Fall 2015

Studies in Postcolonial World Literatures: African Literature and Film

English 352 Waqas Khwaja

MW 3:30-4:45 PM Office: Buttrick 226

Buttrick 213 **Office hours**: T 2:00 – 3:30

or by appointment

**About the Course**

The academic specialty designated by the term "post-colonial studies" challenges, paradoxically, the very drive toward discipline formation, the appropriation and asphyxiation involved in the process of naming as much as the site of this denomination. It represents a vast and various terrain, volatile and uncertain as any mythological landscape. It includes works from areas as different and differentiated as South-Asia, the Far and Middle East, the Pacific, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Ireland. Inevitably, it is, like gender or multicultural studies, a cross-disciplinary enterprise as it is also, in many ways, a cross-cultural one. And the hybrid nature of the texts included in these categories dictates a hybridization of critical strategies as well to examine and analyze them. For instance, geographically or culturally confined methodologies and suppositions may prove to be quite inadequate in examining these works. And, since so much that is relevant to this area of study is being written (and encountered) in the indigenous languages, using translations of this work to supplement post-colonial writings originally produced in *english* may provide a fuller (though by no means complete) understanding of the post-colonial experience.

It is equally important to understand that the term “post-colonial” does not refer to just a state-in-process that succeeds the imperial presence in a colony, settler or otherwise, but it also describes an approach that interjects and accommodates marginalized viewpoints and readings, revisions and recuperations into the narratives of our own and earlier eras. Post-colonial praxis enacts a departure from the tradition of "authoritative" or "master" narratives, a strategy that proves especially pertinent in appreciating perspectival variation, which is such a significant feature of our existence today. It may manifest itself in narratorial diversification which recognizes the precariousness of a singular narrative in the face of shifting points of view, and it opens up the possibility of re-reading texts from individually or culturally realigned contexts.

In this course, we shall look at fiction, poetry, and films from a range of African countries— representing a variety of both distinct as well as overlapping geographical, religious, political, economic, and cultural backgrounds. To get a sense of the theoretical foundations of the field of postcolonial studies we will start out with reading *The Empire Writes Back*, a concise and rich synopsis of the issues, debates, and reservations that constitute this field of study. This will help us also to get acquainted with ideas, themes, strategies, and even perceptions that bring together post-colonial writers from widely different regions and those that separate and differentiate them. *The Empire Writes Back* provides us with brief introductions to, and the generative conditions and impulses behind, some of the more noteworthy theoretical assumptions and methodologies in post-colonial studies, and it should help us get familiar with useful terms and expressions in its discourse.

We shall approach the assigned texts to explore how each writer deals with the colonial legacy and its aftermath and the complex configurations of multiple histories, cultures, and topical details that manifest themselves in each work. Belonging to a world that reflects at numerous levels its experiences of foreign intrusion and colonial incursion, post-colonial writers often find expression through an in-between, double, or liminal and inclusive, consciousness in societies struggling, in their post-independence phase, to find a distinct and secure sense of their identity frequently by rejecting or erasing what they perceive as alien, unpalatable, or humiliating in their colonial past. Postcolonial texts, thus, challenge authoritative “master narratives” and draw sustenance from the conflation and transfusion of genres, written and oral, and narrative strategies that reflect and deliver the richly porous nature of collective experience. Theoretically, the “postcolonial state,” in the very nature of its designation, is a temporary phase during which liberated (postcolonial) societies struggle to find the paths to and narratives of their autonomy, a state of self-definition and self-determination that validates the breaking away from colonial rule. But colonial debris is present everywhere, in societies that have themselves evolved to become strong, independent, and, ironically, sometimes imperial, states, as well as in those that have gained independence comparatively more recently. Moreover, colonization occurs in many forms and guises, external and internal, and is by no means confined only to its usual sense of appropriation and exploitation of a people, their lands, and their resources by an external power. Parallel internal forms of colonization such as gender inequity, ethnic, racial, religious, and economic exclusion or disenfranchisement, and the like, often studied under separate categories, fall under its umbrella as well. In this sense, no society is quite free from the regimes of colonization and, in that the struggle against it continues in the various segments and areas of life everywhere, it can be said that all societies/states, struggling continually to break away from their own exploitative practices and customs, forever caught in the process of becoming, of self-improvement, where all judgments and assessments, all observations and perceptions, can only be contingent, partial, and relative, perpetually exist in the volatile and unstable postcolonial condition. Our objective is to examine and investigate this condition and its manifestations in the texts we study for this course

