

AFST 351 - Africa and the 21st Century Global Imaginary

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Course Description

At the beginning of the 21st century, narratives around Africa's place in the world are largely pre-determined. Stories of exploitation, poverty, health crises and civil war are all too familiar, or are supplemented by 'inspirational' tales of development, democracy, and burgeoning trade. Yet both sets of stories tend to ignore the lived reality of Africa, the very thing they attempt to describe, and its place in the world. What does it mean to be "African?" What counts as "African" writing and art? How does "Africa" imagine the world, and how has the world imagined Africa? This course re-examines the complex, interconnected, and generative meanings that are carried by the term *Africa* and its contemporary and global effects. To study African literature, we will discover, is to encounter specific political, ethical, and cultural relationships to the world – relationships not easily defined by geographic, ethnic and linguistic boundaries.

We will explore how Africa – demographically the world's "youngest" continent of 54 countries and over a billion people – has been defined by the global imagination for centuries, but also how it has always generated its *own* forms of knowledge that have profoundly shaped the world as we know it. Together we will read critical theory on race, gender, cosmopolitanism, and diaspora in our encounters with 21st century literature, film, photography and popular culture that emanates from, or reflects on, the continent. We will work through these diverse readings to complicate ideas of African subjectivity, knowledge, and history. From 16th century Morocco to the tech-utopia of Wakanda, from the neocolonialism of Drake's Afro-Caribbean mixtapes to the queer gaze of Zanele Muholi's camera, we'll consider how "Africa" provides a lens for engaging the most pressing questions of today, and revolutionary blueprints for the future.

Assignments

Attendance and Participation: 10%

2 Blog Posts (250 words each): 15%

Presentation and Critical Reflection: 20%

Course Essay: 25%

Final Exam: 30%

Grading and Assignment Descriptions

Attendance and Participation: 10%

Attendance is a crucial component of this course. As your peers will be leading discussions, this is a chance to learn from and with a diverse community of classmates. Please inform me of issues that might prevent you from attending class (illness, family crises, childcare, conferences, etc) so that we can make alternative arrangements. Participation can take on several forms: speaking in class, responding to your classmate's blog posts, attending office hours, posting relevant material to the discussion sections on Canvas, etc.

2 Blog Posts (250 words each): 15% (2 x 7.5% = 15%)

Two short pieces of writing are to be posted to Canvas in the discussion section for the appropriate/assigned week. They should extend discussion from class or relate course material to your own encounters with relevant historical, material, literary, art, popular culture or personal narratives and experiences. Your blog post can also be written in response to another blog post as part of a substantive academic discussion. Blog posts should end with two critical questions for opening up discussion. One blog post is expected in each half of the course.

Presentation and Critical Reflection: 20%

Thursday classes will be run by a group of students. In Week One you will choose a topic to present on. As a group you should prepare a lecture of approximately 45 minutes for the class, one that offers an interpretation of the materials for that week. The second part of your lesson should engage the class in a learning exercise (small group discussions, a debate, a game of your design, etc.) based on the themes and ideas we are exploring that week. You are welcome to incorporate ideas and concepts from other disciplines: a history or international relations major might want to discuss the historical context for the text, for example. The group will be assigned a grade for the lecture (10%).

The week after your presentation each member is responsible for a one-page written reflection, which should discuss the experience of hosting the class, new or interesting ideas about material you presented on, and so on. This reflection will be graded individually (10%).

I understand that some students might be particularly uneasy with public speaking for any number of reasons. If this is the case, please come see me early in the semester to discuss the alternative assignment, which would take the form of a book review or Wikipedia-style entry on that week's material.

Course Essay: 25%

An argumentative academic essay of approximately 2000 words is due on the final day of the course. The topic is to be developed independently, and your paper should focus on material and texts covered in this course and engage with at least two secondary sources. A brief (3-5 sentence) proposal is due two weeks before the essay due date in which you outline your basic argument and the key texts you plan on using.

Final Exam: 30%

The purpose of the exam is to get students to consider the course as a whole and to synthesize primary ideas. The format of the final will be covered in the last week of the course. **Date TBA.**

(Tentative) Schedule

Withdrawal Dates

Last day to withdraw without a W standing: **Sept. 20**

Last day to withdraw with a W standing (course cannot be dropped after this date): **Oct. 14**

Week One: Introductions

An overview of the course, getting to know each other, forming presentation groups for upcoming weeks.

We will read Binyavanga Wainaina's "How to Write About Africa" in class together.

