Course Description

Violence and suffering has been an endemic feature of social and political life. Even if we regard our lives untouched by violence, images of suffering and pain are close at hand. This course will introduce students to the anthropology and sociology of Violence, Conflict and Suffering. Many courses and topics of interest in Sociology and Anthropology have touched upon violence. For example, the sociology of Ethnicity and Nationalism often raises a concern and interest in ethnic and communal conflict and violence. Studies on Diasporas and Transnationalism and Economic sociology often touch upon the suffering caused by displacement, neo-liberal policies and costly mechanisms for maintaining the sanctity of national borders. Moments of violence and suffering are also implicated in questions of representation and the symbols with which we comprehend the world. Violence and Suffering is thus a framework for approaching the world.

The purpose of this course is to encourage students to question and challenge the meaning of violence and suffering and to not regard it as something ‘natural’. Students will explore violence and suffering not only in terms of the extraordinary and the eventful but also as emerging from and being a part of everyday life. In the process students will be introduced to ways that will enable them to see violence and suffering, not merely as an aberration of normal life, but as a part of and producing notions of normality. The course treats violence and suffering as both produced by and producing the state, society, culture and politics.

The course will pay close attention to cases and will maintain an interest in the ways situations of violence and suffering are perceived and documented in different forms before attempts to generalise and theorise are made. While the course will implicitly attend to concerns of violence and suffering in the Sociology of South Asia, students will also be encouraged to think critically about regional and global concerns.
Unit I: Introduction.

What is violence? What is the Tension between ordinary and normal life with extraordinary violence? What are the levels of violence and suffering? How has violence been commonly approached and apprehended? How has violence and suffering been understood in the modern world (the colonial/post-colonial transition) and in the social sciences? The initial inability of Anthropologists and Sociologists in approaching violence will also be explored until the emergence of studies of violence over the last thirty years.

Suggested Readings


Unit II: The Body in Pain

How do we approach the experience of violence and suffering? What sort of a vector is the human body in understanding the experience of violence and pain? How do societies treat the violated and suffering body? What effect does the violated and suffering body have on socio-cultural formations and representations? How do we approach notions of well-being in contrast to the suffering and violated body? How is gender implicated in discussion of the violated body?


Unit 3 Violence as Creative Force-Subjectivities

How does violence and suffering create forms of culture and sociality? How do they shape our mechanisms and arts of representation? Does violence and suffering create new notions of selfhood and sociality?

As a special case of looking at violence and subjectivities, we will explore victimhood as a personal and socio-political phenomenon.

Suggested Readings


Unit IV: Structural Violence, Political Economy and the Everyday

This unit aims to look at the forms of violence and suffering seen across the world. Structural inequalities, economic changes and downturns, poverty and resultant problems of crime are often sources of much violence and suffering. However unlike situations of war and conflict, they often remain hidden and caught in everyday functioning of the political economy. How do we approach violence and suffering that recognises the impact of the inequities of political economy and in the context of everyday life?

Suggested Readings


Relevant films and texts will be introduced.

**Unit V: Approaching Catastrophe: Genocides, holocaust and ethnic cleansing**

The history of the 20th century and after has often been marked by events of mass trauma and violence such as the holocaust in Europe during the Second World War and genocidal events taking place after, especially in Eastern Europe and Central Africa. But what do we mean by terms such as Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing? What kind of events do we identify as genocide? What kind of a shadow has an event such as the Jewish Holocaust cast on the way we conceive of violence, suffering and the very question of what it means to be a human? This unit will explore this questions as well discussing and interrogating the question of catastrophe and exceptional violence.

**Suggested Readings**


Levi, Primo. 1991. *If This is a Man*. London: Little Brown


We will be screening films, including Alain Resnais’ Night and Fog and Hiroshima Mon Amour, which will be screened independently of Cinema and Society. Students will also read the graphic novel *Mauss: a survivors Tale* by Art Speigelman. As Part of the internal assessment they will write critical reviews of the graphic novel or the films.

**Unit VI: Ethnic and Communal Violence**

Communal and Ethnic conflict has been a hallmark of human life in a nation-state, especially in South Asia. This unit will feature critical readings of communal rioting and violence and will attempt to show how communal riots, mobs and crowds are not aberrations but perhaps a part of life in democracies and nation-states.
Suggested Readings


Unit VII: War, Conflict and Militarisation

War, Conflict and Militarisation are topics that have been extensively studied in various disciplines. Within anthropology and sociology, there has been a new critical engagement, attempting to look at the meaning and life of communities affected by war and militarisation. In South Asia, most studies of violence have tended to focus on communal conflict and the riot as the primary method and event of violence. However the aim of this unit is to introduce students to a new way to think about war and militarisation of space. What happens to communities recovering from war after peace? What is life like for communities that remain trapped in militarised areas? What effect does war and militarisation have on sociality and selfhood? What can an anthropology or sociology of war offer?

Suggested Readings


Allen, Lori. 2008 *Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal during the Second*
Palestinian Intifada.” *Cultural Anthropology* 23(3): 453-487,

This unit will also introduce students to Graphic Novels by Joe Sacco (Palestine, Safe Area Gorazde and Notes from Gaza) which offer a unique and interesting view of life in war and military occupation. Students will be encouraged to write critical reviews of these novels for internal assessment.

**Unit VIII: Documenting Violence and Suffering**

What are the challenges and dilemmas in documenting situations and experiences of violence and suffering? What is the social and political life of representations of violence and suffering? We shall look news reports, ethnographic accounts, art, monuments and practices of commemoration. We shall also look at the work of Truth and Reconciliation Committees. What can sociology and anthropology offer to this discussion?

**Suggested Readings**


The classes for this unit will include discussion sessions with invited journalists, writers and film makers who have covered situations of violence and suffering in the course of their work. Film screenings are planned.