

Social justice: ethnographic insights (10 lectures)

Dr. Raphael Susewind, raphael.susewind@kcl.ac.uk

Social justice has long been at the heart of 'development' – alongside economic growth, environmental sustainability and accountable governance. Further, these other goals are often regarded as instrumental to justice: growth enables surplus for redistribution; sustainability ensures fairness to future generations; and accountability promotes more equitable shares.

Rather than debate 'social justice' in abstract terms, this course engages with embedded, ethnographic perspectives: why does injustice prevail; why do inequalities persist; why are states violent; how do people come to resist and mobilise for change; engage with the state; or turn to violent opposition? In listening to people's perspectives, understanding their beliefs and desires, the course also introduces the anthropological approach to development at large.

After a brief recap of relevant theory, the course reviews seminal ethnographic literature in the two main arenas through which people have attempted to advance social justice: the state and social movements, respectively. It concludes with a session to reflect on the ethics and politics of being embedded in projects for social justice while researching them.

Each of the main lectures introduces one seminal ethnographic monograph, drawn from a single country case. The accompanying weekly seminar sessions aim to provide context and critique through additional literature and comparisons with other parts of the world.

Please read book introductions (at least) before the lectures. This will enable you to engage and critique the arguments presented. Then read full texts as well as seminar readings before seminars. The additional resources are optional, in case something really intrigues you.

Rather than passively writing notes, as if to photocopy the text, you can improve your critical engagement by taking a step back and:

- Synthesising the argument in a single sentence;
- Articulating how it differs from alternative perspectives;
- Identifying the evidence used to support that argument;
- Raising questions, about the methodology, interpretation and justification.

1. Social justice and the perspective of anthropology

This introductory session will provide an overview of the course, recap key insights and questions from the 'introduction to development' module – in particular about the Capability Approach – and highlight the methodological benefits of anthropology. To further illuminate this theme, we consider ethnographic critiques of quantitative research that narrowly defines 'empowerment' and then measures the extent to which it is achieved by other women, via microfinance.

- Mosse, David, 2013: The Anthropology of International Development. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, 227-246

Contrasting readings for the seminar:

- Vera-Sanso, Penny, 2008: Whose money is it? On misconceiving female autonomy and economic empowerment in low-income households, *IDS bulletin* 39 (6), 51-59

Additional resources:

- Evans, Alice, 2014: “Women Can Do What Men Can Do”: The causes and consequences of flexibility in gender divisions of labour in Kitwe, Zambia, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40(5), 991-998.
- Gardner, Katy & Lewis, David, 2015: *Anthropology and development: Challenges for the twenty-first century*. Pluto (*chapter two*)
- Crewe, Emma & Axelby, Richard, 2013: *Anthropology and development: Culture, morality and politics in a globalised world*. Cambridge University Press (*chapter one*)
- Sen, Amartya, 2009: *The idea of justice*. Allen Lane

2. Bureaucracy

We begin our inquiry into state-led projects for social justice with innocent naivete – arguably a key ethnographic sensibility. Could one not simply say that states which intend to further social justice should develop appropriate policies, provide funds for it and task the bureaucracy with its implementation? Unfortunately, the latter step in particular is rarely that straightforward. To understand why, we have to unpack how implementation works. Who are said bureaucrats? How do they operate? And why is their work often so frustrating? These questions are explored in a recent but already classic piece of ethnography about these key actors in state-led development and social justice delivery:

- Gupta, Akhil, 2012: *Red tape. Bureaucracy, structural violence, and poverty in India*. Duke University Press

Contrasting readings for the seminar:

- Pritchett, Lant; Woolcock, Michael and Andrews, Matt, 2013. Looking like a state: techniques of persistent failure in state capability for implementation. *The Journal of Development Studies* 49(1): 1-18.

