

The Politics and Anti-Politics of NGOs

Graduate Seminar, Spring 2014

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GG- 2765/ SOC 3442

Mondays 6:20-9:00 1 Washington Pl 401

Introduction:

Over the last two decades Non-Governmental Organizations, or NGOs, have played an increasingly active and visible role in international aid, disaster relief, development, post-conflict rebuilding, and local governance. They have received increasing amounts of aid and development dollars, in many cases supplanting more traditional actors, like governments. They have thus provided fodder for exciting and contentious academic and public debates marked by extreme positions: Are NGOs the solution to some of the world's most difficult problems, or are they trojan horses for neoliberal reforms? Do they represent a form of global civil society, or simply a circulation of elites? This course steps back and offers a broader perspective, by introducing students to the critical analysis of non-governmental organizations and their role in shaping global institutions and domestic political and social change. It locates NGOs within the web of transnational assemblages that they operate in, and pays attention to the experiences and practices of "local" populations that fall in and out of the category of "client." We draw from a range of literatures to inform our analysis: democratic theory around citizenship and civil society; theories of the state; critical studies of development; and analyses of social movements, institutions and global networks. We focus on a few emblematic areas of NGO activity, including economic development, humanitarian assistance, participation promotion, and transnational human rights campaigns, transnational NGOs and their consequences, including Human Rights, Fair Trade, and alter-globalization NGOs.

This course is also meant to be very challenging. That is, whether you are a Gallatin Senior, a former NGO professional, a MA student in public policy, or even a PhD student in sociology, this course is designed to unsettle assumptions and to occasion a fair bit of work. While you should be the ultimate arbiter of your own goals in this course, I would say there are at least three ways to think of what you should aim for in here:

- *If you are an advanced undergrad*, your goal should be to understand what the critical debates are about, how they relate to specific cases, and how they connect to other theories you have studied so far. A provocation: upon leaving this course, you should be able to discuss the difference and similarities between Ferguson's approach and the line of criticism in

Choudry and Kapoor.

- *If in a former (or current) life you were/are active in NGOs, your goal should be to connect the various lines of criticism here to lines of action rather than paralysis.*
- *If you are a PhD student in a social science, such as sociology, you should take this opportunity to think about both goals above, but should also work on understanding how the outlines of the debates here (which span anthropology, political science, and development studies) connect to broader debates in your discipline.*

IMPORTANT CAVEATS

A note on grading. My pedagogical philosophy and practice is one that privileges classroom dialogue over testing, openness in feedback over ranking of students. The Gallatin School was founded on the principles of educational exploration and encourages at least occasionally taking courses without grades. For these reasons I urge you to take this course for P/NP and experiment with the freedom of the classroom experience without grades. (I know you want to go law school, and or/ apply for a grant, but I'll write you a good letter if you survive this experience, OK?). In any case, the percentage of effort expected of you is described below, under "requirements."

A note on Required/Recommended and "Extra Sessions." Since this course serves multiple audiences there is some room for you to assemble your experience of the course to best fit your needs and interests. *All students in the course are expected to do all of the 'Required Readings' and attend all of regular sessions.* For some of the sessions there are additional 'recommended readings' – you may do any of them, or may keep this syllabus as a reference if you wish to return to some of these topics down the line. I can give you guidance as to what is more relevant to your interests as we go. There may be some 'extra sessions' throughout the semester: so as to make the course slightly less easy and a little more interesting for more advanced students, we will hold these extra sessions with detours that logically follow from our course. *Extra sessions are encouraged of PhD students, , but anyone is welcome to attend. They are self-contained units so you can choose to attend any one, or all of them. They do not make up for other requirements of the course and will not add "points" to your grade, should you choose to attend.*

A note on NGOs. The majority of the readings in this course take as premise that there are things profoundly wrong with the world and that NGOs are at least contaminated by those wrongs. Many of the readings take much more radical positions and are directly accusatory of the role of NGOs. You don't have to accept any of conclusions or premises of the authors we read, but in order for this to be a useful experience to you, you should at the very least accept the premise that

engaging these ideas is an intellectually worthwhile exercise. And to be clear, the purpose here is, paraphrasing Barbara Cruikshank, the idea is to hold non governmental action “to the fire,” but “not to destroy it or to discount it, but bring both its promise and dangers to the light.”¹

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This is a reading-intensive course and you should plan on spending **several hours a week** in reading for this course, and you should realistically assess the workload of this course before deciding to take it. You are expected to come to class having done the all reading and ready to actively participate in discussion. It is not assumed that students have background in NGOs, but it is assumed that you have a basic working background in social theory.

