects and the Management of Malnutrition in Emergencies, *Third World Quarterly*, 34, 5, 2013, 913-928.

Tom Scott-Smith, Control and Biopower in Contemporary Humanitarian Aid: the Case of Supplementary Feeding, *Journal of Refugees Studies*, Volume 28, Issue 1, March 2015, Pages 21–37.

Michelle Tusan, “Crimes Against Humanity”: Human Rights, the British Empire, and the Origins of the Response to the Armenian Genocide, *American Historical Review*, 119, 1, 2014, 47-77.

Week 04, 06/10, Michael Barnett, Humanitarian governance and the nexus relief-development

Michael Barnett, Humanitarian Governance, *Annual Review of Political Sciences*, 16, 3, 2013, 79-98.

Michael Barnett, International Paternalism and Humanitarian Governance, *Global Constitutionalism*, 1, 3, 2012, 485-521.

Relief and Development

Margaret Buchanan-Smith and Simon Maxwell, Linking Relief and Development: an Introduction and Overview, *IDS Bulletin*, 25, 3, 1994, 2-16.

Reginald Herbold Green, Rehabilitation, Sustainable Peace and Development: Toward Reconceptualisation, *Third World Quarterly*, 20, 1, 1999, 189-206.

Róisín Hinds, Relationship between humanitarian and development aid, *Helpdesk Research Report of the GSDRC*, 2015.

Joanna Macrae and Adele Harmer, Beyond the Continuum: an Overview of the Changing Role of Aid Policy in Protracted Crises, *HPG Report*, 11, 2002, (London: ODI).

Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Dilemmas of Development Discourse: The Crisis of Developmentalism and the Comparative Method, *Development and Change*, 22, 1991, 5-29.

Philip White and Lionel Cliffe, Matching Response to Context in Complex Political Emergencies. 'Relief', 'Development', 'Peace-Building' or Something In-Between?, *Disasters*, 24, 4, 2000, 314-342.

Further readings

Christopher T. Fisher, 'Moral Purpose is the Important Thing'. David Lilienthal, Iran, and the Meaning of Development in the US, 1956-63, *The International History Review*, 33, 3, 2011, 431-451.

Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small. The United States and the Lure of Community Development*, (Cambridge MA, Harvard UP, 2015).

Nicole Sackley, The village as Cold War site: experts, development, and the history of rural reconstruction, *Journal of Global History*, 6, 2011, 481-504.

Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory. Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Margherita Zanasi, Exporting Development. The League of Nations and Republican China, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 49, 1, 2007, 143-169.

Week 05, 13/10 Humanitarian Reason, Didier Fassin and Co.

Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason. A Moral History of the Present*, (Berkeley: UCP, 2012), Intro, chapters 1 and 2, and conclusion.

Didier Fassin, Noli me Tangere, The Moral Untouchability of Humanitarianism, *Forces of Compassion: Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics*, edited by E. Bornstein and P. Redfield, (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2011), 35-52.

Ilana Feldman, Looking for Humanitarian Purpose: Endurance and the Value of Lives in a Palestinian Refugee Camp, *Public Culture*, 27, 3, 2015, 427-447.

Ilana Feldman, Difficult Distinctions, Refugee Law, Humanitarian Practice, and Political Identification in Gaza, *Cultural Anthropology*, 22, 1, 2007, 129-169.

Liisa H. Malkki, *the Need to Help. The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). Intro and Chapter 1 (any further chapter you wish to read).

Further readings

Didier Fassin, Humanitarianism as Politics of Life, *Public Culture*, 19, 3, 2007, 499-520.

Ilana Feldman, The Quaker Way: Ethical Labor and Humanitarian Relief, *American Anthropologist*, 34, 4, 689-705.

Week 06, 20/10, Humanitarian interventions and the Responsibility to Protect Readings (see below)

Week 07, 27/10 The American Women's Hospital, case study, no readings.

No readings!

