

Anthropology in Humanitarian Action

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Credits awarded: 5 ECTS, equivalent to 126 work hours
(1 ECTS = 25 hours)

Course Description

The course introduces cultural and social anthropology, its research fields as well as its methodological and analytical approaches. It explores the relevance of anthropological perspectives and findings for international humanitarian action. The central “problem” of cultural and social anthropology can be described as the “diversity of human social life” (Michael Carrithers): How does it come that human beings who - all over the world - belong to the same species have developed such a variety in their forms of social organisation, cultural features and world views? Cultural and social anthropology documents and analyses cultural/social flows, processes and formations shaping localities, communities and societies. From an anthropological perspective, disasters represent radical disruptions that challenge the existing social and cultural orders, including those of the humanitarian workers. Disruptions (wars, disasters, forced population movements), which humanitarian action attempts to alleviate, tear apart the invisible social fabric that surrounds the affected population and gives meaning to their lives. With their expertise and approaches, cultural and social anthropologists often contribute to the discussion and solution of practical problems in humanitarian action. They provide an understanding of communities, translocal connections as well as unexpected effects of international aid interventions that can help humanitarian actors adapt their projects to local conditions and needs.

Learning Outcomes

The overall learning outcome is to provide students with a sound understanding about the importance of the specific approaches, methods as well as with some of the key concepts of cultural and social anthropology for international humanitarian action. In order to achieve this outcome the NOHA programme is officially based on competence based learning, which is mainstreamed in accordance to the needs of future employers, humanitarian workers, and with a view at the necessities of scientific research. In particular, students will gain the following competencies and capacities as developed by NOHA Curriculum Development:

- to get an overview of key concepts, questions, and methods as well as of research fields of cultural and social Anthropology and their relation with humanitarian action;
- to reflect critically on often used concepts like “ethnic groups”, “locality”,

“culture”, “violence”, “gender”, “age”, “healing” and “reconciliation” in the context of humanitarian action;

- to get to know analytical and methodological tools that enable humanitarian workers to develop an understanding of the social and cultural constellations in different localities;
- to assess the possible application of the methods and concepts presented in different constellations of humanitarian action such as in conflict and post-conflict situations as well as refugee camps;
- to reflect on the changes and shifts in social relations among the people affected by immediate and prolonged crises, the role of aid agencies and humanitarian workers with different cultural and social background and the intercultural encounters of all actors in the setting of humanitarian action, thus, taking into account the delicate subtleties and difficulties in working in multicultural contexts and multidisciplinary teams.
- to have a good understanding of social relationships in humanitarian action intervention situations at various level and develop an understanding of possible socio-cultural consequences of humanitarian action and the necessity for the empowerment of the local population.

Assignments

1) *Course attendance and Participation:* All participants are expected to attend the course regularly, read the basic literature for all sessions and participate actively in the discussions during class.

2) *Group Project:* In this assignment, students conduct their own mini-research using anthropological methods (participant observation, interviews, etc.). They will choose from the case studies suggested by the instructor at the beginning of the course. Teams for the group projects will be formed on the basis of self-selection. As a member of a team students are expected to participate in the preparation and presentation of the group assignment. They will gather and analyse information from different sources (own qualitative research, scholarly writings, grey literature, NGO reports, etc.) and relate it to an issue pertinent to the anthropology of humanitarian action. Based on the findings of their research each group will develop one policy recommendation for future action or improvement.

Giving presentations is an important part of today's working environment. This assignment is designed to enable students to improve their presentation skills. Each group will give a presentation of no more than 20 minutes. References should be explicitly quoted in the presentation and listed in the list of sources on the final slide.

3) *Reflection Paper:* At the end of the course groups will write a paper (1000 – 1250 words) to reflect upon their research projects and link them to the module's discussions and readings on anthropology in humanitarian action. Reflecting upon one's own experiences, stance and opinions is an important step in any learning process and is designed to support students' development as an effective

practitioner in humanitarian action. A reflection paper is more academic than a journal entry but is also less formal than an academic essay. It is supposed to provide the groups with an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings about the topic at hand and their experience of conducting the research. Thus, a reflection paper is written in the first person. However, rather than merely listing and summarizing their experiences and opinions groups are expected to analyse, deconstruct and reflect on them, drawing upon examples, course readings and other sources where suitable; thereby, papers should to list at least 5 references.

