

London Study Abroad Fall 2023 - Roehampton University
Asian Studies 491- Z Topics in Asian Studies/English 494 Study Abroad in England
Exploring Colonialism through Literature and Film [WI]

Instructor: Professor Mimi Sharma
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Classroom: TBA
 Class Meeting: TBA

The field of Cultural Studies that focuses on the links with Colonialism is an exciting and dynamic one. It explores the interaction between colonialism and culture in ways that have opened new areas of research and utilized new sources. Topics such as gender, sexuality, identity, religion, resistance, and visions of a new nation all reveal the transformative aspects of empire—both on the colony as well as the metropole. In other words—colonialism isn't just all about markets, geographic expansion, and political rule.

Literature and Film are two important ways to imagine and represent social realities. This course explores the *social context* of the act of writing—as opposed to stylistic, textual analyses—by considering the imagery and constructions of the Asian exotic "Other" or the primitive African produced by British authors within the context of colonial conquest. It considers how the colonized have *written back* to uncover the stereotypes and sources of power that have affected both these actors.

A study of different texts and films uncovers the projection of stereotypes that have shaped cultural perceptions as well as how such productions have themselves been influenced by shifts in political, economic, and individual orientations. What does it mean, for example, to say that a dominant group often *produces* knowledge about a subordinate other? What is the relation between knowledge and power? These issues are discussed through novels and films that emerged from colonial Britain and elsewhere as well as within the colony that reveal differing visions of empire and the peoples that it has conquered. The interpretative possibilities available for the understanding of the power relations that invariably inhere in colonized societies is a primary concern as are the replications of those very same constructions in today's Britain.

The main course objectives are twofold: 1) how colonialism influenced representations of Asia in British and European society and culture as well as in its colonies and 2) to learn how to be critical readers in understanding the multiple ways colonial power relations and stereotypes infuse these creative endeavors.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Specifically for Study Abroad:

Demonstrate **awareness of your own cultural values and biases** and how these impact your ability to interact with others

Demonstrate **knowledge of diversity** with a focus on the population and/or topic of interest in your Study Abroad Program

Demonstrate an increased **capacity to analyze issues with appreciation for disparate viewpoints**

Be able to **communicate appropriately and effectively with diverse individuals and groups**

Specifically for this Course:

An understanding of the ways that literature reflects social realities and enhances our knowledge.

Demonstrate an understanding of key creative texts that reflect specific issues relating to the formation of class, race, gender, and religious identities in Britain.

Demonstrate an integration of this knowledge with the study location

An encouragement of questions that challenge our previous assumptions and cultural values that lead to new insights and an appreciation of multiple viewpoints

Texts: All readings will be uploaded to the class Laulima site (see Resources/Readings)

Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad

Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe

Nervous Conditions, Tsitsi Dangaremba

Passage to India, E.M. Forster

The Sea Wall, Marguerite Duras

Films: TBA [will relate to the texts]

Criteria for Student Evaluation: * **[Please note that as a Writing Intensive course there is a required *minimum* of 16 pages or 4000 words]. Both oral and written feedback will be provided by the instructor on writing assignments.**

- attendance and participation in the class discussions (10%). After **three** absences, each one will result in a **5%** lowering of your grade. Both the instructor and the students are also expected to be on time. Three late entries are *considered an absence*, as is anything over 15 minutes after the start of class.

- two presentations of 15 minutes each on topics engaging issues that arise from the class and reading materials (15%). These will show an appreciation of how different issues (e.g., class, race, gender, generation) intersect and overlap with one another.

- reading journal: weekly entries of at least one page on the class materials and discussions (30%). These will assess your thoughtful and analytical reactions and how they may relate to your actual experiences in London as well as reflect your ability to interact and communicate effectively with others in a foreign setting; they will be collected and graded periodically. **Due Dates: Weeks 5, 9, 11**

- two 2 page “letters” to characters in the books read or to others (15%). To assess how well you comprehend and empathize with the key issues and dilemmas that the characters may face. **Due Dates: Weeks 6 and 8**

- one critical essay of 1000 words (c. 5 pages) that takes up several of the major themes addressed in the readings (30%). **Due Date: Week 12**

