

POSTCOLONIAL POLITICAL THEORY

PHIL-387 ■ Spring 2023

Monday & Wednesday, 11:30am-12:45pm, Room 2-254

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Office Hours: Monday, 3-4 pm, Wednesday, 4-5 pm & by appointment

Course Description

Colonialism and empire have been key elements of political modernity, leaving in their wake a legacy of genocide, racist subordination, capitalist economic extraction and dependency, and ecological destruction. In this course, we explore how this legacy has shaped understandings of politics and forms of political organization and analyze attempts by political actors and theorists to imagine and construct viable political futures in the aftermath of European domination. In particular, we will discuss attempts to rethink central political concepts, such as the nation-state, democracy, citizenship, freedom, self-determination, and economic justice. The goal of this class is to help you understand and participate in debates about the guiding question of political theory: How should we organize the basic social structures that shape how we live our lives and interact with one another?

This is a discussion-based and reading-intensive course, for which students will be asked to read 50-100 pages each week. We will practice reading and critically engaging with analytical and argumentative texts, challenging our own assumptions, analyzing fundamental concepts, and assessing arguments. Our discussions will be guided by a selection of anticolonial writings as well as contemporary readings in political theory and the history of political thought.

Learning Goals

Through active participation in the course, you will improve your abilities to:

- explain and analyze how colonialism and empire have shaped understandings of politics and forms of political organization
- critically analyze fundamental political concepts and assess their use in normative political debates
- develop and use a set of analytic tools that help you engage with complex normative questions about politics
- effectively and critically read, interpret, and respond to analytical and argumentative texts
- reconstruct and assess complex arguments, both in writing and in discussion with your peers
- develop arguments to support your own normative views

Required Texts

All readings for the course will be posted on Canvas / Perusall. I will post a weekly overview and regular updates on Canvas; please check it regularly.

Office Hours

My office hours are an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss readings, assignments, and general concerns. Moreover, I'm always happy to talk about philosophy in general. If you are having difficulties in the class, please communicate with me early so I can help you

succeed. If you cannot make my office hours, please email me to set up an appointment at a different time.

Course Work / Assignments

Reading

Improving your ability to read and critically engage with academic texts is a central aim of the course. You will read a number of texts each week. These texts will provide the starting point for our discussions in class. It is essential that you take the time to read them carefully. The point of reading is not to "fill you" with knowledge but to provide you with new and hopefully useful lenses to see the world. You will likely disagree with some ideas or approaches you will find; such disagreements are a great starting point for discussion. You will find many of the texts difficult; this is not a sign of failure on your part but simply a natural part of learning. Please write down questions about and reactions to the texts so you can discuss them with me and your peers.

Annotations

Readings will be posted on Perusall, and I will ask you to regularly annotate them with comments, questions, ideas, etc. Your annotations will be visible to other students and you can engage with their annotations. Each week, you should post at least five (5) short annotations (over ten weeks). It could be a direct response to a part of the text. You could ask a question, or you could explain what you find confusing, why you disagree with something said in the text, how it relates to something else, etc. You can also respond to another student's annotation. For example, you might explain why you disagree with them, or suggest a different interpretation of the text, or ask them a question, etc. Do not spend a lot of time writing these annotations; use them to capture your immediate reactions.

Discussions

Class discussion is a crucial part of this course. Our goal is to actively and critically reflect on our own beliefs, ideas, and concepts and those of others. In discussion, you can ask questions, reflect on your own views, articulate reasons for your beliefs, listen and respond to different perspectives, etc. Active participation will help you practice your listening, argumentation, and public speaking skills. **Attendance is required**; it is important for your own learning and that of others (it's difficult to discuss alone). You may miss up to 3 class sessions without questions asked. Missing more classes will significantly affect your work in the course even if you have good reasons for missing. If you have to miss more classes, please discuss with me as soon as possible. In that case, I will usually expect that you discuss the material of the missed class in an additional post on your blog (300-500 words).

