Course Description

How does colonial violence generate anticolonial resistance? Is violence ever justified, whether as an end or as a means? What aesthetic strategies do writers deploy to legitimate the exercise of violence? What is the relationship between militant insurgency and literary form?

Posing these and other questions, this course offers an introduction to postcolonial theory through the lens of critical engagements with anticolonial violence. We examine theoretical and empirical defenses of anticolonial violence across several cultural and geographic contexts, including Algeria, Iran, Egypt, Ireland, Germany, and North America. Readings traverse a wide range of disciplines, including literary studies, history, philosophy, and political theory.

We will engage classic European texts on the philosophy of violence as well as reactions to colonial violence across the colonized world. We will also revisit political theories of violence in order to examine their relevance to understanding violence in the modern and contemporary periods. Comparing the experience of violence across a wide variety of colonial and colonizing contexts, this course contemplates the limits of the modern state’s monopoly on violence, while suggesting how literary texts sustain, support, and problematize resistance to colonial regimes.

Each seminar will be structured around one or more primary texts, which will be closely and critically analyzed with regard to stylistic features, literary devices, and ideological content. Students will be encouraged to reflect critically on the range of classic and contemporary texts pertaining to the theory of colonialism and violence, while also engaging in cross-cultural comparison and practicing interdisciplinary methodologies. The comparative and interdisciplinary approach of this course will train students in the methodologies most relevant to the MA in Comparative Cultures in the School of Modern Languages, but the course content will be of relevance to students in other MA programmes.
Seminar Schedule & Assigned Readings

Seminar 1: **Introduction to class and topic. Walter Benjamin: Law-Making and Law-Preserving Violence.**


Seminar 2: **Frantz Fanon: Violence as Catharsis**


Secondary Readings:

Seminar 3: **Frantz Fanon: Anticolonial Nationalism & Woman’s Liberation**


Secondary Readings:

Seminar 4: **Anticolonial Violence in Sunni Islam (from Jihad to Hijra)**

Primary Texts:

Secondary Readings:

Seminar 5: **Anticolonial Violence and the Iranian Revolution**

Secondary Readings:

**Seminar 6: Irish Socialism and the Critique of Empire**


**Seminar 7: Anticolonial Communism and the Black Atlantic**

Primary Texts:

Secondary Readings:

**Seminar 8: Marxist Subalternity: Gramsci’s Social Revolution**


Secondary Readings:
Seminar 9: Civil Disobedience and the Legacies of North American Slavery

Primary Texts:

Secondary Readings:

Seminar 10: Messianic Violence and Secular Doubt: Benjamin, Arendt, Fanon

Primary Texts:

Seminar 11: Workshop final papers

Please bring enough copies of your drafts of your final papers for everyone to read through and provide feedback on.

Assessment Details

1) One 2,000 word commentary assignment involving discussion of two or more course readings (40%)

2) 3,000 word coursework essay engaging with course readings (60%)

Final Commentary Guidelines
Commentaries should be based on the 15-20-minute oral presentations that each of you will have given in class. They need not follow a conventional format (notes are acceptable), but they should demonstrate close engagement with the assigned text(s). Mostly importantly, they should contain thought provoking questions. You are advised to produce a draft of these commentaries prior to your presentations and then to revise them afterwards, prior to submission. While you should reference two or more course readings, it is expected that you will focus on the readings for one seminar only. Please consult with me if any aspect of this assignment is unclear.

Final Paper Guidelines
You are encouraged to be creative and inventive in your choice and treatment of topic. Closely textual analysis is extremely important. You will not be assigned questions or topics unless requested; do make sure to discuss your choices with me prior to submission. Please
use Chicago style citation in the text of your essay and include a bibliography. Essays should be double-spaced and page numbers should be marked. Make sure to proofread for typos. Essays will be workshopped in class, so address your arguments and observations to your peers and not just to your instructor. Please consult with me if any aspect of this assignment is unclear.

Further Recommended Readings
(You are encouraged to consult the sources below while brainstorming for your final papers.)

I. Primary Sources


II. Contemporary Postcolonial Engagements


III. Journals and Resources for Contemporary Postcolonial Studies
Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies

Postcolonial Studies

Journal of Postcolonial Inquiry

Postcolonial Studies Association (UK)

Northern Postcolonial Network (UK)

“Key Texts in Anti-Colonial Thought” Edinburgh University Press
These questions are intended to stimulate your thinking, not to provide a precise outline of what you should focus on. You are welcome to combine these questions in different ways than those proposed here or to think of additional questions and areas of inquiry.

Major Themes and Questions Emerging from our Class, Readings and Discussions

1) **Sociology and Revolution**: At least three of the writers we have read considered themselves sociologists. How does the theory and literature of anticolonial insurgency propagate a new form of knowledge? What, if anything, is new about anticolonial violence in sociological terms? Does anticolonialism (or postcolonialism) envision a theory of the state different from that of prior eras? Is there a new conception of the subject? Of the relation between the state and the subject? (Shariati, Fanon, DuBois)

2) **Marxism and Transnational Solidarity**: Marxism appears to be a necessary condition for transnational solidarity in the struggle against colonialism. How do you account for Marxism’s centrality to anticolonial movements? (Connolly, C.L.R. James, DuBois, McKay, Fanon, Shariati, Benjamin, Gramsci)

3) **Race and Class**: Does a politically awakened class consciousness function as a vaccination against racial prejudice? Or does the problem of race persist even within Marxist and anticolonial reflection? (Connolly, McKay)

4) **The Role of Religion in Stimulating, Sustaining, and Legitimating Violence**: How does religion transform the internal content of violence, making the illegitimate exercise of force legitimate and vice-versa? How does Benjamin’s distinction between law-preserving and law-making violence illuminate key issues and dynamics within other texts we have read? (Benjamin, Shariati, Fanon as a Foil)

5) **The Tension between Political Revolution and Women’s Liberation**: There are very few women on our reading list. Why and how has women’s contribution to anticolonial movements been obscured? How do the writers on our list conceptualize women’s contribution to anticolonial revolution? (Fanon, Arendt)

6) **Revolution**: What is revolution, according to our writers? How is anticolonial revolution similar to and different from revolution in general?

7) **The State**: How do our writers envision the role of the state? Do they support anarchy? Do they conceive of the state playing a role in a liberated postcolonial society different from the role it plays under colonialism? How does Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony illuminate key themes in our other readings? (Thoreau, Mehanna)

8) **Colonialism**: What, on the basis of our readings, is colonialism? What is colonialism’s relationship to imperialism? Is there such a thing as a global ‘form’ of colonialism, that applies to all times and places? You may want to distinguish among different kinds of colonialism (and anticolonialism) that we have encountered in our readings for this essay.