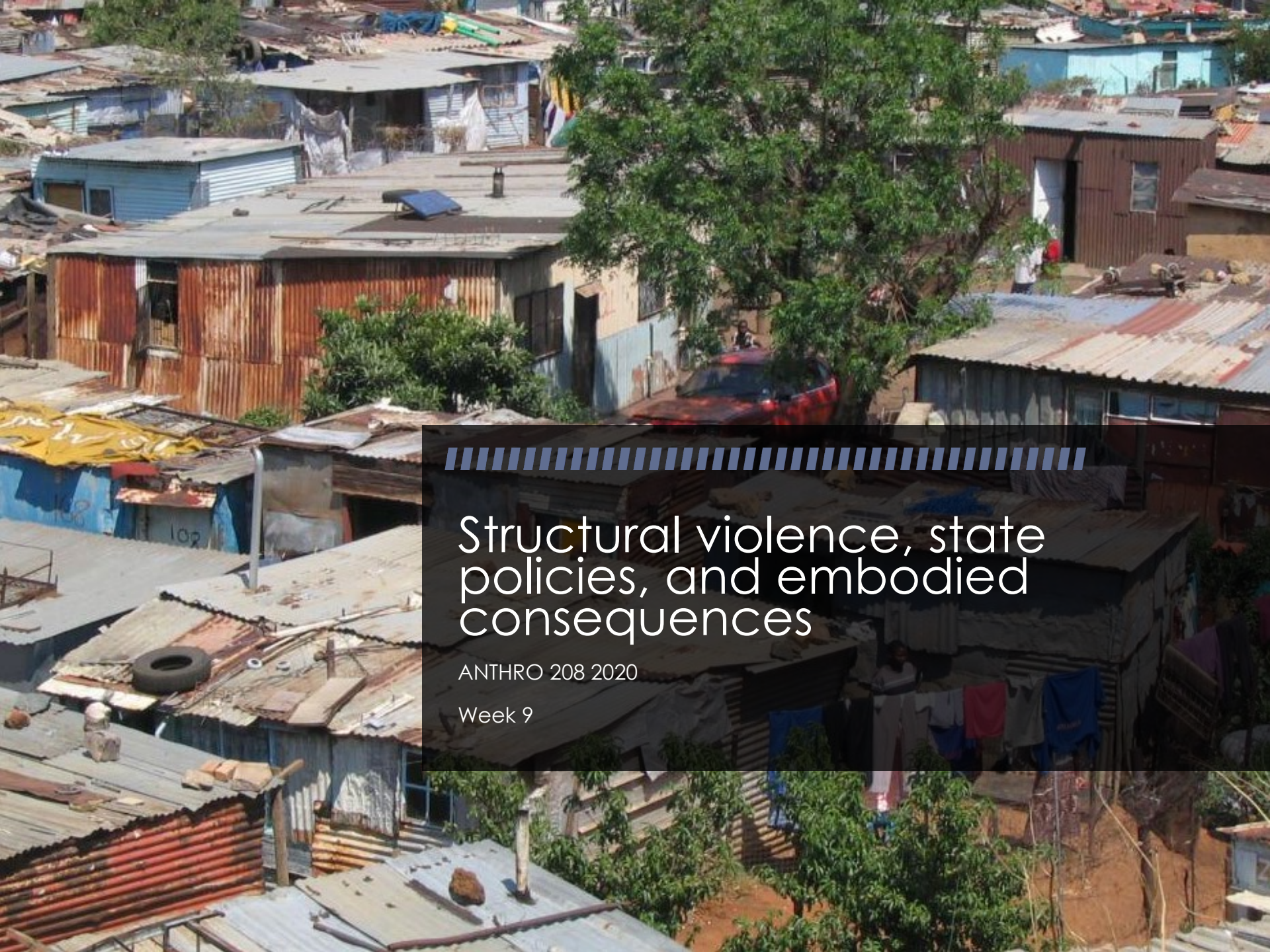


Structural violence, state policies, and embodied consequences

ANTHRO 208 2020

Week 9

Case studies

- Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*: TB and AIDS in Haiti
- Scheper-Hughes, "Nervoso" and mothers in Brazil in *Death Without Weeping*

What is structural violence?

