

**RPOS 437z – LAW, SOCIETY AND COLONIALISM THROUGH LITERATURE
AND FILM**

SPRING SEMESTER 2011

Location: Lecture Center 14

Meeting times: Tu/Th 11:45am-1:05pm

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DESCRIPTION

Law and society studies examine the myriad ways law affects society and society can, in turn, affect law. What better way to learn about this dynamic interaction than by exploring the imposition of western law on colonized societies: the ways in which western law affected the colonized societies; the ways in which preexisting local legal systems affected the law of the colonizers; the ways in which western fears and apprehensions vis-à-vis “native” societies affected western law and society.

The term “colonialism” encompasses an entire system of thought about the nature of the world and one’s place in it. This hierarchical understanding of the world was promulgated in large part through *law*, and those laws continue to have a lasting political and social legacy. Western colonialism yielded many atrocities and deeply unfortunate results – but they are results that, nevertheless, produced a system of legal meaning-making and legal identity that we must continue to confront even in the 21st century.

The aim of this course is to familiarize students with the concept of *colonialism*: what is it; what forms has it taken in its literary and cinema manifestations; how do race, class, and gender play into colonial discourses; and how can colonial assumptions affect those who are made the subject of their logic? Also, students will learn how law, far from being an instrument of neutrality, has been an agent of colonialism. The goal is for you to be able to identify and analytically discuss themes of domination, exploitation, demonization and exoticism in historical and contemporary literature, film, politics and media, as well as connect these themes to law and legal identities.

PEDAGOGY

This course has six pedagogical components: reading, weekly written reflections, in-class discussion, leading a discussion, exams, and a final paper.

While films are used to supplement course material, the readings are long and complex. You will be expected to read closely and without complaint. Course readings will also demand you to read fluently in several different disciplinary styles – works of literature are accompanied by social science research and philosophical texts.

Your participation grade stems from your participation in the Blackboard discussion forum. Students are required to post a one-page, single-spaced **Weekly Reading Response** (WRR) on the Blackboard forum *once a week*. The format of the response will be explained in class; it

mainly consists of critical analysis of a reading of your choice from the week, a meditation on the connection between readings and films, and a thought-provoking discussion question. Responses are due Tuesday morning by 8am, and will not be accepted for credit after that time, no excuses, don't ask. Responses will be graded based on their substance (are they compelling? Thought-provoking?) and presentation (they must be grammatically correct and logically coherent).

You are expected to come to class having read and being prepared to discuss the material. In-class discussion involves thoughtful reflection on the course material, which may mean challenging the authors, relating the readings to your own observations of the political world, making connections between readings and other courses you may have had, and more. Excellent participation during in-class discussion may boost a final participation grade.

In addition to the forum, students will be required to lead a portion of class discussion once during the semester. This will be done in pairs. Instructions will be given in class.

In addition to a quiz and a midterm, this course culminates in a final paper (no final exam). Instructions on the essay will be given in class. As part of a draft-then-rewrite process, one week of class sessions will be dedicated to one-on-one meetings between student and professor. The goal of these meetings is twofold: 1. To identify ways to improve student writing generally, and 2. To improve upon the first draft of this course's final paper.

If you're looking for an easy course, look elsewhere. If you're looking for a class that will challenge you and give you an opportunity to learn about the role law plays in society, inequality, and injustice – all while reading some great books and watching interesting films – stick around.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES

- **Late work:** No late work will be accepted for this course, period. PLAN ACCORDINGLY. Extensions will only be given if in conformity with University-approved reasons.¹ Three of your lowest “WRR” scores will be dropped.
- **Make-Up Exams:** Only provided for University-approved reasons.²
- **Absences:** You are expected to understand and accept the grade consequences of any absence. I assume three absences without a university-approved reason are unavoidable; after that, they depress your participation grade. *Do not* contact me for any absence unless there is a graded assignment other than the “WRR” for that day, or it is a prolonged absence. *You are required to get class notes from peers; the professor does not take notes for students.*
- **Grading Disputes:** If you wish to dispute a grade, request a copy of the re-grading policy and follow its instructions. Your grade may stay as it is, increase, or decrease. Grade complaints will not be accepted two weeks after the exam date/paper submission date.
- **Email:** I check email once a day M-F. I do not guarantee to check my email during weekends. *I do not accept assignments, or tolerate rudeness or informality, over email.*

¹ University-approved reasons: “documented hospitalization, a death in the immediate family, a personal emergency, or a religious observance, the instructor must administer a makeup exam or offer an alternative mutually agreeable to the instructor and student” (Undergraduate Academic Policy Reminders, available on the University’s website).

