



**UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE**

Faculty of Human, Social,  
and Political Science

## **Teaching and Content Warnings**

HSPS encompasses the study of all aspects of human social life. Many of these are positive, and studying them can be a cheering and enlivening experience, but others of course are negative. So the discipline rightly seeks to address ethnographically and develop our understanding of a range of difficult phenomena including conflict and war, illness and disease, poverty, exploitation, oppression, abuse, and suffering in various forms.

As responsible adults, students may need to exercise discretion in reading texts that deal with these matters, especially if they have personal experiences of any of these states of affairs. Of course, academic study can be empowering in relation to such experiences, so it would be a mistake to assume that material relating to one's personal experiences, even where those have been negative, should be avoided. In many cases, anthropologists and other social scientists are motivated to study difficult subjects precisely because they have such experience. That process can be challenging as well as rewarding.

It would not be possible, even were it desirable, for the Departments within HSPS to anticipate which specific subjects might be personally difficult for some particular students. And the Departments do not issue so-called 'trigger warnings' about specific academic materials. If individual students have concerns about their own reactions to specific thematic content, then in addition to exercising their own discretion (specific individual readings are virtually never absolutely required, and alternative topics and readings are generally available) they are encouraged to consult their supervisor, Director of Studies, or Tutor in confidence.