

HUMN 395

**Introduction to Critical Humanitarian Studies**

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Tuesdays 1:15-4:15, Lafayette L400

Office Hours by appointment

**Overview**

“Humanitarian Studies,” as envisioned here, refers to intellectual and practical explorations of approaches to global and local manifestations of natural disasters, war and conflict, refugee resettlement and forced migration, hunger, and other forms of critical crisis that affect human livelihoods. It is rare that the humanities and social sciences can be imbued with the potential for life-and-death stakes; Humanitarian Studies, nonetheless, does just this, bestowing high-impact utility upon knowledge derived from non-STEM disciplines, from linguistics to cartography to history. In situations demanding expansive granular knowledge of conditions on the ground under unambiguously pressing and distressing circumstances calling for immediate and attention, intimate understandings of the calculus of everyday life and the potential complexities of intervention—including from philosophical, political, economic, anthropological, and geographic perspectives—is of paramount importance.

**Learning Objectives**

- (1) Demonstrating the ability to conceptualize the boundaries between external/exogenous and local understandings of an urgent situation;
- (2) Understanding the universal need for caution and care, in part based on historical lessons and in part based on complex cultural dynamics or power relationships, in external intervention;
- (3) Gaining an understanding of the nature of philosophical and ethical problems with well-meaning but poorly-informed idealism that informs humanitarianism;
- (4) Identifying nuance in the deeply relevant distinctions between the NGO sector, “civil society” iterated in associations, movements, and informal spheres, the multinational sector (the UN, the WFP, the WHO, etc.), and the state’s place in humanitarian aid locally and overseas; and
- (5) Describing in substantial detail the non-abstract array of “techniques” that can be brought to bear on all this, including the applications of emergent knowledge, new fields, and technology, with a grasp of problems to which no “solution” has yet been developed.
- (6) Understanding the ways that humanitarianism articulates with elements of humanities and social sciences thinking

**Evaluation**

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Detail</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Due Date</i>
Discussant	Present and lead discussion of a weekly reading	10%	
Report #1	Profile a place subject to humanitarianism	20%	Feb 15
Report #2	Research on a specific organization	20%	Mar 22
Report #3	Profile a humanitarian career	20%	Apr 12
Paper	Propose a novel approach to a particular crisis/disaster	30%	May 3

## ASSIGNMENTS

### **Discussant (10%)**

Following the introductory week, you will identify a particular reading or readings you will lead the class in discussing. Your responsibilities will include presenting a brief summary and at least three points of interest and/or critique you wish to highlight. Your summary and presentation should take up to twenty minutes; you should also lead a broader discussion of the class of the reading and present at least 4-5 prompts to help guide the conversation.

### **Report #1 (20%) – Profile a place subject to humanitarianism**

In a brief report (1500 words maximum) you will present a case study of a particular place that has been subjected to humanitarian intervention or is a subject of humanitarian concern. Your report should include a basic overview of the context of this place (i.e. what are the conditions that lead to the particular condition of humanitarianism), some of the particular interventions that have occurred, and your analysis of these dynamics.

### **Report #2 (20%) – Research on a specific organization**

In a brief report (1500 words maximum) you will provide an overview of a particular humanitarian organization (e.g. MSF, IRC, UNHCR, etc.) including the history of the organization, some of its notable contexts and interventions and its current challenges and opportunities.

### **Report #3 (20%) – Profile a humanitarian career**

In a brief report (1500 words maximum) you will provide an overview of a particular humanitarian – by looking at the backgrounds of some notable professionals within a given field you will examine the kind of educational training, practical experience and opportunities common within such careers.

### **Paper (30%) – Propose a novel approach to a particular crisis/disaster**

In a paper (3000 words maximum) you will choose a contextually-sensitive intervention/project matched to a particular humanitarian situation. You must integrate at least 3 course readings into your discussion of the theoretical framing of your proposed intervention and include if possible feedback from humanitarian professionals in your proposal.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### **Week 1 – January 18: Decolonizing humanitarianism (readings to be done after class)**

- Rutazibwa, Olivia Umurerwa. (2021). “What’s there to mourn? Decolonial reflections on (the end of) liberal humanitarianism.” *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 1(1): 65-67.
- Pallister-Wilkins, Polly. (2021). “Saving the souls of white folk: Humanitarianism as white supremacy.” *Security Dialogue* 52(1): 98-106.

### **Week 2 – January 25: What is a humanitarian crisis? (PB)**

- Bose, Pablo S. (2019). “US policies and migration crises” in Cecilia Menjivar, Marie Ruiz, and Immanuel Ness (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Migration Crises*, 553-569. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Myadar, Orhon, and Kara E. Dempsey. (2021). "Making and unmaking refugees: geopolitics of social ordering and struggle within the global refugee regime." *Geopolitics* DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2021.1924552

### **Week 3 – February 1: Structures of humanitarianism (PB)**

- Recchia, Stefano. (2017). "Authorising humanitarian intervention: a five-point defence of existing multilateral procedures." *Review of International Studies* 43(1): 50-72.
- Davies, Thomas. (2018). "Rethinking the origins of transnational humanitarian organizations: the curious case of the International Shipwreck Society" *Global Networks* 18(3): 461-478.

