“Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines. But just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do the multiple acts of peasant insubordination and evasion create political and economic barrier reefs of their own. And whenever, to pursue the simile, the ship of state runs aground on such reefs, attention is usually directed to the shipwreck itself and not to the vast aggregation of petty acts that make it possible. For these reasons alone, it seems important to understand this quiet and anonymous welter of peasant action.”

——James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak (1985)

Course Description: While most international relations courses focus on the 1 percent of elites who hold power in formal political institutions, this course explores politics at the level of everyday people. How are power relations structured in a Malaysian village and how do the villagers affect economic development? How are social movements and digital activists transforming politics in Egypt? How have ordinary people exercised power in American politics? What role does digital technology play in advancing (or impeding) political change? Drawing on classic works of political anthropology, as well as more recent examples of transnational and digital activism, this course seeks to understand the deployment of power by everyday people.

Course Objectives: By the end of course students should possess an understanding of core concepts in international relations, a new perspective from which to theorize the mechanisms of political and social change, and a practical understanding of how transnational networks are influencing international affairs. Specifically, students will obtain:

• A critical perspective on core concepts in political anthropology and international relations.
• A broad understanding of the everyday practices that fortify important political outcomes including authoritarian rule, social revolutions, and democratic movements.
• A theoretical and empirical understanding of how global activist networks can effect political change.
• In-depth understanding of a single activist network, its accomplishments, and the ability to articulate strategies to increase the effectiveness of advocacy efforts.

A more general objective is to demonstrate that large-scale social and political forces can be productively analyzed from the bottom up.

Anatomy of the Class: A core component of the class (and making up a total of 55% of the grade) is student research on an advocacy network in international politics. In the initial part of the course, students will be exposed to examples of issue areas where individuals have built networks to disseminate information, mobilize political campaigns, raise funds, shape state
policies, build alliances, or engage in other types of activism. Students will learn to map these networks, describe their strategies for advancing social and political change, and assess their influence. Students will then choose an issue area for their research project. In this project, students will a) describe an issue-area in international relations, b) map the network of individuals and organizations that are working on this issue, c) describe the network’s strategies for advancing social and political change, d) describe major accomplishments and failures of the activists in this network, e) drawing on international relations theory and other cases, strategize ways to improve activists’ efforts. Students will be expected to share their research with their classmates through individual presentations during the final two weeks of class. In effect, the projects are a way for you to learn about people power through your own research as well as that of other students.

Required Texts (on reserve at Mugar Library):

Recommended Texts:

Course Requirements:

Participation (20%): The course will be run as a seminar. This format requires students to attend regularly, read diligently, and participate actively in class discussions.

Response Papers (3 x 5% = 15%): Student will write three short (1-2 pages, double-spaced, 1 inch margins) analytical response papers (RP) over the course of the semester. I will provide the paper prompts one week before the papers are due on 1/29, 2/19, 4/2. All papers are due in class. A grade rubric is at the end of the syllabus.
Midterm Paper (1 x 15% = 15%): In a short essay (4-6 pages), students will a) describe an issue-area in international relations, b) map the network of individuals and organizations that are working on this issue, c) describe the network’s strategies for advancing social and political change. Due February 26. Students must meet with me the week of March 16 to discuss their projects.

Presentations (2 x 10% = 20%): Each student will be assigned to a two-person group, which will be responsible for one 10 minute presentation on a social movement, NGO, or advocacy network of their choosing. Students will choose presentation dates on the first day of class. Each presentation should follow the same basic structure as their research project: a) describe individuals and organizations that are working on an issue international relations, b) describe their strategies for advancing social and political change.

Then, in the final two weeks of class, each student will be responsible for one 10-minute presentation on his or her research project, with another five minutes devoted to questions. Final presentations are on 4/23 and 4/30. Students using PowerPoint or other presentation software must email their presentation to the instructor at least 3 hours prior to class, or bring the file to class on a flash drive. A grade rubric for the presentations is at the end of the syllabus.

Final Paper (30%): One long essay (15 pages) building on the midterm, but extending the analysis to d) describe major accomplishments and failures of the activists in this network, e) drawing on international relations theory and other cases, strategize ways to improve activists’ efforts. Due 5/7 by 5pm.

