Concepts in Postcolonial Theory: Diaspora, Exile, Migration

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan
Office: 503, 13 University Place
Office hours: TBA
Class time: T 6.20-8.20 pm

Course description:
Various forms of dislocation, such as exile, diaspora, and migration, have been productively and extensively explored in both postcolonial theory and literary texts. In this seminar we shall explore how and why these phenomena, especially as they are associated with colonialism and its aftermath, have become central topics of postcolonial thought. We will be particularly interested in identifying the theoretical coordinates of this aspect of postcolonialism. Although diaspora has undeniably brought about profound changes in the demographics, cultures, epistemologies and politics of the post-colonial world, whether the sole emphasis on displacement--as opposed to indigeneity, belonging, or residence--is true to the postcolonial condition, remains an issue.

It is an undisputed historical fact that the past century has witnessed the large-scale displacement and dispersal of populations across the world as a result of major political upheavals, among them the two European wars, decolonization and the Cold war. Following on these, globalization, spurred by free trade and increased capital flows, and new technologies of communication, information, and travel, has accelerated the movement of people, commodities, ideas, and cultures across the world. Diaspora is regarded not as a singular phenomenon but as historically varied and heterogeneous in its aspects. The transnational mobility of people may be the result of forced or voluntary migration, of self-exile or expulsion. Refugees, people in transit, are the product of war, ethnic conflict and natural calamity.

Under the generalized rubric of ‘diaspora,’ we will engage with some of the following topics: the histories of slavery and indentured labor, the material aspects of migrant labor and livelihood, the experiences of displacement and homelessness (the ‘politics of dispossession’ as Said called it), the ideologies of ‘home’ and nation, the cultures of diaspora, the politics of multiculturalism, the predicament of minorities, the exilic perspective, the redefinition of cosmopolitanism, identity questions (belonging, ‘national origins’, assimilation, acculturation), and issues relating to race (racism), sexuality and gender. Postcolonial cultural studies has a special interest in theorizing the ‘new’ phenomena of borders and borderlands, mixing, hybridity, language (for example, global English), translation, double consciousness, history and its lack; and in the affective dimensions of migration and diaspora (homesickness, memory, nostalgia, melancholy).

Diaspora is a multidisciplinary field, and we will draw on writings in anthropology, geography, psychoanalysis, post-structuralist theory, history, literary studies, and cultural studies. Writers to be studied will include: Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gloria Anzaldua, Stuart Hall, James Clifford, Paul Gilroy, Rey Chow, Arjun Appadurai, Theodore Adorno, Jacques Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, and Salman Rushdie.
Course requirements and grading:

1. Weekly response papers (300 words) (10 best) + attendance + participation in class discussion: 50%
2. Final essay (4000 words), due last week of term: 50%

Weekly schedule (tentative and subject to some changes)

Week 1: Introduction and overview. Historical contexts, theoretical questions, and literary representations. Exile and modernism.
Texts: Steiner; Eagleton; Philips, ed. *Extravagant Strangers*; Braziel and Mannur anthology; Guillen; Israel, Introduction to *Outlandish*; Kobena Mercer; Deleuze and Guattari

Week 2: the histories of slavery and indentured labor,
Texts: Gilroy; Mishra; Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*; Philips, *Cambridge*

Week 3: Immigration
Texts: Bhattacharjee; Balibar; Lowe; Film: *Dirty Pretty Things*

Week 4: Displacement and homelessness: the refugee.
Texts: J.Bhabha; Malkki; Said, *After the Last Sky*; Naipaul, *Mimic Men*

Week 5: the ideologies of ‘home’ and nation
Texts: Gopinath; George

Week 6: Minorities and multiculturalism
Texts: H.Bhabha; Radhakrishnan; Spivak

Week 7: The exilic perspective; the diasporic intellectual

Week 8: Cosmopolitanism, internationalism, planetarity
Texts: Cheah and Robbins; Clifford; Said, *W/T/C*; Robbins

Week 9: identity questions (assimilation, acculturation)
Texts: Derrida; Hall; Walcott; essays from Lavie & Swedenborg

Week 10: race, sexuality and gender.
Texts: Altman; Brah; Carole Boyce Davies; Gopinath; Massad

Week 11: Travel, tourism, ethnography
Texts: Behdad; Heng; Pratt; Clifford; Ghosh, ‘Imam and the Indian’; Kaplan

Week 12: Borders and borderlands, mixing, hybridity, language, translation
Texts: Anzaldúa; H. Bhabha; Salman Rushdie, *Satanic Verses*.

Week 13: affective dimensions of migration and diaspora (homesickness, memory, nostalgia, melancholy).
Texts: Adorno; Derrida; Amitava Kumar; Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*; Philips, ed. *Extravagant Strangers*
**Week 14:** Globalization  
Texts: Appadurai; Gikandi; Hardt and Negri; Sassen; Krishnaswamy and Hawley  

**Reading list (selected chapters and essays only, TBA)**  


Malkki, Lisa. review essay in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 1995


Said, Edward W. *The World, the Text, and the Critic; After the Last Sky; Culture and Imperialism (‘the Voyage In’); Representations of the Intellectual; Reflections on


Anthologies, collections and edited volumes (selections)


Journals.

*Diaspora, Public Culture, Cultural studies*

**Fiction, poetry, cinema (for additional reading only)**


Naipaul, V.S. *The Mimic Men; The Enigma of Arrival; Bend in the River*


**Recommended texts**


Course-pack.