- ***Violence exerted systematically (indirectly) by everyone who belongs to a certain social order***
- Describes social structures with poverty and high inequality (incl. racism, sexism) resulting from human decisions (i.e., avoidable)
- Interdependent with direct violence
- Intended to inform the study of the social machinery of oppression

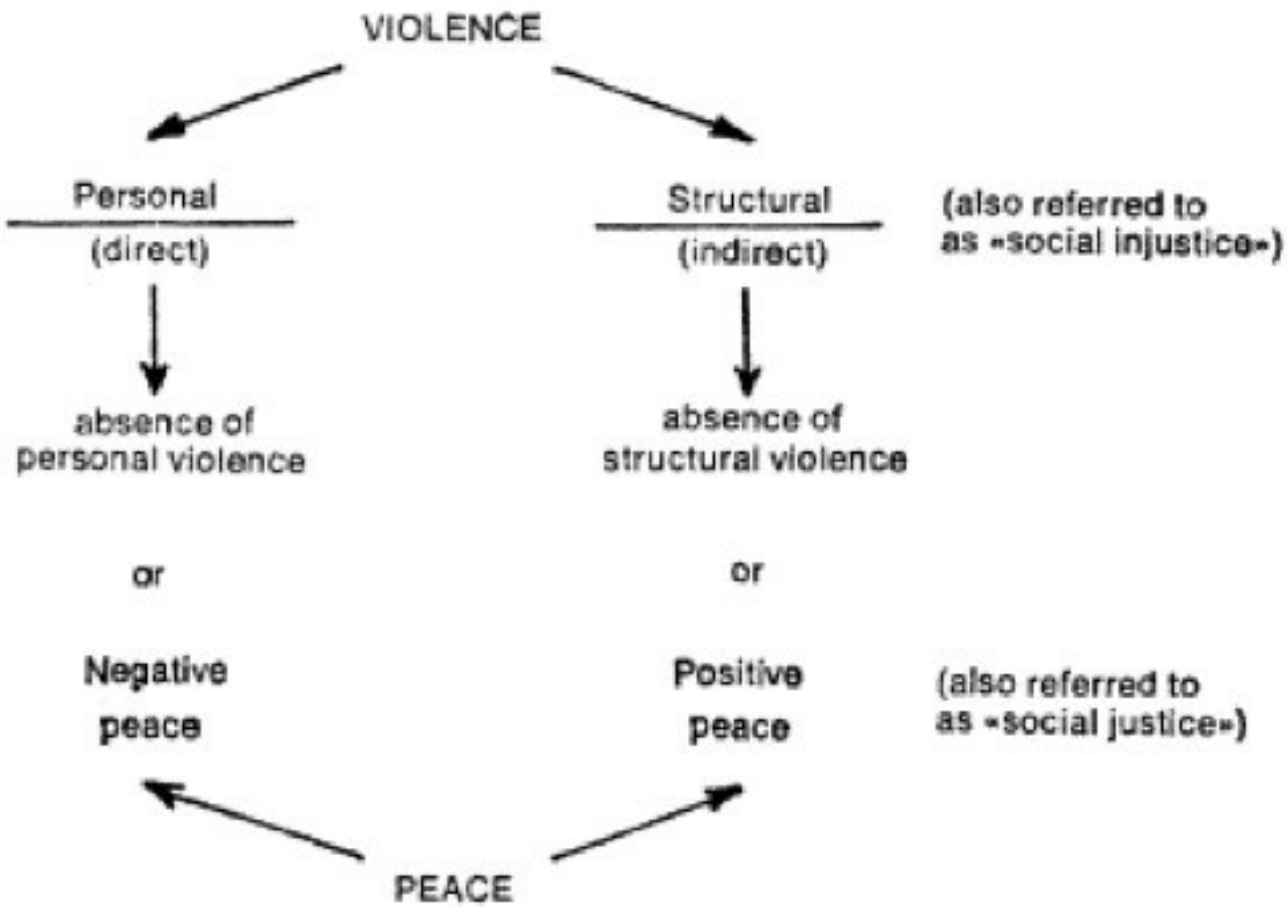


Figure 2

McFarlane (2011) after Galtung

Case study: TB and AIDS in Haiti

- Paul Farmer: "*A syncretic and properly biosocial anthropology of [TB and AIDS] and other plagues moves us beyond noting, for example, their strong association with* ***poverty and social inequalities*** *to an understanding of how such inequalities are* ***embodied*** *as differential risk for infection and, among those already infected, for* ***adverse outcomes*** *including death.*"

Bourgois & Scheper-Hughes

Direct physical assault

Symbolic violence + routinized everyday violence

Farmer – *Pathologies of Power*

- Farmer deploys **biography** in his work to convey the "texture" of affliction
- to make sense of it, biography must be embedded in **ethnography**, which must in turn be understood and embedded in **a historical system** (and global social and economic forces) – the larger matrix.

biography => to make sense
ethnography => to understand
larger historical analysis => to explain

