Writing Seminar I: The History of Orientalism and the Politics of its Legacy

Europe’s fascination with the, East, or “Orient,” has a complicated and often contradictory history. From the time of Alexander the Great to Marco Polo to Lawrence of Arabia, European scholars, linguists, writers, artists, and explorers have depicted the “Orient” as sometimes sophisticated, exotic, mysterious, barbaric, dangerous, or debauched. In doing so, they constructed both a disciplinary field called “Orientalism” as well as a powerful narrative of civilization that pitted “East” against “West.” Using a flexible historical approach, this seminar will explore selected cases studies of cultural encounters between Europe and the "Orient" from Antiquity to the present. Our main text and guide in this course will be Edward Said’s seminal 1978 book Orientalism. We will also read selections from the field broadly defined as “postcolonialism,” which called for a more complex understanding of how gender, class, power, race, and nationalism shaped the construction and reproduction of knowledge. How do imperialism and knowledge production intersect? Can they be disentangled? Do Orientalist constructs still shape our own understandings of “East” and “West,” and our own production of knowledge, still to this day? In answering these questions, we will engage various texts, including primary sources, non-fiction, literature, and theory. Through these readings, class discussions, and weekly writing exercises leading to formal essays, we will explore and write about complex issues of identity, race, exile, multiculturalism, and religious fundamentalism. Readings include William Jones, J. S. Mill, Karl Marx, E. M. Forster, Franz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Nadia Abu El-Haj, Ann Laura Stoler, Benedict Anderson, and Dipesh Chakrabarty.

Course Objectives:

1) To develop critical reading skills of historical texts (primary and secondary) and the theoretical texts that inform our understanding of history

2) To hone critical writing skills based on historical and theoretical texts

3) To encourage original insights and arguments about these texts through class discussions and writing exercises

4) To explore, analyze, and deconstruct historical concepts of “east” and “west” and the political dimensions of such concepts
**Writing and Essays:**

In this class, the central aim of the writing assignments is to develop your ability to analyze primary sources, secondary sources, and, in the final paper, to analyze and synthesize a selection of scholarship around a specific topic. In doing so, you will learn the basics of how to write essays that are critical, historical, political, and theoretical.

You will write 3 formal essays (in 12-pt. font, double-spaced, and paginated). More specific guidelines will also be distributed in class:

1) **Essay 1:** 4-5 pages (25%)
   Choose 2-3 sources from part I of the course to answer: How do these authors conceptualize the “East” or “Orient”?

2) **Essay 2:** 4-5 pages (25%)
   Choose from a selection of prompts on Said’s *Orientalism* and his intervention

3) **Essay 3:** 7-9 pages (30%)
   Choose a topic or question that an Orientalist from the 18th or 19th century would have studied. Explain how the historical literature and critical theory on this topic has evolved over the last 30 years or so, from around Said’s intervention to the present day.

4) **Participation and other writing assignments:** (20%)

**Participation Requirements, Assignments, and Grading:**

To be successful in this class, you must not only read the materials carefully and express yourself clearly in writing, but also effectively articulate your ideas to your classmates. Furthermore, since other students frequently arrive at important discussion points even before I do (and explain them just as well!), you must be prepared to *listen to* and learn from your colleagues. Students should *not* consider their involvement in classroom discussions as extra credit, but rather as a *basic course requirement*. Students should also contribute thoughtfully and respectfully.

I will base your grade on your class participation, the quality of your essays, and your responses to the work of others. Every assignment and essay draft matters (though drafts will not get a separate grade). Presentation (i.e. grammar, proof-reading, MLA format) as well as style and substance counts.

In addition to in-class discussion, students must also:

1) **Post 2 discussion questions** before each class. Please post your questions to the Forum section of NYU Classes by midnight the night before class on the day we are scheduled to discuss the reading.
2) Writing assignments which are due in class should be sent to the entire class (either as an attachment or in the body of the message) via Messages in NYU Classes by midnight the night before class on the day we are scheduled to discuss.

3) Complete all writing assignments promptly. All drafts and formal essays should be BOTH emailed to me and brought into class in hard copy form.

4) Please turn your cell phones off during class. As a general rule, laptops are NOT permitted in class. However, on certain occasions, laptops may be permitted for writing and other specific exercises.

**Attendance and Plagiarism:**

If, due to illness, emergency, or religious holiday, you cannot attend class, please be in touch with me directly via email as soon as possible so that you can be prepared for the next class. Please be aware that more than two unexcused absences will jeopardize your course grade.

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. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. 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](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html) for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

**Readings, Assignments, and Books:**

Readings and assignments are due on the date they are listed. Readings that are followed by (NYU Classes) can be found in the Resources Folder of the course website in NYU Classes. You must print and bring a hard copy of the reading to class. Again, for most of this course, laptops will not be permitted.