### **Week 4 – February 8: Multilateralism and global-local tensions (PB)**

- Ishkanian, Armine, and Isabel Shutes. (2021). "Who needs the experts? The politics and practices of alternative humanitarianism and its relationship to NGOs." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00354-6>
- Wilkinson, Olivia. (2018). "It's being, not doing" Hospitality and hostility between local faith actors and international humanitarian organizations in refugee response." *Migration and Society: Advances in Research*, 1(1): 111-126.

### **Week 5 – February 15: Humanitarian Aid as Imposition, Imperialism, Paternalism? (JS)**

- Slim, Hugo. *Humanitarian ethics: A guide to the morality of aid in war and disaster*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Selections from Fassin, Didier. *Humanitarian reason*. University of California Press, 2011.
- Selections from Schuller, Mark, *Killing With Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2012.

### **Report 1 Due**

### **Week 6 – February 22: Intervention, harm and 'doing good' (JS)**

- Tesón, Fernando R., and Bas Van der Vossen. *Debating Humanitarian Intervention: Should We Try to Save Strangers?* Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Ong, Jonathan Corpus. "Toward an ordinary ethics of mediated humanitarianism: An agenda for ethnography." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 22(4), 2019: 481-498.
- Rawls, John. *A theory of justice*. Harvard university press, 2020.
- Sandel, Michael. *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do*
- AAA Statement on Military Humanitarianism and Human Terrain Teams

### **Week 7 – March 1 (Town Meeting Day, no class)**

### **Week 8 – March 8 (Spring recess, no class)**

### **Week 9 – March 15: Human rights, humanity and humanitarianism (JS)**

- Barnett, Michael. "Human rights, humanitarianism, and the practices of humanity." *International Theory* 10, no. 3 (2018): 314-349.

- Duffield, Mark. "Post-humanitarianism: Governing precarity through adaptive design." *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2019): 15-27.

#### **Week 10 – March 22: Celebrity humanitarianisms (PB)**

- Mostafanezad, Mary. (2017). "Celebrity humanitarianism and the popular geopolitics of hope along the Thai-Burma border," *Political Geography* 58(2017): 67-76.
- Richey, Lisa Ann, and Dan Brockington. "Celebrity humanitarianism: Using tropes of engagement to understand North/South relations." *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 1 (2020): 43-59.

#### **Report 2 Due**

#### **Week 11 – March 29: Criminalizing precarity and resilience (PB)**

- Gordon, Eleanor, and Larsen, Henrik Kjellmo. (2022). "'Sea of blood': the intended and unintended effects of criminalizing humanitarian volunteers assisting migrants in distress at sea." *Disasters* 46(1): 3-26.
- Ilcan, Suzan, and Kim Rygiel. "'Resiliency humanitarianism': responsabilizing refugees through humanitarian emergency governance in the camp." *International political sociology* 9, no. 4 (2015): 333-351.

#### **Week 12 – April 5: Resistance and solidarities (PB)**

- Mim, Nurat Jahan. "Religion at the margins: Resistance to secular humanitarianism at the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh." *Religions* 11, no. 8 (2020): 423.
- Bauder, Harald. "Migrant solidarities and the politics of place." *Progress in Human Geography* 44, no. 6 (2020): 1066-1080.

#### **Week 13 – April 12: Aid and Global Development (JS)**

- Carbonnier, Gilles. *Humanitarian economics: War, disaster and the global aid market*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Gabiam, Nell. "When 'humanitarianism' becomes 'development': the politics of international aid in Syria's Palestinian refugee camps." *American Anthropologist* 114, no. 1 (2012): 95-107.
- Price, David H. "Counterinsurgency by Other Names: Complicating Humanitarian Applied Anthropology in Current, Former, and Future War Zones." *Human Organization* 73(2) (2014): 95-105.

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#### **Report 3 Due**

#### **Week 14 – April 19: Voices of the Displaced (JS)**

- Malkki, Lisa H. "Speechless emissaries." *Cultures of Fear: A Critical Reader* (2009): 101-16.
- Chattoraj, Diotima. "A Sense of Attachment, Detachment or Both: Voices of the Displaced Persons." In *Displacement Among Sri Lankan Tamil Migrants*, pp. 117-152. Springer, Singapore, 2021.
- Selections from Schuller, Mark. *Humanitarian Aftershocks in Haiti*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2016

**Week 15 – April 26: Intervention/Culture: Difference, Disruption, and Innovation (JS)**

- Redfield, Peter, and Erica Bornstein. “Forces of Compassion: An Introduction to the Anthropology of Humanitarianism.” Society for Advanced Research, 2011.

**Week 16 – May 3: Mini-Practicum: Conclusions, Hands-On Projects, and Showcase Event**

**Final Paper/Project Due**