

Department: International Relations

Faculty: Social Sciences

Course Title: The Politics of Knowing Your World (MA, Optional)

Number of Credits: Four

Course Objectives:

This course challenges the assumption that International Relations (IR) should primarily focus on relationships between states and follow the trajectories of the powerful. Instead, it brings peoples and communities to the center of analysis and highlights alternative narratives of contemporary global politics that emerge from this analytical move. The course offers students an eclectic toolbox with which to challenge knowledge received from within and outside academia (for instance, the media) about their world, and the relationships of power that are woven into these dominant narratives and their real-world consequences.

Three seemingly isolated events provide the empirical basis for this course: the Bhopal gas tragedy (industrial accident, India, 1984); the Rwandan genocide (ethnic conflict, Rwanda, 1994); and Hurricane Katrina (natural disaster, United States, 2005). Drawn from three continents and spread over three decades, the cases illustrate the growing significance of global politics in the apparently localized lives of communities. Indeed, together, these reflect the darker sides of economic globalization, humanitarian intervention and humanitarian aid, all of which are of interest and relevance to IR scholars.

The course offers an opportunity for students to reflect upon their received knowledge of the world politics. Employing the three cases, the course seeks to address a number of questions: What constitutes the ‘global’, and on what basis do we claim to know about it? What are the political implications of these knowledge claims? And, are there alternatives – possibly better – to the understandings of global politics (and specific events) that dominate the field of IR? Towards this goal, it would highlight the broader political contexts within which the events, and responses to these, took place; explore the role of key institutions such as media, governments, international agencies, non-governmental organizations and academia in producing knowledge that has shaped our understanding of these crises; and, compare alternative narratives of the events.

Course Structure:

- 1) Introduction: This is first of a series of class discussions on taking seriously voices on the margins (employing here the case of peasants and domestic workers in Chiapas, Mexico) to comprehend global politics.
- 2) Disciplinary Reflections - I: The focus would be on the nature of knowledge claims that have traditionally dominated the study of IR as well as the post-positivist alternatives, and the ‘real world’ implications of both. The class discussions would mainly be based on four ISA presidential addresses.

- 3) **Disciplinary Reflections - II: Critiquing the prevalent conceptualization of global/international in IR**, the readings showcase relatively recent efforts to take people and communities seriously in the global realm.
- 4) **Knowing Your World - I: With the aim to illustrate the scope of research methods in making IR more people-centric**, this week utilizes three instances of scholarly work that pay attention to people's narratives.
- 5) **Knowing Your World - II: Following the examination of scholarly traditions**, the significance of media and policy discourses in mediating our understanding of international politics is discussed.
- 6) **Bhopal (1984): This week examines the international and national factors that contributed to the major industrial accident that took place in Bhopal**, and the ongoing debates on what 'really' happened that night.
- 7) **Human Rights in a Globalized World: With the Bhopal case at the center of analysis**, this week disrupts the globalization-as-progress story and highlights questions of justice and human rights for vulnerable populations located in the developing world.
- 8) **Rwanda (1994): The focus this week is on studying the dominant narratives on the genocide that took place in Rwanda**, and the political consequences of the memories of 1994.
- 9) **Humanitarian Intervention: Moving the analytical lens to the international community**, this week digs deeper into the international community's response to the genocide, highlighting in particular the politics within the UN Security Council.
- 10) **New Orleans (2005): This first week on Hurricane Katrina challenges its portrayal as a 'natural disaster' and examines the disproportionate impact on African American residents of New Orleans**, the weak response of the US government, and the militarized nature of this response.
- 11) **Humanitarian Aid: This week reflects on national interests and international policy mandates that delineate humanitarian aid**, for instance in relation to development and reconstruction and the impact on local communities.
- 12) **Concluding Reflections: The discussions this week will be mainly based on student term papers.**

Reading suggestions:

Acharya, Amitav (2014), 'Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(4): 647-659.

Alexander, David (2006), 'Globalization of Disaster: Trends, Problems and Dilemmas', *Journal of International Affairs*, 59(2): 1-22.

Baxi, Upendra (2010), 'Writing About Impunity and Environment: The 'Silver Jubilee' of the Bhopal Catastrophe', *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment*, 1(1): 23-44.

Alexander Laban Hinton and Kevin Lewis O' Neill (2009) (eds.) *Genocide: Truth, Memory, and Representation*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 80 - 110.

Brunnsma, David L., David Overfelt & J. Steven Picou (2007) (eds.) *The Sociology of Katrina: Perspectives on a Modern Catastrophe*, 2nd Ed., Lanham (MD): Rowman & Littlefield.

Enloe, Cynthia (2004), *The Curious Feminist*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 19-42.

Jenny Edkins and Maja Zehfuss (2014) (eds.) *Global Politics: A New Introduction*, 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 176-198.

Mukherjee, Suroopa (2010), *Surviving Bhopal: Dancing Bodies, Written Texts and Oral Testimonials of Women in the Wake of an Industrial Disaster*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 17-80.

Muppidi, Himadeep (2004), *The Politics of the Global*, Minneapolis (MN): University of Minnesota Press, pp. 1-28.

Smith, Steve (2004), 'Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11', *International Studies Quarterly*, 48(3): 499-515.

Toros, Harmonie (2008), 'Terrorists, Scholars and Ordinary People: Confronting Terrorism Studies with Field Experiences', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 1(2): 279-292.

Uvin, Peter (2001), 'Reading the Rwandan Genocide', *International Studies Review* 3(3): 75- 99.

Weiss, Thomas G. (2001), 'Researching Humanitarian Intervention: Some Lessons', *Journal of Peace Research* 38(4): 419-428.

Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (1996) (eds.) *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 340-353.