# Course Schedule

Aug. 26 Introduction, syllabus, and course requirements

31 *The Empire Writes Back*; Intro. & first 2 chapters; **2-page summary (single space)**

**identifying three significant points from intro. & each of the two assigned chapters**

**Sept.** 02 *The Empire Writes Back* (cont.); **2-page summary (single space) identifying three**

**major points from chapter 3 & 3 from the assigned section of chaper 4 (pp 122-131)**

09 *Decolonising the Mind*; **2-page summary (single space) discussing three significant**

**points you picked up from the assigned reading**

Friday, Sept. 11, screening *Concerning Violence*, Buttrick G-4 (Film room)

14 Discuss movie *Concerning Violence*

16 *Things Fall Apart*

Friday, Sept. 18, screening *Lost Kingdoms of Africa,* Buttrick G-4 (Film room)

21 *Things Fall Apart*

23 Discuss movie *Lost Kingdoms of Africa*

28 *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*

30 *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*

Friday, Oct. 02, screening *The Last King of Scotland,* Buttrick G-4 (Film room)

**Oct.** 05 *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

07 *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*; **6-8 page thesis-driven analytical research paper**

**on one of the movies or literary texts studied so far**

## FALL BREAK, OCT. 08-11

Watch *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* on your own over spring break

12 Discuss movie *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*

14 *A Question of Power*

Friday Oct. 16, screening *Tsotsi,* Buttrick G-4 (Film room)

19 *A Question of Power*

21 Discuss movie *Tsotsi*

26 *Petals of Blood*

28 *Petals of Blood*

**Nov.** 02 *Petals of Blood*

04 *Petals of Blood*

Friday, Nov. 6, screening *Sometimes in April,* Buttrick G-4 (Film room)

09Discuss movie *Sometimes in April*

11 *Aké: Years of Childhood*

16 *Aké: Years of Childhood*

18 *Aké: Years of Childhood*

Friday, Nov. 20, screening *Sankofa*, Buttrick G-4 (Film room)

23 Discuss movie, *Sankofa*;

### **THANKSGIVING, NOV. 25-29**

30 *Nervous Conditions*

**Dec.** 02 *Nervous Conditions*

07 *Africa: Challenges in the 21st Century.* Summing up; **6-8 page thesis-driven analytical**

**research paper on one of the movies or literary texts studied since the fall break**

## Texts (Required)

### Achebe, Chinua. Things Fall Apart

Armah, Ayi Kwei. *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born.*

### Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, eds. The Empire Writes Back. Routledge. 2003.

Dagarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions.*

Head, Bessie. *A Question of Power.*

P’Bitek, Okot. *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol.*

Soyinka, Wole. *Aké: Years of Childhood.*

wa Thiongo, Ngu’gi. *Decolonising the Mind.*

*Petals of Blood.*

**Films**

*Concerning Violence*

*Lost Kingdoms of Africa*

*Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*

*Sankofa*

*Sometimes in April*

*The Last King of Scotland*

##### Tsotsi

**Assignments:** All work turned in should be typed or printed on a letter-quality printer. It should be double-spaced and properly proofread for all typographical and spelling errors. Be sure to follow the conventions of the MLA for documentation, citation, and referencing.

**Students must obtain prior approval of the professor for their research and presentation topics.**

**Class Participation:** You are expected not only to attend your classes punctually and regularly but also to generate and actively participate in class discussions. Your comments should clearly show that you have read, or, in the case of movies, watched, the assigned material carefully and reflected upon it seriously enough to warrant the positions you adopt and the opinions you offer. **It may be helpful to be prepared with a written note of 3-4 discussion points based on the assigned material for each class period.**

Research Papers: Make sure you choose a subject that interests you. If you are not interested in the subject, it is unlikely that you will be motivated to do the scholarly research these assignments require or to produce a superior paper. Be sure to have a clear idea of your topic and the thesis you wish to advance in your paper. It may be helpful to think of this assignment as an opportunity to tackle a problem or a question your reading of the text poses that you would like to explore or investigate in some depth. Your views and opinions should have been formed after taking into consideration the entire text, so that your argument is not based on a partial and localized reading that disregards the events of the work as a whole.

