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Global Social Theory

Dora Suarez
CUNY City College

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OER: Global Social Theory



The City College of New York
City University of New York

SUMMER 2021

Online: Synchronous
Tuesdays & Thursdays
2:30 pm – 5:25 pm

Instructor: Dora Suárez
E-mail: dsuarez@ccny.cuny.edu

Course Description

This course is designed as an introduction to key questions and concepts in the Social Sciences. It aims at exposing students to a conceptual repertoire that prepares the ground for them to develop critical responses to pressing global issues. To this end, throughout the semester we will engage with a variety of texts that comprise global social theory. In class, we will focus on learning how to read these texts carefully with an eye toward using them to analyze the world around us. In particular, we will ask: what does it mean to understand humans as thoroughly social, cultural, and historical creatures? How do humans create, maintain, and transform their social worlds? How are forms of social difference (race, class, ethnicity, language, citizenship, gender, sexuality, etc.) produced and how do they shape our experiences? In what sense is the contemporary world shaped by particular pasts? What historical transformations lie on the horizon? In pursuing this agenda, our course will engage with three overarching categories. The first one will be organized around “approaches/methodologies” and will invite a reflection about the “how(s)” and “what(s)” of social knowledge. The second category will entail an engagement with key thinkers such as Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Althusser, Gramsci, Quijano, Butler, Shiva, and El-Saadawi. Finally, the third category will focus on “concrete problems/contemporary issues” and will be dedicated to a discussion of current events that illustrate the practical manifestations of problems related to colonialism, imperialism, racism, and sex and gender "troubles."

Learning Outcomes

By the successful completion of this course students will:

- 1) show familiarity with some of the major concepts, issues and debates articulated in the social sciences (classic and contemporary)
- 2) be more prepared to read, analyze, and synthesize theoretical texts
- 3) have an informed appreciation of the nuances associated to the construction and defense of appealing arguments such as the ones articulated in the social sciences
- 4) have the conceptual tools to think carefully and critically about a range of contemporary issues
- 5) be able to apply the focal concepts, questions, and objections explored in class to analyze personal experience and social phenomena

Course Readings

- Readings will be posted to Blackboard.
- That being said, please notice that most of the readings for the semester are in Lemert's *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings*, sixth edition (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2017). If you wish to acquire a copy of the textbook make sure you have the correct edition!

** Blackboard:

You **must** have access to your Blackboard account in order to participate in this class and submit work. Verify immediately that your Blackboard account is in good working order and double-check that the site will send you messages to an email address that you check regularly. ***I communicate with students through Blackboard, so you must be sure that you're receiving emails from the Blackboard site.***

If you have any questions or troubles with your Blackboard account, please visit the IT Tech Center (NAC 1/301).

Grades

You can earn a total of 100 possible points over the semester (see break-down of assignments below)

- Participation, worth 30 possible points (individual participation + collective presentation)
- Written responses, worth 30 possible points (3 submissions x 10 points each)
- Final exam, worth 40 possible points

Your final course grade will be calculated as follows:

A+=97-100; A=94-96; A-=90-93;

B+=87-89; B=84-86; B-=80-83;

C+=77-79; C=74-76; C-=70-73;

D=60-69; F=<60

Break-down of Assignments

➤ Class Participation (15 %)

In order to take advantage of what this class has to offer you are required to do the assigned readings ****before coming to class**** each week and to actively take part in class discussions. Please notice that simply appearing online does not constitute meaningful participation. Participation will be graded according to attentiveness, preparation for class (having read and reflected about the day's required texts), questions, thoughtful comments, etc. In occasion, participation will be evaluated via in-class short quizzes.

➤ Collective Presentation (15 %)

At the beginning of the term we will coordinate how to form groups of four, so that each group can sign up to deliver a 15-20 minutes presentation to the whole class during the last weeks of the semester. Groups will be required to choose a topic from the themes/readings listed under "Part III" (Week 12, 13 & 14). During the presentation each group will be expected to do the following:

1) Present the argument conveyed in the article assigned for that particular week/topic (for example, if you choose to present on "race/racism & the role of neoliberalism," you must start by explaining the argument put forward by Cornel West)

2) Explain how some of the materials studied in the course can inform our engagement with the issues presented in the article --the idea is that you show how the course has equipped you to better understand the issue (to this end, you can pick any previous assigned reading(s) that you consider relevant for the discussion)

3) Account for your own position, that is, for what you think about the argument / problem discussed (if the members of the group do not fully agree on this regard, feel free to include all takes on your presentation). Importantly, this last portion of your presentation requires that you provide an argument to support your stance, which means that you need to unpack the steps (reasons) that brought you to the conclusions that you / the members of the group are endorsing. Opinions without support are not enough to fulfill this requirement.

In assigning a grade for the collective presentation, I will evaluate the pertinence of the source(s) chosen, as well as the preparation that the presentation evinces. You are encouraged to use Power Point for your presentation and asked to be mindful of class etiquette when selecting the text, images, videos, and audio recordings that you might want to include in them.