**All percentages given are to be understood as general guides.*

Schedule

I. Introduction

Week 1 Introduction to Ourselves and the Class/exploring Laulima website
Colonialism, Literature and Film

II. Colonial Representations about Africa & Writing Back

Week 2: **Writing as a Critique of Colonialism or Example of It?**

Text: Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Assignment: Tell about Yourself & Background (1-2 pages; ungraded)

Week 3: **Colonized Writes Back: another view of Conrad**

Text: Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, chaps. 1-10

Week 4: **Colonized Writes Back: another view of Conrad**

Text: Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, chaps. 11-end

Assignment:

Week 5 **Colonized Identities and “Nervous Conditions”**

Text: Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, “Introduction” to p. 104

Film: TBA

Assignment: **Reading Journal 1**

Week 6:

Text: Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*, pp. 105-end

Film:

Assignment: **Letter 1**

III. Representing Colonial Rule in South and Southeast Asia

Week 7: **“Jewel in the Crown:” Why Can’t We be Friends?**

Text: E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, chaps I-XVI

Week 8: E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, chaps XVII-end

Film: “*A Passage to India*,” (1984, first half)

Assignment: **Letter No. 2**

Week 9: E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*, chaps XVII-end

Film: “*A Passage to India*,” (1984, last half)

Assignment: **Reading Journal 2**

Week 10: **Colonials Born in Vietnam**

Text: Marguerite Duras, *The Sea Wall*, pp. Preface and Part One

Film: “*Indochine*,” (1992, 239 mins – first half)

Week 11:**Text:** *The Sea Wall*, Part Two**Film:** “*Indochine*,” (1992, 239 mins – last half)**Assignment:** **Reading Journal 3****Week 12:** **Presentation of Final Essays****Assignment:** **Final Essay****TBA:** Course Wrap Up and Get-TogetherGrading Guidelines:

A work: outstanding work that demonstrates significant mastery of subject materials; i.e., shows analytical reading and critical engagement with conceptual issues.

- Responds to questions (all parts)

- Shows original thinking in presentation of own ideas

- Excellent presentation; i.e., develops a focused and clear argument and articulates a sustained train of logical thought.

- Pays attention to spelling and grammar.

B work: shows clear evidence of engagement with the materials as well as critical insight

- Responds to questions (all parts)

- Develops a focused and clear argument that proceeds logically (i.e., has a beginning, middle, and conclusion)

- Very good standard of presentation

C work: shows some understanding of the key factual and/or theoretical issues and addresses them

- Responds to question (all parts)

- Reveals, in places, examples of a clear train of thought or argument

- Concludes properly

- Good standard of presentation

D work: * shows some awareness and understanding of the materials or theoretical issues, but with little development

- Questions or parts are omitted

- Misunderstandings are evident

- Shows some evidence of planning, although irrelevant/unrelated material included

- Fails to develop a clear or coherent response, but shows occasional knowledge or insight

F work: * fails to address materials or develop an argument; irrelevant response

- Fails to address question

- Fails to demonstrate knowledge of the key issues or arguments

- Contains clear conceptual or factual errors or misunderstandings

- Poorly organized/or poorly written

All percentages given are to be understood as general guides. * I will make a special effort with any student who has borderline work and desires to improve upon it.

PLAGIARISM: This is a most serious academic offense and will be treated accordingly. It is defined as “to steal and use” the ideas or writings of another and pass it off as one’s own. Whether done *consciously or unconsciously*, appropriating others’ writings or language—without acknowledging the sources—is a legal offense (some universities may expel students who plagiarize). The act is not excused because of oversight, ignorance, or sloppiness. Plagiarism is considered a form of theft (of the work of others) as well as fraud (i.e., misrepresentation of others’ work as yours).

With the easy accessibility of the web, there is the real danger of being seduced by a “cut and paste” mentality. Learn from others—that’s fine; but be sure the final presentation and interpretation of ideas are your own. Anything you locate I can locate as well!!

Further information is available at the back of the University Catalogue. Don’t hesitate to talk to me if you are unsure about citing others’ work. Direct quotations must be indicated, paraphrasing must be acknowledged, and ideas taken from others must be attributed to their sources.

