

**American University of Beirut**  
**Gender and Sexuality: Women in Africa ENGL 258A**  
Monday/Wednesday/Friday 12:00PM-12:50PM  
Fisk 337  
Professor: Jim Hodapp  
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Office Hours: 10:00-11:00 Friday

**Course Description:**

**Diversity**

*“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stifled. I want all the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”*  
Mohandas Gandhi

Due to the vastness of the world and its literature in regards to gender and sexuality, this class will focus on representative cultural examples of commonly acknowledged outstanding Anglophone literature by African women in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Two questions must be asked though when considering a project of this nature. The first is: Why diversity? That is, why do we care what those who are not like us do and do we have any responsibility to understand them? The answer increasingly stands as a resounding “yes” because of the globalized nature of the world’s commerce, media, migrations, politics, diseases, environment, etc. If we accept the almost undeniable assertion that we live in closely-knit series of globalized networks, then diversity and the study of it are less a luxury than a necessity. As part of a larger entity it only makes sense to understand the other parts of that entity. Although this kind of self-interest is not necessarily out of place in comparative literature, does this mean that we should simply ignore those cultures from which we cannot reap immediate and tangible rewards? If we are to maintain any semblance of ethics we must acknowledge that all cultures and peoples are equal and that while some might be more relevant and accessible to us, those cultures that appear incongruent with our own are not less worthy of understanding. Therefore, we study diverse cultures not only because we want to understand ourselves and our place in the world but also because all groups deserve their say in global culture even if they do not have the political, economic or military power to muscle their way into prominence on the world stage. Ultimately, like Gandhi in the quote above, we do not want to isolate ourselves or subscribe unquestioningly to any culture, even our own.

**Literature**

*“A story is not a message with a covering.”* J.M. Coetzee

The second question then is: Why study diversity and our globalized world through literature by women? There are many ways to answer this but one common answer is that literature allows us to identify with others in an empathetic way. We might know the story of a historical event in terms of the date, the major players and the nature of the event in question but a fictionalized account that accurately represents a culture can offer individual experiences from perspectives that history, anthropology, or autobiography cannot – think about a third person narrative in which the reader knows each characters’ thoughts. In short, we are able to enter into a perspective (in terms of gender, race, age and history) that we simply cannot in our lives. I cannot be an Igbo man in nineteenth century West Africa or a modern Thai woman, but when I read Chinua Achebe and Khamsing Sriwank I am able to briefly inhabit those worlds and get as close to being them as I ever will. This uniquely literary power is why Coetzee says

that a story is not simply a message told in a palatable way. That is, I can easily say that the Igbo people have a complex culture equal to European cultures and give examples but that does not tell me what it is like to *be* one of them. Messages make arguments using evidence but stories, for authors like Coetzee, are lived events. These events change with each reading and the best ones force critical thinking, rather than easily digested talking points, because life in our globalized world is not simple but complex, confusing and ever-changing.

### **Women**

So why study African literature by women in particular? The question answers itself in that women make up half the population of our planet so to not read their work would be unwise if not discriminatory. However, I have heard questions like “Why isn’t there a World Literature by Men” class? To be frank, most of the history of literary studies has been one long study by men of literature written by men. In the western academy, we can also add that it has been until recently the study of white male literature by white male scholars. This history of men monopolizing literature and its study has done few favors to women writers and to representations of women in literature. Therefore, our project in this class is ethically charged because we are trying to establish a sense of gender equity to the study of literature. In other words, the insights on offer by women writers have been minimalized for some time and now we have some serious catching up to do.

### **Required Texts:**

About, Marguerite. *Life in Yop City*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2013.

Adichie, Chimamanda Nzogzi. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. New York: Anchor Books, 2008.

Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004.

Emecheta, Buchi. *Joys of Motherhood*. New York: George Braziller, Inc, 1979.

Maathai, Wangari. *Unbowed*. New York: Anchor, 2007.

Vera, Yvonne. *Butterfly Burning*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.

### **Expectations of Instructor**

I will begin class on time and finish on time. I will be prepared for each session. I will be available during office hours and by appointment. I will return work promptly and give clear feedback on all assignments. I will also try to demonstrate why we are doing what we are doing.