Additional resources:

- Bierschenk, Thomas & Olivier de Sardan, Jean-Pierre (eds), 2014: *States at Work: Dynamics of African Bureaucracies*. Brill
- Ferguson, James with Lohmann, L. 1994. “The anti-politics machine: ‘development’ and bureaucratic power in Lesotho.” *The Ecologist* 24(5)
- Evans, Alice, forthcoming. Amplifying Accountability by Benchmarking Results at District and National Levels, *Development Policy Review*.
- Ang, Yuen Yuen, 2016. *How China escaped the poverty trap*. Cornell University Press

- Hossain, Naomi, 2010. Rude Accountability: Informal Pressures on Frontline Bureaucrats in Bangladesh 41(5): 907–928.
- Kumar, Satendra, 2014. The Promise of Ethnography for the Study of Politics. *Studies in Indian Politics* 2(2): 237-242.

3. Education

If straightforward policy-to-implementation shortcuts tend not to work, perhaps we should adopt a more long-term perspective? Indeed: a second major narrative on state-led social justice projects concentrates on rather more indirect effects of state activity, namely the provision of universal education. If only everybody would attend school, then at last people would be skilled enough to find employment and aware enough to become proper citizens who fight for their rights; after a few generations, this will finally result in greater social justice – or so this particular narrative goes. A second classic ethnography re-evaluates how far the narrative of education holds – and when, why and for whom it breaks. Contrast these with World Bank narratives about the transformative power of education.

- Jeffrey, Craig; Jeffery, Patricia & Jeffery, Roger, 2010: Degrees without freedom? Education, masculinities and unemployment in North India. Stanford University Press

Contrasting reading for the seminar:

- World Bank, 2017. Realizing the Promise of Education for Development: Emerging Themes of World Development Report 2018. Washington, DC: World Bank.
<http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/122551487107699968/WDR2018-Themes.pdf>
- Longwe, Sara Hlupekile, 1998. Education for Women's Empowerment or Schooling for Women's Subordination? *Gender and Development* 6(2): 19-26.

Additional resources:

- Jeffrey, Craig, 2010. Timepass: Youth, class, and time among unemployed young men in India. *American Ethnologist*. 37(3): 465–481.
- Mische, Ann, 2009: Partisan publics. Communication and contention across Brazilian youth activist networks. Princeton University Press.
- Khoja-Moolji, Shenila, 2017. 'Trumping' Let Girls Learn. *Open Democracy*.
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/shenila-khoja-moolji/trumping-let-girls-learn>
- World Bank, 2018. World Development Report 2018. Washington, DC. World Bank.

4. The Violent State?

A third strand of thinking about the state and social justice refrains from both involved bureaucratic management and long-term endeavours such as educational reform. Instead, some posit that the state should act as a neutral arbiter between social groups. Our next ethnographies reveal that the

state (particularly the police) are rarely impartial vis-a-vis society, indeed often engages in injustice, land grabs, forced evictions and violence:

- Denyer Willis, Graham. 2015. *The Killing Consensus: Police, Organized Crime and the Regulation of Life and Death in Urban Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Contrasting reading for the seminar:

- Brass, Paul, 2003: *The production of Hindu-Muslim violence in contemporary India*. Oxford University Press.

Additional resources:

- Borras, Saturnino M Jr; Hall, Ruth; Scoones, Ian; White, Ben; & Wolford, Wendy, 2011. Towards a better understanding of global land grabbing: an editorial introduction. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 38(2).
- Borras, Saturnino M. Jr; Franco, Jennifer C.; Gómez, Sergio; Kay, Cristóbal, & Spoor, Max, 2012. Land grabbing in Latin America and the Caribbean. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(3-4):845-872.
- Brickell, Katherine, 2018. *Home SOS: Gender, Violence and Law in Cambodia*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Holtzman, Jon, 2016: *Killing your neighbors. Friendship and violence in Northern Kenya and beyond*. University of California Press
- Acemoglu, Daron and Robinson, James. 2012. *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*. Basic Books
- Rodgers, Dennis, 2009. Slum Wars of the 21st Century: Gangs, *Mano Dura* and the New Urban Geography of Conflict in Central America. *Development and Change* 40(5): 949–976.

5. Representation

The bureaucracy is frustrating, education only delivers for some, the police turns violent and partial – so should we just completely discount the state as a provider of social justice? Surprisingly enough, most people don't think so – especially poor and disadvantaged people. Rather than ending the first half of this module on a pessimistic note, our final instant ethnographic classic therefore explores the various ways in which the state, despite its flaws, remains a central point of reference for projects of social justice in the imagination of many.

