POSC 348
Strangers, Foreigners, Exiles
Spring 2016
Class Hours: TTH 10:10-11:50
Classroom: Weitz 132
Professor: Mihaela Czobor-Lupp
Office: Willis 418
Office Hours: Tuesday, 3:30-5:00 and Wednesday, 3:30-5:00

Course Description

As the French philosopher, Cornelius Castoriadis, argues, human societies constitute themselves through a closure of meaning, namely, through the claim that any question that can be asked, can be answered within their symbolic boundaries. Those who depart from these boundaries become abnormal, marginal, and strangers. The symbolic way in which human societies constitute themselves explains why strangers were and remain, to a large extent, an unsettling presence to their existence, especially today when fear seems to be taking over contemporary societies, in response to widespread terrorist attacks. Even democratic societies, which are, after all, as the Italian philosopher, Giambattista Vico, points out, the most open, generous, and magnanimous, remain suspicious about the presence of strangers within their confines.

At the same time, as Vico points out, human societies started as a refuge and an asylum, as a hospitable abode for exiles and refugees, for strangers. Through its notion of agape, Christianity takes this idea to its highest expression, calling upon humans to express their solidarity and their love across social and ethnic divides in a true universal spirit. Moreover, as Charles Taylor argues in *A Secular Age*, the modern secular age did inherit the Christian idea of solidarity with strangers, if it would only find a way to redefine its culture outside the grip of materialism, consumerism, and hedonism.

In sum, it seems that from the dawn of human history to the present day, there is a tension between society's constitutive fear of strangers and the moral, religious, and philosophical call for overcoming this fear and for reaching out to strangers and foreigners in ways that keep human civilization going. In the attempt to overcome such age old fears, it seems that the way humans think of culture and engage it in their daily endeavors to define identities, both individual and collective, is crucial to politics.

Our class will address and explore this complex and multifaceted issue of strangers and foreigners, attempting to decipher the problems they pose and promises they carry for modern societies. We will be reading different writers, philosophers, and thinkers in our class, who will open different perspectives for us – ethical, philosophical, political, legal, and cultural – on the issue of strangers, foreigners, and exiles.

We will start the class with an exploration of Hannah Arendt's conception of refugees and human rights. In Arendt's view, it is the influx of refugees after World War I that undermined the idea of human rights and, at the same time, created new and difficult moral,

political, and legal issues related to the status of strangers and foreigners in modern politics. While Arendt is rather skeptical about the possibility of solving these issues outside the framework of the nation state, she has, nevertheless, an interesting and challenging conception about the political and cultural role of strangers and foreigners in a society. Arendt develops this standpoint in her view of the pariah, of those marginal characters, on the fringes of a society, that bring with them a revolutionary potential, both politically and intellectually. Himself a pariah, Franz Kafka inspired Arendt's conception of what strangers can do within and for their host societies, of how they can both unsettle them and inspire them in their struggle for justice.

Second, we will read Isabel Fonseca's book, *Bury Me Standing*, which will give us a sense about the plight of the Romani population, one pariah people, in Europe, where they were for centuries and still are perceived as strangers and foreigners, being, consequently, persecuted. We will also watch and discuss in this context the Romanian movie *Aferim*, about the plight of Roma in the 19th century Wallachia, where they used to be slaves until mid-century.

Third, we will read a novel, *For Two Thousand Years*, written by Mihail Sebastian, a Jewish journalist, novelist, and playwright from interwar Romania. Sebastian will help us to get a vivid and profound sense of how Jews, another pariah people, where perceived and treated in interwar Eastern and Central Europe. The book will also provide us with a vivid portrait of the world that is depicted by Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: the world which failed, after WWI, to protect the minorities that the creation of new nation states brought into being, thus bringing to an end the 18th century idea of human rights.