Each student will start off the discussion with a **discussion prompt** once during the semester. The student will provide a quick summary of the main ideas of the session's reading and develop a question or comment that serves as the starting point for discussion. We will start with this in week 3. I will give out a sign-up sheet during the first week.

Writing

Through writing, we can think through ideas and questions, communicate our thoughts, and convince others. The class offers opportunities to practice your analytic and argumentative writing skills. You are required to write at least **four (4) response papers of 800-1200 words**. Each paper needs to critically engage in depth with at least one text from the weeks prior to the submission. The papers can take a number of different formats, which are listed below in order of increasing complexity and difficulty. Start where you feel comfortable and then challenge yourself over the course of the semester. I will let you know in my feedback if I think you need more practice with a particular format:

1. Summary/argument reconstruction (summarize the main argument of a text or a section)
2. Application (apply an argument or concept from the text to a case or example of your own)

3. Critical discussion (based on a careful reconstruction, assess the strength and weakness of an argument or idea from the text)
4. Debate (critically compare and contrast ideas from different readings)
5. Development of an argument of your own (in conversation with one or more reading, develop and support an idea or argument of your own)

You will post your response papers on a personal blog (you can use [NU Sites](#) or any other public blogging tool). You can keep the blog private by protecting it with a password although I encourage you to share your writing to allow others to give you feedback. You can use the blog to regularly post additional writing about the ideas and questions discussed in class. This includes revisions of previous papers based on feedback you received from others. No one is naturally a good at writing—like all skills, it takes practices to get better. In addition, to writing regularly, I highly recommend consulting with peer tutors at the [NU-Q Writing Center](#).

Additional Sources Report

During the semester, each student will share with the class a source (an academic book or article, a movie, literature or poems, long-form journalism etc.) that engages with topics related to the course. This is an opportunity for you to enrich the course with ideas and topics you are particularly interested in and to share reading (etc.) recommendations. I will ask you to write a short post (of about 500 words) in which you briefly present main ideas from the source and relate them to the course. You will also have about 10 minutes in class to present and discuss your source. You will sign up for a presentation slot during the first few weeks of class.

Final Research Project

For your final project, you will research and discuss a question or topic related to the course in more depth and beyond what we are able to discuss in class. You should aim to develop your own analysis in critical engagement with ideas and concepts that you have studied in the course. In addition to readings discussed in class, you should engage with several additional academic sources. The final project can be either a standard academic essay of about 3000 words, or it can have an alternative format such as a creative essay, podcast, explainer video, etc. with comparable analytic depth. A project proposal will be due in week 10. I will provide more detailed instructions in the second part of the semester.

Self-assessment

A number of activities throughout the semester will help you assess your learning:

Achievement Essay: At the end of week 1, you will write a short essay (300-500 words) to reflect on your current strengths and weaknesses and set personal goals for the course.

One-on-one with instructor: In the middle of the semester, you will meet with the instructor to discuss selected class topics and your self-assessment of your work.

Formal self-assessment: Twice during the semester, I will ask you to reflect in writing on our your learning in the course—once before the fall break, and once at the end of the semester. I will read your assessment carefully and, if necessary, discuss it with you.

Assessment and Final Grade

Individual activities and assignments in this course are not graded. Your final grade will be based on (a) the completion of the required assignments and (b) your self-assessment of your work and learning progress. There is ample evidence that grading negatively affects student motivation and learning outcomes (see e.g. Kohn 2011). Grading leads students to worry more about how to please their teachers than their own learning and to avoid risk-taking and creativity. The assessment policy in this class aims to create a space where you can take risks, be creative, and feel comfortable making mistakes.

You may find this unusual, but imagine you sign up for a class in cooking, poetry, or yoga outside of NU-Q. There would be no official grading of poems, omelets, or yoga poses, since letter grades don't mean anything in that context. But you would still learn with others

in an encouraging, fun, and creative environment. Instructors provide feedback from time to time, pointing out where you've done well and where you can improve. Moreover, participants help each other during and outside of scheduled meetings. Indeed, you would probably get more feedback on your work than in a conventional classroom where only the teacher is expected to evaluate. The goal behind this assessment policy is to create, as much as possible in a university context, a similar learning environment.

