Seminar: Rethinking False Consciousness

Prof. Nissim Mizrachi

Course Description

Drawing on the current Israeli socio-political terrain, especially the persisting gap between the universalistic message of the liberal-left and the social particularity of its adherents and opponents, the seminar offers a theoretical investigation into the relevance of false consciousness as an analytic tool. Although few contemporary critical sociologists would admit to using the concept, the idea of false consciousness continues to shape our thinking. The Israeli case will provide a window to a broader discussion of the concept. The issues to be explored include: What are the concept’s historiosophical roots? How does false consciousness manifest itself as a building block of critical theory? What groups have been characterized as exhibiting false consciousness, by whom and in what contexts? Our investigation into false consciousness will enable us to delve into core issues of interpretation and understanding (verstehen) in the social sciences and to rethink the interpretive space occupied by contemporary critical sociology. Selected cases from the US will provide points of comparison.

Requirements and Grading

1. Before each class session, every student must submit as an attachment to email an analytical summary of the main argument found in each of the required readings. Following the summary, the student will propose 2-3 questions/subjects for class discussion (detailed instructions for preparing the summary are found below). The summary's length should not exceed 3 pages. The deadline for submission is Friday 8pm, two days prior to the upcoming class session. Students presenting during the session will not be required to submit the analytical summary in advance.

2. Each student will make one class presentation during the semester on one of the topics covered. The presentation will be based on the readings assigned for that week. Presenters will be encouraged to incorporate their own research interests when leading the session's group discussion.

3. Distribution of grading weights: class participation (including weekly assignments) – 20%; individual presentation – 20%; final seminar paper – 60%.

Instructions for weekly preparation of the analytic summary of the readings

The summaries will include a short but comprehensive description of each of the required readings while responding to the following questions:

1. What is the main argument (in the case of a theoretical reading) or research hypothesis (in the case of empirical research)?

2. How does the author substantiate his argument (references to the research and theoretical literature, the research methodology)?

3. What theoretical or empirical conclusions does the author reach?

4. What does the respective work contribute to understanding the seminar's subject (indicate the work's weak points, strong points, and sources of inspiration, etc.)?
Seminar Sessions and Required Readings

Week 1. August 29 - Introduction

Week 2. September 12 - Mapping the Context I: Zionism, Demography, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict


Week 3. September 19 - Mapping the Context II: Social Boundaries, Stigmatization, and Social Inequality in Israeli Society


Week 4. September 26 - On the Gap between Israeli Sociology and the Subject of Research


Recommended Readings:

October 3, Rosh Hashanah - No class
Week 5. October 10 - What is False Consciousness: Histories and Subjectivities


Week 6. October 17 - Intellectuals as Public Opinion Makers


Week 7. October 24 - On the Religious-Secular Divide in Israel


Week 8. October 31 - On the Religious-Secular Divide


**Week 9. November 7 - Critical Sociology and Modes of Hermeneutics**


**Week 10. November 14 - The "Problem" of Culture**


**Week 11. November 21 - Rethinking Consciousness-Raising**


**Week 12. November 28 - Post-liberal Imagery**