Late Work: Late submission of assignments will result in your grade incurring an automatic half-point deduction per day beginning with the assignment deadline.


Academic Misconduct: Plagiarism and cheating are serious offences and will be punished in accordance with BU’s Academic Conduct Code for undergraduate students: http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/ and for graduate students: http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/grs-forms-policies-procedures/academic-discipline-procedures/

Electronic Communications in Class: Please close all email accounts, cell phones, instant messaging programs, homing pigeons, and any other communication devices for the duration of class. These are serious distractions to the instructor and your fellow students.

Special Needs: If you have any special needs or circumstances, such as a learning disability or health concern, please do not hesitate to speak with me and we can discuss suitable accommodations and assistance.

Dates and Readings:

Week One Introduction (Jan 22)
• Martin Luther King, Jr. 1963. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”
Part I: Domestic Activism

Week Two       Theories of People Power (Jan 29) [RP1]
• Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* [Introduction and ch. 1]

Recommended:

Week Three     The Birth of the Social Movement (Feb 5)
• Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* [ch. 2-8]

Week Four      People Power in Nondemocracies (Feb 12)
• Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections* [read ch. 1, 2, 3, and 6 / skim ch. 4, or ch. 5]

Part II: Transnational Activism

Week Five     Theories of Transnational People Power (Feb 19) [RP2]
• Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* [ch. 12 + conclusion]

Week Six       Networks (Feb 26) *Midterm Due*

Week Seven    Networks, Technology, Violence Prevention (March 5)
• Bock, *The Technology of Nonviolence* [read the intro and ch. 1 - 9 / skim ch. 10-12]

*** Spring Break ***

Week Eight     The Global Right Wing (March 19) *Project Meetings*
• Clifford Bob, *Global Right Wing* [read ch. 1, 2, 7, and either 3 + 4, or 5 + 6]

Week Nine      Women’s Movements and Engaged Ethnography (March 26)
• Rubin and Sokoloff-Rubin, *Sustaining Activism* [entire]
Part III: Digital Activism

Week Ten  Liberation Technology? (April 2) [RP3]

Week Eleven  Hackers (April 9)
  • Coleman, Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy [specific chapters TBD]

Week Twelve  Pathologies of Digital Activism (April 16) [RPX]
  • #Kony2012 at http://youtu.be/Y4MnpzG5Sqc, and some responses:

Week Thirteen  Student Presentations (April 23)

Week Fourteen  Student Presentations (April 30)

*** Final Papers Due by 5pm on May 7 ***
Grading Rubric – Response Papers

5    Answers the prompt in a coherent manner. Makes creative links between the reading, authors and concepts. Goes beyond the assigned content to draw fresh insights and analysis. Demonstrates mastery of the material and engages in independent thinking. Avoids making claims unsupported by evidence and/or reasonable judgment, or making fallacious claims including equivocation. Writing is exceptionally lucid.

4.5   Answers the prompt in a coherent way. Makes links between the cases, concepts or authors. Demonstrates a solid understanding of the material and goes beyond simple regurgitation, even if all claims are not convincingly established. Avoids being vague, making claims unsupported by evidence and/or reasonable judgment. Writing is clear and concise.

4    Answers the prompt in a coherent way although lacks creativity and depth. Demonstrates more than cursory understanding of the material. Tends toward vagueness but does not make claims unsupported by evidence and/or reasonable judgment. Writing is good.

3.5   Answers the prompt. Provides examples of cases, concepts or authors but fails to effectively connect evidence to the prompt. Makes claims unsupported by evidence and/or reasonable judgment. Writing itself is acceptable but needs improvement.

3    Unclear answer to the prompt. Fails to lay out the answer with evidence from the cases concepts, and/or fails effectively connect evidence to the argument. Tends toward vagueness, makes claims unsupported by evidence and/or reasonable judgment. Writing itself is poor.

2.5 - States an unclear claim. Fails to lay out the argument with evidence from the texts and fails to demonstrate knowledge of the material itself. Vague, makes claims unsupported by evidence and/or reasonable judgment. Writing itself is unacceptable or incoherent.

Grading Rubric – Presentations

1 pt.  Clear and concise
1 pt.  Relevant to course material
1 pt.  Accurate
1 pt.  Uses scholarly sources
1 pt.  Engaging
5 pt.  Total