

*Sample Syllabus (200-level)*

**Introduction to Decolonial Theory:  
Decolonizing Philosophy**

Instructor: Prof. Carmen De Schryver

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**Course Description**

This course provides an overview of some of the major themes and debates within decolonial theory. Some of the questions that will guide our discussions throughout the semester are: What is colonialism? To what extent has colonialism involved not just political domination but the hegemony of specific ways of knowing? In what ways is colonialism ongoing? What is involved in “decolonization”? Is it just a political process aiming at sovereignty, or is it more thoroughgoing? What would it mean to decolonize academia, and philosophy in particular? How should we think about the connections between philosophy as an academic discipline and the historical reality of colonialism? Does decolonizing philosophy require a break with the Western tradition of thought, and, if not, what are the advantages and disadvantages of remaining in dialogue with the Western “canon”? What are some of the strategies of decolonization proposed by decolonial philosophers across the globe? What sorts of aims do they enact and how they differ according to differential colonial experiences?

In the first part of the course, we will read a variety of key texts within contemporary decolonial theory which propose very different answers to these questions. The second part of the course goes on to consider a variety of strategies for decolonization more broadly, and academic decolonization in particular. Some of the thinkers we will look at include Seloua Luste Boulbina, Charles Mills, Audre Lorde, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Paulin Hountondji and Marisa Belausteguigoitia. Beyond becoming equipped with the tools to think critically about canon-formation and the meaning of academic decolonization, we will also become familiar with seminal texts in Africana and Latinx traditions of decolonial theory.

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**Learning Outcomes**

- Develop a critical understanding of public debates around decolonization in general, and the decolonization of academia in particular
- Think critically about what constitutes “philosophy” and its implicit geographical and racial biases

- Gain fluency in discussing various strategies for decolonizing academia, as well as a practical understanding of how to apply these strategies
- Cultivate skills in critically reading and evaluating technical philosophical material

### Course Elements

- Participation [20%]
  - Each week, our aim will be to co-construct a dynamic and hospitable learning environment. The success of this depends entirely on your willingness to actively participate in the pedagogical process, to be engaged and to step into an active role.
  - (i) Preparation for class. This means having not just done the readings but being ready to discuss and share your insights or questions with your peers.
    - Readings. Weekly discussions will be based largely on the assigned readings. All the assigned readings for this course are mandatory. You are expected to read closely and attentively (often, this will mean reading twice).
    - Post on the discussion board *before class*. Depending on the week, you will be asked to either pose a question of your own based on the readings, or answer the question posted on the discussion board.
  - (ii) Participation in the classroom. This can take on a variety of forms. I encourage you to let me know if speaking up in larger group settings is uncomfortable for you.
  - (iii) Peer engagement. How you engage with your peers is a central component of the course. You will be expected to contribute to a healthy and respectful dialogical space, which is especially important given the sensitivity of the issues we will be discussing. We will spend more time talking together about peer critique, but the starting point here is that critical comments should be constructive, appropriate and aimed at the content of the argument and *never* at the person making the argument.
- In-class presentation [10%] of no more than 10 minutes. This should set up the discussion by offering a detailed summary of the reading and raising two substantive discussion questions.
- Two term papers [20% each]
  - Papers should be no more than 7 pages, double-spaced
  - Prompts will be circulated prior to the deadline.
  - Two weeks before the deadline you should submit a one-page outline which articulates your *thesis* and shows how you will go about demonstrating it.
  - You will then be assigned a partner, and each of you will provide written commentary (one-paragraph) on one another's outlines. Your commentary on your partner's work will be a key part of your successful completion of this task, counting for 10% of your final grade.
- Final Paper [30%]

- (A) A more traditional 12-page philosophical paper which enters into the debates surrounding decolonization and/or the application of this metaphor to the academic context
  - (B) a more applied 12-page paper or project which picks out an object which stands in need of decolonization (this can be a philosophical text, a (social-)scientific methodology, a film, an artistic object, etc. etc.) and then (iii) explains in detail how your chosen strategy would apply to this.
  - Final papers should be drawing on the course material as well as utilizing at least two new sources (to be discussed with me)
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### **Course Materials**

All of the readings will be made available in PDF.

