Global Poverty

Prof. Sebastián Ramírez

Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy

Rutgers University

Fall 2016

Office hours:
Civic Square Building - Room 255
Monday between Noon and 2pm and only by appointment through Sakai Tool
Introduction

What is poverty? Who are the poor and how do we know they are so? How do we overcome the challenges poverty poses?

Poverty is simultaneously a simple term and an exceedingly complex idea. It defines a negative: a lack that is physical, psychic, and material; presently felt, ancient in origin, and unfolding in its effects. Its immediacy and depth sparks our imaginations mobilizing a great deal of optimism and hope that its solution is within our grasp. Yet what to do, to whom, and how, remain questions without easy answers.

This class is primarily concerned with the production of poverty as a social category in the 20 and 21st century. Our focus during the coming weeks will be on exploring what poverty is, how it is defined, what produces it, how does it become a call for action, and, above all, how it is lived. We will take a double track in following this focus; on the one hand we will look at works that describe the actual lived experiences of the so-called poor, how is it that they survive living within this construct of and amid the daily realities privation. On the other, we will survey efforts to intervene in these lives, looking at the ways in which people, markets, and things, are transformed into objects to be changed and corrected. Our assessments of these efforts will speak to even larger questions about, among other things, the intricate connections between purported centers of capital and their imagined margins, and the possibilities of life in late capitalism.

The class is structured around a set of “challenges” posed by poverty. We will take these problems as an opportunity to do a couple of things. First and foremost, these materials will help us understand the lives of those living precariously: the circumstances that render their lives treacherous and problematic, the materials and relations on which they lean to make ends meet, their aspirations and demands for better futures. Second, we will deploy these materials as an entry into the ways in which scholars, activists, and institutions understand and problematize poverty, its causes, its continuing challenges, and the possibilities of its solution. The caveat here will be that the technical tools that we will explore each week will not be exclusive to whatever problem we are focusing on that week, and, more importantly, that the problems that we explore don’t exist independently from each other. Over the course of the semester our sense of what these problems really entail will hopefully become denser and more complex, and understanding the often devilishly complicated ways in which they interact will give us a sense of the difficulties posed to answering the questions raised by poverty, not least to those who must bear its indignities in their daily lives.
Course Requirements

Students are expected to come to class having read all the material assigned. Many of the pieces – even the short ones – are dense and their reading can be time consuming, so please do not expect to be able to do them in one night. Some class time will be dedicated to discussions of current events, group activities and presentations.

Your participation in class will revolve around your critical reading of the materials. As you read try to keep in mind who the author’s audience is? What are they writing for? What are they writing against? What is at stake? Try to extrapolate from the readings and ask what does the author assume? How do they construe their subjects (“the poor,” “aid workers,” “an intervention”)?

A one-page Reaction Paper (RP) is due electronically (via Sakai’s assignment submission function) by 9am MONDAY morning each week for 10 out of the 11 weeks for which there are readings. The papers will not be graded with a letter grade, but will be allocated points based on the following system: 0 points, 1 point or 1+ points. The paper should usually be 350–500 words (about one page single-spaced) and are intended to facilitate class discussion in seminar. You can use the Reaction Paper (RP) to ask for clarification about any aspect of the readings and/or to express an opinion about one or more of the readings. RPs should be clearly written, spell-checked, stylistically polished and grammatically correct. Students are required to read their peers’ responses prior to class. Reflecting on this preliminary conversation will set the stage for the class discussion.

Class participation is a major requirement in this course. Every student will be expected to contribute to the class conversation with relevant and informed questions and comments both to the material covered and their peers’ thoughts. Attendance is therefore mandatory. Absences must be excused through the Dean’s office and all work for that week must be made up. Unexcused absences will result in a lower overall grade.

Students will write a short midterm paper. The questions will be available in class and in Sakai October 18 and will be due through Sakai on October 24.

At the end of the semester, groups of two or three students will be assigned to do a presentation. Students will discuss a particular community, it’s challenges in terms of the topics discussed during class and any interventions that have sought to help them. Each presentation will last between 15 and 20 minutes and groups are encouraged to use a variety of media and sources.
There will be a final take home examination. The questions will be made available through Sakai on Tuesday December 13 and the essays will due electronically via the Sakai site on December 23rd.

I will communicate with all students via Sakai and official Rutgers email. It is students’ responsibility to check these for class communications.

Plagiarism or cheating or copying each other’s work in any manner is not tolerated and will result in a grade of 0 (zero) for the assignment in question. Please see the updated Academic Integrity document up on the web (http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/integrity.shtml).

In-classroom Behavior

Students are expected to respect the views, opinions and experiences of their peers at all moments in class. Everyone will be allowed equal opportunity to share their thoughts in an environment that is welcoming of diversity and tolerant of difference.