- Banerjee, Mukulika, 2014: *Why India votes?* Routledge

Contrasting reading for the seminar:

- Heller, Patrick, 2001. Moving the State: The Politics of Democratic Decentralization in Kerala, South Africa, and Porto Alegre. *Politics & Society*, 29(1): 131-163.

Alternative readings:

- Fox, Jonathan, 2014. Social Accountability: What does the Evidence Really Say?, *World Development* 72: 346–361
- Kohli, Atul. 2012. *Poverty amid Plenty in the New India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nielsen, Kenneth Bo & Nilsen, Alf Gunvald (editors), 2016. *Social Movements and the State in India: Deepening Democracy?* London. Palgrave.
- Nugent, David, 1997: *Modernity at the edge of empire. State, individual, and nation in the Northern Peruvian Andes, 1885-1935*. Stanford University Press
- Tender, Judith, 1997. *Good governance in the tropics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University.

6. Class Formation

Despite the potential gains of more responsive governance, poor people do not always mobilise or even identify as a class. Rather than organise collectively, they may secure their individual material survival (e.g. jobs and services) by supporting political patrons. These rational coping mechanisms entrench ruling elites by curbing public critique and horizontal associations. So how do marginalized groups come to question and resist inequality?

- Koo, Hagen, 2001. *Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation*. London: Cornell University Press.

Contrasting reading for the seminar:

- Cornwall, Andrea; Oliveira, Creuze and Gonçalves, Terezinha (2013) ‘ “If You Don't See a Light in the Darkness, You Must Light a Fire”: Brazilian Domestic Workers' Struggle for Rights’, in Naila Kabeer, Ratna Sudarshan and Kirsty Milward, (eds) *Organizing Women Workers in the Informal Economy: Beyond the Weapons of the Weak* (London: Zed Books).
- Evans, Alice, 2017. *Politicising Inequality: The Power of Ideas*. Working Paper.

Additional resources:

- Auyero, Javier (2000) ‘The logic of clientelism in Argentina: An ethnographic account’, *Latin American Research Review* 35 (3): 55-81.
- Ciccariello-Maher, George (2016), *Building the Commune: Radical Democracy in Venezuela*. London: Verso.
- Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for autocracy: Hegemonic party survival and its demise in Mexico*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Postero, Nancy Grey (2007) *Now we are citizens: indigenous politics in post-multicultural Bolivia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Wolford, Wendy (2010) *This Land is Ours Now: Social Mobilisation and the Meaning of Land in Brazil*. Duke University Press.

7. **Transnational Protests**

One problem with limiting our understanding of social justice to projects of the state is the fallacy of methodological nationalism: neglecting regional influences. Their importance is clearly illustrated by ethnographies of transnational activism:

- Juris, Jeffrey, 2008: *Networking Futures: The movements against corporate globalization*. Duke University Press

Contrasting reading for the seminar:

- Murillo, M. Victoria & Schrank, Andrew, 2005. *With a Little Help from my Friends: Partisan Politics, Transnational Alliances, and Labor Rights in Latin America*. *Comparative Political Studies* 38(8).

Additional resources:

- Borras, Saturnino M.; Edelman, Marc & Kay, Cristóbal (editors) *Transnational Agrarian Movements Confronting Globalization*. Wiley
- Anderson, Lisa, 2011. *Demystifying the Arab Spring: Parsing the Differences Between Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya*. *Foreign Affairs* 90(3): 2-7.
- Brysk, Alison (2000) *From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).
- Della Porta, Donatella & Tarrow, Sidney G. 2005. *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Edelman, Marc, 1999: *Peasants against globalization. Rural social movements in Costa Rica*. Stanford University Press.
- Htun, Mala and Weldon, Laurel, 2012. *The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence Against Women in Global Perspective*. *American Political Science Review* 106 (3)
- Murillo, M. Victoria & Schrank, Andrew, 2005. *With a Little Help from my Friends: Partisan Politics, Transnational Alliances, and Labor Rights in Latin America*. *Comparative Political Studies* 38(8).
- Rice, Roberta and Van Cott, Donna Lee, 2006. *The Emergence and Performance of Indigenous Peoples' Parties in South America: A Subnational Statistical Analysis*, *Comparative Political Studies* 39(6): 709-732.
- Van Cott, Donna Lee, 2005. *From Movements to Parties in Latin America: The Evolution of Ethnic Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

