Instructor: Prof. Sue Ruddick
Office Hours: Wednesday 4 pm – 6 pm or by appointment Sidney Smith Hall 5059
Course Time & Place: Wednesday 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.  RM 5017A
Contact Information: ruddick@geog.utoronto.ca

Course Description and Objectives:
What is difference? Difference has been conceived of as the expression of alterity, a modality through which class is lived and experienced, as an irreducible supplement, a tool deployed in the normalization (or rendering invisible) of oppression, a site of resistance, a demand for opacity. The course focuses on the intensification of struggles around longstanding tropes of difference, and the emergence of new forms (or new understandings) of difference: conceptualizations of the ‘roots’ of difference (e.g. Sylvia Wynter’s Man1) and the ‘routes’ of difference -- current struggles around precarity, unimagined communities, indebtedness, authoritarianism, racism and sexism. The emphasis is as much on how difference is organized, contested and mobilized – in specific historical geographies, spatial forms, state practices, counter-strategies – as it is on how difference is conceptualized. The objective of the course is to come to a deeper understanding of political struggles around difference in the current conjuncture.

Organization of Materials
The course is organized around grammars that shape difference – some familiar and some emerging and the divergent ways that the state structures oppression. The material includes a mixture of book length manuscripts and articles, which share the commonality as distinct expressions of ‘grounded theory’ – the conceptual framings and nuanced insights emerging in relation to specific historical geographies and specific mechanisms that are mobilized in the construction of and challenges to difference.

This choice is deliberate: on the one hand, as doctoral and master’s students I encourage you read these texts instrumentally, symptomatically as different models you might reflect on in organizing your own theoretically grounded research, or theoretically informed practices; on the other hand, in the current juncture I feel it is increasingly important to read (and produce) theory through a nuanced understanding of its specific geographical-historical manifestations, to come to terms with the practices, and possibilities of the current juncture in both in terms of its continuities over a long durée and its specificity in the present.
Grading Scheme:

Class Participation / Weekly report: 20% This consists of your reflections on the readings -- due at 6 pm Monday evenings, two days before class. Please bring a paper version of your contribution to class. You are expected to comment on 4 weeks of readings.  
Proposal: 10% (3-5 pages) due week 5 in class  
Point form Draft of Your Paper: 35% due week 11 in class.  
Paper: 35% (20-25 pages) due one week after the last day of class. You will be asked to give a brief presentation of your paper in class.

Description of Assignments:

Class participation:  
Please come to class having done the readings. I try as much as possible to limit the number of readings to enable you to engage deeply with the writings of particular scholars. In-class discussion will be focussed on a close reading of texts, with particular attention to specific passages, their meanings, implications.

The course is organized in the spirit of slow scholarship – “thoughtful, reflective, and the product of rumination – a kind of field testing against other ideas” – and as such I had to make hard choices about what we would read together. This does not mean you cannot bring alternative perspectives to the readings, to critique them, to engage them intertextually, but productive discussion will emerge by connecting these to a close reading of the texts.

Weekly Report:  
You will be asked to produce 4 separate reports/ reflections to bring to class. These will form part of the in-class discussion.

*Two of the reflections should engage the main texts – here you have the option to read from a variety of perspectives. You might read instrumentally in relation to the methods the author uses, the way they structure their argument, the kinds of logic they engage and its effectiveness (for example a scholar like Berlant uses associative logics to produce new concepts, other forms might be deductive – proceeding from a set of principles, inductive or abductive). You might focus on method and archive. You might put the text in conversation with readings we have done in earlier weeks – but the focus should be on the readings for the
current week (this might take the form of compare and contrast or an intertextual reading, or other approaches).

*Two of the reflections should engage supplemental texts in relation to the current week’s readings (I can suggest several but you are invited to bring your own text). You should choose texts that leaven our understanding of the texts for that week or perhaps challenge them from an alternative viewpoint. This might involve an interrogation of concepts. For example, you might ask what challenges Clyde Woods’ writing on Arrested Development or Slyvia Wynter’s article on 1492 raise when thinking about Agamben’s concept of homo sacer. Or it might involve a consideration of practices (political practices or planning initiatives). Here I invite you to put the week’s readings in conversation with other work you are engaged in outside the class, to work against the “siloing off” of work you are doing in different courses or in your larger research projects.

