“Postcolonial Remains”: Narratives of Freedom and Decolonization

Course Description:
This course introduces students to some of the central themes and debates that constitute the field of postcolonial studies. While many have announced the field’s demise over the years, it stubbornly persists across the academic disciplines and in activist practices. Why? On the one hand, the field insists on unpacking the ways in which imperial, colonial and racist modes of thinking “remain” (Robert Young) the cultural, economic and political cornerstones of our modernity. On the other, it provides an important archive of anti-colonial and decolonizing narratives that engage in imagining the future from an often invisible, decolonial vantage point. For many inhabitants of the non-West or the global South, decolonization refers to an unfinished project and freedom embodies a “pluriversal” theory and practice (Walter Mignolo). This class will examine multiple epistemologies of freedom through a wide range of literary and theoretical texts. We will explore the complex relationship between freedom and decolonization, for these terms neither coincide with one another, nor are they synomymous with “rights.” In fact, in many former colonial societies, formal decolonization did not lead to the liberation of the people but, instead, to state terror, corruption, and neo-colonialism. The issue of freedom, as it is famously the case in Antigone, appears in the prism of violence, authority, and the individual and/or collective conscience and modes of memorialization. It is inflected with questions of race, gender, and class and subject to the politics of representation. Hence, freedom emerges as a literary and political project. This class, then, examines postcolonial discourses of freedom, ranging from discourses of anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism and resistance, to narratives of female subalternity, decolonization, posthuman critical anti-racism, and planetary thinking. We will explore the ways in which literary texts dramatize and challenge the various epistemologies of freedom and decolonization while imagining new formations and processes of freedom and collective forms of memory and belonging.

Literary Texts:

**Theoretical texts will be available on StudiUM at the beginning of the term.**

**Assignments:**
1. In-Class Presentation                                       20 
2. Short Paper (Critical Reflection)                        30 
3. Research Paper                                                   40 
4. Participation                                                       10 

**In-Class Presentations**
In this class, students are required to prepare a short presentation on ONE of the theoretical texts assigned for our meetings (the text to be discussed will be assigned by me). Each presentation must, first, present an accurate summary of the theoretical text in question and, second, provide a well-founded discussion of the logic and validity of the argument. The latter ideally includes what other critics have said about the text in question. Finally, the presentation must establish meaningful connections between the theoretical and literary text assigned for the day of his or her presentation.

The two central goals of each presentation are to draw out the complex relationships between the theoretical and literary texts and to generate a discussion among course participants. Thus, each presentation must propose THREE relevant questions about the texts under consideration. Whenever possible, your questions should open up a dialogue between literary and non-literary texts. The quality of your questions will play an important part in evaluating the quality of your presentation as a whole. Your presentation should be between 20 and 30 minutes long.

**Short Paper (Critical Reflection)**
Your short essay must be a critical reflection of one of the issues or texts you prepared for your in-class presentations. Your paper should be a critical reflection rather than expository summary of the theoretical text(s) you discussed in your in-class presentation. Your paper may or may not address the ways in which class and group discussions helped you expand, rethink, and/or research particular thoughts you had on a theoretical text. However, your paper may also be a way of developing your critical reading skills and mediate the ways in which a literary text can be read to question or shift some of the assumptions and arguments made in one of the theoretical texts you discussed in your presentation. A careful close reading of the text at hand will help you sharpen the argument of your critical reflection.

You may expand your short paper into your final essay. Short papers must be handed in the week following your presentation.

**Research Paper**
In this course you will have to write a 15-page research essay on a topic of your choice. All essays must be persuasive rather than expository essays and adhere to the MLA style of academic writing and quotation. Essays will be graded for their originality of thought, their appropriate use of theoretical texts and of secondary sources, their logical organization and argumentation, and their writing style.

Although all research papers must deal with one of the literary texts we discussed in class, students may also incorporate a creative component into their final essays (e.g., photography, film stills, storyboards, short stories, poetry, visual arts etc.). However, students who wish to
include a creative element into their essays must discuss their intentions with me in advance. Moreover, all creative elements must be properly theorized and/or conceptualized with a view to the central argument of the main body of the essay. You need to develop a Critical Bibliography and Works Cited for your research essay. Your Critical Bibliography must reflect your independent research and must include digital resources and library resources (e.g., resources not readily available on the net and that need to be researched physically at the library).