Lecture Schedule

Introduction to the Course and Anthropology as Discipline 17th November, 10am-1.10pm

After introducing the module (schedule, assignments, etc.) in this first unit students reflect on the meaning of culture before being introduced to socio-cultural anthropology as an academic field of study. The unit provides students with a brief overview of the history of the discipline and familiarizes them with themes, concepts and methodologies. Students will then explore and discuss the various ways in which anthropology contributes to the study of international humanitarian action in the subsequent units. At the end of the unit students will

- Have an understanding of anthropology as a scientific field of study
- Be familiar with anthropological methods
- Be able to take an anthropological perspective on the socio-cultural dynamics of humanitarian action

Readings:

- Eriksen, H.T. (2001), *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*, London: Pluto Press, pp. 1-23
- MacClancy, J. (ed.) (2002), *Exotic no more: anthropology on the frontlines*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, pp. 1-14

Further reading (optional):

- Geertz, C., (1983), *Local Knowledge. Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books
- Rao, V. & Walton, M. (2004), *Culture and Public Action*, Stanford: Stanford University Press
- Robben, A. & Sluka, J. (eds.) (2012), *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, Oxford: John Wiley & Sons
- Wasson, Ch. et al. (eds.) (2012), *Applying Anthropology in the Global Village*, Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press

Anthropology and Humanitarian Action

17th November, 2.15pm-5.30pm

In this unit students will build on the knowledge acquired in the first unit and explore the various ways in which anthropology contributes to the study of international humanitarian action. Taking an anthropological perspective, this unit (re)defines common concepts in the field of humanitarian action such as vulnerability, disaster, risk and gender. Students will further discuss what kind of expertise anthropologists have to offer that could be helpful for and how ethnographic methods may be made useful humanitarian practice. At the end of the unit students will:

- Be able to identify socio-cultural issues in international humanitarian action
- Be able to explain and critically assess the key role anthropology plays in the emergence of new perspectives on humanitarian action

Readings:

- Henry, D., "Anthropological Contributions to the Study of Disasters", in: McEntire, D., and Blanchard, W., (eds.) (2007), *Disciplines, Disasters and the Emergency Management: The Convergence and Divergence of Concepts, Issues and Trends from the Research Literature*, Springfield: Charles C Thomas Publisher
- Minn, P. (2007), "Toward an Anthropology of Humanitarianism", *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, <https://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/51>

Further reading (optional):

- NOHA (1998), *Anthropology in Humanitarian Assistance*
- Blaikie, P. et al. (1994), *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability, and Disasters*, London: Routledge
- Fassin, D. (2012), *Humanitarian Reason. A Moral History of the Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Redfield, P. and Bornstein, E. (eds.) (2011), *Forces of Compassion*, Santa Fe: SAR Press

Anthropology of Violence and War

18th November, 10am-1.10pm

Anthropologists have developed different tools to analyse the meanings, everyday experience and effects of violence and war. In this unit, students will get acquainted with some important anthropological positions and findings about violence and warfare. Watching an ethnographic film about a Bosnian village at the beginning of the war (1992), students will reflect on the emergence of physical violence in a specific community and critically assess categories of "ethnicity" and "ethnic conflict". At the end of the unit students will:

- Demonstrate an articulated understanding of the concepts of violence and war in anthropology
- Critically assess assumptions and categories in the analysis and interpretation of violent conflicts from an anthropological perspective

Film: “*We are all Neighbours*” (UK 1993, 52 min., Debbie Christie & Tone Bringa)

Readings:

- Roepstorff, K. (forthcoming), “Armed Conflicts and Humanitarian Crises: Insights from the Anthropology of War”, in: Heintze, Hans-Joachim und Joost, Herman (eds.), *International Humanitarian Action: NOHA Textbook*, Berlin: Springer
- Eller, J. (2000), *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict: An Anthropological Perspective on International Ethnic Conflict*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, Introduction