➤ **Written Responses (30 % total)**

You will write a total of 2 written responses (15% each). Each of this assignment will require that you respond to a prompt that will ask you to summarize, compare and/or critically assess the arguments made by the authors under examination. Important: please notice that you are expected to submit 2 double-spaced, regular margins, 12- pt. Times New Roman font pages per response (excluding citations and bibliography).

➤ **Final Exam (40 %)**

One final take-home exam to be submitted in the last week of classes. The exam will consist in 2 short questions and 2 long questions revolving around the topics and authors addressed during the semester. 9-10 pages (excluding citations and bibliography), double-spaced, regular margins, 12-pt. font, Times New Roman.

IMPORTANT: Assignments deadlines are firm. If a last-minute emergency arises that will prevent you from completing your work on time, email me immediately to explain the situation. Unexcused late assignments will drop one-third of a letter grade each day (i.e., an “A” will receive an “A-” on the first day after the deadline; after two days, a “B+”; after three, a “B”; etc.).

IMPORTANT: The syllabus is a tentative guide to the semester and subject to revision. If there are changes to the syllabus, I'll let you know ahead of time.

PART I

Approaches / Methodologies:

Tuesday, JULY 6 - PART 1: Introduction

Introductions and discussion of readings, assignments, and expectations.

Tuesday, JULY 6 - PART 2: “Social Theory” (on what the “Social Sciences” are and do)

Required Readings:

- C. Wright Mills, “The Promise” in *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1959]), 3-24

Thursday, JULY 8- PART 1: “Epistemology” (on how(s) and what(s) to know)

Required Readings: pp. 96-108

- Miranda Fricker, “Powerlessness and Social Interpretation” in *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology*, 2006, VOL. 3
PDF Available in Blackboard

Thursday, JULY 8- PART 2: “De-Coloniality” (how(s) and what(s) to know – continued)

Required Readings: pp. 168-178.

- Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” in *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 21, n.2 (March/May 2007)
PDF Available in Blackboard

- **PROMPT FOR FIRST RESPONSE DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS**

***** First Written Response due on Saturday, July 10 @ 9pm. *****

PART II
Classical Thinkers:

Tuesday, JULY 13 - PART 1: Karl Marx

Required Readings: pp. 28-37 + 40-52

“The Manifesto of Class Struggle,” “Capital and the Values of Commodities,” “Capital’s Two-Fold Nature: How Commodities Embody Human Labor,” “The Form of Value or Exchange Value,” “Capital and the Fetishism of Commodities,” “Labour-Power and Capital”
From Charles Lemert’s *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings* (2017)

Tuesday, JULY 13 - PART 2: Max Weber

Required Readings: pp. 83-86 + 90-94

“The Spirit of Capitalism and the Iron Cage,” “What is Politics?” “The Types of Legitimate Domination”
From Charles Lemert’s *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings* (2017)

Thursday, JULY 15 - PART 1: Antonio Gramsci + Louis Althusser

Required Readings: pp. 209-210 + 251-254

“Intellectuals and Hegemony,” & “Ideology and the Ideological States Apparatuses”
From Charles Lemert’s *Social Theory: The Multicultural, Global, and Classic Readings* (2017)

Thursday, JULY 15- PART 2: Michel Foucault

Required Readings: pp. 209-210 + 251-254

“Docile Bodies”

Tuesday, JULY 20 - PART 1: Anne Fausto Sterling + Judith Butler

Required Readings: pp. 519-531

“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution”

PDF Available in Blackboard

Tuesday, JULY 20 - PART 2: Vandana Shiva

April 13 - Required Readings: pp. 9-14 + 1-14

“The Gendered Politics of Food” &

“Earth Democracy: Sustainability, Justice, and Peace”

PDF(s) Available in Blackboard

Thursday, JULY 22 - PART 1: Nawal El-Saadawi

Required Readings: pp.233-246 + pp. 146-152

“Social Change and the Exploitation of Women -- the Writings of Nawal El-Saadawi” by Muhammad Youssef Suwaed in *Journal of International Women's Studies* (2017), 18(4)

“Breeding Terror, or an Uncivilized Clash of Civilizations” by Nawal El-Saadawi

PDF(s) Available in Blackboard

Thursday, JULY 22 - PART 2: PROMPT FOR SECOND RESPONSE DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS

***** Second Written Response due on Saturday, July 24 @ 9pm. *****

PART III

Concrete problems / Contemporary Issues

(Topics for Collective Presentations):

Tuesday, JULY 27 - Colonialism / Imperialism & the Migration Crisis

Required Readings: Slavoj Žižek

[“We Can't Address the EU Refugee Crisis without Confronting Global Capitalism”](#)

Tuesday, JULY 27 -Sex /Gender Trouble(s) & the Ethics of Inclusion

Required Readings: Toshio Meronek

[“Transgender Activists Speak Out Against Campaign to End Trans Military Ban”](#)

Thursday, JULY 29 - Race/Racism & the Role of Neoliberalism

Required Readings: Cornel West

[“Ta-Nehisi Coates is the Neoliberal Face of the Black Freedom Struggle”](#)

+ Distribution of Final Exam Prompts

***** Final Exam due on Sunday, Aug 1st @ 9pm. *****

Course guidelines, requirements, policies, etc.