Week 08, 03/11 Transnational Advocacy: human rights and/or humanitarianism?

Advocacy in Conflict. Critical Perspectives on Transnational Activism, edited by Alex De Waal, (London: Zed Books, 2015). Introduction, Jennifer Ambrose, Casey Hogle, Trisha Taneja and Keren Yohannes, 1-17; Alex de Waal, Genealogies of Transnational Activism; 18-44.

Students pick up a chapter of their choosing, will inform the TA and will be ready to discuss if, how and why human rights activism intertwines with humanitarianism.

Week 09, 10/11 The Horrific Photo of a dead Syrian Child: the Alan Kurdi's case and its aftermath

Heide Fehrenbach, & Davide Rodogno, A horrific photo of a drowned Syrian child: Humanitarian photography and NGO media strategies in historical perspective, *International Review of the Red Cross*, 97, 900, 2015 1121-1155.

Week 10, 17/11 TA Teaching the class,

The Role of Law in Armed Conflict: the Case Study of the Iraq War

In this seminar, the TA will present the case of invasion of Iraq from the perspective of international law. The case was selected because it features a comprehensive legal argument pertaining to multiple aspects of a so-called humanitarian intervention; issues such as the legality of the use of force, applicability of Geneva Conventions and of Human Rights regimes and the treatment of detainees will be discussed. On the theoretical side, the case study will be used to discuss the claim of indeterminacy in law. The case study is meant to open a critical discussion on the multifaceted role of law in armed conflict and on the legal impact of the Iraq War on subsequent interventions in the region. Students are invited to participate and to bring in their perspectives on the topic.

Readings for the session will be put on Moodle.

Students submit their papers on 20 November.

24/11 Reading Week –

Students use this week to read one assigned paper of a colleague and prepare a 1-page written assessment. The assessment must cover formal and content aspects of the assigned paper. The student has to express her/his view on the clarity and written style, on the coherence and consistency of the paper, on its originality, on the quality and quantity of the readings, on the originality of the research question.

01/12

TBC
08/12
TBC

15/12
Final roundtable

For 1 and 8 December Guest-speaker, L'aventure MSF or case study: Haiti 2011

Readings for MSF

Rony Brauman, Emotion et Action Humanitaire, *Etudes*, 410, 1, 2009, 9-19.

Renée C. Fox, *Doctors Without Borders. Humanitarian Quests, Impossible Dreams of MSF*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

Michal Givoni, Beyond the Humanitarian/Political Divide: Witnessing and the Making of Humanitarian Ethics, *Journal of Human Rights*, 10, 1, 2011, 55-75.

Bernard Kouchner, *Le Malheur des Autres*, (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1991).

Peter Redfield, *Life in Crisis. The Ethical Journey of Doctors Without Borders*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013).

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

Jean-Christophe Rufin, *Le Piège Humanitaire*, (Paris: Lattès, 1993).

Emily Baughan and Juliano Fiori, Save the Children, the Humanitarian Project, and the Politics of solidarity: Reviving Dorothy Buxton's Vision, *Disasters*, 39, S2, 1015, S129-S145.

Eric James, The Professional Humanitarian and the Downsides of Professionalisation, *Disasters*, 2015

Readings for Week 06 Haiti/Natural Disaster (and documentary, VIMEO+)

Murali Balaji, Racializing Pity: the Haiti Earthquake and the Poling of 'Others', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 28, 1, 2011, 50-67.

Vijaya Ramachandran and Julie Walz, Where Has All the Money Gone?, *Journal of Haitian Studies*, 21, 1, 2015, 26-65.

Anna Versluis, Formal and Informal Material Aid following the 2010 Haiti Earthquake as Reported by Camp Dwellers, *Disasters*, 38 (s1), 2014, S94-S109.

In the Eyes of Others. How People in Crises Perceive Humanitarian Aid, edited by Caroline Abu-Sada, (New York: MSF, 2012).