The most important requirement of this course is that you read the materials each week closely, carefully, and thoughtfully, and that you attend class as an active participant. Some of the weeks have more reading than others – the reading load generally varies inversely with its difficulty. In addition to general attendance/participation you will be expected to write weekly memos, prepare presentation(s) to the class, and two small writing projects. My assumptions in making these papers smaller and of lesser importance in the overall grade scheme is that you will devote your energies to careful reading (and thinking).

- **Memos (50 percent of your effort).** Before 6pm on Sundays (that is, the day before the seminar meeting), submit to the seminar distribution list an analytical memo of no more than 600-1,000 words. Comment succinctly on what you found most interesting, important, puzzling, infuriating, fundamental, etc. about the readings. Distributed over email in a timely manner, these abstracts will not only help you organize your response to the readings but will also serve as a guide for discussions.
- **Critical reviews / class presentations (30 percent of your effort).** In groups of 2-3 you will write and distribute in class a discussion guide for the week’s reading in which you briefly summarize some of the key ideas of the readings and offer some guiding questions for discussion. The discussion guide will also contain **a dictionary of key terms** used by the authors as well as a summary of questions submitted to the email list. I would like you to enter those terms on our class wiki. You will then briefly present some themes for discussion in the first **fifteen minutes** of class (this is a firm limit); you should **not** read your discussion guide, or feel each member of your group needs to present. Your presentation could consist of identifying particularly problematic passages in the text, contextualizing the debates implicit or explicit in the text, or preparing specific questions for discussion. I expect you to take some time preparing this presentation.

¹ Cruikshank. *The Will to Empower*. (1999): 125.

- **Small Paper (20 percent of your effort).** *You should negotiate a topic with me appropriate to your academic objectives.* These papers should be no more than 10 pages (2,500-3,000 words). Non-traditional projects and other media are welcome, but please let me know at least a month in advance of your intentions.

REQUIRED BOOKS:

1. Bebbington, Samuel Hickey, Diana C. Mitlin, editors. *Can NGOs Make a Difference? The Challenge of Development Alternatives.* 2008, Zed
2. Mark Schuller. *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs.* 2012, Rutgers.
3. Julia Elyachar. *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo,* Duke University Press, 2005
4. Millie Thayer. *Making Transnational Feminism: Rural Women, NGO Activists, and Northern Donors in Brazil.* 2009, Routledge.
5. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence. *The Revolution Will Not be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex,* South End Press, 2007
6. John Arena. *Driven from New Orleans: How Nonprofits Betray Public Housing and Promote Privatization,* U of Minnesota Press, 2012
7. Aziz Choudry, Dip Kapoor . *NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects.* Zed Books, 2013
8. Gay Seidman. *Beyond the Boycott: Labor Rights, Human Rights, and Transnational Activism* Russell Sage Foundation, 2007
9. Caroline W. Lee. *Disciplining Democracy: Public Engagement Experts and the New Participation Economy.* Oxford University Press 2014
10. Nina Eliasoph. *Making Volunteers: Civic Life after Welfare's End.* Princeton University Press, 2011

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND DISCUSSION

PART I: SETTING THE STAGE

January 27 – Introducing the Course

Jock Baker (2011) 'Challenges and debates in relief and development: interview with Harin Song', *Oxford Internationalist* No. 10 (6 pages).

Pranab Bardhan (2011) 'Who represents the poor? The limits of the NGO movement in global development', *Boston Review*, 19 July 2011 (3 pages).

Ferguson, James. (1994). "The Anti Politics Machine" in *The Ecologist*.

Feb 3 – Defining the Terrain: What are the Key Questions?

Re-read Week 1 Readings

William Fisher, 1997, "Doing Good? The Politics and Anti-Politics of NGO Practices. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26:439-464.

Kamat, Sangeeta. "The privatization of public interest: theorizing NGO discourse in a neoliberal era." *Review of International Political Economy* 11.1 (2004): 155-176.

Choudry and Kapoor, Ch 1.

Bebbington et al. Ch 1.

Eric Werker and Faisal Z. Ahmed (2008) "What Do Nongovernmental Organizations Do?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 22(2): 73-92.

Alvarez, Sonia E. "Beyond NGO-ization: Reflections from Latin America." *Development* 52.2 (2009): 175-184.

Recommended:

Symposium on NGOs in PoLAR: esp the introduction: Leve, Lauren, and Lamia Karim. "Introduction Privatizing the State: Ethnography of Development, Transnational Capital, and NGOs." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 24.1 (2001): 53-58.

Alvarez, Sonia. "The NGOization of Feminism"

Ferguson, James. *The anti-politics machine*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

PART II – PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES FACING NGOS

Feb 24th - Organizational Dynamics:

Susan Cotts Watkins, Ann Swidler, and Thomas Hannan (2012) 'Outsourcing social transformation: development NGOs as organizations', *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (31 pp.).

