FALL 2020
FYSEM-UA 775 Ethics and Activism
M 2:00pm-4:30pm Location: Silver 102
Professor Aisha Khan (ak105@nyu.edu)
Office hours: M 5:00pm-6:00pm, T 10:00am-11:00am

Course Description

What is empathy? Does it aid or complicate activism? Does it influence scholarly activities such as ethnography? Working among communities, whether as scholars, journalists, human rights workers, or health care practitioners, requires grappling with positions or persons one may find sympathetic—or not. Either perspective is multidimensional, complicated because such work requires spending extended time with interlocutors. Fieldworkers must generate rapport, empathy, and intimacy with their subjects—but without losing objectivity. The ethics of such encounters hinge both on doing no harm and on doing good—through advocacy, opposition, or expressions that are not so straightforward. Doing no harm is a clear-cut ethical imperative. But do empathy, intimacy, and approval fall within the same categorical imperative? What happens when boundaries break down between researcher and subject, sympathy and ambivalence, rapport and incompatibility? This Colloquium explores exemplary cases from across the globe, giving particular attention to the production of knowledge—as text and as “activism” that engages the ambiguities and conventions that structure our societies and lived experience.

Learning Aims and Outcomes

a) To clarify the historically shifting category of “ethics” and “activism” in relationship to historical contexts, social formations and ideologies, and the relationships between doctrine and the vernacular.
b) To assess conventional assumptions about “identity” and the groups and individuals who embody different expressions of it.
c) To critically assess the theoretical and empirical research on ethics and activism from theoretical and ethnographic perspectives.
d) To demonstrate and refine students’ research skills by conducting a research project, where they will each prepare a case study, with the oversight of the instructor.
e) Reflect in written and oral expression the themes and issues covered in the class, and gain the confidence and expertise to articulate independent, informed opinions.
f) Evaluate, respond to, and critique given texts in clear prose, while learning to accept constructive criticism and to rewrite drafts based on suggestions.

Teaching and Learning Methodologies

This course consists of a seminar format that requires students to participate actively in class discussions. Considerable class time will be spent discussing different kinds of texts—historical, theoretical, ethnographic, and film—which will be placed in their relevant contexts
through short lectures given by the instructor at the beginning of each class meeting in order to introduce the material for discussion and analysis by the students. The class will seek refinement of student learning through guided research projects, training in oral and written reflection in class topics which will include leading discussions and peer review.

**Assignments**

1. Students will post online (NYU Classes) to the entire class a written, 1 paragraph reading response to class assignments each week by 12:00pm. I will collect a hard copy each Monday. Responses are required: their goal is to help you summarize and clarify your thoughts, stimulate classroom discussion, and establish an archive that you can consult in the future. Each response must include (i) a question about, or critique of the author’s argument, and (ii) your answer to your question, or your own point of view related to your critique. Responses are not in lieu of attending class and will not be counted if you are absent. (10% of final grade)

2. There will be two short papers, 5 double-spaced pages each.

   The first paper will be due about mid-term in the semester (see Schedule below), and will be based on a prompt that I ask you to discuss. (20% of final grade).

   The second paper will be due toward the end of the semester (see Schedule below) and will consist of your critique of your peer review partner’s term paper. I will provide detailed Peer Review Guidelines. The peer-review process is a required component of the drafting of the term paper (see below). On our penultimate class meeting date, students will select peer review partners, exchange draft essays, and return them with typed comments addressing argument, clarity, and persuasiveness. Each student will review their peer review partner’s draft and provide critical commentary. This will be work done outside of class time. The goal of this assignment is to increase your analytical and communication skills. (20% of final grade).

3. There will be one term paper, 10 double-spaced pages, due at the end of the semester (see Schedule below). I will provide guidelines. All students are required to workshop their topic, ideas, and bibliographies with me. Final papers will be peer-reviewed by another student in the class (see above). (Term paper = 30% of final grade. Annotated bibliography of term paper sources [I will provide guidelines] = 20% of final grade).

**Grading Policy: Assessment Method**

Assignment scores will be added together and given a letter grade according to the final grading scale:

100-95=A, 94-90=A-, 89-85=B+, 84-80=B, 79-75=B-, 74-70=C+, 69-65=C, 64-60=C-59-50=D, 49-0=F
Attendance and Submission Policies

1. All assignments must be submitted by their respective due dates, unless you have consulted with me beforehand. Otherwise, one point per day late will be deducted from the assignment.

2. Students are responsible for announcements made and materials distributed in class and online through our NYU Classes site. If you miss a class, please contact a classmate for missed announcements and content.

Rules on Electronic Devices

Please do not use cell phones during class since they distract from class discussion. You may use your laptop in class for class-related matters, but any other use of laptops may result in your no longer being able to bring it to class. Disregarding the rules about device use in class may result in a lowered grade: after the first warning it is at the instructor’s discretion to deduct up to three points from the final grade.