Proposal:
The proposal should be a 3 to 5-page document (with annotated bibliography) addressing some aspect of the course themes around the mobilization, construction or contestation of difference. Depending on your background and current projects it might be a purely theoretical engagement of the concept across different perspectives, it might focus on a set of approaches that cohere around specific understandings, a planning practice.

Alternately you might read across a range of authors in relation to their method and archive – how do they define difference, what kinds of archive do they engage? Or you might read in terms of practice – how understandings of difference inform state initiated policies, strategies of governance, planning initiatives, political struggles? I encourage you to develop a project that will support other aspects of your academic work – it might feed into development of comprehensive readings, research project proposal, CIP, grant proposals. Please feel free to come and discuss your proposal during my office hours (or other hours by appointment) before the proposal is due.
Point form paper:
I request a point form paper before the final draft for a number of reasons.

1) it helps you to separate argument + evidence from exposition in the writing stage and allows you to avoid some of the pitfalls in writing before you commit to a final draft: it is much easier to identify problems in your argument – including the logical flow of the paper – in point form than to try to redraft a written piece (believe me – I speak from experience here!)

2) it enables me to do a quick diagnostic of the paper and give you feedback to strengthen it before you write

3) it helps you organize you time over the term (first third of the term collecting material, second third drafting argument; final third writing) in a way that limits the end of term crunch of paper writing.

Final paper: 20-25 pages 1.5 spacing 12 point font. All the usual requirements apply here (citation and bibliographic practices)
Week 1 Introduction

**Difference: Altery, Identity/ Invisibility, Opacity**

Week 2: Learning from Afro-pessimism and Black optimism
Hortense Spillers 1987 Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book
Culture and Countermemory: The “American” Connection 17(2)64-81
Jared Sexton 2011 The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black
Optimism Intensions Vol 5 1-47
Frank Wilderson 2003 Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society? Social
Identities, Volume 9, Number 2, 225-240
Fred Moten 2013 Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh) South Atlantic
Quarterly 112:4 738-780

Week 3: Invisible difference: unimagined / opaque
Rob Nixon 2010 Unimagined Communities: Developmental Refugees, Megadams and
Monumental Modernity New Formations 69(03) 62-80
H. Adlai Murdoch 2013 Édouard Glissant’s Creolized World Vision: From Resistance and
Relation to Opacité Callaloo, 36(4) 875-890

Grammars of Difference

Weeks 4 and 5: Difference and the Project of ‘Man’
(4)
Slyvia Wynter 1492
Weheliye Habeas Viscus Racializing Assemblages Biopolitics and Black Theories of the
Human Ch 1-4;
(5)
Katherine McKittrick (2011) On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place, Social &
Cultural Geography, 12:8, 947-963
bell hooks 1991 Homeplace in Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics pp 382-390
Weheliye Habeas Viscus Racializing Assemblages Biopolitics and Black Theories of the
Human Ch 5-8;
Week 6 and 7: Difference and the project of sovereignty
(6)
Nicholas A. Brown (2014) The logic of settler accumulation in a landscape of perpetual vanishing, Settler Colonial Studies, 4:1, 1-26
Shiri Pasternak The fiscal body of sovereignty: to ‘make live’ in Indian country Settler Colonial Studies, 4:1, 1-26
(7)
John Borrows 2017 The Right Relationship: Reimagining the Implementation of Historical Treaties. University of Toronto Press (select chapters)

Weeks 8 and 9: Difference and class - InDebtedness
(8)
Tayyab Mahmud 2012 Debt and Discipline American Quarterly 64(3): 469-494
Lazarrato The Making of Indebted Man Ch 1
(9)
Lazarrato The Making of Indebted Man Ch 2&3

Weeks 10 and 11: Difference and Class – Indifference
(10)
Berlant Cruel Optimism ch 1-4
(11)
Berlant Cruel Optimism ch 5-7

Week 12: Wrap up – class presentations, discussion.