

## **Sociological Theories of Power**

920:570

Spring 2010

Tuesday 9:50-12:30, LSH A-256

Professor Ethel Brooks

Lucy Stone Hall, Room A-259

Office Hours: Tuesday 12:30-1:30 and by appointment

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### **Description**

Sociology often takes as its object power relations without always calling them into epistemological question. This course explores the stakes in explicitly theorizing power by exploring its workings in multiple social domains. A central premise of this course is the notion that power manifests itself through processes and forms ranging from the workings of everyday life to institutions of governance, cultural practices and global economic relations. What would form would a sociology of power take? What place does the practice of "speaking truth to power"<sup>1</sup> have in the discipline of sociology? This course will consider the ways in which particular sociologies of pleasure, the body, migration, work, violence and nation-building rely on the maintenance, production and circulation of power, and in which ways sociological scholarship serves to call into question, disassemble and/or recreate power formations in its analysis. As sociologists, how do we understand and theorize power as a set or processes and formations that are at once geographical and theoretical, disciplinary and disciplining, national and gendered, sexual and juridical, sociological and political?

In this seminar, we will explore the sociological dimensions of power and challenges to power that often cross the line between academic and activist, in order to understand the ways that scholars have reconfigured power in theory and in everyday practice. How does sociology help shed light on changing political economies, nation-states, and movements of people through immigration, displacement, and exile; on globalization, diaspora, hybrid identities and changing sexualities? Over the course of the semester, we will read scholarship from sociology and other disciplines that challenges our ways of thinking about sovereignty, production, space and subjectivity. You will be asked to write a final research paper that examines in depth a particular facet of power and its workings from a sociological perspective.

### **Requirements**

You will be expected to attend class, read carefully and participate actively in the weekly discussion. Attendance and participation, along with a weekly one-page discussion paper, will count for 30% of your grade. Other requirements include a 200-300 word abstract of your proposed final paper (15%) and leading discussion for one class (15%). The final research paper should be 6,000-8,000 words long and will comprise 40% of your grade.

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<sup>1</sup> American Friends Service Committee Pamphlet, *Speak Truth to Power* (1955).

## Readings

The following books are available at the Barnes and Noble Bookstore on Livingston Campus and on reserve at Kilmer Library:

Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). [JF256.A3413]

Javier Auyero and Débora Alejandra Swistun, *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). [HV4070.B84A99]

Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977). [DT298.K2B6913]

Lionel Cantú, Nancy Naples and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, *The Sexuality of Migration: Border-Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men* (New York: NYU Press, 2009). [HQ76.2.U5C3]

Dan Clawson, *Public Sociology: Fifteen Eminent Sociologists Debate Politics and the Profession in the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). [HM511.P83]

Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (New York: Picador, 2009). [JC131.F68]

The Invisible Collective, *The Coming Insurrection* (Cambridge: Semiotext(e), 2009). [JC328.5.C6513]

Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). [HQ1785.M34]

Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). [DT100.M57]

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979). [DS12.S24]

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Another Knowledge is Possible* (New York: Verso, 2008). [not available in the library]

Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). [HM701.S26]

## Class Schedule

- January 19: **Introduction**
- January 26: **Theories and Praxes**  
The Invisible Collective, *The Coming Insurrection*
- February 2: **Power and Exceptions**  
Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*
- February 9: **Power and Practice**  
*Abstract for Research Paper due Today*  
Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*
- February 16: **Productions I**  
Edward Said, *Orientalism*
- February 23: **Productions II**  
Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*
- March 2: **Rights**  
Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights*
- March 9: **Migrations**  
Lionel Cantú, Nancy Naples and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, *The Sexuality of Migration*
- March 16: **Spring Break!!!**
- March 23: **Knowledge**  
Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Another Knowledge is Possible*
- March 30: **Bodies and Subjectivities**  
Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety*
- April 6: **Collaborations**  
Javier Auyero and Débora Alejandra Swistun, *Flammable*
- April 13: **Governmentality and Biopolitics**  
Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*
- April 20: **Rethinking Publics, Rethinking the Discipline**  
Dan Clawson, *Public Sociology*
- April 27: **Presentations and Conclusions**  
*Research paper is due this week.*