

SOWK 570k / INDS502c

Seminar

Historical Memory and Social Reconstruction

Instructor: Pilar Riaño-Alcalá

Class Time: Wednesday 9 - 12 m

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“The question is, whose perception and whose needs? Who gets to decide what happened yesterday, then to tell the tale?
Erna Paris, “Long Shadows. Truth, Lies and History.”

In the afterlives of war, displacement, state repression or disaster, how do people reconstruct their social worlds? What are the ways in which memory is used and mobilized by various social groups to confront past atrocities and the serious violations of their human rights? What are the broader social forces and regimes of truth that mediate survivors' labour of memory? In what ways and by what expressive practices and social tensions, social groups, communities and societies make sense of their memories of the past?

Through critical reading, presentations, activities and debates, we will examine these questions focusing on the relationship between *memory and social reconstruction*. Students will explore the complex tensions, agents and social disputes on memory in societies undergoing crisis and in the afterlives of disaster, systemic abuse, dispossession and the breakdown of their social worlds. Stressing the structural and ever present realities of structural violence, racism and colonialism, this course examines processes of social reconstruction and the many forms or mechanisms associated with these processes including international led programmatic interventions, national relief efforts, organized and non organized social resistance, local level initiatives and micro practices of social repair.

We will approach memory as cultural practice, as a complex and expressive social field shaped by power relations and in which various agents struggle for recognition in unequal fields of power. Memory, therefore, will be understood as a field in tension, where hierarchies, inequalities and social exclusions coexist in complex and dynamic ways. For this end, the seminar is organized around significant themes and fields of practice in examining the relationships between memory and social reconstruction.

Readings for this seminar come from various fields and disciplines and cover several case studies on mass violence, state repression and disaster from Canada, Latin America, Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

Weekly Themes

January 3 - Introduction: The relationship between historical memory and social reconstruction

January 10 - Time: Memory and History

January 17 - Land: place, emplaced memories and displacement

January 24 - Social repairing and worlds of repair

January 31 - Body: embodied memories and silences

February 7 - Texture and Materiality: artefacts, traces and reconstruction

February 14 - Water and movement

Feb 21 - Reading week

Feb 28 - Voice: Generational and gendered works of memory

March 7 - Archive: Knowledge, witnessing and testimony

March 14 - Politics of Memory: Truth telling, redress, refusal and resistance

March 21 - Politics of Memory, confessions and perpetrators

April 5 - Politics of social reconstruction: Neighbours, fellows and intimate enemies