While there are no grades for individual assignments, you will get feedback on your work from your classmates and the instructor throughout the semester. Use it to deepen your understanding and to improve your skills. In addition, I will ask you to regularly assess your own work (see Self-Assessment Activities in the Course Work section above). I will read your self-assessments and discuss with you how you can improve. My intention is to help you work and learn in a self-directed way that feels valuable to you, as opposed to simply doing what you think you are expected to do for a grade.

Final Grade Guideline

At the end of the semester, I will assign you a final grade based on (a) your completion of the required assignments and (b) your self-assessment of your work and learning progress. I do reserve the right to change your final grade if your assessment significantly deviates from the guideline set out in this section.

Requirements for a B: If you complete all assigned work in good faith, you will receive at least a B as your final grade. By showing up and putting in the required work, you will grow and improve. I trust that you will do your best for each activity and use the feedback you receive to improve your work. The following work must be completed to achieve a B (please see the Course Work sections above for more details):

- Read and annotate the weekly readings
- Attend and participate in class discussion (miss no more than 3 sessions), and present a discussion prompt when it is your turn
- Complete all four (4) reflection papers (each at least 800 words)
- Submit an additional sources report
- Complete the final project

I have to lower your grade if you do not complete these assignments. I will subtract up to a letter grade for not submitting (or doing your fair share in) your final project. I will subtract two-thirds of a letter grade (B to C+, etc.) for each missing reflection paper. I will subtract one third of a letter grade (B to B-, B- to C+, etc.) for any two additional absences beyond the first three (unless I agreed to an exception), missing a substantial number of Perusal annotations, or not doing your discussion prompt.

Guideline for an A: An A (or A-) indicates excellent work that goes above and beyond what is required in terms of effort and quality. Excellent work stands out in accuracy, clarity, depth, originality, and/or critical engagement. Such work requires additional effort, e.g. by engaging deeply with the readings, exploring additional background sources, revising your work to address feedback, and engaging deeply with the work of others.

The following are some examples of how you might improve your work beyond what is required. By no means do you have to do all of them; choose what you find useful to improve your work and achieve your goals. I'm happy to make more individual suggestions for what I think may be useful for you:

- Posting substantively revised versions of response papers in response to feedback
- Engaging with additional sources in your writing
- Posting additional responses and reflections that engage with class topics and readings on your blog
- Regularly and substantively engaging with others in class discussion
- Engaging in writing with the written work of other students

If you have completed all required work (see above), I will assign your final grade based on your own self-assessment of your work and the improvement you made during the semester. In your self-assessment, I will ask you to provide some evidence for your assessment. I know that this can be difficult and awkward; but knowing how to do this honestly and productively is an incredibly important skill. I am here to help you with this process by giving you an outside perspective. I may sometimes point out that your work does not go beyond what is required. It's also part of my job to let you know when your work falls short of academic standards (e.g. when I think you are misunderstanding readings, or when you need to work on your writing). On the other hand, I will also let you know when I think you are being too harsh to yourself in your self-assessment. I always do this with the intention of helping you better understand your current strengths and weaknesses and identifying how you can learn and grow.

Course Schedule

The following is the schedule of topics, readings, and assignments. Please note that some of the readings may change; in that case, I will inform you in advance. Please regularly check the weekly page on Canvas for updates.

Week 1: Introduction (starts January 8)

Readings:

- David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality*, ch. 8 (“Fanonian Futures?”)