Fourth, we will read Tzvetan Todorov's book, *The Fear of Barbarians*, which discusses the ways in which strangers are perceived and labeled across different cultures. Todorov's book is relevant for our topic due to the fact that it raises provocative issues about what it means today to be a barbarian and what it means to be civilized (given his assumption that the terms maintain their relevance), all in the context of the pressing and difficult issues of European identity, widespread Islamophobia, and, in general, xenophobia, the fear of strangers that seems to be increasingly pervading nowadays the Western world. In connection with Todorov's book we will also watch the Greek movie, *Xenia*, a moving but also unsettling story about the human (in)capacity to welcome the strange and the unfamiliar.

Fifth, we will explore Jacques Derrida's conception about the importance of hospitality. The merit of Derrida's conception of hospitality is to forcefully express the tensions between the ethical obligation to welcome the other in one's own home (country) and the political restrictions and limitations that come with national politics and claims to sovereignty (and the concerns of security). At the same time, given the realities of the contemporary world, Derrida makes the strong claim that, despite such tensions and fears, (European) politics should take ethics and philosophy as guides in its attempt to improve itself and the way it deals with strangers. We will also read in this context Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Sixth, we will wrap up the class with a discussion of Edward Said's book, *Freud and the Non-European* and Judith Butler's book, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism.* Both authors argue for the positive role that exiles and exilic consciousness can play in a non-nationalist and non-exclusivist politics, as it applies in the case of the state of Israel. Similar to Arendt, both Said and Butler argue in favor of the positive role that exiles and marginals can play in the culture of a society in ways that bridge differences and attenuate the clash of beliefs and collective identities, thus making cohabitation possible.

Course objectives

1. The general objective is to understand the role of strangers, foreigners, and exiles in contemporary domestic and international politics. An important part of such a general objective is to understand how the political aspect connects with moral, legal, and cultural issues in the arguments that are made by different philosophers about the role of strangers and foreigners in domestic and international politics.
2. The more specific objective is to explore and understand varied arguments and stories about the role of strangers, foreigners, and exiles in contemporary politics, as done by philosophers as different as Hannah Arendt, J. Derrida, Tzvetan Todorov, Edward Said, and Judith Butler and by writers as different as Franz Kafka, Mihail Sebastian, and Sophocles.
3. To carefully read the following books about the role of strangers, foreigners, and exiles in human societies, in their culture and politics:

   - Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, Oxford, 2009, ISBN: 9780199238286
   - Isabel Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing*, Vintage Books, 1995, ISBN: 9780679737438
   - Mihail Sebastian, *For Two Thousand Years*, Penguin Classics, 2016, ISBN: 9780241189610
   - Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians*, University of Chicago Press, 2010, ISBN: 9780226805757
   - Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, Stanford University Press, 2000, ISBN: 100804734062
   - Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, in *Three Theban Plays*, Penguin, 1982, *9780140444254*
   - Edward Said, *Freud and the Non-European*, Verso Books, 2014, ISBN: 9781781681459
   - Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, Columbia University Press, 2014, ISBN: 9780231146111

Film Screenings:

1. ***Aferim*, Library, Room 305, April 2 and April 3, at 7:30 PM**
2. ***Xenia*, Library, Room 305, April 23 and April 24, at 7:30 PM**

Course Requirements:

1. **One research paper (80%) (The paper should identify and address a puzzle related to the topic of the course - foreigners and democracy, migration, refugees, human rights, nationalism, (cosmopolitan) culture and politics. It should also engage secondary literature.)**

(i) **A two-paragraph proposal** that **you will discuss in advance with me (10%), due on April 8.**

(ii) **First draft of the paper** (6 double spaced pages) **(15%), due on April 25.**

(iii) **One in-class presentation of your work-in-progress (15%).** Each presentation should be no more than 10 minutes and you should be prepared to defend your argument and to answer questions from the audience for about 5-7 minutes**.**

(iv) **Second draft of the paper (**10 double spaced pages) **(15 %), due on May 19.**

(v) **Final version of the paper (no longer than 12-14 double spaced pages) (25%), due on June 1, by Midnight. Please, e-mail me a copy of your paper at mlupp@carleton.edu.**

2. Class presentation of one reading (to be chosen from Todorov, Derrida, Said, and Bulter) (20%). For this assignment, the students should:

(i) Post on Moodle a group of questions that will guide and structure the class discussion.
(ii) Make sure to present in class the main ideas and points of the text.
(iii) Where relevant, the students need to show how the ideas and the argument of the text illustrate, clarify, contradict, or simply connect with the previous readings and authors that we have covered in class until that point in time.
(iv) Organize and lead class discussion.
(v) Answer the questions their colleagues might have about the text that is under discussion.