² *ibid.*

- **Cheating and plagiarism:** Outcomes will be a failing grade and University sanctions.
- Students needing academic accommodations for a disability should contact the Disability Resource Center, Campus Center 137, (518) 442-5490. If you have a letter from the Disability Resource Center, please present this letter to me.
- I reserve the right to amend this syllabus over the course of the term.
- I reserve the right to administer unannounced quizzes.
- **I am your professor:** I am not your friend or a roadblock between you and your degree. I will give you the tools to succeed, but your performance in class is your responsibility.

MATERIALS

There are four books to be bought, and a series of articles and book chapters bundled together in a sizeable “Course Pack.” All are available at *Mary Jane Books*. You are expected to bring the readings to class (books and course pack). Neither the books nor the course pack are optional.

The books are:

- * Achebe, Chinua. (1994). *Things fall apart*. Anchor Press.
- * Césaire, Aimé. (2000). *A tempest: Based on Shakespeare’s The Tempest: Adaptation for a black theatre*. London: Oberon Books.
- * Rhys, J. (2001). *Wild Sargasso sea*. Norton.
- * Conrad, J. (1990). *Heart of darkness*. New York: Dover Publications.

COURSE SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

Week	Dates	Theme	Tuesday	Thursday	
1	Jan 17-21	Colonialism as historical events and discourse	No Class	Introduction	
2	Jan 24-28				
3	Jan 31-Feb 4				
4	Feb 7-11				
5	Feb 14-18		The law and colonialism nexus	Quiz	
6	Feb 21-25			No Class	No Class
7	Feb 28-March 4	Colonialism and its effects on colonized/ colonizer			
8	March 7-11			Midterm	
9	March 14-18	Colonialism, narrative and voice		First draft	
10	March 21-25	One-on-one meetings	No Class	No Class	
11	March 28-Apr 1	Colonialism, narrative and voice (cont)			
12	April 4-8				
13	April 11-15				
14	April 18-22	The degeneracy of the "civilizing mission" <i>(spring break)</i>	No Class	No Class	
15	April 25-29				
Last	May 2-6	Conclusions	Final paper	No Class	

IMPORTANT DATES

Tuesday, Feb 1: Last day to drop semester-length course without receiving a W
 Wednesday, March 30: Last day to drop semester-length course (will receive a W)
Final: There is no final exam. The final paper is due on the last day of class.

GRADE BREAKDOWN

Quiz, Week Five: 10%
Midterm, Week Eight: 20%
First Paper Draft: 10%
Final Paper: 25%
Online Forum Participation (WRRs): 20%
Leading Class Discussion: 15%

ASSIGNED READINGS AND DUE DATES

*Complete the assigned reading (marked with a *) prior to the lecture for which it is assigned.*

Section 1: Colonialism as historical events and discourse

WEEK ONE

January 20 Thursday: Introduction

We will begin with an introduction to the syllabus and course expectations. There will be a short lecture about law and social order.

WEEK TWO

January 25 Tuesday: Colonialism as historical events

* “Colonialism.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (Hand-out distributed in last class; otherwise available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism/>, stopping at section 3)

* Kipling, R. (1899). “White man’s burden.”

What is colonialism as *historical fact*? Come prepared to brush up on, or perhaps learn about, this important politico-economic facet of the fifteenth through twentieth century. If countries no longer hold colonies, then why do we continue to discuss colonialism? Kipling’s poem will help us to understand the colonial mindset.

January 27 Thursday: Colonialism as (persistent) discourse

* Saïd, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books. p. 1-15, 31-41, 108, 314-316.

* **[in class viewing]** Shaheen, J. G. (2001). *Reel bad Arabs: how Hollywood vilifies a people*. New York, Olive Branch

What is colonialism as *discourse*? Saïd’s landmark text will provide us the theoretical background that will give us a language to discuss this subject. In order to “see” the discourse Saïd analyzes, we will watch a short film entitled *Reel Bad Arabs* in class. The film gathers together a series of Hollywood’s depictions of Arab people and culture, as well as depictions of Islam and Muslims – you may not even realize how many of these stereotypes you have been imbibing since you first watched *Indiana Jones* as a kid!

WEEK THREE

February 1 Tuesday: Law and Colonialism, in theory and in India

- * Comaroff, John L. (2001). Colonialism, culture and the law: An introduction. *Law and Social Inquiry* 26 p. 305-313.
- * Shamir, Ronen and Hacker, Daphna. (2001). Colonialism's civilizing mission: The case of the Indian hemp drug commission. *Law and Social Inquiry* 26 p. 435-461.