Showing respect to your peers means paying attention when they speak and not interrupting or dismissing their contributions. With this in mind, use of computers will be restricted to class-related activities, phones will be turned off or silenced and no extraneous reading material will be allowed. Students who actively disrupt class participation will be dismissed and they will be given an unexcused absence, which will lower their overall grade accordingly.

Special Needs

Students will be given special accommodation in accordance with the stipulations of Office of Disability Services. If such accommodations are needed is the student’s responsibility to approach me during the first week of class and provide me with a Letter of Accommodation. For more information you should contact the ODS or the Dean of Student Life.

Grading
10% Ten weekly one-page reflections

20% Presentation

20% Class attendance and Active participation

20% Midterm paper

30% Final paper

Schedule of Topics and Reading

All readings and materials are available in Sakai. All readings and assignments are subject to change in the course of the semester. If they do, I will notify students via email and will post the new materials on the Sakai site at least a week in advance.
Week 1. Introductions (September 11)

Week 2. Making the poor (September 18)
  a  Ian Hacking - Making up people
  b  Arturo Escobar - Encountering Development (Ch2)
  c  James Ferguson - Of Mimicry and Membership
Recommended: Watch Les maîtres fous - 1956 - Jean Rouch

Week 3. Theories of poverty (September 25)
  a  Joseph Stiglitz - Globalization and its Discontents (Ch 1 and 2)
  b  Jeffery Sachs - The End of Poverty Ch 1 and 3
  c  Reddy & Lahoty - $1.90 A day? What does it really say? (in New Left Review)

Week 4. Slums (October 2)
  a  Mike Davis – Planet of Slums (Ch 2 and 4)
  b  Banerjee and Dulof - Poor Economics (Ch 8)
  c  David Harvey - The Right to the City (in New Left Review)

Week 5. Homelessness (October 9)
  b  Helena Hansen, Philippe Bourgois , & Ernest Drucker - Pathologizing poverty: New forms of diagnosis, disability, and structural stigma under welfare reform (in Social Science and Medicine)
  c  Bruce O’neill - Cast Aside: Boredom, Downward Mobility, and Homelessness in Post-Communist Bucharest (in Cultural Anthropology)

Week 6. Rural poverty (October 16)
  a  Sacks on Millennium Villages
  b  John Mazzeo Lavichè: Haiti’s Vulnerability To The Global Food Crisis (in Annals of Anthropological Practice)
  c  Kregg Hetherington - Waiting for the Surveyor: Development Promises and the Temporality of Infrastructure (in JLACA)
  d  Tania Murray Li - Centering Labor in the Land Grab Debate (in Journal of Peasant Studies)
  e  Kristina Marie Lyons - Decomposition as Life Politics (in Cultural Anthropology)

Week 7. Violence (October 23)
  a  Danny Hoffman – War Machines (Ch 2 and 4)
  b  Nafziger and Auvinen - Economic Development, Inequality, War, and State Violence (in World Development)
  c  Collier and Heffler – Greed and Grievance in Civil War (in Oxford Economic Papers)
  d  Rens Willems - When do inequalities cause conflict? (http://www.thebrokeronline.eu/Articles/When-do-inequalities-cause-conflict)
Week 8. Health (October 30)
  a  Vincene Adams Alternative accounting in maternal and infant global health
  b  Paul Farmer – Pathologies of power (Ch 1)
  c  Banerjee and Dulof - Poor Economics (Ch 3)
  d  NYtimes - Mosquito nets for malaria spawn an epidemic of overfishing

Week 9. Debt (November 6)
  a  Muhammad Yunnis - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9QAE9eFDa0
  b  Connie Bruck – Millions for Millions (New Yorker http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/10/30/millions-for-millions)
  d  Clara Han – Life in Debt: Intro and Ch 1

Week 10. Governance and Corruption (November 13)
  a  Daniel Jordan Smith - Culture of Corruption (Ch 3)
  b  Akhil Gupta - Red Tape (Ch 4)
  c  James Ferguson & Larry Lohmann – Anti-Politics Machine.
  f  Paul Collier - Guinea's battle against corruption: which side is the west on? https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/nov/15/guinea-corruption-which-side-is-west-on

Week 11. Thanksgiving Recess (November 20)

Week 12. Environment (November 27)
  b  Nicole D. Peterson Unequal sustainabilities: The role of social inequalities in conservation and development projects (in Economic Anthropology)
  c  Nature – Can Conservation cut poverty?
  d  Movie: Bay of all saints

Week 13. Education (December 4)
  a  American Prospect - Is Education the Cure for Poverty?
  b  Brisdall and Londono - Asset Inequality Matters: An Assessment of the World Bank's Approach to Poverty Reduction in American Economic Review
  c  Clive Harber - Education Democracy and Poverty Reduction in Africa in Comparative Education
d  Jeffrey et. al. - Degrees without freedom: The Impact of Formal Education on Dalit Young Men in North India in *Development and Change*

e  What Tomorrow Brings - Movie

**Week 14. Presentations (December 11)**