

POSC 348 Online Version

Strangers, Foreigners, and Exiles

Spring 2020

Class Hours: TTH 10:10-11:55

Professor: Mihaela Czobor-Lupp

Zoom Office Hours, Wednesday 3:00-5:00 PM Central Time (with the exception of the first week of the term when the office hours will be on Saturday, April 11)

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, migrations, and pandemics. Even democratic societies, which are the most open, generous, and magnanimous (Giambattista Vico, *New Science*), are becoming today increasingly xenophobic.

At the same time, according to the 18th century Italian philosopher, Giambattista Vico, human societies started as a refuge and an asylum, as a hospitable abode for exiles and refugees, for strangers (*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. In this context we will watch and discuss the German movie, *Transit*, a very powerful evocation of the condition of being a refugee, that is, someone in transit, who belongs nowhere.

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.

Then, 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, were 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.

Tzvetan Todorov's book, *The Fear of Barbarians* will be our next partner of conversation. The book 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 labeled a barbarian and what it means to see yourself as being 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 the world nowadays.

Zygmunt Bauman's book *Strangers at our Door* is a powerful and very moving account of the plight of strangers in today's world, an account which the current pandemic only reinforces. We will next read this book and use it as an introduction to Jacques Derrida's argument for 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.

We will wrap up the class with a discussion of Edward Said's book, *Freud and the Non-European*. With Said's help we will explore the contribution that exiles and marginals can make in a society to the bridging of differences and the attenuation of the clash of beliefs and collective identities, in ways that increase the chances of co-habitation in communities that share a traumatic past.

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, and Edward Said 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
 - Mihail Sebastian, *For Two Thousand Years*, Penguin Classics, 2016, ISBN: 9780241189610
 - Zygmunt Bauman, *Strangers at Our Door*, Polity, 2016, ISBN: 9781509512171
 - 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

HOWEVER, the ways in which we will achieve our course objectives will be different, at least to some extent, from what we have experienced up to this point in time at Carleton, in our classroom engagements.

The class will meet on Zoom. I already sent the invitations to join our weekly meetings. The course will combine synchronous and asynchronous teaching/learning methods.

First, everyone should have an Internet connection and a laptop (or access to one).

Second, PLEASE, understand that teaching/learning online involves a rethinking of what the public means. Hence, find a quiet place to connect with us during class. Be decently dressed (do not wear a pajamas or something so relaxed that you might make us blush), be respectful of everyone, do not eat during our class. Pay attention, listen to others and be as polite and considerate of others as you would be in a classroom at Carleton. Do not quit the class to go to the bathroom. We will take a five minute break in the middle of the class.

We are living through very stressful and threatening times. Some of us might get sick or have members of the family and friends getting sick. I do not dare to think about death, but it lurks in the background. So, it is going to be hard to concentrate and a time might come when some of us will have something much more important to think about than this class. I am working on a backup plan.

My firm belief is that philosophy and art will help us go through these trying time. They will provide us with meaning and many opportunities to reflect and even alleviate the fear and the pain.

Films:

1. *Transit* (Matt Bailey is working on finding a copy of the movie that is going to be free of charge)
2. *Xenia* (on Kanopy)

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, what an interesting idea in today's world!) culture and politics.
 - (i) **A two-paragraph proposal that you will discuss in advance with me (10%), due on April 20.**
 - (ii) **First draft of the paper (6 double spaced pages) (15%), due on May 4.**
 - (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 25.**
 - (v) **Final version of the paper (it must be between 10 and 20 double spaced pages) (25%), due on June 3rd, 5 PM.** Please, e-mail me a copy of your paper at mlupp@carleton.edu.
2. **Group Presentations (20%).**
First Group Project/Presentation (due on April 16): *The political and cultural climate in interwar Romania. Who was Mihail Sebastian? The Criterion Group. The*

First group will introduce all these ideas to the class in a 15 minutes presentation. The group is also in charge of providing 4 questions for the breakout groups during our Zoom class.

