

GS/SOCI 6090 3.0 Selected Topics in Empiricist Methods

Summer 2017 (May1 – June 12)

Instructor: Himani Bannerji

Mondays and Wednesdays 4 – 7 pm

Room: Ross 202

Course Outline

The research methods focused on in this course are ‘institutional ethnography’ (I.E.) devised by Dorothy E. Smith as a ‘sociology for people’, and an interconstitutive method for exploring the concrete nature of the social devised by Himani Bannerji. Smith’s alternative to the discipline of ‘mainstream’ sociology builds on feminist marxism and is far more than a methodological instrument for the purpose of empirical research. Institutional ethnography is grounded in Smith’s critique of knowledge for ruling, named ‘social organization of knowledge’. Institutional ethnography is rooted in this project. This combines an exploration of the ontology of the social with the anti-ideological critique found in Marx, especially in *The German Ideology*.

Himani Bannerji’s method of scrutinizing the social is deeply informed by her reading of Smith’s ‘social organization of knowledge’ and shares the same theoretical grounds of feminist anti-ideological critique that Marx offers. She relies on Marx’s notion of the ‘concrete’, on the idea that the social is a convergence of many ‘social determinations’. She extends her feminist marxism to social relations of ruling and the role ideology plays in the creation of this rule, both at the levels of explicit and hegemonic formations.

The course is approximately divided into three parts, and includes a practical dimension inquiring into how social research may be best set up. This involves exploring actual happenings, experiences both of institutional and everyday nature and their blurred or refracting boundaries.

The first part of the course is centred on Smith. It introduces her own definition of institutional ethnography and its ramification. This will mean an extensive use of her book *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People* (2005). Her ideas of the social and the standpoint of her critical inquiry (of people and women in particular), her understanding of institutions and ethnography will be thoroughly scrutinized. Her practical method for figuring out ‘what actually happens’, in which the problematic of research arises, will be a central aspect of this section.

The second part will consist of articles by Himani Bannerji, which will be read both in terms of her amplification of Smith’s social organization of knowledge as well as the differences between their approaches. There will be exploration of social relations at their varying levels of concretization, not the least of which is exploring ideologies and practices coded as gender, class and ‘race’. Both the relations of ruling and of resistance will be considered with historical references. There is an aim to move away from an ‘intersectionality’ approach to an inter-constitutive one. This will be connected with Marx’s and Smith’s ideas of the ‘social’ in their historically materialist formational character.

The third part of the course will be a very brief attempt at reading some of Marx's own writings which undergird both Smith and Bannerji's approaches, namely Part I of *The German Ideology* (the critique of Feuerbach) and segments from the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, Vol I. This section is meant to sensitize students to the critical/theoretical and, ultimately, political dimensions from which research projects and methods arise and conclusions that are arrived at. Questions of 'objectivity', accusations of 'subjectivism' and partisanship are important for this section.

### Sequence of texts/readings for the class

- May 1 Introduction to the course  
Reading: D. Smith, *Institutional Ethnography*, chpts 1, 2
- 3 Presentations on the chapters and discussion followed by 45 minutes lecture/clarifications, etc.  
Readings: *Institutional Ethnography*, chpts 3, 5
- 8 as above  
Readings: *Institutional Ethnography*, chpt 7
- 10 as above  
Readings: *Institutional Ethnography*, chpt 8  
H. Bannerji, "But who speaks for us?" in *Thinking Through*
- 15 as above  
Readings: "Introducing Racism" in *Thinking Through*;  
"Ideology" in S. Mojab (ed) *Marxism and Feminism*
- 17 as above  
Readings: "In the matter of X" in *Thinking Through*
- 22 Victoria Day – no class
- 24 as above  
Readings: "Building from Marx: Reflections on 'race', gender and class" in *Marxism and Feminism*.
- 29 as above  
Readings: Marx, *German Ideology*, Part I (section on Feuerbach)  
Bannerji, "The sociology of tradition and the tradition of sociology" in *Demography and Democracy*
- 31 as above  
Readings: continuation of *German Ideology*  
Marx, *Grundrisse*, pages tba

- June 5 as above  
Readings: Marx, *Capital* Vol I, pages tba
- 7 as above  
Readings: tba
- 12 Discussion on Marx, Smith and Bannerji

### Assignments

1. Class presentations, as assigned for each class. 20%
2. Designing a research project based on methods studied in the course. 30%
3. A paper on any of the authors studied, correlating them to each other and discussing the concepts and approaches brought during the course. 50%

### Texts

*Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*, Dorothy E. Smith (2005)

*Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-Racism*, Himani Bannerji (1995)

*Demography and Democracy: Essays on Nationalism, Gender and Ideology* (2011)

*Marxism and Feminism*, Shahrzad Mojab (ed) (2015)

Readings for Marx may be used from any of the available sources.