Fractured States: Borders, Divisions, and Partitions

This course explores what happens when geographical spaces get divided and people are dislocated, forced to migrate, or become part of a new political entity. We will focus on these geographical divisions both as larger political crises and as events that have effects at more personal and local levels, for example, on familial ties, the ability to find work, or to practice one's religion. We will focus on a few regions whose borders have been and still are in crisis in different ways: Haiti and the Dominican Republic; India and Pakistan; and Israel and Palestine. Some specific questions we will explore: In what ways do geographical borders participate in the creation of national, racial, or religious, identities? What happens to individuals or groups of people who live in a nation to which they do not feel a primary allegiance and to people who have multiple allegiances? In what ways do borders facilitate or demand the production of social difference? How do writers imagine the relationship of subjects to divided spaces and the relationship of those subjects to each other? How do fictional and historical works address the relationships between possibilities for peace and security and notions of justice? The class will focus primarily on literary texts and narrative films, which we will place in dialogue with oral histories, personal memoir, and documentary films.

Course Aims:
As you can see from the description above and the schedule below, this course focuses on three geographical regions. My hope is that you learn about the history of these regions and the complexity of their geopolitics. But my primary concern is not that you become experts in the history of these regions. Instead, the primary objective of this course is to help you to think in more nuanced and creative ways both about how geopolitical entities are constituted through the creation of boundaries and barriers and about the effects these boundaries have on those who live on either side of them, or “inside” them or “outside” of them, as the case might be. Each region we will study serves as a kind of case study of the effects of the fracturing of states. I have chosen these regions for their similarities as well as for their differences. Thus my hope is that we will be able to bring insights we have learned in earlier units to our study of later ones. Ideally, we will use the critical lenses we develop in our study of one area to help us think in greater depth and in new ways about the others.

You might be wondering why the course is exploring these issues primarily through literature and film and not through empirical analysis of social and political realities. First, the focus on these forms of cultural production that work not merely to recount eventscan
help us to understand the effect of these political crises on individuals or on specific groups of individuals. Relatedly, the study of these fictional works also allows us to see how those who are affected by these crises make sense of them by putting them into a narrative form. By examining how literature and film thus do not merely reflect historical and political events, but make sense of them and sometimes even contest them, we can explore alternative possibilities that challenge those that dominate political discussion and thus open up other ways to understand these crises.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

**Class Attendance and Participation:**
This seminar is a collaboration. Thus, regular attendance (including arriving to class on time) and thoughtful engagement with the course materials are crucial to its success. Be generous with your ideas and questions, and show up with texts in your hand and ready to think in new ways. Careful preparation is a key component of participation. Complete all readings, viewings, and assignments before you come to class in order to be ready to participate in that day's discussion. Come to class with questions you have about the material and/or with specific issues or passages from works you would like to discuss. Be ready to contribute meaningfully to our discussions.

If you are absent, I will assume you have a good reason. You do not need to tell me why. (The exception is if something very out of the ordinary happens that requires you to miss more than two classes in a row.) The course, however, moves quickly and the material is challenging, and those that miss seminar will likely find it difficult to keep up. Whenever you miss class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed from one of your classmates and for keeping up with the assignments.

**Written Work:** A variety of forms of written work will be required for the class. I detail them below. All written work will share in the project of moving toward accomplishing the stated goals of the course, of making connections among the different works and discussions of them, and, of course, making new discoveries about why studying this material matters to us. Because this course is rapidly paced, it is particularly vital that student work arrives on time and in good form.

**Reading Responses:** In order to help you prepare to participate in discussion and to give you the practice of writing on a regular basis about course materials, you will also be asked to complete a response paper roughly every other week. This paper is a two-page critical response to the materials assigned since the previous response paper was due. These are typed, thoughtful engagements that address a specific issue, question, or section of a work that you would like to explore. They may also engage with issues raised in class discussion. For some classes, I will assign a specific topic or approach. For others the choice will be yours. Due dates by which the responses must be turned in are listed on the syllabus. Response papers are due on the day that the work you are writing about will be discussed. In most cases, you can choose the work and thus the day during the (usually) two-week period when you will be writing. Response papers are due at the beginning of the class period. Please number and date your response papers.
Weekly questions: In addition to the response papers you will also be asked to bring a thoughtful discussion question to class a few times during the semester. Once a week, we will begin class by having four students present their questions based on the assigned works for that day. This assignment will help us to bring your questions and concerns to the center of class. You are expected to bring your questions and concerns to every class, but these questions should be particularly designed to stimulate discussion about the issues in which you are interested. I will post your assigned days before the second week of class begins. Please make sure to bring your question to class in writing.