### **Grading**

Grades on various assignments will be weighted according to the following scale:

Participation 150 points

In-class work 150 points

Response Papers 150 points

Midterm Paper 200 points  
Final Project 350 points

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1000 points

### Grading Criteria for Papers

#### A Papers-Excellent (90%-100%)

1. Fulfills the assignment in a fresh and mature way. The paper is intellectually dynamic and demonstrates a mastery of the texts and salient cultural issues surrounding them.
2. The evidence is highly detailed and used persuasively towards an original analysis.
3. Citations are used effectively and formatted correctly
4. The organization of the paper gives the reader a sense of the flow of the argument; meaning paragraphs are fully developed and properly related to one another.
5. Few if any grammatical mistakes.

#### B Papers-Above Average (80%-89%)

1. Fulfills the assignment in a better-than-average way. The paper is intellectual and demonstrates an above average understanding of the texts and cultural issues surrounding them, although may rely too heavily on the obvious.
2. The evidence is detailed and used persuasively towards an insightful analysis.
3. Citations are used effectively and formatted correctly
4. The organization of the paper gives the reader a sense of the flow of the argument; meaning paragraphs are well developed and properly related to one another.
5. Few grammatical mistakes.

#### C Papers-Average (70%-79%)

1. Fulfills the assignment in an average way. The paper is serviceable and demonstrates limited understanding of the texts and cultural issues surrounding them and restates obvious points.
2. The evidence is primarily vague and lacks meaningful insightful towards an analysis.
3. Citations are mostly used effectively and formatted correctly.
4. The organization of the paper gives the reader some sense of connection between the argument's various components.
5. Repeated grammatical mistakes.

#### D Papers- Below Average (65%-70%)

1. Fulfills the assignment in a below-average way. The paper's serviceability is highly limited and it demonstrates highly limited understanding of the texts and cultural issues surrounding them.
2. Necessary evidence is fragmented or missing and lacks meaningful insightful towards an analysis.
3. Citations are used ineffectively and formatted poorly.
4. The organization of the paper makes following the argument difficult, if not impossible.
5. Repeated grammatical mistakes.

#### F Papers-Fail (64% and below)

1. Does not fulfill the basic requirements of the assignment. The paper is unserviceable as an assignment by showing no understanding of relevant material.
2. No evidence or analysis.
3. Does not meet page requirements.
4. Citations are used ineffectively or not at all.

5. Little discernable organization.
6. Repeated grammatical mistakes.

### **Participation**

By participation I mean that you should engage in class discussion. This includes reading the assigned material, engaging in constructive discussion and not in any way inhibiting discussion in the class (things like texting/web-surfing and other demonstrations of a lack of respect for the class). I understand that you may not feel that you have something to contribute, but your insight or question might be helpful to other members of the class and part of your responsibility is to find something interesting or insightful to discuss. So please do not deny us a learning opportunity; share your thoughts! On the other hand, participating continuously with extraneous and off-topic remarks will lower your grade. Please focus and measure your remarks to be as insightful and as on-topic as possible. We all have different learning styles and personality types, but participation is a part of your grade. Therefore, do whatever it takes to be not only an observer or follower of class discussions, but also an active participant.

### **Attendance**

**Excused Absences:** The University excuses absences for certain reasons (illness, representing the University at certain events, religious observance, and the death of an immediate family member), provided the cause of absence is appropriately documented. Do not give me the generic form you can get off the University's website.

If you have, or will have an excused absence (such as your mandatory presence at a University event), you must let me know ahead of time or as soon as possible. For absences for religious observance, you must notify me before the end of the schedule adjustment period. No absence is officially excused, however, until I have seen the documentation. Documentation must be presented no later than the first class period after your return to class—you have, in other words, one class day's leeway to get your documentation in order. If you do not supply documentation within the specified time period, your absence will be regarded as unexcused. Please make one copy of your documentation for me to keep and keep another copy for your own records.

**Documentation Requirements to Justify an Excused Absence:** Documentation must justify absence for the specific period missed: a vague statement that you were "under [a doctor's] care during the week of X" won't do. Ask your doctor to be specific about times and limitations. The Student Health Service will give out medical excuses only for long-term ailments. If you have an illness for which you went to the Student Health Service, contact me right away about how to present appropriate documentation.

