

LT 225 Children, Rights and Storytelling

Seminar Leader: Kerry Bystrom

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Class times: Wednesdays 14:00-17:15

Office Hours: Tuesday 13:30-14:30 or by appointment

Course Description

Children are both specifically vulnerable and highly symbolic figures, requiring extra protection and lending themselves to certain kinds of policy and advocacy. In this course we will explore the international systems and structures set up for protecting children's rights, the way activists and allied writers and artists have historically used child cases to motivate action for children's and wider human rights, and current issues and challenges in child protection. Across the course we will pay special attention to narrative and visual storytelling as a part of human rights work, exploring not only legal conventions but also testimony, novels and films. After surveying the history and current outlines of the international rights regime and institutions, we will study two important historical cases: the "disappeared" children of the Dirty War in Argentina and the Australian Stolen Generations. We will then turn to the key contemporary topic of protecting children from armed conflict—whether as child soldiers, as civilians in conflict zones, as victims of forced transfer, or as asylum seekers. As part of the OSUN Network Collaborative Course "Children's Rights," we will also learn with experts and students from across Bard, Al Quds Bard and American University of Central Asia about children's rights issues impacting partner campuses. In addition to a written exam and one essay, students will in small groups develop a research and advocacy report aimed at a human rights treaty body and present this at a joint student conference at the end of the semester.

Required books

- Abani, Chris *Song for Night*
- Beah, Ishmael *A Long Way Gone*
- Luiselli, Valeria *Lost Children Archive*
- Pilkington, Doris *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*

Personal copies of the listed books (hard copy or digital) should be purchased at a local bookstore or on-line. At least one copy of each required course text is also available on the Library Reserve Shelf. Further required readings can be found as files in our Brightspace page [B].

Requirements

- Active and informed participation in all class sessions and activities
- One mid-term examination
- One critical essay
- Group research and advocacy report and presentation

Attendance and Participation

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Additional absences may be excused with the permission of the instructor and pending agreed-upon make-up work or (when possible) remote participation. Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Please note: This class is a seminar and is therefore dependent not only on you actually being in class but on the quality of thought and energy you bring. Class sessions often include brainstorming and writing periods, in which you may work alone or with a partner. You will also be asked to select passages, circulate discussion questions or prepare mini-presentations in advance of the class. You are expected to engage in all of these activities. It is crucial that you prepare adequately for each class and bring hard copies of the text(s) we will be discussing with you to the seminar meeting.

Mid-term examination

This course has an in-class mid-term written examination which will include short answer questions, passage identifications, and similar.

Written Essay:

This course has one written essay assignment of 5-6pp or 1500-2000 words. The essay will be keyed to one specific primary text and course session as per the choice of each student. More detailed instructions will be circulated after the start of the course.

Group Research and Advocacy Report:

Students in all OSUN sections of this course will for a final project participate as stakeholders in a mock Committee on the Rights of the Child Review Process by preparing Thematic Stakeholder Reports (max. 3,000 words) in small groups. Students will present the reports at a conference in Berlin on May 7 and 8, 2025. Preparatory steps towards this final project include joint sessions learning about the Committee on the Rights of the Child as well as an (ungraded) progress report. Full information about this assignment can be found in the separate Children's Rights Final Assignment Workbook, available in Brightspace.

Academic Integrity

In this course, we aim to conduct ourselves as a community of scholars, recognizing that academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others; that is a vital part of academic life. However, you are also obligated to document every occasion when you use another's ideas, language, or syntax. When you use another's ideas or language—whether

through direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase—you must formally acknowledge that debt by signaling it in the MLA parenthetical format (<http://www.mla.org/style>). Please come to see me if you have any questions about when and how to cite. Please note that Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Grade Breakdown

Mid-term Examination: 25%

Critical Essay: 25%

Research and Advocacy Report and Conference Presentation: 30%

Participation (including informal assignments): 20%

Around the time of Spring Break you will receive a mid-term grade via email. Your final grades will be released in May.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Schedule

Please note that this schedule is provisional; dates may change and it is your responsibility to stay up to date

Week One

Wednesday January 29

Introduction: Why Children? Child Figures, Humanitarianism and Human Rights

Required Readings:

- Bhabha, “The Child: What Kind of Human?”
- Suski, “Children, Suffering and the Humanitarian Appeal”

Recommended Readings:

- Stephens: “Children and the Politics of Culture”

Week Two

Wednesday February 5

A Modern History of Children’s Rights

***Online Zoom meeting from 15:45-17:15 only**Additional time will be made up during Student Conference Week*

Required Readings:

- [Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child](#)
- Marshall, “Humanitarian Sympathy for Children in Times of War and the History of Child’s Rights, 1919-1959”
- Morris, Chapter Two, from *The Origins of UNICEF: 1946-1953*