8. Illiberalism

When considering social movements as vehicles for social justice, it is important to note the multiplicity of meanings that this term can take on – not always does it mean working for peace, environment and women’s empowerment. While the social movement literature long concentrated on activists who pursue these liberal goals, anthropologists have creatively adopted its instruments to the study of right-wing, sectarian and nativist protest as well, challenging the tendency to denounce rather than understand such movements. After all, their practices are also often articulated in the language of social justice – only that the aim isn't necessarily justice for all, and the means not necessarily protest, as this highly influential ethnography of an Islamist piety movement demonstrates:

- Mahmood, Saba, 2005: *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press

Contrasting reading for the seminar:

- Sen, Atreyee, 2007: *Shiv Sena women. Violence and communalism in a Bombay slum*. Indiana University Press. [introduction]

Additional resources:

- Corbridge, Stuart and Harris, John, 2013. *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu nationalism and popular democracy*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Hadiz, Vedi & Robison, Richard, 2005. *Neo-liberal Reforms and Illiberal Consolidations: The Indonesian Paradox*. *The Journal of Development Studies* 41(2).
- Hansen, Thomas Blom, 1999. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. Princeton University Press.
- Zakaria, Fareed. 1997. *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*. *Foreign Affairs*. 7(6): 22-43

9. Insurgency

Mainstream development narratives often construe social change as non-conflictual. Yet the preceding session demonstrated that the rhetoric, imaginary and practice of social justice has such strong appeal that it can inspire much more radical politics than thought possible by either politicians or scholars. Indeed, social change has often been fought for, violently. The final ethnography provides an engaged, ethically and conceptually challenging account that demonstrates violent pathways to social justice:

- Kunnath, George, 2012: *Rebels from the mud houses. Dalits and the making of the Maoist revolution in Bihar*. Social Science Press

Contrasting reading for the seminar:

- Holston, James, 2007: *Insurgent citizenship. Disjunctions of democracy and modernity in Brazil*. Princeton University Press. [introduction]

Additional resources:

- Gomes, James Flavian, 2015. The Political Economy of the Maoist Conflict in India: An Empirical Analysis. *World Development* 68: 96-123
- Jones, Gareth and Rodgers, Dennis, 2016. The Violence of Development. In J. Grugel and D. Hammett (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of International Development*. Palgrave
- Lawoti, Mahendra, 2007. *Contentious Politics and Democratization in Nepal*. SAGE.
- Lawoti, Mahendra and Pahari, Anup Kumar, 2009. *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-first Century*. Routledge.
- Skarbeck, David, 2011. Governance and Prison Gangs. *American Political Science Review* 105(4): 702-716. Or listen to the EconTalk podcast: http://www.econtalk.org/archives/2015/03/david_skarbek_o.html
- Shah, Alpa, 2013. The intimacy of insurgency: beyond coercion, greed or grievance in Maoist India. *Economy and Society* 42(3).
- Tilly, Charles and Tarrow, Sidney, 2015. *Contentious Politics*. 2nd Edition. Oxford University Press.

10. Activist Academics?

One underlying tension in many ethnographies of social justice introduced throughout this course – from staid bureaucracy to violent revolution, from electoral politics to nativist protest – has been the extent to which anthropologists should, could, or want to participate in the politics that they experience and write about. The final session explicitly reflects on these tensions, from ethical and political as well as methodological perspective.

- George, Susan, 2004: The global justice movement. Where it came from, where we hope its going. *Anthropology of Work review* 25(3-4), 1-9
- Crewe, Emma & Axelby, Richard, 2013: *Anthropology and development: Culture, morality and politics in a globalised world*. Cambridge University Press (*chapter two*)
- Gardner, Katy & Lewis, David, 2015: *Anthropology and development: Challenges for the twenty-first century*. Pluto (*chapter four*)