

Phil 3123: Decolonizing Philosophy Open Seminar, Fall 2021

When/Where: Tuesdays, 3:35-6:30pm in Library, E2

Instructor: Carmen De Schryver

Email: cdeschryver@sarahlawrence.edu

Office: Andrews East 2

Course Description

This course provides an overview of some of the major themes and debates within decolonial theory. Some of the questions that will guide our discussions throughout the semester are: What is colonialism? To what extent has colonialism involved not just political domination but the hegemony of specific ways of knowing? In what ways is colonialism ongoing? What is involved in “decolonization”? Is it just a political process aiming at sovereignty, or is it more thoroughgoing? What would it mean to decolonize academia, and philosophy in particular? How should we think about the connections between philosophy as an academic discipline and the historical reality of colonialism? Would decolonizing philosophy require a break with the Western tradition of thought, and, if not, what are the advantages and disadvantages of remaining in dialogue with the Western “canon”? What are the various decolonizing strategies, and what goals do they enact?

In the first part of the course, we will read a variety of key texts within contemporary decolonial theory which propose very different answers to these questions. The second part of the course goes on to consider a variety of strategies for decolonization more broadly, and academic decolonization in particular. Some of the thinkers we will look at include Seloua Luste Boulbina, Frantz Fanon, Audre Lorde, Lewis Gordon, Kwasi Wiredu, Souleymane Bachir Diagne and Paulin Hountondji. Beyond becoming equipped with the tools to think critically about canon-formation and the meaning of academic decolonization, we will also become familiar with seminal texts in Africana and Latinx traditions of decolonial theory.

Learning Outcomes

- Develop a critical understanding of public debates around decolonization in general, and the decolonization of academia in particular
- Think critically about what constitutes “philosophy” and its implicit geographical and racial biases
- Gain fluency in discussing various strategies for decolonizing academia, as well as a practical understanding of how to apply these strategies

- Cultivate skills in critically reading and evaluating technical philosophical material

Course Elements

- Participation. Each week, our aim will be to co-construct a dynamic and hospitable learning environment. The success of this depends entirely on your willingness to actively participate in the pedagogical process, to be engaged and to step into an active role.
 - (i) Preparation for class. This means having not just done the readings but being ready to discuss and share your insights or questions with your peers.
 - Readings. Weekly discussions will be based largely on the assigned readings. All the assigned readings for this course are mandatory. You are expected to read closely and attentively (often, this will mean reading twice).
 - **Post on the discussion board on mySLC before class. Depending on the week, you will be asked to either pose a question of your own based on the readings, or answer the question posted on the discussion board.**
 - (ii) Participation in the classroom. This can take on a variety of forms. I encourage you to let me know if speaking up in larger group settings is uncomfortable for you.
 - (iii) Peer engagement. How you engage with your peers is a central component of the course. You will be expected to contribute to a healthy and respectful dialogical space, which is especially important given the sensitivity of the issues we will be discussing. We will spend more time talking together about peer critique, but the starting point here is that critical comments should be constructive, appropriate and aimed at the content of the argument and *never* at the person making the argument.
- Position paper of no more than 5 pages, double-spaced.
 - Prompts will be circulated prior to the deadline.
 - Two weeks before the deadline (November 4th), you should submit a one-page outline which articulates your *thesis* and shows how you will go about demonstrating it.
 - Deadline: November 12th
- Conference Component. A separate syllabus detailing the schedule and expectations for conferences will be provided.
 - Conference project.
 - (A) Your own proposed project, be this more creative or a written project. You should have a well-defined plan from our first meeting.
 - My suggestions are either:
 - (B) A more traditional 12-page philosophical paper which enters into the debates surrounding decolonization and/or the application of this metaphor to the academic context

- (C) a more applied 12-page paper or project which (i) elaborates on one of the decolonial strategies (here, you can draw on your position paper), (ii) picks out an object which stands in need of decolonization (this can be a philosophical text, a (social-)scientific methodology, an artistic object, etc. etc.) and then (iii) explains how your chosen strategy would apply to this.
 - In-class presentation.
 - During the final weeks of class, you will give a **7 minute** presentation providing a detailed outline of your final conference project.
 - You will then be assigned a partner, and each of you will provide written commentary (one-paragraph) on one another's outlines. Your commentary on your partner's work will be a key part of your successful completion of this task
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Course Materials

All of the readings will be made available in PDF.