What is Expected from the Students?

Students will be expected to read, think, form arguments and counter-arguments, understand the fundamental concepts, and participate (in a critical and creative manner) in class discussion. That means that students must keep up in their reading assignments, carefully read before every class the assigned reading, and attend class regularly. Students must be fully prepared *at all times* to discuss the arguments and concepts from the previous readings. The best students will be knowledgeable, critical but balanced in their critical assessments, and will develop coherent and sound arguments that they can defend in their essay and in class discussion.

Academic dishonesty:

"All assignments, quizzes, and exams must be done on your own. Note that academic dishonesty includes not only cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism, but also includes helping other students commit acts of academic dishonesty by allowing them to obtain copies of your work. You are allowed to use the Web for reference purposes, but you may not copy material from any website or any other source without proper citations. In short, all submitted work must be your own.

Cases of academic dishonesty will be dealt with strictly. Each such case will be referred to the Academic Standing Committee via the Associate Dean of Students or the Associate Dean of the College. A formal finding of responsibility can result in disciplinary sanctions ranging from a censure and a warning to permanent dismissal in the case of repeated and serious offenses.

The academic penalty for a finding of responsibility can range from a grade of zero in the specific assignment to an F in this course.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS:

March 29: *Course Overview and Introduction*
Reading: Hannah Arendt, *Jewish Writings*: *We Refugees* (e-reserve)
Note: start reading Kafka's *Castle* (if you can even before the term starts)

March 31: *Strangers as Pariahs and the right to have rights*
Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man* and the *Jew as a Pariah: A Hidden Tradition* (e-reserve)

April 5: *What can Kafka tell us about strangers and their role in society?*
Reading: Hannah Arendt, *Franz Kafka, Appreciated Anew* (e-reserve) and Kafka's *Castle*

April 7: *Roma: Strangers as nomads*
Reading: Isabel Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing*, 3-112 and the movie *Aferim*

April 12: *Roma: these strangers next to me*
Reading: Isabel Fonseca, *Bury me Standing*, 113-305
Guest speaker, Margareta Matache, will visit our class.

April 14: *Being a Jew in Romania after the 1923 Constitution*
Reading: Mihail Sebastian, *For Two Thousand Years*, 5-93

April 19*: The Politics and the culture of being a Jew in Interwar Romania: Some Lessons for Today*
Reading: Mihail Sebastian, *For Two Thousand Years*, 97-231

April 21: *Barbarism and Civilization*
Reading: Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians*, 1-86

April 26: *European Identity and Islamophobia*
Reading: Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians*, 86-196 and the movie *Xenia*

April 28: *Derrida: The foreigner question*
Reading: Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, pages 3-75
Note: Start reading *Oedipus at Colonus*

May 3 *Hospitality and Foreigners*
Reading: Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, pages 75-155 and Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*

May 5: **Presentation of student projects for papers**
May 10: **Presentation of student projects for papers**
May 12: **Presentation of student projects for papers**
May 17: **Presentation of student projects for papers**

May 19: *The role of exiles in politics*
Reading: Edward Said, *Freud and the Non-European*

May 24: *Self-Departure, Exile, and the Critique of Zionism: Said and Levinas*
Reading: Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2

May 26: *Arendt and the Critique of the Nation-State: Cohabitation and Sovereignty*
Reading: Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, Chapters 5 and 6

May 31: *What Shall We Do Without Exile?*
Reading: Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, Chapters 7 and 8