Accessibility

I am committed to making this class accessible to all students, regardless of any disability (visible or non-visible; physical, cognitive, emotional, or learning) or any other special circumstances (such as a medical, personal, or housing emergency; family responsibilities; financial difficulties; legal difficulties; or Immigration status) that may affect your ability to come to class and complete your coursework. Please speak to me on Zoom or via email (dsuarez@ccny.cuny.edu) early in the semester or as soon as you're aware that you may need accommodations. I will do whatever I can to make this class accessible. In addition, the following campus services offer vital help to students in a wide range of circumstances:

Inform me immediately **in writing** if you have registered with the AccessAbility Center/Student Disability Services (AAC/SDS) or have any ***special needs, learning differences, or medical conditions*** that may affect your coursework so that we can make the appropriate accommodations. If you believe you may need an accommodation, please do get in touch with the AAC/SDS. More information about the office can be found on the website: www.ccny.cuny.edu/accessability

If you have any questions or concerns about your ***immigration status*** or that of your family members, please consult the CCNY Immigration Center for free and confidential advice. The Center is located in NAC 1/206 and can be reached at 212-650-6620.

If, for whatever reason, you are struggling with ***personal issues, emotions, or stress***, please take advantage of the the Student Counseling Center in the Health and Wellness Center (Marshak J-15).

If you are dealing with ***food insecurity***, please visit the CCNY Food Pantry. The pantry is located in NAC 6/145 and has walk-in hours Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, 10:00-5:00. You can also schedule an anonymous appointment at tinyurl.com/ccnyfood

If you are facing an acute and short-term ***emergency shortage of funds*** and would like to apply for an emergency grant, please speak to Ms. Charlene Darbassie in the Colin Powell School Dean's Office (NAC 6/141) about the Emergency Viola Fund and to someone at the Health and Wellness Center (Marshak J-15) about the CCNY Emergency Grants Program.

If you are experiencing or have experienced ***domestic violence*** or ***violence that is sex-based, gender-based, or sexuality-based***; or if you are experiencing or have experienced ***discrimination because of gender, sex, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, religion, disability, or other reasons***, please contact Diana Cuzzo, the Interim Chief Diversity Officer via email (dcuzzo@ccny.cuny.edu), phone (212-650-7330), or in the Office of Affirmative Action, Compliance, and Diversity (Shepard Hall 109 A-D).

If you are struggling in your classes and would like extra ***academic support***, please make an appointment with the Academic Resource Center (www.ccny.cuny.edu/sssp/tutoring-arc)

The CCNY Writing Center (www.ccny.cuny.edu/writing) offers individualized ***writing support*** to all students.

Emails and communication

If you need to get in touch with me, please send me an email at dsuarez@ccny.cuny.edu. I check my email about once a day, and I will do my best to respond to you within twenty-four business hours. Emails in an academic setting must adhere to basic guidelines (regarding grammar, spelling, polite and professional language, etc). For a handy guide to composing emails both in college and in your professional futures, see: <https://medium.com/@lportwoodstacer/how-to-email-your-professor-without-being-annoying-af-cf64ae0e4087#.gi76di29n>

Absences and emergencies

Aside from the observance of religious holidays, absences and tardiness will only be excused in cases of last-minute emergencies. In those cases, email me immediately explaining the situation. You may be required to provide documentation of that situation. It is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate. If religious observances will cause you to miss any lectures, discussion sections, or work this semester, **inform me in writing** by the end of the second week of classes so we can make appropriate arrangements.

Assignments

Deadlines are firm. If a last-minute emergency arises that will prevent you from completing your work on time, email me immediately to explain the situation. Unexcused late assignments will drop one-third of a letter grade each day (i.e., an “A” will receive an “A-” on the first day after the deadline; after two days, a “B+”; after three, a “B”; etc.).

Academic integrity

All work must be your own. If you use the words of others, you must identify those words with quotation marks. You must indicate the source of ideas not your own, whether you quote them directly or paraphrase them. Familiarize yourself now with CUNY’s academic integrity policies: <https://www.ccny.cuny.edu/about/integrity>

Electronic devices

All electronic devices must be turned off and put away during class. This includes but is not limited to cellphones, and tablets (as long as you do not need them to connect to our Zoom meeting). For a synopsis of one of many recent studies demonstrating the deleterious effect of electronic devices in the classroom, see: www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/

Course readings:

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