Consult both conventional library as well as digital resources to locate background and contextual information, critical views, articles, and books on your subject. Use a variety of sources, and do not rely for more than 50% of your secondary sources from internet and digital databases. **You should have at least six relevant secondary sources of literary criticism on the primary text you are discussing in your paper.**

Incorporate in your paper only the relevant portion of the information gathered. Enter into a dialogue with the critics and scholars you cite and do not quote passively, i.e., just for the sake of quoting or ornamentation**. Ascribe within the text of your paper the quotation and any paraphrased source material you use to the author from whom it originates. Integrate the quoted material into the structure of your argument and exposition.**

These are guidelines and suggestions. Use them intelligently and imaginatively.

**Class Presentations**: Students need to choose a subject they wish to present on by the end of the third class period. **If you decide to present on a movie, you cannot opt to write also your required 2-page paper on that movie.** Dates for the presentations shall be allocated on the basis of mutual accommodation, ensuring that no duplication of topics or dates takes place, but the earlier requests will be given priority over the later in case of conflict. Presentations should be no less than 15, and no more than 20 minutes long, offer an analysis based on a distinct personal interpretation without however ignoring variations in point of view picked up during the research, and be creatively conceived and executed.

**A 2-page summary of the research done and the way it influenced or modified your view of the subject should be turned in to your professor at the end of the presentation.**

**Presentation Summary:** **A 2-page summary of the research done and the way it influenced or modified your view of the subject should be turned in to your professor at the end of the presentation. The summary should follow the following format:**

1. **A clear statement of the area of research, investigation, and analysis, along with the main idea, thesis, or objective of the presentation;**
2. **A list of sources consulted, taking care to distinguish between primary and secondary sources;**
3. **The information for the class presentation gathered from these sources properly organized under thematic categories;**
4. **An explanation of how your scholarly investigation and analysis helps to give you a better understanding to the work on which you are presenting; and**
5. **Suggestions for further research on the subject.**

**TURN IN YOUR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS IN FOLDERS, AND KEEP A FULL DUPLICATE RECORD OF YOUR WORK WITH YOU AS A RULE.**

**LATE PAPERS, ATTENDANCE POLICY, AND PUNCTUALITY**: The college policies prescribe penalization of 1/3rd of a letter grade for each day an assignment is late beyond its due date. **All work is due strictly on the day designated for its submission or completion.** An extension may be granted only under exceptional circumstances that constitute a clear and unexpected emergency. Class attendance and punctuality are mandatory. **Six missed classes without compelling cause or prior notice (and permission from your professor) will result in “F” for the course.**

**The Department of English requires that all assignments must be completed for a student to receive credit for the course.** The college policy of penalization by 1/3 letter grade for each day an assignment or paper is late shall be followed. Attendance is crucial to this course. Six missed classes without compelling cause or prior permission shall result in "F" for the course. Each absence without cause or excuse will affect the grade negatively in proportion.

**GRADES:** 1)Individual Oral Presentation and printed presentation summary, 15%; 2) Two 6-8 page research papers, 30%; 3) Two 2-page, single-space, papers on two of the movies assigned for the course, 20%; 4) Class participation, 5%; 5) Three, 2-page summaries (single space) of major points gathered from assigned readings in *The Empire Writes Back* and *Decolonising the Mind,* 30%.

**Grading scale:**

93 to 100 A

90 to less than 93 A-

87 to less than 90 B+

83 to less than 87 B

80 to less than 83 B-

77 to less than 80 C+

73 to less than 77 C

70 to less than73 C-

67 to less than 70 D+

63 to less than 67 D

60 to less than 63 D-

Less than 60 F

Your professor reserves the right to make modifications to this syllabus.

**Credit and workload**: Eng. 352A-A is a 4-credit course. In addition to in-class time, you will be spending a minimum of 8 hours per week in preparation for our class sessions, completing reading assignments and preparing discussion questions and/or writing two-page responses to the assigned material before coming to class. You should also plan to spend an additional 4 hours per week on research for your presentations and papers as well as watching the assigned movies, the schedule for which will be provided separately to you.