Week Two: The Idea(s) of Africa

Primary Texts:

HFW Hegel – "Geographical Basis of History" from *The Philosophy of History*

Achille Mbembe – "Introduction: Time on the Move" in *On the Postcolony*

Ngugi wa Thiong'o – *Decolonizing the Mind*

Secondary Text:

Kwame Anthony Appiah – "The Case for Contamination" (*The New York Times*)

Week Three: Cosmopolitan Histories and Movements

Primary Text:

Laila Lalami – *The Moor's Account*

Secondary Texts:

Pnina Werbner – "Vernacular Cosmopolitanism"

V.Y. Mudimbe – *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*

Week Four: The Black Diaspora and the Modern Subject

Primary Texts: Selections from Drake – *More Life*, Lauryn Hill – *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* and Kendrick Lamar – *To Pimp a Butterfly*

Secondary Texts:

CLR James – *The Black Jacobins*

Paul Gilroy – *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*

Week Five: The Global African City (Part One: New York and Lagos)

Primary Text:

Teju Cole – *Open City*

Secondary Text:

Abdou Maliq Simone – "People as Infrastructure"

Week Six: The African Global City (Part Two: Johannesburg)

Primary Text:

Ivan Vladislavic – *The Exploded View*

Secondary Text:

Mbembe, A. and Nuttall, S. – "Writing the World from an African Metropolis" in *Public Culture* 16 (3)

Week Seven: Queering Africa

Primary Texts:

John Trengrove – *Inxeba* (film)

Diriye Osman – *Fairytales for Lost Children*

Secondary Texts:

Neville Hoad – *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality and Globalization*

Sylvia Tamale – *African Sexualities: A Reader*

Week Eight: The Image of Africa

Primary Texts:

Selections of Zanele Muholi's photography

Zanele Muholi – “Difficult Love” (documentary)

Secondary Texts:

Teju Cole – “When the Camera was a Weapon of Imperialism” (*The New York Times*)

Yvonne Vera – “Thatha Camera”

Frantz Fanon – “The Fact of Blackness” in *Black Skin, White Masks*

Week Nine: National Historiography (Part One)

Primary Text:

Jennifer Makumbi – *Kintu*

Secondary Text:

Frederic Jameson – “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”

Week Ten: National Historiography (Part Two)

Primary Text:

Jennifer Makumbi – *Kintu*

Week Eleven: Afrofuturism, Capital and Hollywood (Part One)

Primary Text:

Ta-Nehisi Coates – *Black Panther*

Secondary Text:

Mark Dery – “Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R Delaney, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose”

Week Twelve: Afrofuturism, Capital and Hollywood (Part Two)

Primary Text:

Ryan Coogler – *Black Panther* (film)

Secondary Texts:

Jelani Cobb – “Black Panther and the Invention of ‘Africa’” (*The New Yorker*), Russell Rickford – “I Have a Problem with Black Panther” (*Africa is a Country*)

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

UBC is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://www.students.ubc.ca/access/disability-services/> as soon as possible. This is particularly important in advance of deadlines.

PREPARATION

To assist classroom discussions, please come to class prepared with questions, discussion points, notes, and the relevant text(s) for that class. Lack of preparation will negatively impact your grade.

RESPECT

Some of the issues we discuss will be provocative, controversial, or emotionally challenging. Our classroom should be as conducive as possible to an ethos of thoughtful and open inquiry that encourages everyone to share ideas in a productive way. Please be respectful of the rights of others to their own opinions and beliefs. Please keep in mind that many of the issues we discuss in class are the lived experience of real human beings, not just theoretical concerns, so be kind to one another even in disagreement.

A note on facing challenges inside and outside of class: This course deals with a number of challenging and emotionally charged issues, and some students may find the content unexpectedly stressful, including discussions of sexualized violence. If at any point you encounter distress or feel emotionally triggered for personal reasons, you are encouraged to take advantage of the many confidential supports on campus and in the community, including UBC Counselling Services. Counselling Services may also be useful to access if you encounter personal difficulties during the semester that are causing you to miss class or assignments. If you are concerned about your ability to complete the term successfully due to unexpected hardships, you can contact Arts Advising to request an academic concession. For more information:

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/?tree=3,48,0,0>

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

The integrity of academic work depends on the honesty of all those who work in this environment and the observance of accepted conventions such as acknowledging the work of others through careful citation of all sources used in your work. Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are treated as serious offences at UBC. You should be aware of the sections of the University Calendar that address academic integrity (<http://students.ubc.ca/calendar/>). The UBC library also has a useful web-based Plagiarism Resource Centre that explains what plagiarism is and how to avoid it (www.library.ubc.ca/home/plagiarism/). If you have questions or concerns about any of these policies or conventions in relation to how they apply to the work you do in this course, please discuss them with me.

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This course is taking place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people. We thank the Musqueam Nation for hosting us here in their territories, and for their ongoing support of the work of the African Studies program.