Group 1: Evan, Peter, Benjamin, Scarlett, Jonas

Second Group Project/Presentation (April 23): *Who was Tzvetan Todorov? Todorov and the notion of critical humanism. In a 15 minutes presentation the group will introduce the class to these ideas and then will provide 4 questions from the reading for the day for the breakout groups of our Zoom class.*

Group 2: Noah, Mosses, Sebastian, Hana, Tyrone

Third Group Project (May 26): *Jacques Derrida's conception of ethics. In a 15 minutes presentation the group should present to the class Derrida's view of ethics and show how this connects to his take on hospitality. At the end the group should provide 4 questions for the breakout groups of our Zoom class.*

Group 3: Jake, Hiromichi, Riley, Kapani, Michael

Fourth Group Project (June 3): *The life of Edward Said, his activity as a public intellectual and his view of humanism. In a 15 minutes presentation the group will introduce these ideas to the class and then provide 4 questions for the breakout groups of our Zoom meeting.*

Group 4: Kou, Zoe, Sophie, Jacky, Ben

Each group should record its presentation so that it can be made available to Hana and Jacky who might not always be able to join us during our Zoom meetings.

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:

The Stranger as Pariah

April 7: *Course overview and introduction*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *Jewish Writings: We Refugees*, Paul Ricoeur, *Being a Stranger*, and Norman Manea, *Exile*, in *The Fifth Impossibility: Essays on Exile and Language* (e-book at the library)

Moodle Discussion Forum: *What does it mean to be a stranger? Did you ever feel a stranger in your life?*

April 9: *A Refugee crisis and its consequences*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man* (library e-book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*) and *The Jew as a Pariah: A Hidden Tradition*

April 14: *What does Kafka tell us about strangers and their role in society?*

Reading: Hannah Arendt, *Franz Kafka, Appreciated Anew* and Franz Kafka, *The Castle*

Moodle Discussion Forum 1: *What do we learn from the movie Transit about the condition of the refugee and of the stranger in general? What does it mean to be in transit? What kind of state of being, moral, social, and political is this?*

April 16: *Being a Jew in Romania after the 1923 Constitution*

Reading: Mihail Sebastian, *For Two Thousand Years*, 5-93

April 21: *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

Moodle Discussion Forum 2: As a Jew in the Romania of the 1930s and 1940s, Sebastian was a pariah. Who are the new pariahs today's, during the current world pandemic?

Strangers as Foreigners and Refugees: The Issue of Hospitality

April 23: *Are strangers the barbaric destroyers of civilization?*

Reading: Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians*, 1-86

April 28: *European identity and Islamophobia*

Reading: Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians*, 86-196

May 5: Presentations of student research papers project

May 7: Presentations of student research papers projects

May 12: Presentations of student research papers projects

May 14: Presentations of student research papers projects

May 19: *Why do we fear strangers?*

Reading: Zygmunt Bauman, *Strangers at our Door*, 1-68

May 21: *What shall we do with all these refugees?*

Reading: Zygmunt Bauman, *Strangers at our Door*, 69-117

Moodle Discussion Forum 3: *Xenia*... Does the notion of stranger have an absolute justification? Can human beings (notice I do not say individuals) be indeed a stranger to each other in an absolute and unconditional way?

May 26: *Derrida: The foreigner question*

Reading: Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, pages 3-75

Note: Start reading *Oedipus at Colonus*

May 28: *Hospitality and foreigners*

Reading: Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, pages 75-155

Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*

Moodle Discussion Forum 4: *Oedipus at Colonus*... Can we be hospitable when our own life and security are at stake? Can we still remain open and welcome others? If so, what would this act require? What do we learn about the issue of hospitality from Sophocles' tragedy?

Exile: Promises and Dangers

June 3: *Why do we need the Other? What shall we make of exile?*

Reading: Edward Said, *Freud and the Non-European* and *Reflections on Exile*