

The University of Florida.

Department of English.

LIT 6236 (Section: 8022): Issues of Race, Gender and Sexuality in African Literature

Fall 2021

Times: Tuesdays Periods 6- 8

Instructor: Apollo O. Amoko

Office: 4350 Turlington Hall

Office Hours: T, R, 11.45-12.45pm or by appointment

Location: Graduate Seminar Room, Turlington Hall

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Course Description:

This course explores the compelling questions pertaining to issues of race, gender and sexuality in modern African literature. Since the inauguration of the field in the late nineteen fifties and early sixties, sex and sexuality have constituted a central creative and interpretative discursive formation. The representational economies these diverse literatures have been called into question on account of their normative gender and/or sexual logics. Much of this critique has been dependent, for its authority, on theories developed in the Western academy. To what extent can such ostensible “western” theories as feminism and queer theory provide critical paradigms and parameters for the study of putatively African aesthetic objects? Are such theories necessarily inappropriate on their account ostensible Eurocentricism”? From the perspective of Western feminism and queer theory, is African literature doomed to seem sexist and heteronormative, if not, homophobic (in silent contradistinction perhaps to more enlightened Western literature)? Is a critique of sexism and heteronormativity in African letters conceivable outside the bounds of Western theory? Alternately, is it not problematic to conceive of African literature in terms its radical difference from the so-called Western tradition? In the name of contesting Eurocentricism, do allegedly nativist theories of African literature risk normalizing historical and contemporary social inequalities, not to mention a certain anti-intellectualism? What accounts for the lingering hostility to feminism and especially queer theory in certain prominent quarters of African studies? Is the opposition pitting Western theory and African literature itself part of the problem it purports to resolve? To what extents are the texts in question “African”; to what extent is the theory in question “Western”? We will seek to answer these questions by looking at a range of canonical African fictions and Western theories of gender and sexuality. In addition to such hypercanonical Western thinkers as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, we will focus on lesser known but insightful and provocative theorists situated in Africa. Authors studied will include such diverse figures as Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa, Sony Lab’ou Tansi, Mariama Ba, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Chamamanda Ngodi Adichie and Yvonne Awour Odhiambo.

Course Goals:

The course aims to introduce students to various canonical African/postcolonial writers from a wide range of cultures, nationalities, regions, and aesthetic formations. As well, we will examine foundational concepts and debates animating the field. Through close readings of fourteen diverse novels, students will be empowered to engage critically with the dizzyingly diversity of the vast postcolonial library.

Disability Accommodations:

In line with federal law, the university strives to provide reasonable accommodations for students with either physical or mental disabilities (including learning disabilities such as ADHD or dyslexia). Accordingly, it is essential that you call my attention to any disabilities as soon as possible. In addition, it is imperative that you contact the Office of Students with Disabilities in order to obtain not just the required documentation, but also, support on an ongoing basis. Especially in light of the challenges of remote learning, kindly endeavor to arrange for any disability assistance as early in the semester as possible.

On a different, but related note, let me underline my commitment to provide all students with a rigorous but safe and respectful learning environment by providing specific protection against harassment including sexual harassment. That undertaking notwithstanding, it is imperative that you feel free to express all good faith opinions even or especially when we address charged issues such as racism, sexism, homophobia, nationalism, violence and so on.

Course Requirements:

- I. Response papers:** You will be required to submit responses papers addressing a salient aspect of each week's reading in between 250 and 500 words. Due no later than 11am each Thursday, each response will be addressed to the class as whole the better to facilitate consequent class discussions.
- II. You will be required to submit a 12-page final paper on topics to be formulated in consultation with the instructor.**

Week 1: Thursday August 26: Introductions

Week 2: September 2:

- i. J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*.
- ii. Bill Ashcroft, et. al., *The Empire Writes Back*, Introduction and Chapter 1

Week 3: September 9:

- i. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
- ii. Frederic Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65- 88.

- iii. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (Selections)

Week 4. September 16:

- i. Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*.
- ii. Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture," in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Week 5. September 23:

- i. Ferdinand Oyono, *Houseboy*
- ii. Fanon, "Concerning Violence," in *The Wretched of the Earth*.
- iii. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men*, (Selections)

Week 6. September 30

- i. Flora Nwapa, *Efuru*
- ii. Susan Andrade, "The Joys of Daughterhood," *Research in African Literatures*

Week 7. October 7:

- i. Sembene Ousmane, *Xala*
- ii. Fanon, "Pitfalls of National Consciousness," in *The Wretched of the Earth*

Week 8. October: 14.

- i. Mariama Ba, *So Long a Letter*.

Week 9. October 21:

- i. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*,
- ii. Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Week 10: October 28:

- i. Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*
- ii. Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post in the Postcolonial, the Post in the Postmodern?"

Week 11: November 4:

- i. Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*

Week 12. November 11:

- i. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Week 13. November 18.

- i. Uwem Akpan, *New York, My Village*

Week 14. November 25: Thanksgiving; class suspended.

Week 15: December 2: Wanuri Kahiu, *Rafiki*.

