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 events can 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 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.

My preference is that you bring hard copies of all reading materials to class. You will be permitted to use laptops in class to read course materials (if you have a very strong preference to do so) and to take notes, but NOT for any other purpose. All other electronic devices should be off--not ringing or vibrating in class and not visible to you or others.

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 your 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.

For your final response paper (the epigraph response paper), you will choose a passage or image from any work we’ve read or viewed this semester that you think speaks to a major theme, issue, or concern of the course that is of particular interest to you. You will then discuss this quotation/image in relationship to at least a few works from the course. The epigraph you choose should function as an entry point for you to synthesize a range of materials from the course. The objective of this assignment is to give you the opportunity to think about the works and issues we’ve discussed in relationship to each other and to reflect on how the works for this course have given you new ways to think about the implications of fractured states.

**Discussion questions:** In addition to the response papers you will also be asked to bring a thoughtful discussion question to class at least twice during the semester. Each class period, two students will 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 during the second week of class. Please make sure to bring your question to class in writing. When possible, please email your question to me prior to class.

**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 eight to ten pages. Topics for your research papers should develop from the issues 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 and inspires you. I encourage you to develop research topics that allow you to connect what we have been studying to your concentration or major if it will be productive for you to do so. You might choose a topic by thinking about how the
ideas we’ve studied in this course add a new dimension to, or way of thinking about, issues that are central to your concentration. A prospectus for this paper will be due in April, 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 or other visual works, reading works by historians, anthropologists, 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 listed below should be available at the NYU bookstore and at Shakespeare & Co. In addition to these texts, I will be distributing additional materials. Films will be available 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*
5) Ghassan Kanafani, *Palestine’s Children: Returning to Haifa and Other Stories*
Course Schedule: (There might be occasions when materials are added or assignments shifted. I will always give you notice of these changes, of course. I don’t anticipate making changes frequently, but I find it important to allow some flexibility to accommodate how our conversation develops and to make room for new materials or events that become available to us during the semester.)

Week 1:
Jan. 28:
--Introduction; Definitions
Jan 30:
--Video: Ricardo Pollack (Henry Louis Gates, Jr.), *Black in Latin America*; Disc 1, Episode 1; *Haiti and Dominican Republic: An Island Divided*
(Also available at Avery Fisher Center in Bobst Library)
--Turn in sheet on your interests in relation to the course.

Week 2:
Feb 4:
--*The Farming of Bones* up to p. 116. Be sure to read the epigraphs preceding the first page of the novel. Come to class having marked and thought about a passage that you have found particularly compelling.
Feb 6:
--*The Farming of Bones* up to p. 203
Response Paper 1 Due by today’s class

Week 3:
Feb. 11:
--Finish *The Farming of Bones*
--“As Refugees from Haiti Linger, Dominicans’ Good Will Fades,” NYT August 31, 2011
(Optional Documentaries to view about Haitian sugarcane workers in The Dominican Republic:
--William Haney, *The Price of Sugar*
Feb. 13:
--*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Through page 118. Be sure to read the epigraphs and the footnotes.)
Week 4:
Feb 18: Holiday. No Class
Feb 20:
-- *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (Through page 223)
-- **Response Paper 2 Due By Today’s Class**

Week 5:
Feb 25:
-- Finish *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*
Feb 27:
-- Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (excerpts)
-- Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (excerpts)
-- Mehta, *Earth* [Film at Avery Fisher Center]

Week 6:
March 4:
-- *Midnight’s Children* (through page 133)
March 6:
-- *Midnight’s Children* (through page 254)
-- **Response Paper 3**
(When this response paper is returned you will receive a cumulate grade for the first three response papers.)

Week 7:
March 11:
-- *Midnight’s Children*; (through page 390)
March 13:
-- *Midnight’s Children* (through page 484)

Spring Break: March 18-24

Week 8:
March 25:
-- Finish *Midnight’s Children*
March 27:
-- Sumar, *Silent Waters* [film at Avery Fisher Center]
**March 29: Friday: First Paper Due**

Week 9:
April 1: -- Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence* (selections)
April 3: Introduction and Historical Background: Israel and Palestine
-- Shlaim, “The Debate About 1948”
-- **Response Paper 4**
Week 10:
April 8:
--Kanafani, "Returning to Haifa"
April 10:
--Jacir, Salt of This Sea [film at Avery Fisher Center]

Week 11:
April 15:
--Refuge (through page 95)
April 17:
--Refuge (through page 181)
--Response Paper 5 Due

Week 12:
April 22:
Possible Research Day
April 24:
--Refuge (through page 280)
--Darwish, In the Presence of Absence (excerpt to be read in class)

Week 13:
April 29:
--Finish Refuge
Tuesday April 30: Course Epigraph (Final) Response Paper Due
May 1:
--Bacha, Budrus [film at Avery Fisher Center]
--Images of Separation Barrier

Week 14:
May 6:
----Bilu and Hager, Close to Home [Film available at Avery Fisher Center]
--Mahmoud Darwish, “A Soldier Dreaming of White Lilies” (1967)
Tuesday May 7: Final Research Paper Due
May 8:
--Jackie Salloum, Slingshot Hip Hop [Film available at Avery Fisher Center]

Week 15:
May 13:
--Epigraph Discussion