Please purchase the following books at the NYU bookstore:

4) Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Atlantic 2004)

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

Part I: The Construction of the Orient and Birth of a Discipline

Week 1: Introduction: The Enlightenment and the East, past and present

Wed Sept 7th: In class:
- Short reading: François Guizot, The History of European Civilization (1828)
- Short clips: Indiana Jones; Assassin’s Creed; Eat, Pray, Love (film)
- In-class writing: free-write responses

Week 2: The “West” and the “Orient”

Mon Sept 12:
1. Ernst Renan, Islamism and Science (NYU Classes)
2. J. S. Mill, The Indian Form of Government (Macfie)
3. Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Gorgeous Edifices” from The Philosophy of History (Macfie)
   - Discussion: Western ideas of history and civilization

Wed Sept 14th
4. Karl Marx, The British in India (Macfie)
   - In class discussion: understanding Marx and his critique
   - In-class writing exercise: How to analyze primary sources

Week 3: Orientalism as a Discipline

Mon Sept 19th
1. William Jones, A Discourse on the Institution of a Society for Inquiring into the History, Civil and Natural, the Antiquities, Arts, Sciences and Literature, of Asia [1784] (NYU Classes)
2. T. B. Macaulay, Minute on Indian Education (NYU Classes)
   - *Due in Messages to discuss in class: 250 word response to a primary source

Wed Sept 21st
4. E. M. Forster, Passage to India – begin reading!
   - Discussion: What is Orientalism as a discipline?
   - Assign paper 1
Week 4: Orientalism in Art and Literature
Mon Sept 26th
1. E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* – continue reading
2. In Class: Orientalist Art

Wed Sept 28th
3. Discussion of *A Passage to India* – Is this Orientalist? Why?

Part II: The Intervention of the Orientalist Critique: Said

Week 5: Questioning Knowledge and Power: Critiques from the West
Mon Oct 3rd
1. Nietzsche (Macfie)
2. Gramsci (Macfie)
3. Foucault (Macfie)
   - Discussion: What do these authors have in common?
   - **Due in class**: Rough draft of Paper 1

Wed Oct 5th
1. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* – begin reading
   - Discussion: Nietzsche, Gramsci and Foucault continued
   - In-class writing: how to synthesize sources
   - Workshop of in-class writing tbd

Week 6: Questioning Knowledge and Power: Critiques from the non-West
Mon Oct 10th
Fall Break! No Class!
Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* – continue reading

Wed Oct 12th
1. Anouar Abdel-Malek *Orientalism in Crisis* (Macfie)
2. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* – continue reading
   - Discussion of Abdel-Malek’s critique of Orientalism
   - **Due in Class**: Paper 1

Week 7: Questioning Knowledge and Power continued…
Mon Oct 17th
1. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (finish whole book)
   - Discussion of Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*
   - Begin Said’s *Orientalism* (Intro and Part I)

Wed Oct 17th:
- Discussion of Fanon and Abdel-Malek
- In-class writing: TBD
- Continue to read Said’s Orientalism (Intro and Part I)
Week 8: Said’s Intervention
Mon Oct 24th
   • Discussion: Said’s intervention
   • Assign Paper 2

Wed Oct 26th
• Discussion of Said’s *Orientalism* continued
• In class: short video of interview with Said

Week 9: Debating Said
Mon Oct 31st
   • Discussion: Debating Said

Wed Nov 2nd:
• Debating Said continued…
• Due in class: Workshop drafts of paper 2

Part III: Post-colonialism and the Critiquing of the Critique of Orientalism

Week 10: Self-Critique by West: Questioning Nations and Traditions
Mon Nov 7th
1. In-class short reading: Hobsbawm on traditions
   • Discussion exercise: Finding the argument

Wed Nov 9th
   • Discussion: Imagining communities, inventing traditions
   • In class writing exercise: how to analyze sources

Week 11: Critiques from the non-West
Mon Nov 14th
   • Discussion: What is Prakash’s main argument so far?
   • Due in class: Paper 2
Wed Nov 16th
   • In class writing: Summarize and analyze secondary sources using Prakash

Week 12: From Subaltern Studies to the Post-colonial Critique
Mon Nov 21st
1. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography” (NYU Classes)
   • Discussion: Subaltern studies – what is it?

Wed Nov 23rd
Thanksgiving Break! No Class!

Week 13: Moving Past Post-Colonialism
Mon Nov 28
1. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” Tensions of Empire. (NYU Classes)
   • Discussion: Is everything Orientalist in a post-colonial world?
   • Assign Paper 3

Wed Nov 30th
• How do we write post-colonial history?
• In class writing exercise: the reverse outline of previous essay

Week 14: Said’s Long Legacy
Mon Dec 5th
   • In class Discussion: What would an Orientalist like William Jones think of our class today?

Wed Dec 7th
• Due in class to workshop: paper 3 topics, bibliography, (rough non-reverse outline tbd)

Week 15: Writing our own post-colonial histories
Mon Dec 12th
• Due in Class: Drafts of paper 3
• Workshop in class: drafts of paper 3

Tuesday Dec 13th: Legislative Day / Monday Schedule
• Workshop of paper 3 drafts continued / reverse outlining
Wed Dec 14th
- In class: video / art tbd
- Discussion: Orientalism today?
- Course evaluations

Friday Dec 16th: Final Paper Due in Mailbox