Papers:
In addition to the above, you will be writing two analytical papers for the class. The first paper will be 5-6 pages, and the last will be a research paper of about ten pages. Topics for your research papers should develop from and focus on the works we have discussed in class. The research paper is designed to give you the opportunity to delve more deeply into a particular topic we have studied that is of great interest to you. A prospectus for this paper will be due on November 17, and we will have individual conferences to discuss your topics and ways to research them. There are many ways to conduct research for this paper. These might include: reading additional novels, viewing other films, reading works by historians, or literary critics, etc. Many of you will find that a combination of the above will be most useful.

Please keep in mind that all written work must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides.

Grades are based on the quality of all written work (response papers and papers) as well as class participation (which includes your discussion questions). The following is a rough breakdown of how much each category is worth. If your work gets stronger as the course progresses, I will weigh your later work more heavily. (Attendance and Participation: 30%; Response Papers: 25%; Papers: 45%).

Disabilities: If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me soon.

Plagiarism: As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy. Do not plagiarize. If you take an idea or more than two or three words directly from any source (including the Internet), you must cite the source in a footnote. If you are not sure if you are plagiarizing, please ask me. Similarly, if you are unsure how to complete an assignment, come talk to me.
Required Texts:
All texts should be available at the NYU bookstore. In addition to the texts listed below, I will be distributing additional materials. Films will be on reserve at the Avery Fisher Center at Bobst Library.

1) Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*
2) Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*
3) Salman Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children*
4) Sami Michael, *Refuge* (not yet at bookstore)
Course Schedule: (Schedule May Be Subject to Changes)

Week 1:
Sept. 6:
--Introduction; Definitions
Sept. 8:
--*The Farming of Bones* up to p. 116. Come to class having marked and thought about a passage that you have found particularly compelling.

Week 2:
Sept 13:
--Ricardo Pollack (Henry Louis Gates, Jr.), *Black in Latin America*; Disc 1, Episode 1; *Haiti and Dominican Republic: An Island Divided* (On 2 Hour Reserve at Avery Fisher Center DVD 20837)
--*The Farming of Bones* up to p. 203
--“As Refugees from Haiti Linger, Dominicans’ Good Will Fades,” NYT August 31, 2011
--Discussion Questions Group 1
Sept. 15:
--Finish *The Farming of Bones*
Response Paper 1 Due by Today’s class

Week 3:
Sept. 20:
--*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*
Sept. 22:
--*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*
--Discussion Questions Group 2

Week 4:
Sept. 27:
--*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*
Sept. 29:
--Mehta, *Earth* [Film at Avery Fisher Center]
--Discussion Questions 3
--Response Paper 2 Due By Today’s Class

Optional Reading: Sidhwa, *Cracking India*
Week 5:
Oct 4:
--Midnight’s Children
Oct 6:
--Midnight’s Children
--Discussion Questions Group 4

Week 6:
Oct 11: No Class; Holiday
Oct. 13:
--Midnight’s Children;
--Response Paper 3
--Discussion Questions 5
(When this response paper is returned you will receive a cumulate grade for the first three response papers.)

Week 7:
Oct. 18:
--Midnight’s Children
--Discussion Questions Group 6
Oct. 20:
--Midnight’s Children
--Response Paper 4

Week 8:
Oct. 25:
--Sumar, Silent Waters [film at Avery Fisher Center]
Oct. 27:
--Butalia, The Other Side of Silence (selections)
--Discussion Questions Group 7
October 28: Friday: First Paper Due

Week 9:
Nov. 1:
--Shlaim, “The Debate About 1948”
--Kanafani, “Return to Haifa”
Nov. 3:
Jacir, Salt of This Sea [film at Avery Fisher Center]
--Discussion Questions Group 8
--Response Paper 5 Due
Week 10:
Nov. 8:
--*Refuge*
Nov. 10:
--*Refuge*
--Discussion Questions Group 9
--*Response Paper 6 Due*

Week 11:
Nov. 15:
--*Refuge*
Nov. 17:
--Kanafani, “Men in the Sun”
--Selections from Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness*
--Discussion Questions Group 10
--*Final Paper Prospectus Due*

Week 12:
Nov. 22:
--Bacha, *Budrus* [film at Avery Fisher Center]
--Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza* (selections)
--Discussion Questions Group 11
--*Response Paper 6 Due*

Nov. 24: No class

Week 13:
Nov. 29:
--Bilu and Hager, *Close to Home* [film at Avery Fisher Center]
Dec. 1:
--*Arab Labor* [TV Series; selected episodes, at Avery Fisher Center]
--*Course Epigraph/Response Paper 7 Due*
--Discussion Questions Group 12

Week 14:
Dec. 6: Day for the Unexpected
Dec. 8: *Final Paper Due*
Epigraph Discussion

Week 15:
Dec. 13: Presentations
Dec. 15: Presentations