Course Description

This seminar engages with questions of social structure, power and subjectivity. We consider particular institutions and systems of power including the economy and markets, the nation and state, and civil society and the formation of publics. The first half of the seminar considers foundational social theories including Marxism and liberalism, critical theory and structural/poststructural theory. The second half engages with the institutions of modernity including the nation, state, publics, citizenship and the post-colonial. These readings combine social theory, history and comparative case studies that consider political economy, the forces of globalization and the legacies of imperialism across the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, communication and media studies. The seminars will focus on explicating the readings, clarifying and critiquing the concepts, and relating these concepts to students’ particular areas of study.

Assessment

Class participation. In addition to participating in discussions each week, students are required to introduce two authors during weeks 3-10. These presentations (15-20 minutes each) should include a brief background of the author, the historical context in which the author was writing, and the main conceptual contributions the author has made to academic work. These introductions will serve as gateways for the closer discussion of the particular readings. (33%)

Essay #1. A 10-12 page paper that critically engages with the foundational concepts that we discuss in weeks 1-5. Seminarians should include readings from each of these weeks, demonstrate their understanding of the key concepts considered each week, place the concepts in dialogue, and provide a critical analysis of the concepts. These papers cannot be comprehensive assessments, so students are encouraged to focus their engagement on how these concepts can inform the particular work they are pursuing in their dissertation areas. Papers are due at the beginning of class on week 5. (33%)

Essay #2. A 10-12 page paper that critically engages with the institutions of modernity we consider in weeks 6-10. Papers should engage with theories of the nation and state, the formation of publics and citizens, and the political economic forces at play across national and transnational contexts. Students must demonstrate their understanding of the key concepts, but may focus their engagement on a particular case study that is relevant to their dissertation area. Papers are due in my department mailbox at noon on Friday March 20. (33%)
Week 1 (1/9): Introduction


Foundations

Week 2 (1/16): The Social Subject


Week 3 (1/23): The Liberal Subject

David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism. Look for selections. 1-63, bibliography.

Week 4 (1/30): Critical Theory and Ideology

Antonio Gramsci. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci. 229-239.
Week 5 (2/6): Discourse, Practice, Networks


Modernity

Week 6 (2/13): Nation


Week 7 (2/20): State


Week 8 (2/27): Publics


Week 9 (3/6): Citizens


Week 10 (3/13): Post-colonial


Ella Shohat. “Area studies, Gender Studies, and the Cartographies of Knowledge.” Social Text 72, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Fall 2002):67-78.
