

ETHN 106: Life, Death and the Human
Winter 2011

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

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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:

20%- Short essay	90-100%=A	70-79%=C	
20%- Midterm exam	80-89%=B	60-69%=D	<69%= F
20%- Participation			
40%- Final exam	Pass/Fail: Passing is C or higher		

Course Outline

Week 1: The Conditions of 'Human' Life

Tuesday January 4th: Course Introduction and syllabus overview

Thursday January 6th: Arendt, Hannah. "Prologue," and Ch. 1: "The Human Condition," *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958. pp. 1-21. CR

Week 2: Humanity, Race and Biopower

Tuesday January 11th: Foucault, Michel. "Ch. 11: 17 March, 1976." *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76*. New York: Picador, 2003. Pp. 239-264. CR

Thursday January 13th: Agamben, Giorgio. Ch 2: "The Muselman," *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and The Archive*. New York: Zone Books. Pp. 41-86. CR

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

Thursday January 20th: Giroux, Henry A. "What Might Education Mean After Abu Ghraib?" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*. 24:1. 2000. pp. 3-22. CW/E-res.

Week 4: Life with Colonialism

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

Disorders,” *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: New Grove Press. pp. 249-310. E-res.

(First Half) Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions*. Seal Press: Seattle. 1989. 86 minutes.

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**

Thursday February 3rd: Lock, Margaret. “Living Cadavers and the Calculation of Death.” *Body and Society*. London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004. pp. 135-152. E-res.

Eric Klinenberg, “Bodies that Don’t Matter: Death and Dereliction in Chicago.” *Body and Society*. Sage Publications: London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi. 7:2-3. 2001. Pp. 121-136. E-res.

Week 6: Life and Debt: International Lending and Microlending

Tuesday February 8th: Cockburn, Alexander. (Travels with Sainath): “Why Indian Farmers Kill Themselves.” *Counterpunch*. Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Claire, eds. March 25th 2005. <http://www.counterpunch.org/cockburn08042005.html>.

Megan Moodie. “Enter Microcredit: A New Culture of Women's Empowerment in Rajasthan?” *American Ethnologist*. 35:3. 2008. Pp. 454-465. E-res.

(1st half) Film: *Life and Debt*. Dir: Stephanie Black. New York: New Yorker Films. 2001.

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

Week 7: Commodification and Bodies in Parts

***Distribute Essay Questions**

Tuesday February 15th: Nancy Scheper-Hughes. “Bodies for Sale: Whole or in Parts.” *Body & Society*. London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications. 7 (2-3). 2001. pp. 1-8. E-res.

Thursday February 17th: Lawrence Cohen. “Where It Hurts: Indian Material for an Ethics of Organ Transplantation.” *Zygon* 38, no. 3 (2003): 663-88. E-res.

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

and the Global Traffic in Organs." *SAIS Review* 22, no. 1 (2002): 61-80. E-res.

Week 8: Immigration and Invisibility

*** Essay due in classroom before lecture begins.**

Tuesday February 22nd: Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, "Migrant Philipina Domestic Labor and the International Division of Reproductive Labor," *Gender and Society* 14, no. 4 (2000): 560-580. E-res.

Tadiar, Neferti Xina M. Ch 3: "Domestic Bodies." *Fantasy Production : Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order*. London: Hong Kong University Press ; Eurospan, 2004. E-res.

Thursday February 24th: Film: *Dirty Pretty Things*. Dir: Stephen Frears. Miramax Films: 2002.

Week 9: Death and Access to the Human

Tuesday March 1st Roddey Reid: "Death of the Family, Or keeping Human beings Human. In *Posthuman Bodies*. Judith Halberstam, Ira Livingston. Pg. 177-202. E-res

Joy James. The Dead Zone: Stumbling at the Crossroad of Party Politics, Genocide, and Postracial Racism. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 108:3, Summer 2009. P.459-481. E-res.

Thursday March 3rd: Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Introduction: Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence. Verso, 2006. pp. 1-18. E-res.

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

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

Thursday March 10th: In-class final exam