

Critical Interventions:
Decoloniality in Humanitarian Action: Dilemmas, Challenges and Innovation
INTD 398
Tentative Course Syllabus Fall 2023
(Please check MyCourses for the official syllabus)

Course Instructor: Rachel Kiddell-Monroe
Class times: Monday 1-230pm and Wednesday 1-230pm.
Room: TBD
Instructor: Professor of Practice Rachel Kiddell-Monroe
Teaching assistant: Samuel Oyugi
Office hours: Monday 3-4.30 pm
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Recognition:

McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

1. Course Description

“The world is collapsing in on itself,” says Professor Solomon Benatar. He is referring to the cascading crises caused by climate change, racism and socio-political polarization. The impact on people most vulnerable to these crises is already devastating and will only continue to escalate. Meanwhile, the current humanitarian system is failing, unable to meet the needs of today, let alone tomorrow.

Globally, people are mobilizing to confront this massive upheaval and collectively strive to reach a new status quo. To play its role in alleviating suffering and restoring dignity, the humanitarian system will have to undergo a fundamental transformation, the beginnings of which are starting to emerge. We are obliged to stretch ourselves beyond pragmatism and look to the ethics of our actions. We know that today’s humanitarian system remains anchored in a colonial structure and mindset, embedding racism and social injustice into our humanitarian practices. In response to this growing consciousness, we are moving into, what I call, fourth wave humanitarianism.

This course will take students on a deep-dive into the colonial history of humanitarianism, efforts at decoloniality¹ and the drivers of the current discourse. We

¹We will be discussing the intentional use of decoloniality as opposed to decolonization throughout this course in Week 6. Decolonization is a concrete action which “brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools.” (Tuck and Yang, 2012). Decoloniality, on the other hand, is a mindset or praxis; it is an orientation toward culture marked by a commitment to route out that

will critically analyze humanitarian action through practical case studies of major humanitarian contexts and their impact on humanitarian action today. Through ethics, we will look at what decoloniality and systems change means for humanitarian action moving forward. We will look at some of the key challenges to the “system” and discuss how the fourth wave humanitarian action will take shape.

2. Course Overview

The course will introduce students to the root causes of key issues facing humanitarian action today. Through practical case studies and theory, students will identify, analyze and reflect on cross cutting dilemmas and challenges facing practitioners and policy makers alike.

Using case studies, lectures and the instructor’s first-hand experiences from 30 years of humanitarian work, these seminars will encourage students to engage with the issues from both a theoretical and a practical perspective.

After a discussion about our role as individuals and a collective in addressing these issues, the course will be divided into three parts:

- Part 1: Unpacking humanitarianism
- Part 2: Decoloniality and humanitarian action
- Part 3: Towards decolonized humanitarian action

We will consider in depth the history and present of humanitarianism, and the drivers of the current discourse on decoloniality. We will critically analyze humanitarian action through practical case studies of major humanitarian contexts and their impact on humanitarian action today. Focusing on ethics, we will look at what decoloniality and systems change means for humanitarian action moving forward. We will look at some of the key challenges to that “system” and discuss the future of humanitarian action in what I call the fourth wave of humanitarianism.

Unique to this course will be the translation of theory to action. Students will learn how to develop policy briefs, opinion pieces and proposals to help turn the learning from the course into meaningful humanitarian impact. A running theme of the seminar series will be the Team Humanitarian Project developed by students to bring the principles of decoloniality and humanitarian action into contexts being faced by people and communities today.

which remains in culture, education, society, and so on from the colonial era (Mignolo, Walter D. and Katherine E. Walsh. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Duke University Press, 2018).

Each week, there will be two classes of 1.5 hours.

- Monday *Perspectives Class*: This class will be composed of lectures, speakers and/or panels on the subject of the readings
- Wednesday *Inquiry Class*: This class will be led by students, with presentations on the readings, with support from the course lecturer and teaching assistant.

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify the root causes of the major issues facing humanitarian action today. Through practical case studies and theory, students will identify, analyze and reflect on cross cutting dilemmas and challenges facing practitioners and policy makers alike.
- Appreciate the convergences and divergences between theory and practice in humanitarian action
- Develop and present persuasive oral and written arguments on the transformation of humanitarian action. Students will learn how to develop policy briefs and how to translate the learning from the course into meaningful humanitarian impact. A running theme of the seminar series will be the team project developed by students.
- Recognize their own responsibility and agency in the decoloniality debate.

The teaching methods include:

- Weekly lectures to introduce key terms and theoretical debates.
- Class discussions and presentations.
- Guest lectures and panels.
- Guided reading and independent research.
- Facilitating the group humanitarian project.

Method of Evaluation

Your course grade will be assessed as follows:

Course Assignments	Course grade percentage
Participation	15%
Weekly journal entries	15%
OpEd	20%
Policy Brief	
- Outline	10%
- Full	20%
Group Humanitarian Project Proposal	20%

Important Dates

30 August Course begins

4 September	Labour Day – no class or office hours
13 September	Class presentations begin
20 September	Group humanitarian projects launched
25 September	Classes cancelled – no office hours
9-11 October	Reading week - no class or office hours
18 October	OpEd due @1pm - hard copy in class
1 November	Outline of policy paper due @1pm – hard copy in class
6-8 November	THP Team Prep Week - no class
22 November	Full policy brief due @1pm hard copy
4 December	Group humanitarian project due @1pm - hard copy in class

Readings

Required readings are identified below under each seminar. I have tried to keep readings between 1.5 and 2.5 hours per week, ensuring a mix of academic, visual and commentary type articles. This field is emerging which means we need to think beyond our usual research go tos, and to listen and read from beyond our dominant paradigm.