Writing

I urge you to schedule appointments with the Writing Center on campus.

Citing Sources

When listing references at the end of the paper, follow this format: Author (e.g., Doe, Jane), Date of Publication (e.g., 2018), Title (On a Clear Day You Can See Forever), Page Number (e.g., Pp.13-37), Publisher Location and Press (e.g., New York: New York University Press).

For in-text citations, please do the following: (Author’s Last Name Date of Publication: Page Number), e.g., (Doe 2018: 13). You may use any other standard, if consistent. If you have any questions about how to acknowledge sources or whether your use of sources is proper, please come see me during my office hours.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism occurs when you present the ideas and writings of others, including material found online, as your own. Anyone caught plagiarizing will fail the assignment, if not the course, and may encounter further disciplinary action through the university. Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original. Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the Internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious — for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea(s) without a reference to the source of the idea(s); or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects).
Students with Documented Disabilities
All NYU programs and curricula are bound by the Americans with Disabilities Act as well as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which require University classes to ensure that students of diverse abilities have equal access and opportunity. If this might apply to you, please contact Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at mosescsd@nyu.edu or +1-212-998-4980 to ensure that you have reasonable accommodation.

Email Policy
I am available on email (ak105@nyu.edu), but reserve a 24-hour period for responses. However, generally I reply to students’ email within a few hours. Students may inquire about meeting with me at times other than my office hours if those conflict with students’ class schedules. We will find a mutually possible date and time to meet.

Schedule of reading and assignments

PART I: The Challenge and the Issues

Week 1 Mon Sept 9 Introduction, overviews
Video clips: “Ethics,” Public Anthropology”

Week 2 Mon Sept 14 Introduction, overviews

Week 3 Mon Sept 21 Challenges and Issues from the Arts
Film clips from “Rashomon,” directed by Akira Kurowsawa (1954) and “The Outrage,” directed by Martin Ritt (1964).
PART II: Case Studies: Whose Voices, Whose Views?

**Week 4 Mon Sept 28** Guilt and Memories of Disaster: Bhopal, India  
Video clips: “Informants,” Public Anthropology

**Week 5 Mon Oct 5** Case Study, “Undesirables”: U.S. Drug Culture  
Reading: Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg, 2009, *Righteous Dopefiend*, Introduction (pp. 1-24), chapter 1 (pp. 25-46), chapter 2 (pp.47-78), chapter 3 (pp.79-116)

**Week 6 Mon Oct 12** U.S Drug Culture continued  
Reading: Bourgois and Schonberg, chapter 4 (pp. 117-141), chapter 5 (pp.142-182), chapter 6 (pp.183-208), chapter 7 (pp.209-240), Conclusion (pp. 297-320).

**Week 7 Mon Oct 19** Case study: the U.S. Abortion Debate  
Reading: Faye Ginsburg, 1998, *Contested Lives*, Part 1 (pp. 43-60), Part II (pp. 61-93)  
Short Paper #1 due!

**Week 8 Mon Oct 26** The U.S. Abortion Debate continued  
Reading: Ginsburg, Part II (pp.94-132), Part III (pp.133-200)

**Week 9 Mon Nov 2** Case Study, Race: Apartheid in South Africa  
Reading: Vincent Crapanzano, 1985, *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*, Introduction (pp.xiii-xxiv), chapter 2 (pp.16-47), chapter 6 (pp. 116-132), chapter 9 (pp.240-275)

**Week 10 Mon Nov 9** Case Study, Race: The Far Right and White Supremacy in Germany  
Reading: Cynthia Miller-Idriss, 2018, *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*, Introduction (pp. 1-23), chapter 1 (pp.24-50), chapter 2 (pp. 51-81) (Bobcat e-book)

**Week 11 Mon Nov 16** The Far Right and White Supremacy in Germany (continued)  
Reading: Miller-Idriss, chapter 3 (pp. 82-106), chapter 4 (pp.107-130), chapter 5 (pp.131-161), chapter 6 (pp.162-180), Conclusion (pp.181-194)

**Week 12 Mon Nov 23** The Perils of Gender and Sexuality  
Film clips of “Soma Girls,” directed by Nandini Sikand (2009)  
Guest speaker (Zoom): filmmaker and anthropologist, Professor, Nandini Sikand

**Week 13 Mon Nov 30** The Perils of Gender and Sexuality continued  

**Week 14 Mon Dec 7** Peer review partners presentations to class  
**Short paper #2 due!**

**Mon Dec 14** Reading Day

**Mon Dec 21** Term Papers Due (email to ak105@nyu.edu as Word doc attachment)