Ethics of Intervention: 
Anthropological Approaches

11.238J/21A.409J
Fall 2019
T 9:30-12:30
Room 3-133
Professor Erica Caple James

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Office hours: Thursdays, 10:30 am-12:30 pm, and by appointment

This subject is an historical and cross-cultural study of the logics and practices of intervention: the ways that individuals, institutions, and governments identify conditions of need or “states of emergency” within and across borders that require a response. The class will analyze the technologies and practices of intervention as modes of ordering, transforming, or governing the ‘targets’ of intercession – whether these targets are individual subjects, communities, infrastructures, or geographical environments. The course reviews theories of the state, globalization, and humanitarianism; power, policy, and institutions; gender, race, and ethnicity; and law, ethics, and morality. Students assess the ethical underpinnings of action and inaction in a variety of contexts that are increasingly visible and have long historical roots: colonial slavery and imperialist endeavors; missionaries and religious charitable work; human rights and refugee crises; war as military and humanitarian intervention; democracy promotion as ‘prevention’; disaster response and environmental protection; epidemics, medical missions, and public health, among others. Participants will ask the following questions: When is a response viewed as obligatory, when is it deemed unnecessary, and by whom? When is the intercession considered fulfilled? What rationales or assumptions are employed in assessing interventions?

This class will be run primarily as a reading seminar, with the instructor giving occasional lectures and commentaries that link theoretical materials to ethnographic case studies. All books are available at the MIT Coop and are on reserve at Rotch Library. Articles or book chapters are available on the course stellar site. Students will be evaluated on the basis of the following requirements:

1) Reading presentation (10% of the final grade): Each student is required to guide the discussion for at least one class session. Discussants will circulate an outline to all class participants that summarizes and critiques the main points of the readings and provides questions for in-class discussion. Outlines should be uploaded to Stellar by 7 pm, the night before class meets. Bring hard copies to class for each participant.

All students should prepare the readings for each class in the following manner:
Analyze each reading in terms of its argument, research methods, data (evidence marshaled to support the argument), and method of data analysis, theoretical contributions, and conclusions.

How does each reading frame its topic? For readings based on fieldwork, is the ethnography convincing? Why or why not? Could the text be improved? How does the writer’s style influence the strength or weakness of the argument?
2) **Reflection papers** (20%): **By 7 pm, the night before class**, upload to Stellar a 450–500-word analysis of the week’s readings—much like an op-ed for a newspaper—that generates questions for class discussion. These short papers may be used (in revised form) in your final research papers. *Bring hard copies to class.*

3) **Research paper** (40%): Each student will complete a 5000-word research paper (not including notes and bibliography) that applies the theoretical and ethnographic analyses studied throughout the course to a particular case study or to an original field project. *Paper topics and a preliminary bibliography should be uploaded to Stellar in writing on October 8.* Please use the *Chicago Manual Style* as a model for your bibliography. **Full references should be in the bibliography, not footnotes or endnotes.**

4) **Final paper presentation** (10% of the final grade): Students will give 10–15-minute presentations (depending on enrollment numbers) of their final research paper in the last class session.

5) **Class participation and attendance** (20%): Regular attendance and participation are essential in this class. If you must be absent, alert the instructor prior to your absence. More than one *unexcused* absence will affect your final grade.

Extensions on any work must be arranged well in advance with the instructor. **For every day that a paper is late without a granted extension, papers will lose a letter grade from the final grade.** Please take advantage of the Writing and Communication Center (WCC) at any stage in your writing at: WCC, 12-132, information: 617-253-3090; to speak to someone: 617-324-4858, *writing-center@mit.edu.*

**Student Support Services**
If you are dealing with a personal or medical issue that is impacting your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an exam, please discuss this with Student Support Services (S3). The deans in S3 will verify your situation, and then discuss with you how to address the missed work. Students will not be excused from coursework without verification from Student Support Services. You may consult with Student Support Services in 5-104 or at 617-253-4861. Also, S3 has walk-in hours Monday-Friday 9-10 am.

**Student Disability Services**
MIT is committed to the principle of equal access. Students who need disability accommodations are encouraged to speak with Kathleen Monagle, Associate Dean, prior to or early in the semester so that accommodation requests can be evaluated and addressed in a timely fashion. Even if you are not planning to use accommodations, it is recommended that you meet with SDS staff to familiarize yourself with the services and resources of the office. You may also consult with Student Disability Services in 5-104 or at 617-253-1674. If you have already been approved for accommodations, please contact me early in the semester so that we can work together to get your accommodation logistics in place.

**Statement on academic integrity:** In this class you are to present your own original ideas, and oral and written work that has been completed without collaboration with others. Be sure to cite
ideas that are derived from other sources accurately. If you have questions about how to cite sources properly, please consult the MIT handbook on academic integrity: http://web.mit.edu/academicintegrity/handbook/handbook.pdf or the instructor.

**Required Texts**
Vincanne Adams, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*
Michel Agier, *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*
Octavia Butler, *Dawn*
Stephen Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International*
Erica Caple James, ed., *Governing Gifts: Faith, Charity, and the Security State*
Erica Caple James, *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti*
Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*
Jarett Zigon, *A War on People: Drug User Politics and a New Ethics of Community*

9/10 Course Introduction

**Recommended background readings:**


9/17 Pastoral Power and the Modern State (of Exception)

Veena Das and Deborah Poole, “The State and Its Margins: Comparative Ethnographies,” in *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, Veena Das and Deborah Poole, eds., pp. 3–33.


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9/24 Human Rights and Secular Soteriology
Stephen Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International*


Film: *50 Years: Amnesty International*, 2011, 16 minutes

10/8 Race, Civil Rights, and Medicine

Note: Upload to Stellar your 1-2-page final research project proposal by 10/7 at 7 pm and bring a hard copy to class. The proposal should contain an initial project summary that includes your hypothesis or questions to be considered and a preliminary bibliography. We will discuss these in class and you’ll receive feedback from the instructor and fellow students.

10/15 No class, Columbus Day

10/22 Bureaucraft
Erica Caple James, *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti*

Film: *The Quake*, 2010, Frontline

10/29 Spaces of Exception
Michel Agier, *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*

11/5 Faith, Security, and Intervention

11/12 Affective Economies and Unnatural Disasters
Vincanne Adams, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*

Film: *The Storm*, 2005, Frontline

11/19 No class—AAA—Work on your final papers.

11/26 Drug Interventions
Jarrett Zigon, *A War on People: Drug User Politics and a New Ethics of Community*
Speculative Intervention
Octavia Butler, *Dawn*