IS 531 N Critical Thought in the Global South

Optional Course offered in the Monsoon Semester

Course Instructors: Nivedita Menon and Mohinder Singh

Credits: 4

Method of Instruction:  
   a) Lectures  
   b) Guided reading in class of selected texts

Contact hours: 4 per week

Evaluation: Two mid-term assessments and a final exam. Depending on the size of the class, mid-term assessments may be term-papers or class exams. The second mid-term assessments will expect students to read a work of literature/fiction/poetry/cinema from the Global South in the light of three to four readings from the course.

Rationale and description of course

Critical Thought in the Global South is an optional course offered to second year students of the MA (PIS) programme of School of International Studies. It is conceptualized as a companion course to the Compulsory courses Political Thought I and Political Thought II, taught in the first year, which act as a foundation on which this course builds. Although three courses offered by CCP&PT - Political Thought I and II and Comparative Politics – already introduce students to thought from the global South, this course is meant to focus exclusively on critical thinking and debates in the region.

Students from other Centres who have not done Political Thought I and II at CCPPT may also take this course.

The course draws on resources offered by Arab, Japanese, Chinese, African and South Asian intellectual traditions and contemporary debates, and is multi disciplinary and inter disciplinary in scope. The readings are thus from Philosophy, Anthropology and Political Theory, History, Sociology and Cultural Studies. The attempt is to offer students a panoramic view of scholarship across these regions through a focus on six selected key themes.

The course will work towards developing perspectives on thought and theorizing that question and subvert the Eurocentric gaze and positioning of what is normally conceived of as theory and thought.

Scope and method of teaching

Since this is a survey course, the approach would be to cover a wider field rather than intensively focusing on a small area. Each theme is centred around a set of readings that are provided to the students in
advance. Apart from lectures, students will engage with several of the readings through guided reading in class, and make readings-based presentations themselves.

1. What is Critical thought Critical about?

*Critiques of Eurocentrism of dominant intellectual traditions; internal critiques of dominant nationalisms*


Julius K Nyerere “Ujamaa The Basis of African Socialism” in *Ujamaa* OUP 1968


Siba Grovogui “IR as theology, reading Kant badly, and the incapacity of Western political theory to travel very far in non-western contexts” Interview in *Theory Talk* 57 (Available on-line)


2. The Crisis of ‘Translation’

*This section thinks through the question of translation of cultures both linguistically into English as well as conceptually, into terms legible to Modernity and ‘the West’, and the transformations that are entailed by this. Readings are about Indian and South American Indigenous discourses, debates on Sanskritic and Bhasha traditions in India; Indian responses to Freudian psychoanalysis; and African, Chinese and Japanese philosophers’ reflections on translation and (re) invention of cultures in the encounter with colonialism/modernity/globalization.*


G N Devy Sections from the *GN Devy Reader*, Orient BlackSwan, 2009.


VY Mudimbe The Invention of Africa Indiana University Press, 1988. Chapters I, III and Conclusion


Min Dongchao “Duihua (Dialogue In-between): a Process of Translating the term 'Feminism' in China.” Interventions vol 9 (2) 174-193

3. Writing the Self

Constructions of the Self in ‘non-Western’ cultures and internal voices of dissent. Resources from South Asia, Japan and the Islamic world. The last two readings outline debates on reason and argumentation in Islamic and classical Hindu traditions.


Rabindranath Tagore Nationalism, Rupa and Co. 1994


Muhammad Iqbal, “The Spirit of Muslim Culture” (1930) in Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, Shivalik Prakashan 2011


4. Themes in Political Theology

Political Theology is centrally concerned with understanding the relationship between religion and the foundations of ‘the political.’ The explorations in contemporary political theology are dominated by such concerns as the continuing role of religion in politics, nature of secularization in different parts of the world, understanding Western secularism the problems of its conceptual translation in different parts of the world. The readings suggested below seek to introduce students to some of these issues, from the perspective of comparative political thought.


Sherine Hafez *An Islam of her Own. Reconsidering Religion and Secularism in Women’s Islamic Movements* New York University Press, 2011. Chapters 2 and 7


Muzaffar Alam, ‘Sharia, Akhlaq and Governance’, in *The Languages of Political Islam* Permanent Black, 2004


5. Cosmopolitanism

The readings listed below seek to introduce the students to some of the contemporary debates on the idea of cosmopolitanism. Some of these readings engage with the dominant doctrine of cosmopolitanism originating in European Enlightenment. The rest of the readings offer alternative visions of cosmopolitanism from different parts of the world.


Mona Abaza “Japan as Imagined by Arabs” (Available on-line)

Bharucha, Rustom (2006) *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin*, Oxford University Press


6. Decolonial and Postnational Alternatives

*Argentinean scholar Walter Mignolo’s phrase ‘decolonial’ implies a delinking from coloniality and Western modernity, while a group of South Asian scholars propose an idea of ‘postnationalism’ that attempts to escape the dichotomy of ‘global’/‘local’. Scholarship from India, Uganda, Kenya, Guinea and China propose a fundamental rethinking of given conceptual categories and propose alternative frames of reference.*


Mahmood Mamdani “Reading Ibn Khaldun in Kampala” (Available on-line)