ETHN 106: Life, Death and the Human
Winter 2011

Professor Kalindi Vora
T. Th. 9:30-10:50 am
Lecture: CSB 004

Office Hours: T. Th. 2-3:30
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858-822-6657

Course Description:
This course provides a comparative and relational survey of some of the global and historical contexts in which life and death become sites of political significance, ranging from ways they may reveal dehumanizing circumstances to the expression of revolutionary social politics. We examine these contexts, including life under colonization, the commodification of the human body, and the legal and cultural invisibility of some lives, with an interdisciplinary approach which pairs readings in western philosophy, medical anthropology, history, postcolonial theory, and anthropology with film and fiction.

The goal of this course is to trouble the idea of a universally understood category of ‘humanity,’ specifically the idea that humanity and its protections are evenly accessible across differing historical and material contexts. Instead, we can approach the conditions of life and death as revealing important aspects of the politics and economics involved in who gets to live a fully ‘human’ life. Students are encouraged to approach the films and novels on the syllabus with the same rigor as scholarly texts, and to identify conversations between the topics assigned each week, as well as within one given week’s readings.

Texts:
Nervous Conditions, Tsitsi Dangarembga (UCSD bookstore)
CR: Course Reader from University Readers
E-res readings

Assignments and Evaluation:
Students are expected to complete the readings for each course meeting before they attend that class, and to bring their readings for a given entire week for each class meeting. Recommended readings are available through E-res or as indicated on syllabus.

Grading is based on the completion of two short essays, one in-class midterm, one in-class final exam, and class participation**.

Pop quizzes: A question from the reading for that class meeting will be asked. A correct answer passes and an incorrect answer does not. Pass=retaining your participation points. Fail=one point removed from participation grade at end of course for each fail.

Short Essay: (3 pages, 1.25” margins, 12 pt. Times New Roman, double-spaced). Essay topics will be distributed in class on the Monday of the week preceding each deadline. These should be submitted by the beginning of lecture on the day they are due. Late papers cannot be accepted (including those turned in after lecture begins). Essays will not be accepted via email.
**Midterm and Final Exams:** Format: In-class exams composed of short answer questions and short essays in response to questions selected from a list provided one week in advance. Think creatively, think eccentrically, but always make a clear argument grounded in textual references that are properly cited by MLA or Chicago Manual of Style conventions (articles, films, novels, etc.).

**Discussion/Participation:** An essential part of this course is making connections between the various topics each week, particularly during discussion in lecture and in break-out group meetings. For this reason, participation constitutes a significant percentage of student evaluation.

*It is highly recommended that each student follow one US newspaper, or news journal and one foreign newspaper or news journal on a regular basis. At least one exam will require the incorporation of current events and small-group discussions will utilize this exposure.*

**Percentages and Grades:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Type</th>
<th>Grade Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20% - Short essay</td>
<td>90-100%=A</td>
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<td></td>
<td>70-79%=C</td>
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<tr>
<td>20% - Midterm exam</td>
<td>80-89%=B</td>
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<td>60-69%=D</td>
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<tr>
<td>20% - Participation</td>
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<td>40% - Final exam</td>
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<td>Pass/Fail: Passing is C</td>
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<td>or higher</td>
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**Course Outline**

**Week 1: The Conditions of ‘Human’ Life**

**Tuesday January 4th:** Course Introduction and syllabus overview


**Week 2: Humanity, Race and Biopower**


**Week 3: Capture, Incarceration and Resisting Dehumanization**

**Tuesday January 18th:** Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Introduction,” and “Ch. 7: Mothers Reclaiming Our Children.” in *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in California*. pps. 5-29; 181-240. CW/E-res


**Week 4: Life with Colonialism**

**Tuesday January 25th:** Fanon, Frantz. Ch. 5: “Colonial War and Mental


**Thursday January 27th**: (Second Half) *Nervous Conditions*.
*First in-class 45 minutes break-out meetings. Introductions, group name, schedule of leadership

**Week 5**: Quality of Death and The Afterlife of Human Remains

**Tuesday February 1st**: **Midterm**


**Week 6**: Life and Debt: International Lending and Microlending


**Thursday February 10th**: (2nd Half) Film: *Life and Debt*

**Week 7**: Commodification and Bodies in Parts.

*Distribute Essay Questions*


Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. "The Ends of the Body--Commodity Fetishism

**Week 8: Immigration and Invisibility**

* Essay due in classroom before lecture begins.


**Week 9: Death and Access to the Human**


**Week 10: From Biopolitics to Necropolitics: Life, Death and Human Meaning in Contemporary Global Political and Cultural Economics**

**Tuesday March 8th:** Wrap-up and final review discussions

**Thursday March 10th:** In-class final exam