Further reading (optional):

- Anderson, B. (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London
- Falola, T. & Ter Haar, H. (eds.) (2010), *Narrating war and peace in Africa*, University of Rochester Press, Rochester
- Hinton, A. (ed.) (2002), *Annihilating Difference. The Anthropology of Genocide*, Berkeley: University of California Press
- Reyna, S. & Downs, S. (eds.) (1994), *Studying War: Anthropological Perspectives*, Amsterdam: Gordon & Breach Science Publishers
- Robben, A. & Nordstrom, C. (1995), *Fieldwork under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*, Berkeley: University of California Press

Anthropology of Displacement

18th November, 2.15pm-5.30pm

One of the major responses by people affected by disaster or war is to flee. In this unit students will learn about anthropological perspectives on displacement. Understanding flight and displacement as a process, not an event, this unit addresses issues such as the motifs of individuals and groups for leaving their homes / countries; the way this may impact on value systems, gender roles and social organization, etc.. It further looks at the power structures and in IDP and refugee camps and the everyday experience of living in such settings. More fundamentally, students will critically assess the use of labels/categories used in reference to displacement (e.g. ‘refugee’ or ‘IDP’) and scrutinize related assumptions and narratives. At the end of the unit students will:

- Demonstrate a sound understanding of anthropological perspectives on displacement
- Be able to analyse socio-cultural consequences of displacement, including economic and social changes, power conflicts and gender issues for refugees and IDPs
- Explain, analyse and critically assess from an anthropological perspective the different labels used in reference to displacement

Readings:

- Agier, M. (2011), *Managing the Undesirables. Refugee camps and humanitarian government*, Cambridge: Polity Press, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-36
- Colson, E. (2003), "Forced Migration and the Anthropological Response", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 16(1): 1-17

Further reading (optional):

- Agier, M. (2002), "Between war and city. Towards an urban anthropology of refugee camps", *Ethnography*, 3(3): 317-341
- Daniel, E.V. (2002), 'The Refugee: A Discourse on Displacement', in: MacClancy, J. (ed.) (2002), *Exotic no more: anthropology on the frontlines*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, pp. 270-286
- Harrell-Bond, B. (2002), "Can Humanitarian Work with Refugees be Humane?", *Human Rights Quarterly*, 24: 51-85
- Malkki, L.H. (2002), "News From Nowhere: Mass Displacement and Globalized 'Problems of Organization'", *Ethnography*, 3(3): 351-360
- Malkki, L. H. (1995), *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Scherschel, K. (2011), "Who is a refugee? Reflections on social classifications and individual consequences", *Migration Letters, Special Issue: Survival Strategies of Irregular Immigrants*, 8 (1): 67-76
- Sideris, T. (2003), "War, gender and culture. Mozambican women refugees", *Social Science and Medicine*, 56: 713-724

Anthropology of Trauma, Coping and Healing

8th December, 10am -1.10pm

Humanitarian aid workers often have to deal with physically and psychologically wounded individuals and communities. Perceptions of trauma and healing, thus, always accompany the work with people affected by humanitarian crises. In this unit students will explore the meaning of trauma and the role culture plays in it. In addition to assessing concepts such as trauma, and approaches to healing, this unit will also address the issue of post-conflict reconciliation from an anthropological perspective. At the end of the unit students will:

- Demonstrate an articulated understanding of the concepts of trauma, healing and reconciliation from an anthropological perspective
- Be sensitized to cultural aspects of trauma, healing and reconciliation

Readings:

- Hassan, G. *et al.* (2015), *Culture, Context and the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Syrians. A Review for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Staff Working with Syrians Affected by Armed Conflict*, Geneva: UNHCR
- Ventevogel, P., (2015), "The effects of war: local views and priorities concerning psychosocial and mental health problems as a result of collective violence in Burundi", *Intervention*, 13(3): 216 - 234

Further reading (optional):