How can we begin to understand the relationship between law and colonialism? This can be especially difficult, given our “legal upbringing” in the US, which often leads us to believe that the law is neutral and the legal branch is separate from other branches of government. We will see the extent to which this depiction cannot describe the very ideological and political influence of colonial law. These articles serve as a sort of “introduction” for the two works of social science to follow.

February 3 Thursday: Law and Colonialism, in Hawai'i

- * Merry, Sally Engle. (1999). Colonizing Hawai'i: The cultural power of law. *Princeton University Press*. p. 1-9, 11-28, 35-62.

In this masterpiece of law and society literature, Merry traces the ways in which the imposition of colonial law shaped Hawaii – its people and its culture. Also note the interplay of identities – as law shapes “bad” behavior by sanctioning it, it conversely privileges certain behaviors as “good,” with all these behaviors of course implicated in processes of identity construction. You may find yourself surprised by how little you know about our 50th state.

WEEK FOUR

February 8 Tuesday: Law and Colonialism, in Hawai'i

- * Merry, Sally Engle. (1999). Colonizing Hawai'i: The cultural power of law. *Princeton University Press*. p. 207-257.

We will complete our discussion from last Thursday.

February 10 Thursday: Law and Colonialism, in Malawi and Zambia

- * Chanock, Martin. (1998). Law, custom and social order: The colonial experience in Malawi and Zambia. *Heinemann Press*. p. 3-10, 71-84.

Chanock provides us another glimpse into the role of law in the colonial process – and colonialism as a system of thought. Compare what you see in these cases to what you read about Hawai'i.

WEEK FIVE

February 15 Tuesday: Colonialism in Literature, Part One

- * **SHORT QUIZ** at the beginning of class, covering weeks one through four.
- * Achebe, Chinua. (1994). *Things fall apart*. Anchor Press. Part 1.

This is the first of our forays into the literature of colonialism. As you read, try to identify in the novel law and society themes that you've read about in the previous five weeks.

February 17 Thursday: Colonialism in Literature, Part One

* Achebe, Chinua. (1994). *Things fall apart*. Anchor Press. Part 2 and 3.

We will complete our discussion from Tuesday.

WEEK SIX

**** (no WRRs) ****

February 22 Tuesday: No class

February 24 Thursday: No class

Section 3: Colonialism and its effects on colonized/colonizer

WEEK SEVEN

March 1 Tuesday: Colonialism in Literature, Part One

* Fanon, Frantz. (2004). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press. p. 29-35, 203-226, 238-251.

Fanon provides a stark account of the psychological impacts of colonization on the colonized. How do legal and communal identities develop under the gaze of colonial forces?

March 3 Thursday: Colonialism in Literature, Part One

* **[in class viewing]** Pontecorvo, Gillo. (1966). *The battle of Algiers*.

This remarkable documentary recreates a particular battle of the 1954-1962 war in Algeria (alternatively called the “Algerian War,” the “Algerian War for Independence,” depending on one’s political stance). It is singularly neutral regarding both sides of the conflict, and has been hailed for its accurate depictions of the events. Interestingly, the Pentagon showed the film in 2003, describing the French efforts in Algeria as a sort of “bad example” for the US to try to avoid in Iraq.

WEEK EIGHT

**** (no WRRs) ****

March 8 Tuesday: Colonialism and its effect on the colonized

* **[in class viewing]** Pontecorvo, Gillo. (1966). *The battle of Algiers*.

We will finish the film and discuss it in light of what we have read so far. Be sure to consider connections between the film and Fanon.

March 10 Thursday: Midterm

Section 4: Colonialism, Narrative, and Voice

WEEK NINE

**** (no WRR, but a 1 paragraph summary of your paper) ****

March 15 Tuesday: Colonial history as (rewritten) narrative

* **[in class viewing]** Sokolov, Stanislav. (1992). *Shakespeare: The Animated tales*. *The*

Tempest. BBC2.

In order to prepare for Thursday's reading, today is an opportunity to brush up our Shakespeare. Some of you may not have read *The Tempest* yet, and it's imperative you be familiar with it to making sense of Césaire's retelling. If you haven't read it yet, this film should bring you up to speed. It's the most faithful that I know of, even though dramatically edited, and done entirely in stop-motion with puppets. It's better than it sounds (even if some of the voice acting is very dodgy); Sokolov even won an Emmy for these *Animated Tales*.

March 17 Thursday: Colonial history as (rewritten) narrative, cont.

