Course manual
Joint Master's Programme in
International Humanitarian Action

University of Warsaw

Anthropology in humanitarian action
Semester 1
Module coordinator: Dr. Mateusz Laszczkowski
  e-mail: m.laszczkowsk5@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.laszczkowsk5@uw.edu.pl
  phone: 22 553 16 11
  office location: Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology,
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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:

**Week 2**
Introduction to Anthropology, part 2.
Overview of central methods and major theoretical paradigms in anthropology.

Required reading:

**Week 3**
Suffering and Aid as Objects of Anthropological Reflection

Required reading and video:

**Week 4**
The Capacity to Aspire and the Will to Improve

Required reading:

**Week 5**
Towards an Anthropology of Humanitarian Action

Required reading:
Week 6
Introduction to Ethnographic Methods, Part 1: Participant Observation

Required reading:

Week 7
Introduction to Ethnographic Methods, Part 2: Field Notes

Required reading:

Recommended further reading:

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:

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:

Recommended further reading:
Antonio Donini, ‘Humanitarianism, Perceptions, Power’,
http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/humanitarianism-perceptions-power

**Week 10**
Refugees, Border Control and Humanitarianism

Required reading:
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:

Recommended further reading:

**Week 12**
Development and Its Effects

Required reading:

Recommended further reading:

**Week 13**
Disasters, Humanitarian Aid and Anthropology

Required reading:

**Week 14**
The Militarization of Humanitarian Action


Recommended further reading and video:
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:

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).