### **Note on the Readings**

In order to get the most out of the course, it is necessary that you read the assigned texts closely *in advance* of the class meeting. As you will see, most of the readings are relatively short. Do not be discouraged if you find the readings difficult or even confusing. Our class discussion is designed to (i) collaboratively make sense of the text and (ii) equip you with the skills that you need to fully comprehend and critically interrogate the course material. I will not expect you to understand everything that you read. I do, however, expect you to make a good-faith effort to interpret the text on your own, to note down any questions, and to participate proactively in the class discussion on this basis. I would also like to emphasize that raising clarificatory questions is not just okay but very much encouraged; if you are confused about something, it is very likely your peers will be as well, and your questions will be welcomed!

### **Course Schedule**

*N.B. The following is a tentative schedule for the semester. Changes to the schedule will be announced in class.*

#### Part I: Decolonization and its Objects: The Meaning and Scope of Decolonization

**Week 1:** Discussion of the Syllabus & Pedagogy

Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pp. 71-86

**Week 2:** Initial Discussion: Decolonizing Philosophy?

[UCT Rhodes Must Fall Statement](#)

Garfield & Van Norden, "[If Philosophy Won't Diversify, Let's Call It What It Really Is](#)"

Dabashi, [“Can Non-Europeans Think”](#)

**Week 3:** Colonialism: Scope and Impact

Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, pp. 31-78

**Week 4:** Defining Decolonization I

Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, pp. 16-20

Boulbina, “Decolonization” in *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, pp. 1-15

**Week 5:** Defining Decolonization II

Tuck & Yang, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor”, pp. 1-40.

Taiwo, *Against Decolonization*, pp. 1-66

[Nadia Nyasi on Decolonization](#)

**Week 6:** Class Debate

No Reading

**Week 7:** Philosophy as an Object of Decolonization

Mills, *Blackness Visible*, 1-19

Mignolo, “Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought, and Decolonial Freedom”, pp. 159-181

**Week 8:** Philosophy as an Object of Decolonization II

Kisukidi, “Decolonizing, or, Philosophy as an Object of Anthropology”, pp. TBD

Maldonado-Torres, Vizcaíno, Wallace & We, “Decolonising Philosophy” (in *Decolonising the University*), pp. 64-90

[Souleymane Bachir Diagne & Nadia Yala Kisukidi on Decolonizing Philosophy](#)

Part II: Decolonial Strategies

**Week 9:** Delinking

Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, pp.110-114

Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 235-239

Gordon and Gordon, “Introduction: Not Only the Master’s Tools”, pp. ix-xi

**Week 10:** Rehabilitation: Philosophy of Culture

Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, pp. 187-210

Nzegwu, *Family Matters*, pp. 1-23

**Week 11:** Recentring

Hountondji, "Recapturing", pp. 238-248

Tuhiwai-Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (chp. 10), pp. 185-197

→ *Keyword Activity*

**Week 12: Critical Fabulation**

Kisukidi, "Political Grandmotherhoods", pp. 1-8

Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts", pp. 1-14

**Week 13: Decolonization as/through Translation**

Wiredu, "Conceptual Decolonization", pp. 53-64

Diagne, "Decolonizing the History of Philosophy", pp. 1-32

**Week 14: Creolization**

J.A. Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory*, pp. 1-17.

Monahan, "Introduction: What is Rational is Creolizing" (*Creolizing Hegel*), pp. 1-20

**Week 15: Comparative Methodologies: Centering the Margins**

Belausteguigoitia, "Pairing a Triangle", pp. 107-129.

De Schryver, "Centering the Margins", 1-15

Boulbina, "Having a Good Ear" in *Kafka's Monkey*, pp.269-282.

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**Accessibility and Accommodations**

This seminar is committed to accessibility among all dimensions of identity. If you have a condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the objectives of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations.

**Academic Integrity**

Any written work you submit should be your own. This means that you should not copy/paste, paraphrase or borrow ideas from a text or internet source without proper citation. In other words, do not present this work as though it were your own. Failure to properly cite your sources amounts to plagiarism, and the college takes violations of plagiarism very seriously. For further information, you should consult the Student Handbook's policies and procedures regarding plagiarism. If you have any questions about how to use/cite secondary sources appropriately, please do not hesitate to ask – I am here to help!