Course Description

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 (Cornelius Castoriadis). Those who depart from these boundaries become abnormal, marginal, and strangers. The symbolic way in which human societies constitute themselves explains why strangers remain an unsettling presence for their members, especially in today’s globalized and interconnected world of exchanges and migrations. Even democratic societies, which are the most open, generous, and magnanimous (Giambattista Vico, *New Science*), are becoming today increasingly xenophobic.

At the same time, human societies started as a refuge and an asylum, as a hospitable abode for exiles and refugees, for strangers (Vico, *New Science*). 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. The modern secular age inherited 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 (Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*).

In sum, from the dawn of human history to the present day, there seems to be a tension between society’s constitutive fear of strangers and the moral, religious, and philosophical call to overcome this fear and reach out in hospitable and engaging ways to strangers in ways that keep human civilization going. In the attempt to overcome such age old fears, 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 for their host societies, of how they can both unsettle them and inspire them in their struggle for justice.

Second, we will read a novel, *For Two Thousand Years*, written by Mihail Sebastian, a Jewish Romanian 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.

Third, 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 Polish movie, *Papusza*, about the way of life and the plight of the Roma in 20th century Poland, with a specific focus on the life and work of the Roma poetess, Bronislawa Wajs (Papusza).

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, the xenophobic populism that seems to be increasingly pervading nowadays the world.

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* and watch the Greek movie, *Xenia*, a moving but also unsettling story about the human (in)capacity to welcome the strange and the unfamiliar.

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:


Film Screenings:

1. *Papusza*, Library, Room 305, January 20 and January 21, at 7:30 PM
2. *Xenia*, Library, Room 305, February 3 and February 4, 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 January 16.

(ii) First draft of the paper (6 double spaced pages) (15%), due on January 29.

(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 February 26.

(v) Final version of the paper (no longer than 13-15 double spaced pages) (25%), due on March 12 by 5 PM. 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, Delanty, or Butler) (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:**

**January 4:** Course overview and introduction  
*Reading:* Hannah Arendt, *Jewish Writings: We Refugees* and Georg Simmel, *The Stranger* (on Moodle)  
*Note:* start reading Kafka’s *Castle* (if you can even before the term starts)

**January 9:** Strangers as pariahs  
*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)

**January 11:** 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*

**January 16:** Being a Jew in Romania after the 1923 Constitution  
*Reading:* Mihail Sebastian, *For Two Thousand Years*, 5-93
January 18: *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

January 23: *Roma: Strangers as nomads*
*Reading:* Isabel Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing*, 3-112

January 25: *Roma: these strangers next to me*
*Reading:* Isabel Fonseca, *Bury me Standing*, 113-305 and the movie *Papusza*

January 30: *Are strangers the barbaric destroyers of civilization?*
*Reading:* Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians*, 1-86

February 1: *European identity and Islamophobia*
*Reading:* Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians*, 86-196

February 6: *Derrida: The foreigner question*
*Reading:* Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, pages 3-75
*Note:* Start reading *Oedipus at Colonus*

February 8: *Hospitality and foreigners*
*Reading:* Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, pages 75-155
Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* and the movie *Xenia*

February 13: *Why do we need the Other? What shall we make of exile?*
*Reading:* Edward Said, *Freud and the Non-European*

February 15: *The role of the non-European/ the Other in the construction of European identity*
February 20: *The European heritage*
Reading: Delanty, *The European Heritage*, Chapters 9, 10, 11
**Guest Speaker:** Gerard Delanty, Professor of Social and Political Thought, University of Sussex, UK.

February 22: **Presentation of student projects for papers**

February 27: **Presentation of student projects for papers**

March 1: **Presentation of student projects for papers**

March 6: *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

March 8: *Exile and the Critique of the Nation-State: Cohabitation and Sovereignty*
Reading: Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, Chapters 5, 6, and 8