Exploring culture and society in transition: Gender, sexuality, and class in Poland

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**Prerequisite / Co-requisite:**
- none

**Description:**
After 1989, as Poland transitioned from a centrally planned to a market economy, and as Solidarity and the Catholic church transitioned from the margins of Poland’s political and cultural life to its center, the situation of workers, women, and queer people also underwent major changes. Not all those who were swept up by the changes experienced greater freedom and prosperity, though people and ideas could now cross Poland’s borders unimpeded, and store shelves sagged with goods that had once been unattainable. As a result of neoliberal policies, workers who had enjoyed the security of full-time long-term employment found themselves in a precarious position. Likewise, the position of many women and queer people became precarious. Western feminist, gay rights, and queer discourses clashed with the official discourses that relegated queer people to the closet and women to the domestic sphere, where they would not be competing with men for scarce jobs. Meanwhile, backed by the Catholic church, the conservative media, used homophobia as the core of the new Polish nationalism. Local ways of doing gender and sexuality, some of which undermined essentialist ways of thinking, soon gave way to western identity-based feminist and LGBT movements. More recently, as Poland began to attract immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the former Soviet republics, these groups were targeted by the increasingly visible neo-nationalist organizations which blend the American ideology of white power imported with local anti-Semitic discourses. However, not all racial minorities in Poland are disempowered. A sizeable community of Korean and Chinese entrepreneurs and their families has sprung up around the Special Industrial Zone set up by local authorities on the outskirts of Wroclaw to remedy the unemployment crisis. While the Chinese and Koreans have created much needed jobs, they have also resorted to unfair labor practices, provoking a strike in the summer of 2012.

The objective of this course, which combines a historical/theoretical component with action research, is to allow students to explore the current situation of women, queer people, workers, and racial/ethnic minorities in Poland, both through printed sources and first-hand. But since one of the main reasons students sign up for study-abroad programs is to expose themselves to cultural difference, a major component of the course will be writing a thematically-focused, self-reflexive journal. In the preliminary phase of the course students will be introduced to the theory...
COURSE SYLLABUS

of intersectionality as well as the basic concepts of the methodology used in ethnographic, autoethnographic and intersectionality studies. To help students process their encounters with difference, they will be also asked to read excerpts from studies on power dynamic between gender, sexuality, class, and race/ethnicity in the Eastern European context.

Learning Outcomes* (definition and examples at end of form):

After taking this course, the students will be able to:

- conduct focus groups and ethnographic interviews with an awareness of the power dynamics at work between the interviewer and interviewee.

- to analyze, and report on socio-cultural data collected in a foreign culture with the assistance of volunteer translators.

- explain the effects of the post-1989 transformation in Poland on working-class people, women, as well as non-heterosexual people.

- reflect critically in writing on their own experience of living and studying in a foreign culture.

Bibliography/ Texts / Supplies – Required:


Choo, Hae Yeon, Myra Marx Ferree, Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A critical analysis of inclusions, interactions and institutions in the study of inequalities, forthcoming paper


COURSE SYLLABUS

attach to course proposal form


Supplies—Additional:

Films
Specjalne strefy wyzysku [Special Exploitation Zones] Dir. Małgorzata Maciejewska and Magda Malinowska, produced by Szum TV and Feminist Think Tank (2013, documentary on a workers’ strike in the Special Industrial Zone near Wrocław).

Requirements:

Student projects:
1. Throughout the course, students will write a thematically focused journal and may collaborate in groups to read and comment on each others' writing.
   - Students will choose topics to focus their personal reflections. They will be encouraged to make cross-cultural comparisons, referring to their US experience.
   - The practice of autoethnography will be introduced through Carolyn Ellis’s The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography (2004) and other texts on the methodology of autoethnographic research.
2. Students will work in pairs to conduct interviews with local university students and activists on a topic of their own choice to practice the research process and interviewing techniques. They will

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then write a report commenting on their group feedback on the research process. In order to prepare for this task, students will be introduced to several methods of conducting free interviews presented in *Handbook of Qualitative Research* by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln. The instructors will assist students to make contacts with volunteers and student-interpreters from the Department of English Studies. Students will then collaborate in groups to analyze the interviews, collectively produce a short report referring to selected sources from the syllabus, and present the report to the class. Students working on labor and gender can refer to statistical evidence from the Local Data Bank http://www.stat.gov.pl/bdlen/app/strona.html?p_name=indeks (available in English).

**Grading:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal entries</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview and report</td>
<td>40%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Course Specific Policies on attendance, late work, make up work, examinations if outside normal class time, etc.:**

[To be announced – we need to know what the policies are at Syracuse].

**Additional Information:**

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**Academic Integrity**

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information and the complete policy, see http://academicintegrity.syr.edu

**Disability-Related Accommodations**

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), http://disabilityservices.syr.edu, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for

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requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented Disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

**Religious Observances Policy**

SU religious observances policy, found at [http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm](http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm), recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through [MySlice/StudentServices/Enrollment/MyReligiousObservances](http://myslice.syr.edu) from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class no.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Oct. 2</td>
<td>Theoretical intro. and historical background</td>
<td>Excerpts from: Dunn; Hardy; Basiuk et al.; Maciejewska; Graff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Oct. 8</td>
<td>Documentary films <em>The Women's Underground State Mothers' Strike</em></td>
<td>Excerpts from Dunn; Maciejewska; Graff Excerpts from Ellis, <em>The Ethnographic I</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Oct. 9</td>
<td>Intersectionality: gender and class</td>
<td>Excerpts from: Puar; McCall; Choo et al.; Puwar; Mizielińska and Kulpa</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Oct. 16</td>
<td>Documentary films and discussion Special Exploitation Zones</td>
<td>Excerpts from Ellis, <em>The Ethnographic I</em>.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Oct. 22</td>
<td>Race, gender, and sexuality at the university</td>
<td>Excerpts from Ellis, <em>The Ethnographic I</em>.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Oct. 23</td>
<td>Trip to university, “milk bar,” and CRK</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Oct. 29</td>
<td>Intro. to action research</td>
<td>Excerpts from: Denzin &amp; Lincoln; Dunn, Leong</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Oct. 30</td>
<td>Introduction to action research</td>
<td>Brettell</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Nov. 5</td>
<td>Interviewing methods and techniques</td>
<td>Denzin &amp; Lincoln</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Nov. 6</td>
<td>Formulating research projects</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Nov. 13</td>
<td>Conducting interviews</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Nov. 27</td>
<td>Group group analysis of interviews</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Dec. 4</td>
<td>Round table with informants</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Dec. 11</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td></td>
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