NOTE: FIRST DRAFT DUE TODAY

* Césaire, Aimé. (2000). *A tempest: Based on Shakespeare's The Tempest: Adaptation for a black theatre*. London: Oberon Books.

Aimé Césaire was born in Martinique, an island in the Caribbean to which colonial France sent many enslaved Africans to produce sugar on plantations. Césaire, who eventually moved to France and became a formidable thinker on the subject of colonialism (and influence on Fanon), re-wrote Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to examine themes of colonialism, power, and identity. Consider not just the text, but the act of Césaire rewriting such a text.

Section 5: One-on-One Meetings

WEEK TEN

(no WRRs)

March 22 Tuesday: One-on-one meetings

* Come to your appointment ON TIME. There are NO MAKE-UPS.

March 24 Thursday: One-on-one meetings

* Come to your appointment ON TIME. There are NO MAKE-UPS.

Section 6: Colonialism, Narrative, and Voice (cont)

WEEK ELEVEN

March 29 Tuesday: Women, colonialism, and relocating voice, cont.

* Mohanty, C. T. (1991). Under western eyes. In Mohanty, C. T., A. Russo, et al., *Third world women and the politics of feminism*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press. p. 51-80.

Women certainly have long borne the brunt of male domination. So aren't they all together in solidarity against colonialism? Not quite. In this short but piercing essay, Mohanty argues that being a woman is not enough to be an advocate for women's equality; in fact, even some feminists have, in their efforts to help end inequality, perpetuated colonial patterns by silencing certain women. What is the significance of "speaking for," and why is it so problematic?

March 31 Thursday: Women, colonialism, and relocating voice, cont.

* **[in class viewing]** Select scenes from White, Susanna. (2006). *Jane Eyre*. BBC.

Our next novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is related to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. To best understand the subversive nature of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, we need to first have some background with *Jane Eyre*.

WEEK TWELVE

April 5 Tuesday: Women, colonialism, and relocating voice, cont.

* Rhys, J. (2001). *Wide Sargasso sea*. Norton. p. 15-107.

This prequel novel to *Jane Eyre*, penned around 150 years later, tells the tale of the character we are introduced to as Bertha in Brontë's novel. We will explore how Rhys' novel changes much about *Jane Eyre* without touching its plot. It is not plot, but rather narrative that Rhys plays with, and to great effect. In case you are not familiar with Brontë's novel, a short synopsis will be given, and scenes from a film adaptation will be shown. We will consequently discuss the importance of narrative voice, and of voice in general – what does it mean to tell one's own story, versus to have it told in one's stead? How does relocated voice in this retelling reveal different aspects of the original Brontë novel – and why might those aspects not have been available to the reader previously?

April 7 Thursday: Women, colonialism, and relocating voice, cont.

* Rhys, J. (2001). *Wide Sargasso sea*. Norton. 107-end.

We will complete our discussion of the book, and compare the depictions of characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* to those in a recent film version of *Jane Eyre*, as well as the original book.

Section 7: The Degeneracy of the "Civilizing Mission"

WEEK THIRTEEN

April 12 Tuesday: The degeneracy of the "civilizing mission"

* Conrad, J. (1990). *Heart of darkness*. New York: Dover Publications. Part one.

Conrad's novel is one of the most well known literary meditations on the corruption, exploitation, and cruelty of colonialism. Interestingly, the novel itself is not free from the colonial discourse it seems to be criticizing, resulting in a complex and ambiguous narrative that forces a deeper reflection on the power this discourse held and continues to hold on people in the Western world. Be sure to note themes of "civilization" and "savagery," and the colonizer's role as the supposed bringer of "civilization."

April 14 Thursday: The degeneracy of the "civilizing mission"

* Conrad, J. (1990). *Heart of darkness*. New York: Dover Publications. Part two.

We will complete our discussion from Tuesday.

WEEK FOURTEEN

(no WRRs)

April 19 Tuesday: No class

April 21 Thursday: No class

WEEK FIFTEEN

*** (no WRRs) ***

April 26 Tuesday: Is colonialism dead?

* Coppola, F. F. (1979). *Apocalypse Now*. Paramount.

A complicated retelling of *Heart of Darkness*, this film explores the depravities of the American war in Vietnam and the continued existence of colonial thought in the world today. This a theoretically rich film, one of the best; but it is also emotionally/viscerally difficult to watch. I can barely get through it. Do your best.

April 28 Thursday: Is colonialism dead?

* Coppola, F. F. (1979). *Apocalypse Now*. Paramount.

We will complete our discussion from Tuesday.

Section 8: Conclusions

WEEK SIXTEEN

*** (no WRRs) ***

May 3 Tuesday: Final paper due