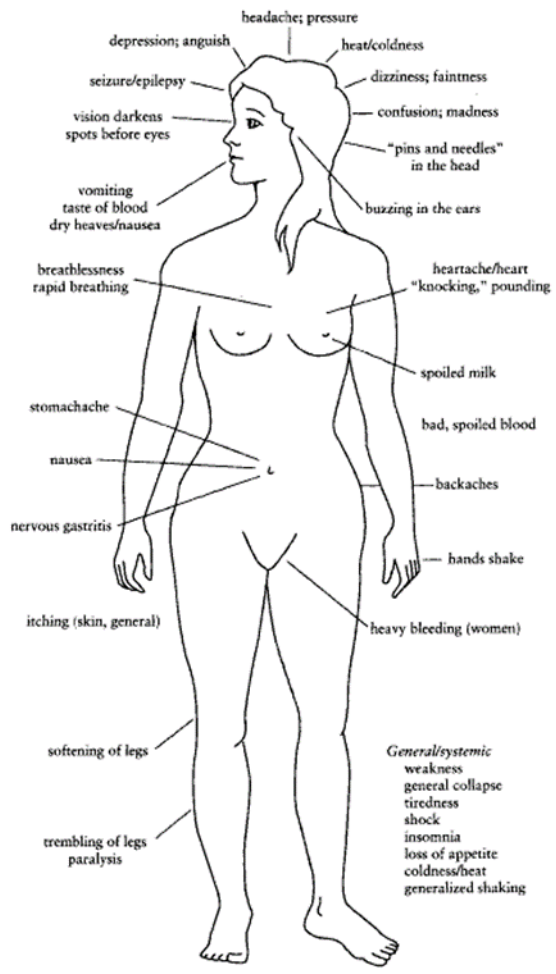
Paul Farmer

Speaking about starting in Haiti:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uI5mouRRaEw

Scheper-Hughes: *Nervoso*

- Nerves/nervousness = idiom through which people of Alto do Cruzeiro reflect on their hunger and hunger anxiety
- a **conceptual scheme** for describing relations among mind, body, and social body



Common sites and symptoms of *nervos*.

Scheper-Hughes: *Nervoso*

- **Medicalized**
- **Individualized**

Scheper-Hughes: *Nervoso*

- Q. How is medicalization of *nervos* a defense strategy of the state?
- **Critique of the social order → a threat to those in power who benefit from that order**

Who benefits?

Scheper-Hughes: *Nervoso*

- *Q. What is hegemony, and how does it play out here?*
- **Gramsci** - dominant classes exercise power both **directly** (through the state) + **indirectly** (through a merging with civil society and identification of their interests with broad cultural ideas and aims)
  - Coercion (force) + consensus (common sense)
- 'Experts' play important role in maintaining commonsense definition of reality – e.g. doctors misidentify *nervos* as individual, physical medical problem

Scheper-Hughes: *Nervoso*

Q. How is *nervos* an example of embodiment? Embodiment of what?

- **E.g. an embodied response to a "nervous" political system**

Scheper-Hughes: *Nervoso*

How is *nervos* linked to social and political changes in Brazil, including the expansion of biomedicine?

- **It created a space for biomedicine in everyday life – a vehicle for medicalization**

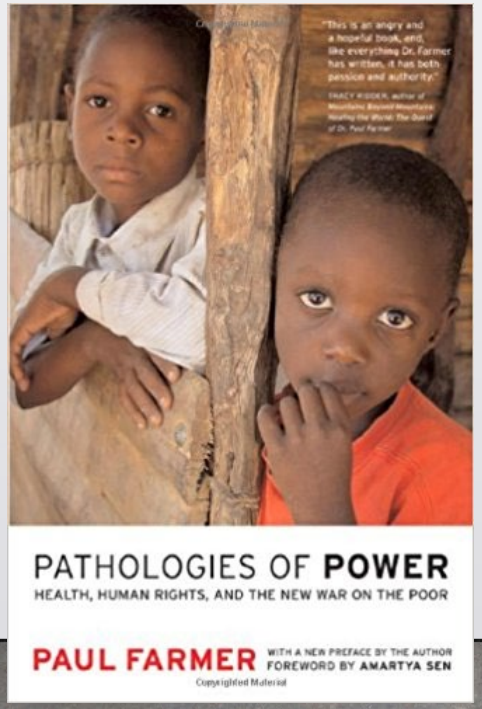
Nancy Scheper-Hughes

"The Revolution in Maternal Thinking and Child Survival in Northeast Brazil:
20 Years After Death Without Weeping"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XaUFD8YyUgw

Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902)

Medicine is a social science, and politics is nothing else but medicine on a large scale. *Medicine, as a social science, as the science of human beings, has the obligation to point out problems and to attempt their theoretical solution: the politician, the practical anthropologist, must find the means for their actual solution... If medicine is to fulfill her great task, then she must enter the political and social life... The physicians are the natural attorneys of the poor, and the social problems should largely be solved by them.*

Structural violence, state policies, and embodied consequences

- What links do you see among this week's content? To previous weeks'?