Informal Assignment: Each student must each identify in advance of the class session one child rights issue and connected country they are interested in researching for the final report

Week Three

Wednesday February 12

The Legal and Institutional Framework for International Children's Rights: the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Additional Protocols, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, and the relationship to national implementation

***OSUN Lecture, Prof. Venera Urbaeva (American University of Central Asia, UNICEF) ***

Required Readings/Shared OSUN Assignment:

- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Skelton and Collins, "The Committee on the Rights of the Child"
- Additional Readings TBC

Week Four

Wednesday February 19

The Legal and Institutional Framework cont'd *and* Human Rights and Storytelling

OSUN Lecture cont'd

Required Readings:

- Keck and Sikkink, "Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics"
- Schaffer and Smith, "Conjunctions: Life Narratives in the Field of Human Rights"
- Higonet, "Child Witnesses: The Cases of World War I and Darfur"

Shared OSUN Assignment:

Choose *one* of the states below and read through the listed set of official materials compiled during the last periodic review by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (NB: the USA is not a State Party to the CRC and therefore has no documentation available)

- Kyrgyzstan (2023): [Human Rights Watch submission](#); [country report](#); [concluding observations](#)
- Germany (2022): [Human Rights Watch submission](#); [country report](#); [concluding observations](#)
- Palestine (2020): [Human Rights Watch submission](#); [country report](#); [concluding observations](#)

Week Five

Wednesday February 26

Argentina's "Disappeared" Children

Required Readings:

- Selection from *Nunca más* report
- FILM *The Official Story* (dir. Luis Puenzo, 1985)
- Arditti, "Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo"
- Taylor, "You are here: HIJOS and the DNA of performance"
- Lazarra, "Kidnapped Memories"
- Mattison, "[Atención!, Murderer Next Door](#)"

Week Six

Wednesday March 5

OSUN Keynote Panel: War Childhoods from Bosnia to Ukraine

Guest speakers: Iuliia Skubystka (confirmed) and Jasminko Halilovic (TBC)

Required Readings:

- FILM *A House made of Splinters* (dir. Simon Lereng Wilmont, 2022)
- Additional readings TBC

Week Seven

Wednesday March 12

Australia's Stolen Generations

Required Readings:

- Bringing Them Home Report, from Chapter 2: Tracing the History, "National Overview" and "New South Wales," pp 21-50
- Pilkington, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*
- Fejo-King, "The National Apology to the Stolen Generations"
- "Bringing them Home--20 years on" Report

Week Eight

Wednesday March 19

Mid-term examination (in-class)

***Please meet for a proctored examination from 14:00-15:30 only**Additional time will be made up during Student Conference Week*

Week Nine

Wednesday March 26

Child Soldiers (West Africa)

Required Readings:

- Machel, "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children," pp. 9-28 ("Introduction" and "Mitigating the Impact")
- Beah, *A Long Way Gone*

Recommended:

- Coundouriotis, "The Child Soldier Narrative and the Problem of Arrested Historicization"
- Schultheis Moore, "African Child Soldiers and Humanitarian Consumption"

Week Ten

Wednesday April 2

Child Soldiers (West Africa) cont'd

Required Readings:

- [Optional Protocol](#) on the involvement of children in armed conflict
- German Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Shadow Report Child Soldiers 2020"
- Abani, *Song for Night*

Advocacy and Research Report Progress Reports due **Friday April 4**

Week Eleven

Wednesday April 9

Unaccompanied minors seeking asylum (USA)

Required Readings:

- Bhabha, “Chapter 6: David and Goliath: Children’s Equal Battle for Refugee Protection” from *Child Migration and Human Rights in a Global Age*
- Ali, “Zero Sympathy: Unaccompanied Minors’ Rights in the US Legal System”
- FILM *Which Way Home* (dir. Rebecca Cammisa, 2009)
- Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive* first third

Recommended:

- Land, Libal and Chambers “The Human Rights of Non-Citizens”

SPRING BREAK April 16

Week Twelve

Wednesday April 23

Unaccompanied minors seeking asylum (USA) cont’d

Required Readings:

- Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive* (finish)
- “Unaccompanied: Alone in America” [website](#) and [short film](#)

Recommended Reading:

- James, “Listening to the Refugee: Valeria Luiselli’s Sentimental Activism”

Week Thirteen

Wednesday April 30

Student Advocacy and Research Topics

Required Readings TBC

Final Report due **Friday May 2**

Week Fourteen

Wednesday May 7

Conference Week

Conference events continue on **May 8**

A full list of activities for the conference week will be circulated before mid-term

Completion Week

Wednesday May 14

Hold for any needed make-up events