

Undergraduate course, Tuesday, 9:45-11:15 am

Gen 185: The Feminine and the Political; or, How I Learnt to Stop Worrying and Love the Man

This course approaches the politics of marginal subjects through the vehicle of women thinkers, writers, characters, actors, and artists, who confront the logics of colonialism, capitalism, racism, fascism, and patriarchy by thwarting the voices, fates, destinies, narratives—and loves—conferred to them within these systems as well as within those discourses that seek to liberate them. A key goal is to show that considering political experience & judgment cannot merely involve aggregating different perspectives from discrete lenses of race, class, and gender; the substance these various forms of subjections share needs to be addressed. The subject that tries to speak but cannot, the subject that refuses to answer questions everyone defaults to, the subject that evades political programmes designed for its liberation, and still asks for something—more, better—is the existential locus of this course's journey. In this way, notions of speech, disorder, pathology, trauma, romance, desire, repulsion, faith, et al., become central to approaching the trenchant critiques and rearticulations of state, society, and politics—indeed, of being—that disrupt conventional geographies of presence, sentiment, knowledge, and action, as we know them. We will work with multiple manifestations (theory, novels, film, etc.), not presuming the site of womanhood or the woman's body to be an a priori, already known or knowable “object” of political work; instead, we will follow these texts into the lifeworlds of capitalism, colonialism, liberalism, and imperialism inscribed on all our bodies and subjectivities—some more than others, to be sure—and to the politics this asks of us. We will continue examining the reliance of war and politics on the feminine, not as an object, but as a premise, or at least a category in collusion. Perhaps, in our search, the Feminine will become something to which the Political must confess itself, in a departure from what usually happens. Some of the featured thinkers are Sara Ahmed, Hannah Arendt, Ingeborg Bachmann, Lauren Berlant, Ismat Chughtai, Brittney Cooper, Denise Da Silva, Assia Djebar, Bonnie Honig, Ranjana Khanna, Katherine McKittrick, Fatima Mernissi, Shailja Patel, Hortense Spillers, Maria Tatar, Paromita Vohra, and Sylvia Wynter.

SOC 610: Race, Religion, and the Feminine: Postcolonial and Post-Soviet Formations

Etched within the seemingly disparate coordinates of the Fall of the Berlin Wall, September 11's inaugural of "terror", the global financial crisis and austerity, the crisis of the refugee as the crisis of Europe, and increasingly fascist-permissive societies, are the crumpled timescapes of the global necropolitical postcolony. The course seeks to enlarge our understanding of life *after* colonialism where Europe is both metropole and colony. It works toward a method of knowing, critique, and politics that is mindful of the fact that the social sciences and their methods of knowing and solving problems have been either inefficacious or complicit in our current situation. In doing so, it turns to the commonalities between decolonial struggles, anti-fascist, and socialist projects--to their disparate insurgencies, and their shared problems. How are we to create totalities and frames that connect without colonising? Is it possible to read and harness our recent history in a way that impacts how we name, understand, and solve problems in Athens, Baltimore, Brno, Gaza, or Karachi? By addressing a range of the problems defined in relation to old and new regimes of capital and colony--and often pegged to the terms postcolonial and post-socialist--by way of the challenges they pose for thought and inquiry, and to the politics of method, it proposes a pluralism and dynamism of methodological agenda to counter order-preserving positivist or functionalist ideas within the social sciences and the humanities.

Longer description:

The course treats this as an occasion for a particular kind of political reading, and for enacting a desire for political, social, and cultural analysis that is honest about at least the inefficacy and, worse, the complicity of our epistemologies and methods in the conditions of our political existence. How are we to create totalities and frames that connect without colonising? Is it possible to read and harness our recent history in a way that impacts how we name, understand, and solve problems in Athens, Baltimore, Brno, Gaza, or Karachi? With the correspondence between decolonial struggles, anti-fascist, and socialist projects in mind, the course will grapple with the entwined and renewed legacies of colonialism and capitalism as they manifest in our contemporary realities. It seeks to enlarge our understanding of life *after* colonialism where Europe is both metropole and colony, especially attentive to the differences that are often sacrificed to achieve grand theory, but never really end up connecting our insurgencies to each other. It will attempt a method of addressing the theoretical, temporal, and spatial intersections of postcoloniality and postsocialism that goes further than the simple intersectionality of race, class, and gender as positivist concepts, to a dynamic treatment of bodies, affect, memory, identities, cultures, institutions, power, and lifeworlds in contemporary geopolitics marked by old and new regimes of capital and colony.

The course will feature select texts that are seeking to advance our new frames to fuel our understanding of insurgent globality from below to counter imperial neoliberalism and neofascism, and the emphasis will be on formulating our own frameworks and methods applicable to our own project and pursuits in conversation with these attempts. Some of the possible themes in discussion will be frames of democracy, nation, ethnos, minority, and religion; the state and sovereignty as a demand or an assertion; memory & nostalgia; colonialism & settler-colonialism; gender, race, and the time of the after (of colonisation, war, and Soviet communism); provincialising Europe; the "problem" of Africa; the Muslim and the Jew as pariah; failed states; refuge, exile & fugitivity. Some of the thinkers we will converse with are Talal Asad, Kathleen Biddick, Rosie Braidotti, Veena Das, Denise Ferreira Da Silva, Faisal Devji, Jenny Edkins, Michel Foucault, Marina Grzinic, Ghassan Hage, Jared Hickman, Corey Walker, Jasbir Puar, Joseph Massad, Achille Mbembe, Anne McClintock, Lynn Ramey, Gayatri Spivak, Madina Tlostanova, Eyal Weizman