About the Novels:

***Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad (1899)**

Perhaps the most well-known and classic novel about the horrors of colonial rule in the Belgium Congo, the story is recounted by the protagonist (Charlie Marlow) about his early life as a ferry boat captain transporting ivory downriver. He soon hears stories about an ivory procurement agent, Kurtz, who is employed by the government. Preceded by his reputation as a brilliant emissary of progress, Kurtz has now established himself as a god among the natives in “one of the darkest places on earth.” The novel is a reflection on the corruptive nature of European colonialism and a journey into the nightmare psyche of one of the corrupted.

Conrad was born in Poland and suffered ill-health and an unstable childhood. At age 13 he declared he would become a sailor and was sent to Marseille at age 16 to begin a career as a merchant marine, entering British service some four years later and traveling extensively for the next 15 years. He went to England for the first time at age 21 where he ultimately learned the language, settled, and began writing in English.

***Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe (1958)**

This first novel by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, was published in 1958. It depicts pre-colonial life in the southeastern part of Nigeria and the invasion and colonialism by Europeans during the late 19th century. He was resident in Nigeria for most of his life. An ardent anti-colonial, Achebe wrote against the dominant perspective of Africans in literature and defended his use of English to make his writings accessible to other colonized peoples particularly readers of previously colonial nations. In 1975 he gave a controversial lecture at the University of Massachusetts, “*An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*.”

Achebe sought to escape the colonial perspective that predominated African literature, and drew from the traditions of the Igbo people, Christian influences, and the clash of Western and African values to create a uniquely African voice. *Things Fall Apart* is the first of three novels in an African Trilogy. It is narrated through the experiences of Okonkwo, a wealthy and

fearless Igbo warrior of Umuofia in the late 1800s, and explores his attempt to resist the transformation of his traditions by British political and religious forces and his despair as his community capitulates to the powerful new order.

Nervous Conditions, Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988)

The author's first novel, it was "was hailed as one of the 20th century's most significant works of African literature." It tells the story of Tambudzai, a girl raised in poverty in what was then called Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and her fight to leave that poverty and obtain an education. In the process she faces challenges of multiple inequalities of gender, class, race, alongside the structures of her own society and that of the colonizer. inequality, Africa in the 1960s and '70s, and the postcolonial world.

Two decades before Zimbabwe would win independence and ended white minority rule, thirteen-year-old Tambudzai Sigauke embarks on her education. She feels the weight of the economic hopes of her parents, siblings, and extended family and. She yearns to be free of the constraints of her rural village. When her wealthy uncle sponsors her schooling, she thinks she's found her way out, however she soon learns that education at the mission school comes with a price.

A Passage to India, E.M. Forster (1924)

Written in 1924 by the British novelist E.M. Forster, this novel tells a different tale of the passage and settling of the British in India than that of Kipling. It represents a more empathetic interpretation of Indian life and of the crushing experiences of British colonial rule. Here, the personal and the political collide head-on as the novel follows the relationship between Dr. Aziz, an Indian, and Cyril Fielding, an English teacher. The two men share a deep personal bond that is strained to the breaking point when Aziz is accused of trying to rape an English woman. Despite Fielding's faith in his friend and their friendship, outside forces on both sides of the colonial divide work to make their friendship practically impossible. Although set in the historical particulars of colonial India, the story of men trying to connect with one another despite a world fractured along lines of race, gender, and nationality is timeless.

Forster's romance with India began when he fell with a young Indian student he was tutoring in London. Their relationship was very close and intimate (especially from Forster's side) and the writer spent some time in India.

The Sea Wall, Marguerite Duras (1952)

Duras is a French novelist who was born in Cochinchina (now Vietnam) and moved to France with her family, ultimately returning to Saigon where she graduated with a speciality in philosophy. She wrote this novel in the middle of France's struggle with the war of independence in Indochina. That is where this 1952 novel takes place. It is a compelling, piece of writing that is semi-autobiographical. Many of the events of Duras' life appear as events in the novel—her early and teen years spent in French Indochina especially her relationship with her mother. A most interesting and critical aspect of the book is the contrast between her and her family's life and those of the indigenous people among whom they lived.

The book is a good example of Duras' cinematic and romantic writing style. (She also wrote *The Lover*, based on her youth, and made into a film).