Other Assignments:

- Achievement Essay (due January 14)

Week 2: Introduction: What is Political Theory and Do We Need it? (starts January 15)

Readings:

- Rajeev Bhargava, *What is Political Theory and Why Do We Need It*, ch. 1 (“What is Political Theory?”)
- Sanjay Seth, *Beyond Reason: Postcolonial Theory and the Social Sciences*, ch. 6 (“Political Theory and the Bourgeois Public Sphere”)

Week 3: Home-Rule and the Postcolonial New World Order (starts January 22)

Readings:

- Nandita Sharma, *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants*, chs. 1, 8, 9

Other Assignments:

- Response Paper #1 (due January 28)

Week 4: Decolonization as National Liberation (starts January 29)

Readings:

- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, chapters 3 and 4 (“The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness” and “On National Culture”)
- Anuja Bose, “Frantz Fanon and the Politicization of the Third World as a Collective Subject”
- Jasmine K. Gani, “Escaping the Nation in the Middle East: A Doomed Project? Fanonian Decolonisation and the Muslim Brotherhood”

Week 5: Anticolonialism and National Self-Determination (starts February 5)

Readings:

- Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, chs. 3, 4
- Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, chapter 15-17

Week 6: Alternative Trajectories to Anticolonial Nationalism (starts February 12)

Readings:

- Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World*, chapters 5, 6, 9
- Kevin Duong "Universal Suffrage as Decolonization"

Other Assignments:

- Response Paper #2 (due February 18)

Week 7 : Reparations for Global Racial Empire (starts February 19)

Readings:

- Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò, *Reconsidering Reparations*, chs. 3 and 4 ("The Constructive View" and "What's Missing")

Other Assignments:

- Midterm Self-Assessment (due February 25)

(Spring Break)

Week 8: Anticolonialism, Popular Sovereignty, and the State (starts March 5)

Readings:

- Mohandas Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, (selections)
- Karuna Mantena, "On Gandhi's Critique of the State: Sources, Contexts, Conjectures"

Other Assignments:

- Sign up for meeting with instructor

Week 9: Anticolonialism and Political Modernity (starts March 12)

Readings:

- Sandipto Dasgupta, "Gandhi's Failure: Anticolonial Movements and Postcolonial Futures"
- Hari Ramesh. "B. R. Ambedkar on Caste, Democracy, and State Action"

Other Assignments:

- Response Paper #3 (due March 18)

Week 10: Populism, Political Society, and Democracy (starts March 19)

Readings:

- Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, chs. 1-3
- Asef Bayat, "Plebeians of the Arab Spring," (Wednesday)

Other Assignments:

- Final project proposal (due March 27)

Week 11: Democracy and the Bifurcated State (starts March 26)

Readings:

- Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native*, chs. 1-4

Week 12: Democracy, Consensus or Majority (starts April 2)

Readings:

- David Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, ch.7 ("Community, Number, and the Ethos of Democracy")
- Kwasi Wiredu, "Democracy and Consensus in African Traditional Politics: A Plea for a Non-party Polity"
- Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "Democracy or Consensus? Response to Wiredu"
- Dennis Masaka, "Kwasi Wiredu's consensual democracy and one-party politics in Africa"

Other Assignments:

- Response Paper #4 (due April 8)

Week 13: Wrap-Up, Discussion of Final Projects (starts April 9)

Readings:

- Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena, "Anticolonism and the Decolonization of Political Theory"

Other Assignments:

- Discussion of final projects in class

Week 14: Wrap-Up, Discussion of Final Projects (starts April 16)

Readings:

- Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena, "Anticolonism and the Decolonization of Political Theory"

Other Assignments:

- Discussion of final projects in class
- Final self-assessment (due on April 22)
- Final project is due on May 2

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NU-Q Policies**NU-Q Grade Scale**

A	4.0
A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D	1.0
F	0

Grade point breakdown:

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D	60-69
F	59 and below

NU-Q Academic Integrity Policy:

Students are expected to comply with University regulations regarding academic integrity. If you are in doubt about what constitutes academic dishonesty, speak to the instructor before the assignment is due and/or examine the University web site. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating on an exam (e.g., copying others' answers, providing information to others, using a crib sheet) or plagiarism of a paper (e.g., taking material from readings without citation, copying another student's paper). Failure to maintain academic integrity on an assignment will result in a loss of credit for that assignment— at a minimum. Other penalties may also apply, including academic suspension. The guidelines for determining academic dishonesty and procedures in a suspected incident of academic dishonesty are detailed on the website.

