Institute for Social Justice Seminar Series

Seminar Leader: Dr Magdalena Zolkos

Date: 21 October – 6 November (except 29-30 October and 3 November)
Time: 10am-1pm
Venue: Institute for Social Justice, Level 2, Meeting Room 2.02, Mary MacKillop Place, 7-11 Mount Street, North Sydney

Magdalena is a political theorist specializing in the fields of memory politics; historical justice and reconciliation; cultural and psychoanalytic trauma theory; emotions and affect; contemporary democratic theory; and feminist theory. She has held the Izaak Killam Postdoctoral position at the Department of Political Science, University of Alberta (Canada); the Irmgard Coninx Research Grant at Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin Sozialforschung (Berlin); and Marie Curie Research Fellowship at the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Kent at Canterbury (UK). She is interested in how the legacy of historical trauma affects the trajectories of democratic transition and consolidation, conditions the play of affective politics, and inspires, though at times also constrains, practices of emancipatory politics and resistance. She is currently working on two research projects. The first project focuses on traumatic memory objects and mnemonic object-worlds in politics and ethics of response to historical injustice. The second project concerns the aesthetics and discourses of memorialization in contemporary Europe.

Course Description

The notion of suffering has become an important category of political identification and visibility in the context of such diverse issues as global poverty, natural disasters, war, forced migration, and animal rights. Some have critiqued the political uses of the notion of suffering and argued that it is essentially a theological category, and that the suffering subject is a disempowered, passive or sacrificial figure who relies on the compassion and humanitarian sentiments of others, rather than articulates her/his vulnerabilities in a more political language of inequality and injustice. Others, including Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, asserted the transformative, even emancipatory, potential of suffering in struggles against oppression and domination. This course seeks to provide a framework for the exploration of, discussion and critical reflection about the contemporary idiom and discourses of suffering, about the place of suffering in the politics of resistance against neo-liberal and neo-colonial violence, and about the attention suffering has received in theoretical humanities and social sciences in the last years.

This course has three parts. First (classes 2-4), it will focus on the socio-theoretical and narrative accounts of the lived experience of suffering in relation both to “extraordinary” instances of suffering (such as torture) and to everyday suffering, and on how the notion of suffering is mediated through categories of class, gender and race. Next (classes 5-7), the course will draw attention to the idiom of “the suffering other” in the context of contemporary humanitarianism, as well as in politics of vulnerability and relationality. Here in particular the problem of distance to, mediation and appropriation of the suffering of the other are thematized and explored. Finally (classes 8-10), this course will ask whether the notion of suffering can play a role in the politics of resistance and disruption by suggesting the limits of its absorption within the neo-liberal frame, and by asking about the ethics of response to suffering.
Topics and Readings

The participants are expected to bring with them to each class "study notes": 200-400 words of reflections on each of the readings (not so much a summary of the readings, but their response to and interpretation of it; what the participants have found particularly useful/interesting or challenging/problematic about the readings, etc.). We will start our discussion of the readings by presenting these notes to the other participants.

Please note, this is not a drop – in course, participants are required to attend all 10 sessions.

i. The idiom of Suffering in Our Times (21 October)

ii. On Pain (22 October)

iii. On Torture (23 October)

iv. Suffering and the Everyday (26 October)

v. Suffering and the Other (27 October)

vi. Distant Suffering (28 October)

vii. Mediations and Appropriations of Suffering (2 November)

viii. The Suffering of Animals (4 November)

ix. Testimony and Trauma (5 November)

x. The Empathic Subject (6 November)

Contact
For more information and to RSVP please contact isj@acu.edu.au or call (02) 9739 2789