

The Colonial Constitution of the “Human”

Fall 2019

Wednesdays 3-5

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Office Hours: Thurs 12-2 and by appointment

What competencies and characteristics make up the “human”? In what ways is this constitution formed by or inflected through the colonial project? And, given how infrastructural the “human” is to questions of ethics, justice, order and domination, how might we better understand politics – global and otherwise – by tracking and investigating the colonial constitution of the “human”?

This course addresses such questions by working through a set of historical, contemporary and theoretical texts all designed to interrogate five abiding figures that mark the bounds and transgressions of – and alternatives to - the “human”: the Unbeliever, the Slave, the Homo-, the Bewitcher, and the Post-Human.

The aim of the course is not immediately disciplinary in an academic sense. Rather, I hope that the course will enable you to bring salient questions and arguments to bear on the kind of politics and traditions of political science that you are interested in studying.

The course requirements are as follows:

1) Co-written review (3500-4000 words), due 30th October - 50%

You will write with your partner a review of the following essay:

- Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument", *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3 (3), 2003

You will explicate the meaning of Wynter’s (complex and complicated) essay by drawing upon the materials from weeks 2-6 that resonate with her argument.

For this task, I will randomly assign you a partner early on in the semester. We will also workshop what will make a good review in class before the assignment is due.

2) Essay: (3000-3500 words), due 13th December – 50%

You will select one topic from weeks 7-11. You will use the statement of that week as a provocation that your essay will answer in the form of an argument.

You need only use the readings posted for that week.

We will workshop the essay in the final class of the semester

SYLLABUS

All readings are available via JHU's electronic library, or online, or otherwise linked to in Blackboard.

You should consider the statement that I have provided for each week's topic as a provocation to which your response might bring the readings together.

Introduction

1. Humanity in Baltimore

Plot your own humanity onto/into these Baltimore stories:

- Extract from Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*, 1892
- Billie Holiday, *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956), ch. 1
- D. Watkins, "Stoop Stories", *Aeon* (2014) <https://aeon.co/essays/these-are-my-two-baltimores-black-and-white>
- Ron Cassie, "Coming Clean", *Baltimore Magazine* (2019) <https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/section/community/baltimore-squeegee-kids-traffic-debate-concern>
- Karen Frances Eng, "An Asteroid Named for Henrietta Lacks Honors her Immortal Legacy", *TedFellows*, 2017 <https://fellowsblog.ted.com/an-asteroid-named-for-henrietta-lacks-honors-her-immortal-legacy-8997d156462a>

2. Anthropos versus Humanitas

"The distinction between partially and properly human is fundamental to theorizing politics."

- Michael Palencia-Roth, "Enemies of God: Monsters and the Theology of Conquest", in A. Arnold, *Monsters, Tricksters and Sacred Cows: Animal Tales and American Identities* (University Press of Virginia, 1996)
- Tendayi Sithole, "Decolonizing Humanities: The Presence of the Humanitas and the Absence of the Anthropos" in R. Grosfoguel et al (eds), *Decolonizing the Westernized University* (London: Lexington Books, 2016)
- Anna Grear, "Deconstructing Anthropos: A Critical Legal Reflection on 'Anthropocentric' Law and Anthropocene 'Humanity'", *Law and Critique* 26 (3), 2015

The Unbeliever

3. Outside the Faith

"Western politics orients towards the inside and outside of colonial Christianity."

- Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 1552
- John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, 1689

- Matthew Gabriele, "Debating the 'Crusade' in Contemporary America", *The Mediaeval Journal* 6 (1), 2016

4. In the Blood

"Religion – and with it, salvation and damnation - is transmitted through the blood."

- David Nirenberg, "Was there race before modernity? The example of 'Jewish' blood in late medieval Spain" in *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (Oxford University Press, 2014)
- Maria Elena Martinez, *Genealogical fictions: limpieza de sangre, religion, and gender in colonial Mexico* (Stanford University Press, 2008), chs 1 & 6
- Sara Robinson, "Blood will Tell: Anti-Semitism and Vampires in British Popular Culture, 1875-1914", *Golem: Journal of Religion and Monsters* 3 (1), 2009

The Slave

5. Peoples-as-Property

"Humans cannot be turned into commodities".