L. David Brown, Alnoor Ebrahim and Srilatha Batliwala (2012) 'Governing international advocacy NGOs', *World Development* 40 (6): 1098-1108.

Alexander Cooley (2010) 'Outsourcing authority: how project contracts transform global governance networks', in Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore and Susan K. Sell (eds) *Who Governs the Globe?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 238-265.

Ramya Ramanath (2009) 'Limits to institutional isomorphism: examining internal

processes in NGO-governmental interactions', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 38 (1): 51-76.

Thomas Parks (2008) 'The rise and fall of donor funding for advocacy NGOs: understanding the impact', *Development in Practice* 18 (2): 213-222.

Alexander Cooley and James Ron (2002) 'The NGO scramble: organizational insecurity and the political economy of transnational action', *International Security* 27 (1): 4-39.

March 3rd - The State/NGO Relationship

Ferguson, James. "Power Topographies" (Chapter 24) in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics* (2008): 383-399

Kim D. Reimann (2006) 'A view from the top: international politics, norms and the worldwide growth of NGOs', *International Studies Quarterly* 50 (1): 45-67.

Jude Howell (2012) 'Shifting global influences on civil society: times for reflection', in Heidi Moksnes and Mia Melin (eds) *Global Civil Society: Shifting Powers in a Shifting World*, Uppsala: Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development, pp.43-61.

Joshua W. Busby (2010) *Moral Movements and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 33-69.

Ole Jacob Sending and Iver B. Neumann (2006) 'Governance to governmentality: analyzing NGOs, states, and power', *International Studies Quarterly* 50 (3): 651-672.

Brent J. Steele and Jacque L. Amoureux (2006) 'NGOs and monitoring genocide: the benefits and limits to human rights panopticism', *Millennium* 34 (2): 403-432.

Chapters 4 and 5 in Choudry: "From Radical Movement to Conservative NGO and Back Again? A Case Study of the Democratic Left Front (DLF) in South Africa" by Luke Sinwell, and "Philippine NGOs: Defusing Dissent, Spurring Change;" *Sonny Africa*

PART III: NGOS in ACTION

March 10th - NGOs and Poverty Reduction/Economic Development

Julia Elyachar. *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo*, Duke University Press, 2005

Hickey, Sam. "The government of chronic poverty: from exclusion to citizenship?." *The Journal of Development Studies* 46.7 (2010): 1139-1155.

Bebbington, A. J., et al. "Decentring poverty, reworking government: social movements and states in the government of poverty." *The Journal of Development Studies* 46.7 (2010): 1304-1326.

Ferguson, J. (2007). „Formalities of Poverty: Thinking about Social Assistance in Neoliberal South Africa“. *African Studies Review*, 50(2): 71-86.

Recommended:

Bebbington, Anthony. "NGOs and uneven development: geographies of development intervention." *Progress in Human Geography* 28.6 (2004): 725-745.

March 24th: Economic Development II

John Arena. *Driven from New Orleans: How Nonprofits Betray Public Housing and Promote Privatization*, U of Minnesota Press, 2012

March 31st: Humanitarianism, Aid and Relief

"Is Foreign Aid Working?" *Prospect Magazine* 128, December 2006 (available on line), A Correspondence between William Easterly and Hilary Benn

Degnbol-Martinussen, John and Engberg-Pedersen, Poul (1999). *Aid: Understanding International Development Cooperation*. Zed Books. Chapters 1-4, 8.

Barnett, Michael. "Humanitarianism Transformed," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 3, no. 4 (December 2005).

Barnett, Michael and Thomas Weiss. "Humanitarianism: A brief history of the present." In *Humanitarianism in question: Politics, power, and global humanitarianism*, ed. Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, 1-49. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Calhoun, Craig. 2010. "The idea of emergency: Humanitarian action and global (dis)order." In *Contemporary states of emergency*, ed. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi, 29-59 [30pgs]. New York: Zone Books.

Barnett, Michael, and Martha Finnemore. 1999. "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations." *International Organization* 53 (4):699-732

Fassin, Didier. 2008. "Humanitarianism as a politics of life." In *Public Culture* 19(3): 499-520. [21pgs]

Francis Kofi Abiew (2012) 'Humanitarian action under fire: reflections on the role of

NGOs in conflict and post-conflict situations', *International Peacekeeping* 19 (2): 203-216.

Deborah Avant (2007) 'NGOs, corporations and security transformation in Africa', *International Relations* 21 (2): 143-161

Recommended:

Fassin, Didier. 2010. "Heart of Humaneness: The moral economy of humanitarian intervention." In *Contemporary states of emergency*, ed. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi, 269-295. New York: Zone Books.

