

ANTH7031: Current themes in Social Anthropology: Law and Human Rights

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Anthropologists have long been concerned with social order and the institutions, persons, and forms of authority that contribute to its maintenance (or, indeed, its disruption). While early anthropologists debated whether or not stateless societies could be said to 'have' law, today's legal anthropologists are more likely to study the interaction of legal regimes, including local, religious, and international legal norms, which may be independent, mutually reinforcing, or even at odds. This course introduces students to the anthropology of law, with a particular focus on the implications of the recent rise of human rights discourse in both scholarly and popular circles. By examining legal anthropology through the growth of (and resistance to) rights-based claims, we will consider such themes as anthropology's historic (and, arguably, ongoing) colonial legacy; the question of universal versus relative values; the constraining (and liberating) effects of legal language; and the existence (or otherwise) of a discrete legal sphere.

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