Graduate Seminar: Social Suffering
Javier Auyero

Social suffering has recently gained a long-deserved attention in the social sciences, particularly in sociology and anthropology. In this seminar, we will read texts that scrutinize the causes and experiences of suffering in both theoretical and empirical terms. After reviewing the foundations in the study of social suffering (readings will include Marx, Engels, Arendt, Foucault, Bourdieu, Das, and Kleinman) we will move into different “case studies” – ranging from Brazil to France, from New York East Harlem to Soweto and Ukraine, including experiences of political and everyday violence, migration, disease and death. These case studies will serve us to inspect affliction’s universal and culturally constructed attributes as well as its varying causes (from categorical inequalities along “race”/class/gender to the dynamics of the specific social worlds in which individuals inhabit), lived experiences, and representational forms. The seminar will examine epistemological debates related to “knowing suffering” as well as potential research agendas and strategies.

FORM

The course follows a mixed lecture-seminar format, combining formal presentations, short lectures, and group discussion. The requirements are threefold:

1. Weekly electronic reading notes: due every Sunday before 6 PM, participants will submit reading notes (one page maximum) to the instructor and to each other by e-mail. These notes should include: two paragraphs outlining possible connections between the assigned readings and a paragraph of questions/topics you would like to discuss in class.
2. Active participation in class discussions, including two short oral presentations on a given set of readings. Presentations should be done in groups of two.
3. A term paper of no more than 15 pages. The paper can criticize and contrast two or more of the authors studied, deploy their ideas in the course of an empirical research, etc. Term paper topics should be submitted for approval by the instructor by week 9 (one page abstract). NOTE: the term paper can also be a first draft of a track paper. Throughout the course we will discuss possible topics (and give bibliographic guidance) for track papers. Deadline: January 31st.

SCHEDULE

FOUNDATIONS IN THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SUFFERING

WEEK ONE: Structures of Inequality and Domination: Marx and Arendt.

Required:
Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Chapter X, Sections 1-5; Chapter XV, Section 3); Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (“To

WEEK TWO: Experiences and Appropriations: Kleinman and Das.

Required:

WEEK THREE: Habitus and Dislocations: Bourdieu.


CASE-STUDIES

WEEK FOUR: Bodies in Pain: Meanings and Denial


Recommended: Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good et al., Pain as a Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective.

WEEK FIVE: Disasters I: Individual and Collective Trauma

Required:
Kai Erikson, Everything in its Path (entire). ON KATRINA: Neil Smith, “There’s No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster.” Stephen Jackson, “Un/natural Disasters, Here and

MOVIE NIGHT: The Sweet Hereafter.

WEEK SIX: Disasters II: The Distribution of Suffering

Required:


WEEK SEVEN: Misery and Hunger

Required:
Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Death Without Weeping. The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil. (Introduction, Chapters 1 to 6)

WEEK EIGHT: The Routinization of Death

Required:
Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Death Without Weeping. The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil. (Chapters 7 to end)

WEEK NINE: Drugs in the Inner-City and the Normalization of Violence

Required:
Philippe Bourgois, In Search of Respect. Selling Crack in El Barrio (entire)

Recommended:

WEEK TEN: Dislocated Lives


**WEEK ELEVEN: Chemical Lives**

**Required:** Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed. Biological Citizens after Chernobyl (Entire)*

**WEEK TWELVE: Apartheid Lives**


MOVIE NIGHT: *Death and the Maiden*

**Recommended:** Adam Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa*

**WEEK THIRTEEN: Environmental Suffering: Work in Progress**

**Required:** Javier Auyero & Debora Swistun, *Playthings of Misfortunes. An Ethnography of Poisoned Peoples and Places* (manuscript draft)