HUMAN RIGHTS: LOCAL AND GLOBAL
Prof. Vasuki Nesiah

Class Room & Hours: Room 206, 194 Mercer Street; Wednesdays 11:00-1:45
Room & Office Hours: Room 614; Thurs. 12:15-2:15 AM; Friday: 2:30-4:30 PM (By appointment)

The term ‘International Human Rights’ invokes the notion of universalism as background presupposition, as practice and as promise. Yet human rights means something very different in different political contexts. How does the tension between supranational definitions of human rights and the situated knowledges of particular contexts get articulated? What are the harmonies and disharmonies between global and local practice? How do different locals relate to each other? How are questions of empire implicated in the human rights field? This course approaches these questions by looking at how human rights is invoked and negotiated in the United States and Sri Lanka in areas such as freedom of religion, women’s rights, human rights and counter terrorism and labor rights.

REQUIRED TEXTS:
Nayomi Munaweera, Island of a Thousand Mirrors (2014)
Ambalavaner Sivanandan, When Memory Dies (1997)

All other readings can be accessed through the ‘Resources’ section of NYU classes.

OPTIONAL TEXTS:
Sri Lanka
Non-Fiction
- Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, Unmaking the Nation (2009)
- Neloufer De Mel, Women and the Nation’s Narrative (2001)
- Sharika Thirangaman, In My Mother’s House (2013)

Fiction
- Michel Ondaatje, Anil’s Ghost (2011)
- Shyam Selvadurai, Funny Boy (1997)
- Shehan Karunatilaka, Chinaman (2012)
- Shyam Selvadurai, Cinnamon Gardens (1999)
Human Rights

**REQUIREMENTS/GRADING**
Each of the following components of the final grade will count for 25%

1. **CLASS PARTICIPATION**
   Punctual attendance and active participation is key to your success in this course. Come to class prepared; this means you would have read and thought about the readings and will come to class ready to contribute to a collective exploration of the issues they raise.
   As you undertake your readings, highlight a passage or argument from the readings that raised an interesting question or comment regarding the theme for the day and come to class prepared to discuss.
   If you cannot attend because of illness or an emergency of some kind, please email me in advance. Unexplained absences will affect your grade.

2. **RESPONSE PAPERS**
   The primary aim of this assignment is to give you an opportunity to critically reflect on the readings prior to class so that your contribution to class discussion will be thoughtful and informed. Each paper should offer a brief summary of each of the readings assigned for that day – these are likely to lead to 2-5 page papers on most days. They should be submitted by the morning before the relevant class discussion takes place. Papers should be emailed as word documents or pdf documents.

3. **CLASS PRESENTATION AND GROUP PROJECT**
   Students should work in groups to take up a case from each country in one of the four thematic areas and assess the values and constraints of the international human rights framework in advancing ‘the interests of justice’.

4. **FINAL PAPER**
   **Substantive focus:** You are free to use outside material but the paper should also be anchored in readings from the course that are most relevant to the topic you are writing on. The paper should advance arguments with analytical rigor and insight, and assess and situate those arguments in conversation with background debates on that topic.

   **Format and deadlines:** The paper should be approximately 12-15 pages long, in times font, double-spaced with one-inch margins. The will be due on Friday, May 15\(^{th}\) and should be submitted through ‘turnit-in’ on Blackboard. A copy should also be emailed to me.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES/LEARNING GOALS**
Students should develop familiarity with central debates in the human rights field in the US and Sri Lanka. They should also develop the ability to critically analyze the varied ways in which human rights discourse is invoked, negotiated, and contested, and the stakes these engagements may hold for different agendas for social change

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY** (including plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling/recycling coursework & cheating): Consult [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html)
1. January 28th

Introduction:

2. February 4th

Sri Lanka: Two windows into the Political Context
- Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy by S. J. Tambiah
- Island of a thousand mirrors by Nayomi Munaweera

3. February 10th: 5:00 pm “Who Enjoys Human Right in Abu Dhabi?” 20 Cooper Sq.; 4th Floor

3. February 11th: Freedom of religion
- Framing essays:
- USA:
  - Hassan v. City of New York (http://ccrjustice.org/hassan)
  - ACLU, Blocking Faith, Freezing Charity (2009)
- Sri Lanka:

4. February 18th Labor rights.
- Framing essays:
- USA:
  - Local 1330 v. US Steel

**Sri Lanka:**

5. **February 25th. Women’s rights.**
   - Framing essays:
   - **USA:**
     - Nancy Fraser, *Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History* (2009)
   - **Sri Lanka:**
     - Neloufer De Mel, Excerpts from *Women and the Nation’s Narrative* (2001)

6. **February 27th. The Future of The Left in Sri Lanka, Panel in NYU South Asia Conference**
   - 1-3 p.m. Institute for Public Knowledge, 20 Cooper Square, 5th Floor
     - V. V. Ganeshananthan, *What Kind of Democracy: Rebuilding Citizenry*
     - Fathima Cader, *How the Light Gets In: Canvassing Muslim Politics in Contemporary Sri Lanka*
     - Thushara Hewage, *Anti-corruption and the Left: Reflections on a Democratic Idiom*
     - Kanishka Goonewardena, *Electoral Politics, Social Movements and Left Political Prospects*
       Moderator: Vasuki Nesiah, New York University

7. **March 4th. Human rights and Counter Terrorism**
   - Framing essays
   - **USA:**
   - **Sri Lanka:**
     - Center for Policy Alternatives et. al., *Joint Civil Society Memorandum to the Human Rights Council and the International Community* (2014)

8. **March 11th. Sri Lanka: Legacies of Conflict**
9. March 12th - March 22nd  Field Trip in Sri Lanka
   Shared classroom learning with students from University of Colombo in the morning and
   afternoon site visits to NGOs working on Freedom of Religion, Labor Rights, Women’s
   Rights and Human Rights in relation to Counter Terrorism. Detailed schedule to follow.

10. March 25th  Meetings in Thematic Clusters

11. April 1st  Critical Engagements with Human Rights
   - Susan Marks, ‘Four Human Rights Myths’ (2012) Law, Society and Economy Working
     Papers 10/2012 (London School of Economics)
     Rights and Empire’s Embrace: A Lain American Counterpoint” in Wasserstrom,

12. April 8th  Local and Global: Human Rights in Transnational Context
   - Johanna Simeant, Interpreting the Rise of International Advocacy, Humanity (2014)
   - Kathryn Sikkink, Introduction of The Justice Cascade (2011)
   - Stephen Hoppggod, Excerpts from The Endtimes of Human Rights (2013)
   - Jacques Ranciere, “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man? (2004), The South Atlantic
     Quarterly, Volume 103, Number 2/3

13. April 15th  Field Visit to the Center for Constitutional Rights

14. April 22nd  Group Meetings with Professor
   1. 11:00_Women’s Rights Group
   2. 11:30_Labor Rights Group
   3. 12:00_Freedom of Religion Group
   4. 12:30_Human Rights and Counter Terrorism

15. April 29th  Class Presentations
   1. 11:00-12:15_Women’s Rights
   2. 12:30-1:45_Labor Rights

16. May 6th  Class Presentations
   1. 11:00-12:15_Freedom of Religion
   2. 12:30-1:45_Human Rights and Counter Terrorism

17. May 8th  Wrap-up discussion and celebration!