**Accommodation Statement**: Agnes Scott College seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities.  If you will need accommodations in this class, please contact Kelly Deasy in the Office of Academic Advising (X6150) to make complete the registration process. Once registered, please contact me so we can discuss the specific accommodations needed for this course.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s ideas or words without giving them credit. This can mean using someone’s ideas without proper acknowledgement in papers you are writing for class, copying a sentence directly from a book or journal without citing the source, or turning in the same paper or assignment for different classes without the professors’ knowledge. There are specific requirements for documenting sources and ideas. For this course, you are expected to follow the MLA style for citation, documentation, and referencing of sources. Please familiarize yourself with these requirements by consulting the MLA Handbook (available in the McCain Library) or the chapter titled “MLA Style” in the *St. Martin’s Handbook* (also available in your library if you do not have a personal copy). Plagiarism is a serious offense and the penalty ranges from warnings to probation or suspension.

**The Honor Code and Plagiarism:** Intellectual communities are founded on principles of honesty and fair use. Teaching, learning, and the advancement of knowledge all depend on these principles. One of the most important things you will learn as an Agnes Scott student is how to use the writings of others in combination with your own ideas and research to create thoughtful papers that make contributions to the world of knowledge with full credit to all the minds that have participated.   
  
For many reasons, including the explosion of information available on the Internet, plagiarism is on the rise in colleges and universities across the country. In recent years it has become easier to find and copy or download papers or parts of papers and easier to find sources of papers or other works that are for sale. Of course it has also become easier for such crimes to be detected. Most of you will not be tempted to pass off others’ work as your own, yet it is also possible to inadvertently use others’ work in an improper way. One of the goals of this course is to teach you how to avoid making such mistakes and how to use sources properly and effectively in your written work.   
  
Nothing is more important in a college course than adherence to the Honor System. You have all signed the Honor Pledge, and its principles should govern all of your work for this course as for any other. If you directly (direct quotations) or indirectly (paraphrases, other borrowings) borrow ideas from others—whether those ideas appear in books, articles, or online, or develop during conversations—you must give proper and full credit to the original sources.   
  
Please pledge individual papers and exams as a reminder for all of us that you are committed to upholding the Honor System. To make sure everyone understands how this system and its principles provide the foundation for all course work, we will spend a substantial portion of class time—including a required class session on September 11—discussing academic and intellectual honesty and conducting a thorough examination of the proper use of sources in informal and formal writing.   
  
At any time during the semester, I will be happy to answer questions you may have about the Honor System, academic and intellectual honesty, the proper use of sources, or any related topic.

**Course Evaluations:** Near the end of the semester you will be notified by e- mail and provided with a link to follow to complete course evaluations on line outside of class. I want you to know that your feedback on the course is extremely valuable to me, the department, and the administration. In particular, I take your comments very seriously and use them to improve the course the next time I teach it. Please do fill out a course evaluation when you receive the e-mailed link at the end of the semester.

**Course Objectives:**

1. To introduce a broad range of postcolonial African literature and film;

2. to provide an opportunity to gain cross-cultural competence by acquiring the

historical & cultural background necessary for an informed analysis of the literary

& film productions from Africa;

3. to examine the historical, cultural, and political role of literature and film in

African societies;

4. to introduce postcolonial literary theory, its fundamental principles and

surrounding theoretical debates and criticisms, especially as relates to Africa, and

deploy its methods and strategies in examining assigned texts and films;

5. to examine the structures of domination and subjugation, exploitation and abuse,

colonial as well as indigenous, that find expression or representation in the texts

studied for this course.

**Student Outcomes:**

After taking this course, students should be able to demonstrate:

a) a basic understanding of postcolonial approaches and strategies as they pertain to

African societies, and to determine their usefulness, as well as shortcomings, in

negotiating and examining literary texts and films;

b) proficiency in understanding and analyzing African literature and film;

c) the ability to communicate effectively, orally and in writing, about the assigned

material;

d) the ability to identify distinctive themes, conventions, and devices, shared or

autonomous, in the texts studied;

e) the ability to identify the range of historical and sociopolitical issues, systemic

forms of dominance, exploitation, and abuse that influence and/or are reflected in

the work of African writers and film-makers;

f) the ability to conduct independent research on the subject and to use that research

to provide informed critiques and analyses of targeted texts.