Although you are not required to attend class, your ability to fulfill the participation and in-class assignment portions of the grading scale will be negatively impacted by absence. What this means is that I will not penalize anyone for being absent but that you cannot receive participation credit if you are not present and you will receive a zero for any in-class work missed.

### **Tardiness**

You have made a commitment to be in this class on time. If you can't do that then you should not be taking the class. We're all human and sometimes we turn up late for reasons beyond our control. At the same time, it is disruptive and disrespectful to regularly come into class when it is already in progress. Do your best to be on time and keep in mind that any participation or in-class work missed because of tardiness cannot be made up.

### **Consultations**

Communication with me is one of the best ways to better understand the expectations of this course and how well you are fulfilling them. Contact me and I will spend as much time as needed to work on any issues. I am here to guide you through the process of this class so do not be shy about coming to see me even if just to touch base. In preparing to see me, though, you should have specific questions that you want to discuss.

### **Drafts**

What is a draft exactly? For our purposes, a draft is a paper you would feel comfortable turning in for a grade. That means that your drafts are not sketches or outlines or a game plan. They must also be formatted to my normal paper requirements. We take this approach because we want to work on your essays in a state you would submit. Failure to submit a draft will result in one full grade off of the final draft of the paper.

### **In-class assignments**

In-class assignments are not noted on the syllabus. They can be announced days before or simply given without warning. If you do not show up for class that day, you fail the assignment. Only students with excused absences will be given a make up.

### **Paper specifications**

All essays must be double spaced and typed with one inch margins. The font must be 12 point Times Roman. These are the default setting of Word 2007 (not 2003) so if you don't mess with the margins, you have no worries. Do not include a cover page and be sure to staple all assignments. Your name, the class, the assignment and the date should be single spaced in the top right corner of all papers. If there is a title there should be one space between the date and the centered title.

### **Late Papers/Projects**

All papers are due at specific times on ELMS. Any paper not submitted by that time is considered late and will be penalized at least one full grade.

I do not give extensions on papers after the due date. Under special circumstances I may give an extension beforehand if you have consulted with me. All the essays are noted on the syllabus and will be discussed in class beforehand. I take one full grade off for every day the paper is late. I will not accept any papers that are more than two weeks late. Also, keep in mind that a failing grade and zero are two different things. Not turning in a paper earns you a zero. A late paper may earn a low grade, even below 60%, but that will still amount to a lot more points than a flat zero.

### **Academic Integrity**

I will not tolerate plagiarism of any kind in our class. Any student caught improperly using online or print resources in a paper will receive an automatic zero for the assignment and may incur further disciplinary action. No exceptions.

Plagiarism is a serious issue in academia and I want to clarify exactly what I mean.

#### *Online Sources*

Plagiarism includes online sources; so cutting and pasting material from a website and passing it off as your own is plagiarism. Not citing the sources of your argument is also plagiarism, as is partially citing; so do not just cite "History.com" but specific URLs.

### *General*

Not using quotation marks for a quote is plagiarism. Not citing every time you use a quotation is plagiarism. Changing a few words in a citation and passing it off as your own is plagiarism as is using work from other classes for this class. Turning in the same paper for different classes without permission is also not allowed by the university. Please see me if you have any questions.

These are some of the major forms of plagiarism. For complete information see the university's academic integrity code.

### **Response Papers**

Each week each member of a group will submit a one-page response paper. These papers should be one double spaced page with normal paper specifications. The point of the response papers is for you to formulate arguments and points concerning the texts while reading them. They are not mini-papers that need an intro, body, and conclusion. Rather they should be precise insightful points of interpretation. "Response" here does not mean observation or the first thing that came to mind when reading something. A response in the academic sense is a short analysis of a particular point of interest. This means making a non-generic claim, providing evidence and then analyzing why the evidence provides insight beyond the obvious. Also, do not summarize the work you are discussing; we have all read it and do not need a recap. What we want is your particular insight. All response papers must be posted to the appropriate Blackboard forum by noon on Tuesday. Other members of the class must respond to at least two responses by midnight on Tuesday.

### **Schedule**

This schedule of readings is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class. In addition to the literary readings, we will have some sessions on how to write literary arguments. These will be allocated and adjusted once I have had a chance to read some of the classes' work.

**TBA**