All readings are available through the McGill library and on the internet. Please use your internet skills if a link is broken - all the articles are easily findable through a quick search online. Since many of the issues we will discuss are current, I will post articles and video links relevant for the courses in MyCourses throughout the seminar series. Students are also encouraged to share articles they come across relevant to what we are discussing in class.

3. Description of Course Assignments

3.1 What You Will Be Doing Every Week

- **Participating in class**

Participation will be assessed in two ways:

- *Attendance and engagement.* This course requires us all to be practical and constructively critical. In order to get the most out of it, students need to commit themselves to being actively engaged, collaborative and participative. Attendance at courses in person is therefore mandatory and at the end of each class there will be a question for students to respond to on MyCourses which can only be answered if you are present.
- *Class presentation on readings.* The class will be divided into 9 teams and each team will be responsible for presenting the week's readings. The whole team gets the same grade. Extra points for creativity!

Your participation grade will be assessed based on your attendance in the Perspectives class and your engagement in the team work for the Inquiry class. If your participation is excellent (you show a command of the assigned readings, some originality and/or intellectual curiosity in the discussion, and your arguments are pertinent, clear and solid) you will receive an A-range grade; if it is good to very good (your remarks are competent, interesting, and well-articulated, even though you may not have fully digested the material) you will receive a B-range grade.

The participation grade drops by 1% if a student misses 10% of the classes, 2% for 20% of classes etc. Classes missed for valid reasons approved by the Course lecturer or the TA are excluded.

- **Journaling**

This is a reading intensive course and the weekly journaling entails deliberate, careful preparation, focused attention and is measured in quality not quantity. Active participation of all students is essential to achieving a successful seminar series.

Students are required to write short journal entries (maximum 1 page, single-spaced) each week on the assigned readings. These journal entries should be your reflections on the assigned readings/audiovisual materials. There is no right or wrong, and your reflections need to be thoughtful and well presented. *Each journal entry should include one key question the week's readings raised for you.*

These journal entries should be sent via email to the Course Instructor and teaching assistant by 10am each Monday. If you miss the 10am deadline, then you will receive a 0 for that week. A journal entry that is substantive and shows solid engagement with the readings will receive a + (positive sign). Journal entries that are filled with lengthy quotations from the readings, or only describe the reading content (instead of but engaging critically with it) will receive a – (negative sign). You need to receive at least 8 + evaluations to receive an A-range grade, and 7+ evaluations to receive a B-range grade.

3.2 Graded Assignments

Note: This course promotes values of community, connection, care and transparency. Therefore, there is a zero tolerance policy for the use of Chat GPT or other AI to write any of your assignments. If you plan to do so, this is not the course for you.

- **Op-ed (20%)**

An essential tool of the policy maker. Take time to read some different Op-Eds and study how to they are written. The Op-ed is due on **18 October 2023**. It must have a clear thesis,

identify key terms and focus on a particular humanitarian issue which raises issues of decoloniality and ethics. Detailed references for the Op-Ed will be required.

- **Policy brief (30%)**

A key skill in humanitarian work is being able to develop a policy paper which draws out a key argument and supports it with persuasive and well-supported arguments. Students will be asked to produce one policy paper directly on an issue covered during the course and will be guided to many different policy papers which can be used as models.

The policy brief exercise is in two parts:

- *Outline* (10%)
Students must submit a 2 or 3 page proposal due at 1pm on **1 November 2023**. The outline should include a thesis statement, a skeleton structure for the introduction, main argument and conclusion plus an annotated bibliography of texts being used.
- *Full Policy Brief* (20%)
It should be between 3 and 5 pages and is due at 1pm on **22 November 2023**.

- **Team Humanitarian Project (THP) (20%)**

Through team work, the student will develop a project proposal for a humanitarian project of the team's choice linked to the course, together with a budget.

The choice of theme is due on **4 October 2023**, the outline GHP is due on **18 October 2023** (5%) and the final proposal is due by **27 November 2023** with a 5-7 minute presentation of the project proposal to the class in week 14 (15%)

4. Course Policies

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures" (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

All slides, video recordings, lecture notes, etc. remain the instructor's intellectual property. As such, you may use these only for your own learning (and research, with proper referencing/citation) ends. You are not permitted to disseminate or share these materials; doing so may violate the instructor's intellectual property rights and could be cause for disciplinary action under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009, (<http://www.mcgill.ca/osd/>) to receive further information and assistance. However, please remember that the OSD has no authority to approve changes to course assignment due dates, to devise alternative assignments, or to waive course requirements.

Late policy

Written work is due at the start of class on the specified due dates. Late papers will be subject to a 5% penalty *per day, starting with the due date*, except in exceptional cases, with the instructor's prior agreement. Extensions will not be granted on the day an assignment is due, except in case of medical or family emergency, accompanied by appropriate documentation.

Format and style

Students are required to type their text in 12-point Times New Roman font with standard one inch margins. Please double space the text. Use single spacing for block quotations, footnotes, appendices and bibliographies. References and citations must follow a standard academic format. In-text citations are preferred. Include your name, date and title on the first page of your paper, and number and staple your pages. ***Proofread your drafts carefully before turning them in.***

Sensitive content Statement:

Content warning: Please be aware that some of the course content may be disturbing for some students. It has been included in the course because it directly relates to the learning outcomes. Please contact the instructor if you have specific concerns about this.