Pandolfi, Mariella and Didier Fassin. 2010. "Introduction" in *Contemporary states of emergency* ed. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi, pp.9-29 [20pgs]. New York: Zone Books.

Laura Hammond (2008) 'The power of holding humanitarianism hostage and the myth of protective principles', in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds) *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, pp. 172-195.

Mosse, David and Lewis, David, eds. (2005) *The Aid Effect: Giving and Governing in International Development*. London: Pluto Press

April 7: NGOs and International Aid part II

Mark Schuller. *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs*. 2012, Rutgers.

April 14 and 21 International Activism I and II (to be divided according to our discussions up to that point)

Gay Seidman. *Beyond the Boycott: Labor Rights, Human Rights, and Transnational Activism* Russell Sage Foundation, 2007

Millie Thayer. *Making Transnational Feminism: Rural Women, NGO Activists, and Northern Donors in Brazil*. 2009, Routledge.

Sidney Tarrow (2005) *The New Transnational Activism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bebbington A, Kothari U, 2006, "Transnational development networks" *Environment and Planning A* 38(5) 849 – 866

Smith, Jackie (2012) 'Transnational activism and global social change, in Heidi Moksnes and Mia Melin (eds) *Global Civil Society: Shifting Powers in a Shifting*

World, Uppsala: Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development, pp. 9-26.

Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink (1999) 'Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics', *International Social Science Journal* 51 (159): 89-101.

Recommended:

Kathryn Sikkink (2005) 'Patterns of dynamic multilevel governance and the insider-outsider coalition', in Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow (eds) *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 151-173.

Sidney Tarrow (2005) *The New Transnational Activism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 15-56 [on 'Internationalism and contention' and 'Rooted cosmopolitans and transnational activists'].

Joshua W. Busby (2010) *Moral Movements and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 104-150 [on 'Climate change: the hardest problem in the world'].

R. Charli Carpenter (2010) 'Governing the global agenda: "gatekeepers" and "issue adoption" in transnational advocacy networks', in Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore and Susan K. Sell (eds) *Who Governs the Globe?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 201-

April 28 and May 5 Participation

Caroline W. Lee. *Disciplining Democracy: Public Engagement Experts and the New Participation Economy*. Oxford University Press 2014

Nina Eliasoph. *Making Volunteers: Civic Life after Welfare's End*. Princeton University Press, 2011

Selections from the *Participation and Its Discontents Blog*.

Dagnino, E. (2007). „Challenges to participation, citizenship and democracy: perverse confluence and displacement of meanings“. In A. Bebbington, S. Hickey and D. Mitlin (Eds). *Can NGOs make a difference: the challenge of development alternatives*. London: Zed Books.

Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, 2001, "The Case for Participation as Tyranny," pp. 1-15, in *Participation: The New Tyranny?*, Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, eds. New York and London: Zed Books.

Baiocchi, Gianpaolo and Ernesto Ganuza. "How and When Did Participation become Neoliberal?" (2014).

White, Sarha. "Depoliticising development: The uses and abuses of participation." Volume 6, Issue 1, 1996

Leal, Pablo A." Participation: the ascendancy of a buzzword in the neo-liberal era." Volume 17, Issue 4-5, 2007

May 12 Social Change and Putting it All Together

Incite! Women of Color Against Violence. *The Revolution Will Not be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex*, South End Press, 2007

Is good policy unimplementable? Reflections on the ethnography of aid policy and practice D Mosse *Development and change* 35 (4), 639-671

Mitlin, Diana, Sam Hickey, and Anthony Bebbington. "Reclaiming development? NGOs and the challenge of alternatives." *World Development* 35.10 (2007): 1699-1720.

Selections from Choudry and Kapoor, and from Bebbington.

PART IV: ADDITIONAL TOPICS

Accountability

Michael Edwards and David Hulme, *Beyond the Magic Bullet: NGO Accountability and Performance in the post-Cold War World* (1996) Chapters tbd.

Hugo Slim, "By What Authority? The legitimacy and Accountability of Non governmental organizations," 2002 (<http://www.jha.ac/articles/a082.htm>)

David Hulme and Michael Edwards, Eds., *NGOs, States and Donors: Too Close for Comfort?* Chapters tbd

Hans Peter Schmitz, Paloma Raggio and Tosca Bruno-van Vijeijken (2012) "Accountability of Transnational NGOs: Aspirations vs. Practice." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. 41(6): 1175-1194.

Alnoor Ebrahim (2003) "Accountability in Practice: Mechanisms for NGOs." *World Development*. 31(5): 813-829. 6 7