

Covid-19 and the politics of trauma

Tuesday 14 June 2022 16:45 (1h 30m)

Covid-19 seems to have inaugurated a “new normal.” This is the fashionable talk we hear in the middle of a global pandemic that has so far victimized 1,000,000 people, has disproportionately affected racialized and working class communities, has been characterized by blatant policy failure, evidenced the senselessness of the neoliberal assault on the state, and risks triggering an unprecedented economic crisis. In this absolutely dystopian scenario, critical scholars are faced with two choices: First, to take the “new normal” as another buzzword, another unfortunate point in a long history of publicity tricks meant to numb global audiences to the violence, death and suffering caused by the forward march of racial, colonial capital. Or, second, to take the buzzword seriously, as evidence of the (re)emergence of symbolic and material processes whereby the modern/colonial/capitalist world reorganizes its basis, attributing or extracting different values and meanings to aspects of everyday life.

As more time passes, and the normalization of acceptable deaths becomes more evident, the “new normal” also invites a much needed reconceptualization of the larger politics of trauma, a concept that has acquired a privileged position in critical security studies. Trauma refers to an external event (a shock) that interrupts normality of life with a magnitude and force defies the logics of representation, shattering our capacity to put into words the violence suffered or witnessed. But what happens to the traumatic once we enter Covid’s “new normal”?

What happens to governance via the logic of exceptionality? The representation of Covid as an event that cannot be comprehended? The reality of death, its proximity, and routinization? The role of emotions in the political sphere (where are all the “rational men in suits” supposed to lead us through the storm)? The language of militarized masculinity (what does it mean to take a million deaths on the chin)? The constantly reinvented technologies of body-counting? Among others.

We propose a panel that begins a conversation on the larger connections between death, trauma, memory, racialization, coloniality, dispossession and Covid-19. This workshop seeks to bring together scholars interested not only in the global pandemics as such, but also in the larger theoretical questions that Covid-19 has brought to light. The panel is not meant to produce a final word and overwhelming phenomenon, but to explore the opportunities for rethinking the usual frames through which we talk about violence, death, and strategies of mourning/commemoration.

Abstract time zone

Membership

Track Classification: Post-Structural Politics Working Group