History and Colonial Modernity: Problems & Perspectives from South Asia, Africa, & the Middle East

HIST 233.402/SAST 264.402, Mondays 2-5pm
College Hall 311A
Instructor: Faisal Chaudhry
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Is it meaningful or dangerously relativist to say that 'reality' is socially constructed? Is social constructionism/social constructivism the purview simply of continental philosophers and assorted post-modernists? Is it right, as many scientists and philosophers in the analytical tradition would contend, that claims about social construction make for an implicit disavowal of the subject(ive)/object(ive) distinction or a disbelief in the reality of nature or even the external world? Is social constructionism a view about how we go about knowing the world or about the contents of the world itself? In this course, we will consider whether there is any special insight that historians can bring to bear upon these questions. After all if history is change over time in human societies, in a certain sense, all social reality must be partly constructed by human actors who interact socially. Yet at the same time, if history is a process of people creating new forms of reality through social interaction, then claims about social constructionism in the historical context may be liable to appear as if they are simply truisms.

To think more specifically about social construction in the historical context, we will focus our attention on the rich outpouring of scholarship about the 'invention of tradition,' the reification of native culture, and the genealogies of colonial modernity in British (and to a lesser degree French) colonial South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Coming to the fore especially in the wake of Edward Said's landmark *Orientalism* (1977), ideas about social construction in history are often thought of—whether to their benefit or detriment—as being coequal with the three great *post's* in the humanist intellectual landscape of the last quarter of the twentieth century—post-structuralism, post-modernism, and post-colonialism. In the first few weeks of the course, therefore, we will unpack the connection between social constructionism and the latter orientations as well as other traditions in philosophy and sociology. In the rest of the course we will then go on to survey important scholarship by historians and historically minded anthropologists dealing with eighteenth- to twentieth-century history in a number of former colonial/semi-colonial domains of the African and Asian continents.

While it has never been without controversy, one unmistakable legacy of the rise of a social constructionist temperament among scholars of Africa and Asia after the mid-1970s has been to put the histories of these parts of the non-West into greater dialogue with one another. Therefore, it is ultimately in the spirit of connected history that we will be asking whether it is meaningful, dangerous, or vacuous to speak about modernity as

a ‘social construct’ in the very Afro-Asiatic world that contemporary scholarly dialogue has increasingly and perhaps problematically ‘constructed’ into being.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Class Participation and Attendance (35% of your final grade)

A. Because this is an advanced seminar student attendance, preparation and participation is a must. Each week, near the beginning of class I will ask everyone to articulate one question or key point for discussion ***based on a close reading*** of the texts for that day ***and to speak for three or four minutes*** about your own wider thoughts in response to that question/key point and whatever wider set of issues it provokes in your mind. We will then try to use these questions/key points as points of departure for further advancing our discussion after we have heard from everyone once.

B. Beyond the need to be prepared to articulate your own thoughts about some one key question/point that has been brought to your mind, for seminar to work well you must be prepared engage with the points that others articulate. This requires not only that you carefully listen to what others are asking/saying but use it as food for your own further thought. Do you agree or disagree with what your classmate has said? Does it coincide with your own understanding of the readings for the day? In what way does it resonate or end up being in tension with issues that have come up for you in your wider studies?

2. Final Paper (35%): Another main factor that will count towards student evaluation will be the main written work requirement for the course—**a final paper (20 pages minimum)** on a topic of your choosing. Your topic must resonate with the broader historiographical and/or substantive themes of the course.

3. Book Review/Source Analysis (15%, due class 8): Depending on what type of final paper you plan on writing—historiographical/methodological or substantive—you can hand in either a 5-6 page review of one of the books from class or a 5-6 page analysis of one or two key sources that you might use in a final paper. If you choose the first option, this presumes that you read the entirety of the book you are reviewing rather than whatever portion of it we may have limited ourselves to for class. With respect to the second option, “substantive” means a historical topic that is rooted in some concrete time, region, and place covered in the course. In other words, you must focus on some process of contextually-specific historical change that has implications for the overall question about the relationship between colonial/indigenous knowledge, power, and the changing content of the social world that we are investigating.

4. Annotated Bibliography and Preliminary Introduction (15%, due class 12): This assignment is geared toward ensuring that you are well-placed to write your final

paper. The bibliography must be commensurate with what would be warranted for a quality 20-page paper. This means that listing two or three sources and two or three sentences is not sufficient. An "annotated" bibligoraphy means that each entry should include a paragraph describing the source and how it is relevant to some particular argument you will be making in your paper or some particular point of substantive historical exposition. A "preliminary" introduction means at least one page, inclusive of a 3-4 sentence thesis statement.