- Mtubani, C.D. Victor. 1983. "African Slaves and English Law." *PULA: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 3 (2): 71–75
- Anita Rupprecht, "Excessive memories: Slavery, insurance and resistance." *History Workshop Journal* 64 (1), 2007
- Jennifer L. Morgan, "Partus sequitur ventrem: Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery", *Small Axe* 22 (1), 2018

6. Humans-out-of-Bondage

"Black cultures of resistance to slavery must necessarily invoke a radical humanity."

- Anthony Bogues, "And What About the Human?: Freedom, Human Emancipation, and the Radical Imagination", *boundary 2* 39 (3), 2012
- Alice Walker, "In Search of our Mothers' Garden [1982]", in A. Mitchell (ed.), *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present* (Duke University Press, 1994)
- Roberto Strongman, 'Transcorporeality in Vodou', *The Journal of Haitian Studies* 14, no. 2 (2008)

The Homo-

7. Phobia/Philia

"Homosexuality is a key structuring principle of global order."

- Nivi Manchanda, "Queering the Pashtun: Afghan Sexuality in the homo-nationalist Imaginary", *Third World Quarterly* 36 (1), 2015

- Rahul Rao, "The Locations of Homophobia", *London Review of International Law* 2 (2) 2014
- Christine M. Klapeer, "LGBTIQ Rights, Development Aid and Queer Resistance" in O. Rutazibwa & R. Shilliam (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Politics* (London, 2018)

8. Hyper-masculinities

"It is not rationality but hyper-masculinity that drives global politics."

- Rudyard Kipling, "The Ballard of East and West", 1895, <https://www.bartleby.com/246/1129.html>
- Ashis Nandy, "The Psychology of Colonialism: Sex, Age and Ideology in British India" in *The Intimate Enemy* (Oxford University Press, 1983)
- Mark Driscoll, "White dude's burden", *Cultural Studies* 23 (1), 2009

The Bewitched

9. Sycorax

"The indigenous witch is too powerful for white man's rule."

- Matthew Dennis, "American Indians, Witchcraft, and Witch-hunting", *Organization of American Historians Magazine*, July 2003
- Stacy Schiff, "Unraveling the Many Mysteries of Tituba, the Star Witness of the Salem Witch Trials", *Smithsonian Magazine*, Nov 2015
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/unraveling-mysteries-tituba-salem-witch-trials-180956960/>
- Lara, Irene (2007). Beyond Caliban's Curses: The Decolonial Feminist Literacy of Sycorax. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9(1)
- Rachana Sachdev, "Sycorax in Algiers: Cultural Politics and Gynecology in Early Modern England", in Dymphna Callaghan (ed.) *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, Second Edition (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016)

10. Sexuality

"Sexuality must be contained if order is to be maintained'.

- Ann Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures", *American Ethnologist* 16 (4), 1989
- Isra Ali, "The Harem Fantasy in Nineteenth-century Orientalist Paintings", *Dialectical Anthropology* 39 (1), 2015
- Treva B. Lindsey & Jessica Marie Johnson, "Searching for Climax: Black Erotic Lives in Slavery and Freedom", *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 12 (2), 2014
- Qwo-Li Driskill, "Stolen From Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic", *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 16 (2), 2004

The Post-Human

11. After Ontology

“We used to think that the human condition was ontologically distinct, but not anymore.”

- Robert Pepperell, "The Posthuman Manifesto", *Kritikos* 2, 2005
[https://dpva.org/en/images/6/63/The Posthuman Manifesto by Robert Pepperell, Kritikos V.2 Feb. 2005.pdf](https://dpva.org/en/images/6/63/The_Posthuman_Manifesto_by_Robert_Pepperell,_Kritikos_V.2_Feb._2005.pdf)
- Francesca Ferrando, "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations", *Existenz* 8 (2) 2013
- Zoe Todd, "An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word For Colonialism", *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29 (1), 2016
- Juanita Sundberg, "Decolonizing Posthumanist Geographies", *Cultural Geographies* 21 (1), 2014

12. After Modernity

“Modernity (un)made the human.”

- Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984)
- Derek Walcott, “The Muse of History [1974]” in *What the Twilight Says* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998)

13. Essay workshop and finish – in this final class, we’ll workshop the essay and reflect on the course.