- Becker, D. (2004), "Dealing With Consequences of Organised Violence in Trauma Work", in: Austin, A. et al. (eds.), *Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict. The Berghof Handbook*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 1– 25
- Buckley-Zistel, S. (2006), "Remembering to Forget: Chosen Amnesia as a Strategy for Local Coexistence in Post-Genocide Rwanda", *Africa*, 76(2): 131–150
- Eastmond, M., & Selimovic, J. M. (2012), "Silence as Possibility in Postwar Everyday Life", *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 6(3): 502– 524.
- Summerfield, D. (1999). A Critique of Seven Assumptions Behind Psychological Trauma Programmes in War-Affected Areas. *Social Science and Medicine*, 48(10): 1449–1462
- Thurnheer, K. (2014), *Life Beyond Survival. Social Forms of Coping After the Tsunami in War-affected Eastern Sri Lanka*, Bielefeld: transcript
- Ross, F., (2002), *Bearing Witness: Women and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, London: Pluto Press

Presentation of Group Projects

8th December, 2.15pm-5.30pm

In this unit, students will present their group projects. Each group will present the findings of their mini-research followed by a discussion. This assignment is designed to allow students' a first experience in anthropological research. With their group projects students:

- Demonstrate an understanding of how to develop a research question, gather and evaluate data
- Demonstrate the ability to present research findings in a concise and convincing manner
- Be able to respond to questions and critique

Please note: Further details and readings will be provided at the beginning of the course

Anthropology and the Logic of Intervention

9th December, 10am-1.10pm / 2.15pm-5.30pm

Building on the insights from the previous units, students will critically assess the logic of intervention in humanitarian crises. The unit addresses the social consequences of humanitarian crises and intervention and the relationship between givers and recipients of humanitarian aid through an anthropological lens. This unit further draws attention to the interactions of different humanitarian actors and the role of perceptions and power in these interactions. At the end of the unit students will

- Demonstrate an articulated understanding of the socio-cultural consequences of humanitarian crises and interventions
- Explain, analyse and critically assess the logic of interventions in humanitarian action from an anthropological perspective
- Be able to analyse through an anthropological lens the interaction between givers and recipients of humanitarian aid
- Be sensitized to (inter)cultural aspects of humanitarian action

Readings:

- Autessere, S. (2014), *Peaceland. Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-19
- Donini, A. "Humanitarianism. Perceptions, Power",
<http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/humanitarianism-perceptions-power>
- de Torrenté, N. (2013), 'The Relevance and Effectiveness of Humanitarian Aid: Reflections about the Relationship between Providers and Recipients', *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 80(2): 607-634

Further reading (optional):

- Eck, D. (2013), 'Religious Gifts: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Perspectives on Dana', *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 80(2): 359-379
- Fechter, A.-M. & Hindman, H. (eds.) (2011), *Inside the Everyday Lives of Development Workers: The Challenges and Futures of Aidland*, Sterling: Kumarian Press
- Gamburd, M. (2014), *The Golden Wave: Culture and Politics after Sri Lanka's Tsunami Disaster*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Harrell-Bond et. al. (1992), Counting the Refugees: Gifts, Givers, Patrons and Clients: *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 5 (3-4): 205-225
- Khan, A.A. (2012), 'Religious Obligation or Altruistic Giving? Muslims and Charitable Donations', in: Barnett, M. and Gross Stein, J. (eds), *Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism*, New York:
- Leonard, P. (2010), *Expatriate Identities in Postcolonial Organizations: Working Whiteness*, Burlington: Ashgate
- Mauss, M. (2001) [1925], *The Gift*, London: Routledge
- Mosse, D. (ed.) (2011), *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*, Oxford: Berghahn Books
- De Waal, A. (2002), "Anthropology and the Aid Encounter", in: MacClancy, J. (ed.) (2002), *Exotic no more: anthropology on the frontlines*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, pp. 251-269
- De Waal, A. (1997), *Famine Crimes: Politics and Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Wilder, A. and Morris, T. (2008), "Locals within locals': Cultural sensitivity in disaster aid", *Anthropology Today*, 24(3): 1-3