

## **Graduate Seminar: Social Suffering**

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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 31<sup>st</sup>.

### 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

the Working Classes of Great Britain,” “Introduction,” “The Industrial Proletariat,” “The Great Towns,” “Competition,” “Results.”); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Chapter 12, pp.437-459).

Recommended: John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*. Iain Wilkinson, *Suffering. A Sociological Introduction*. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*. Emmanuel Levinas, “Useless Suffering.”

## **WEEK TWO: Experiences and Appropriations: Kleinman and Das.**

### Required:

Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narrative* (Preface, Chapters 1-5, Chapter 11). Veena Das, *Critical Events* (Chapter VI “Suffering, Legitimacy and Healing: The Bhopal Case”) (Xeroxed). Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, “The Appeal of Experience; The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times” (Xeroxed). David Morris, “About Suffering: Voice, Genre, and Moral Community” (Xeroxed). Maya Todeschini, “The Bomb’s Womb? Women and the Atom Bomb” (Xeroxed).

## **WEEK THREE: Habitus and Dislocations: Bourdieu.**

Required: Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Chapter 6 “Social Being, Time and the Sense of Existence”); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Weight of the World* (Chapters: Pierre Bourdieu’s “The Space of Points of View,” “Jonquil Street,” “Hanging by a Threat,” “Understanding,” and Rosine Christin’s “A Silent Witness”); Pierre Bourdieu, “Participant objectivation: The Huxley Memorial Lecture” (Xeroxed), “Making the Economic Habitus. Algerian Workers Revisited” (Xeroxed).

MOVIE NIGHT: *Mondays in the Sun*

## **CASE-STUDIES**

## **WEEK FOUR: Bodies in Pain: Meanings and Denial**

Required: Robert Alford and Andras Szanto “Orpheus Wounded: The Experience of Pain in the Professional Worlds of the Piano;” Steven P. Wainwright et al “Fractured Identities: Injury and the Balletic Body;” Loïc Wacquant, “A Fleshpeddler at Work: Power, Pain, and Profit in the Prizefighting Economy,” “The Pugilistic Point of View: How Boxers Think and Feel about Their Trade” (Xeroxed).

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

There.” Scott Frickel “Our Toxic Gumbo: Recipe for a Politics of Environmental Knowledge.” Elizabeth Fussell, “Leaving New Orleans: Social Stratification, Networks, and Hurricane Evacuation.” Susan Cutter, “The Geography of Social Vulnerability: Race, Class, and Catastrophe.” Steven Lukes, “Questions About Power: Lessons from the Louisiana Hurricane.” Julie Sze, “Toxic Soup Redux: Why Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Matter after Katrina.”

MOVIE NIGHT: *The Sweet Hereafter*.

## **WEEK SIX: Disasters II: The Distribution of Suffering**

### Required:

Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave* (entire). Paul Farmer, “The Consumption of the Poor. Tuberculosis in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” (Xeroxed)

Recommended: Lee Clarke, “Using Disaster to See Society,” Mitchell Duneier “Scrutinizing the Heat: On Ethnic Myths and the Importance of Shoe Leather,” Jane McLeod “Dissecting Social Autopsy,” Eric Klinenberg “Overheated.”

## **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:

Philippe Bourgois, *Righteous Dopefiend* (unpublished manuscript, forthcoming University of California Press). Loïc Wacquant, *Deadly Symbiosis* (unpublished manuscript, forthcoming Polity Press).

## **WEEK TEN: Dislocated Lives**

Required: Abdelmalek Sayad, *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (Preface by Pierre Bourdieu, Chapters: 1 “The Original Sin and the Collective Lie,” 6 “A Relationship of Domination,” 9 “Illness, Suffering and the Body.”). Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, “The Organic Ethnologist of Algerian Migration” (Xeroxed).

Recommended: Gérard Noiriel, “Colonialism, Immigration, and Power Relations,” Douglas Massey, “Long Day’s Journey into Night: One Person’s Reflections on International Migration,” Suzanne Oboler, “History on the Move...”, David Fitzgerald, “Towards a Theoretical Ethnography of Migration” (downloadable from Qualitative Sociology Website [www.springer.com](http://www.springer.com))

**WEEK ELEVEN: Chemical Lives**

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

**WEEK TWELVE: Apartheid Lives**

Required: Adam Ashforth, *Madumo. A Man Bewitched*. Nancy Scheper-Hughes, “Undoing: Social Suffering and the Politics of Remorse in the New South Africa” (Xeroxed).

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)