For more information visit:

<https://my.qatar.northwestern.edu/student-life/code-of-conduct/procedures-academic-dishonesty.html>

NU-Q Online Academic Integrity Addendum

Maintaining standards of academic integrity is just as important online as it is in more traditional learning environments. All NU-Q students are required to uphold standards of academic integrity in online meetings and learning activities. The following is a non-exhaustive list of types of behavior that violate the standards of online academic integrity:

- **Academic Integrity Violations and Online Resources:** These violations may occur in the following ways:
 1. Granting unauthorized access to a class video conferencing application (such as Zoom) to someone not enrolled in the class.
 2. Granting unauthorized access to online class material, including Canvas, to someone not enrolled in the class.
 3. Recording and/or sharing in any form, including pictures, video, or

audio, class conversations with other students or faculty without the approval of the persons involved.

- Academic Integrity Violations and **Attendance of Synchronous Class Meetings or Activities:** These violations may occur in the following ways:
 1. Using any means to facilitate the appearance of attendance while not actually being present during a synchronous meeting, exam, office appointment, etc. For example, opening a video conferencing application (such as Zoom), disabling video, leaving the meeting.
- Academic Integrity Violations and **Online Quizzes and Exams:** These violations may occur in the following ways, and equally apply to quizzes and exams taken in the classroom:
 1. Using unauthorized online or other materials.
 2. Communicating, electronically or in person, with anyone except the supervisor during the exam.
 3. Receiving help from or having work completed by unauthorized individuals.

Accessible NU-Q Policy

Northwestern University Qatar and AccessibleNU-Q are committed to providing a supportive and challenging environment for all students with disabilities who attend the University. ANU-Q works to provide students with disabilities a learning environment that affords them full participation, equal access, and reasonable accommodation. Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with [AccessibleNU-Q](#) and provide professors with an accommodation notification, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

For more information about accommodations and the accommodation process, please visit: <https://my.qatar.northwestern.edu/academic-resources/academic-advising/accessiblenu-q/index.html>

Policy on Institutional Equity

Northwestern University in Qatar is committed to fostering an environment in which all members of our community are treated with dignity and respect and are free from discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct. Such conduct violates the values of our institution and disrupts the living, learning, and working environment for students, faculty, staff, and other community members.

Northwestern continues to prohibit all forms of discrimination and harassment, including sexual misconduct, previously covered under the University's Policy on Discrimination and Harassment and the Policy on Sexual Misconduct. Northwestern has combined these policies into one policy, the Policy on Institutional Equity. A subset of conduct that previously fell under the Policy on Sexual Misconduct, conduct constituting "Title IX Sexual Harassment" under the regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Education, is now covered by a new Interim Policy on Title IX Sexual Harassment. Pursuant to the regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Education, this policy only applies to conduct that occurred in the United States. This means that any sexual misconduct occurring at NU-Q will fall under the Policy on Institutional Equity, below, and will be subject to the process outlined in that policy, rather than the policy or process outlined in the Interim Policy on Title IX Sexual Harassment.

[Northwestern University Policy on Institutional Equity](#)

Northwestern prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, parental status, marital status, age, disability, citizenship status, veteran status, genetic information, reproductive health decision making or any other

classification protected by law (referred to as “protected classes”) in matters of admissions, employment, housing, or services, or in the educational programs or activities Northwestern operates. Such conduct violates Northwestern’s values and disrupts the living, learning, and working environment for students, faculty, staff, and other community members. Additionally, allegations of sexual misconduct that do not fall within the jurisdiction of the [Interim Policy on Title IX Sexual Harassment](#) may fall within the jurisdiction of this Policy.

Unauthorized Recording Policy

Instructors may choose to record class sessions or activities or portions of class sessions or activities if it would benefit currently enrolled students. These recordings will be shared only with students enrolled in the course and will be deleted at the end of the semester. Instructors will let students know if they are choosing to record any class sessions.

Unauthorized recording (including photographing) of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of University policy and Qatari law and custom. Unauthorized use of classroom recordings – including distributing or posting them – also is prohibited. Under the University’s Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials – including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.