Note on the Readings

In order to get the most out of the course, it is necessary that you read the assigned texts closely *in advance* of the class meeting. As you will see, most of the readings are relatively short. Do not be discouraged if you find the readings difficult or even confusing. Our class discussion is designed to (i) collaboratively make sense of the text and (ii) equip you with the skills that you need to fully comprehend and critically interrogate the course material. I will not expect you to understand everything that you read. I do, however, expect you to make a good-faith effort to interpret the text on your own, to note down any questions, and to participate proactively in the class discussion on this basis. I would also like to emphasize that raising clarificatory questions is not just okay but very much encouraged; if you are confused about something, it is very likely your peers will be as well, and your questions will be welcomed!

Course Schedule

The following is a tentative schedule for the semester. Changes to the schedule will be announced in class.

Part I: Decolonization and its Objects: The Meaning and Scope of Decolonization

Week 1 (September 7th): Discussion of the Syllabus & Pedagogy

Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pp. 71-86

Dewey, "Traditional vs. Progressive Education", pp. 17-23 (optional)

Week 2 (September 14th): Decolonizing Academia: Student Movements and Eurocentric Curricula in the Media

Garfield & Van Norden, "[If Philosophy Won't Diversify, Let's Call It What It Really Is](#)"

Dabashi, "[Can Non-Europeans Think](#)"

[UCT Rhodes Must Fall Statement](#)

Week 3 (September 21st): Defining Decolonization

Boulbina, "Decolonization" in *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*

Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, pp. 16-20

Week 4 (September 28th): Defining Decolonization II: Class Debate

Tuck & Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor", pp. 1-40.

[Watch: Nadia Nsayi](#)

Week 5 (October 5th): Philosophy as an Object of Decolonization

Mills, *Blackness Visible*, 1-19

Maldonado-Torres, Vizcaino, Wallace & We, "Decolonising Philosophy" (in *Decolonising the University*), pp. 64-90

L. Gordon, "Decolonizing Philosophy", pp. 16-36 (optional)

[Watch: Digne on Decolonizing Philosophy](#)

Part II: Decolonial Strategies

Week 6 (October 12th): Delinking

Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pp.110-114

Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 235-239

Gordon and Gordon, "Introduction: Not Only the Master's Tools", pp. ix-xi

Week 7 (October 19th): Study Days (no class)

Week 8 (October 26th): Rehabilitation: Philosophy of Culture

Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, pp. 187-210

Nzegwu, *Family Matters*, pp. 1-23

Week 9 (November 2nd): Recentring

Hountondji, "Recentring", pp. 238-248

Tuhiwai-Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (chp. 10), pp. 185-197

Week 10 (November 9th): Decolonization as/through Translation

Wiredu, "Conceptual Decolonization", pp. 53-64

Diagne, “Decolonizing the History of Philosophy”, pp. 1-32

Week 11 (November 16th): Comparative Methodologies I: Creolization, Questions of Reception, Reading Strategies

J.A. Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory*, pp. 1-17.

Week 12 (November 23rd): Comparative Methodologies II: Reading Strategies

Belausteguigoitia, “Pairing a Triangle”, pp. 107-129.

De Schryver, “Reading Heidegger through Lugones”, pp.1-7

Week 13 (November 30th):

No Reading (concluding discussion)

Week 14 (December 7th): Presentations

Week 15 (December 14th): Presentations

Accessibility and Accommodations

This seminar is committed to accessibility among all dimensions of identity. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Sarah Lawrence College. If you suffer from a condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the objectives of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. The contact person to discuss such accommodations is Polly Waldman, Associate Dean of Studies and Disabilities Services, in Westlands 207C or x2235 or: pwaldman@sarahlawrence.edu.

Academic Integrity

Any written work you submit should be your own. This means that you should not copy/paste, paraphrase or borrow ideas from a text or internet source without proper citation (*i.e.* presenting them as though they are your own). Failure to do so amounts to plagiarism, and the college takes violations of plagiarism very seriously. For further information, you should consult the Student Handbook’s policies and procedures regarding plagiarism. If you have any questions about how to use/cite secondary sources appropriately, please do not hesitate to ask.