Other Course Policies

1. Syllabus: Some of the reading assignments in the syllabus are subject to change/will be further specified over the course of the semester. While I will alert you of any such changes, you should generally remember to stay up to date with the current version of the syllabus posted on the course website and through watching Announcements made through the website.

2. Disabilities: If you have a disability that requires accommodation or special arrangements please see me at the beginning of the semester.

3. Plagiarism and Violations of Academic Integrity: Be sure to read the University's code of student conduct, especially its section on violations of academic integrity and plagiarism. Plagiarism, which is the unacknowledged use of the ideas or works of another on a paper, is something that will be taken very seriously and that will not be tolerated. (Also see: http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/.) It will result in an automatic failing grade for the assignment as well as the possibility that you will face larger consequences from higher administrative censure by the appropriate office at the University.

4. Office Hours and Other Issues: If you face any other issues, including unplanned emergencies, during the semester you should not hesitate to contact me or stop by for office hours. Even aside from any urgent issues, I encourage you to use office hours or to make an appointment to talk about the substantive issues raised in the course and any questions you may have about assignments. One great pleasure of teaching is to get to know one's students and to see them grappling with new issues. So please don't hesitate to share your thoughts outside of seminar.

Course Readings

The following books are required for the course and are available at the University of Pennsylvania Book Store. At least one copy should also be available at the reserves in Van Pelt library and/or the reserves at the Annenberg library. All other course readings will be made available through the course website (and will generally be posted following the conclusion of the previous week's seminar session).

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Knopf Double day, 1967).

Berman, Berman. *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya*. Ohio University Press, 1991.

Chanock, Martin. *Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia*. Heinemann 1998.

Edney, Matthew. *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843*. University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Knopf Doubleday 1995.

Hamilton, Carolyn. *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention*. Harvard 1998.

Mitchell, Timothy. *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity.* University of California Press, 2002.

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*. University of California, 2005.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Knopf Doubleday, 1979.

Searle, John. *The Construction of Social Reality*. The Free Press 1997.

SCHEDULE OF COURSE SESSIONS BY TOPIC

Part I: The Rise of Constructionism

1. (Wednesday) 1/15: Social Constructionism and the Traditions of Phenomenology and the Sociology of Knowledge

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 1-104 (from Intro to II.2.a) and 185-189 (conclusion).

[Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (1979), Brief intro by Salk and ch. 4.]

2. 1/27: Social Construction and the Analytical Tradition in Philosophy

John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995), selections.

Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Harvard 1999), selections.

3. 2/3: Social Constructionism's Advent into the Study of History and the Tradition of Post-Structuralism

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), selections.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), selections.

Part II: Moving East- and Southward

4. 2/10: Social Constructionism and Post-Colonialism

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1977), selections.

V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (1988), selections.

5. 2/17: The Post-Modern Critique of Eurocentrism and its Discontents

Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook, "After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism and Politics in the Third World," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jan. 1992), pp. 141-67.

Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (1994), selections.

Part III: Constituting the Subject(ive Forms of Identification)

6. 2/24: The Emergence of the Individual as a Modern Political Subject

Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India* (1990), selections.

Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996), selections.

7. 3/3: The Standardization of Gender Roles and the Conjugal Ideal

Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women With Mustaches And Men Without Beards: Gender And Sexual Anxieties Of Iranian Modernity* (2005), selections.

Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (1997), selections.

**********************Source Analysis Due at Start of Class 8*************************

8. 3/17: Ties that Bind (and Separate): Race and Caste

Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (2001), selections.

Bruce Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960* (2011), selections.

9. 3/24: Other Forms of Ascriptive Group Identification: Tribe and Ethnicity

Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: the Dialectic of Domination* (1990), selections.

[Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (2006), selections.]

Part IV: Constituting the Object(ive Content of the Social World)

10. 3/31: Geography, Environment and Natural Space

Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India: 1765-1843* (1996), selections.

Diana Davis and Edmund Burke III, eds., *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa* (2011), selections.

11. 4/7: The Nation (State)

Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (1998), selections.

[Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (2003), selections.]

********************Reaction Paper 2 Due at Start of Class 12*************************

12. 4/14: The Economy

Manu Goswami, *Producing India*, selections.

Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (2002), selections.

13. 4/21: The Normative Surround: Law and Religion

Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom, and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (1998), selections.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1991 [1962]), selections.

Part V: The Fall of Constructionism? (or relativism? Or post-modernism?)

14. 4/28: Limits, Possibilities, or Misplaced Concerns

Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (2006), selections.

Bruno Latour, (2004) "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter 2004), pp. 225-248.

[Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (2004), selections.]

************Research Paper Due by 5pm on May 8, 2014**************