

8:098 HONORS PROSEMINAR: HUMAN RIGHTS NARRATIVES

INSTRUCTOR: MARIE KRÜGER

TIME: T, TH 5:30 – 6:45 PM in E 250 AJB

OFFICE HOURS: T 4 – 5:30 PM; TH 12:30 – 2 PM and by appointment in OFFICE: 370 EPB

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In the Western media the African continent has become synonymous with human rights violations though we rarely pause to consider whether such stereotyped portrayals do justice to the complexity of the continent's 55 countries. Instead, troubling images of genocidal violence in Rwanda and Darfur, reports of political instability and electoral fraud in the Congo tend to dominate global media representations. While this course will also be concerned with literary and cinematic portrayals of armed conflict in specific African countries, our main focus will be on issues easily forgotten in current human rights discourses: the struggle to secure basic human needs for food and shelter, access to education and salaried employment, and attempts to protect the special needs of orphans. In our discussion of these topics in African literature and film we will devote particular attention to the situation of African women and children.

How do African authors and film directors talk about human rights? Which issues do they identify as crucial in their discussion of social justice and political democracy, of gender equality and children's rights? What historical and cultural explanations do they offer for human rights violations? How do they implicate Western nations in creating conditions under which life for many Africans becomes intolerable? Which representational strategies do they employ to narrate 'undesirable' or even 'unbearable living conditions' without, necessarily, resorting to the sensationalist language that often turns human suffering into a voyeuristic spectacle? Can acts of violence and conditions of dispossession be represented without violating the victim's right to dignity? Is the label 'victim' already a patronizing gesture denying agency and individuality to human beings? And finally, after having read human rights narratives from African perspectives, how do we relate to the images of the African continent we consume daily as Western readers and viewers of contemporary news culture?

READINGS (available from University of Iowa Book Store or from instructor):

Ferdinand Oyono. *Houseboy*. Heinemann 1966. (Cameroon)

Tsitsi Dangarembga. *Nervous Conditions*. Seal Press 1988. (Zimbabwe)

* Farida Karodia. *A Shattering of Silence*. Heinemann 1993. (Mozambique)

Sindiwe Magona. *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*. Interlink Books 1991.

---. *Mother to Mother*. Beacon Press 1988. (South Africa)

* Calixthe Beyala. *Your Name Shall be Tanga*. Heinemann 1988. (Cameroon)

* Uwem Akpan. *Say You're One of Them*. Little, Brown and Company 2008. (Nigeria)

* Yvonne Owuor Adhiambo. "The State of Tides." (Kenya)

Course Readings available on ICON (<http://icon.uiowa.edu/>).

FILMS (available for viewing from Media Services, Main Library):

Africa, I will fleece you (= *Afrique, je te Plumerai*). Cameroon 1992.

Zulu Love Letter. South Africa 2004.

The Little Girl Who Sold The Sun (= *La Petite Vendeuse de Soleil*). Senegal 1999.

Hollow City (= *Na Cidade Vazia*). Angola 2004.

****** In this class we will be discussing some politically and emotionally charged issues [race; sexuality; colonialism; imperialism, etc.]. I encourage you to share your opinions on these topics, and to respectfully listen to and discuss the perspectives that other students express in class. ******

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION POLICY:

Course requirements include regular attendance and active participation, two short papers (2 pages), one research paper (12 - 15 pages), and one research project intended to relate our classroom discussions to current media coverage of the African continent. Students will be expected to work in groups occasionally and to lead a class discussion on one of the following novels and short story: *Nervous Conditions*, *A Shattering of Silence*; *Mother to Mother*; *Your Name Shall be Tanga*, "The State of Tides."

ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION, AND ORAL PRESENTATION (20 %):

Regular attendance is a mandatory requirement for this course. Please be on time for each class and turn off your cell phone while in class. Since 20 % of your grade is based on participation, it is in your interest to contribute to every class as an active listener and discussant. In addition, each student will lead a class discussion on one of the texts listed above. Your responsibilities as a discussion leader include:

- Provide a brief biographical sketch of the author;
- Provide a list of 5 – 6 questions for class discussion; these questions need to be distributed in class one week **prior** to the discussion;
- Lead the discussion of these questions.

Up to two absences will be excused. **More than two absences** will negatively affect your grade by ½ a grade for every class missed. In case of emergency or serious illness, please contact me as soon as possible.

POSITION PAPERS (2 @ 10 % each = 20 %):

You are required to submit two position papers of two pages (double-spaced). These papers will help you to improve your writing and critical skills and to engage with the basic theoretical issues framing our classroom discussion.

The first position paper is **due on Thursday, September 4**. In this paper you'll have to engage with the readings for the first week of class and reflect on the concerns and controversies surrounding the definition of human rights.

The second position paper is **due on Thursday, September 11**. For this paper you can choose any topic introduced in the readings for the second week of class and reflect on contemporary media coverage of Africa and the challenges it might pose to understanding other cultures in general and human rights concerns in particular. Please bring papers to class or deposit them in my departmental mailbox (310 EPB = Zimansky reading room). I will not accept late papers.

RESEARCH PROJECT (25 %):

For your research project you can select any topic pertaining to human rights in an African

country and explore how this particular issue is covered in Western and African media (for example, the electoral controversy in Zimbabwe; the conflict in Darfur; the peace negotiations with the Lord Resistance Army in Uganda; access to anti-retroviral drugs for the treatment of HIV/AIDS; community and government support for AIDS- or war orphans; the social reintegration of child soldiers; campaigns for gender equity; situation of labor migrants, the internally displaced or refugees). Select eight media reports from different sources covering a period of approximately two months and write a one-page commentary for each report, reflecting on the following questions: how does the report implicitly/explicitly define human rights; how would you assess the overall quality of the report (informational and rhetorical quality; potential bias and stereotypes; rhetorical construction of ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators,’ etc.); who is the intended audience; how does the item compare to other relevant materials from class or from your prior readings? For links to African media see <http://www.abyznewslinks.com/> Collect in a binder your written commentaries together with copies of the original reports (print-outs; tape recordings or relevant internet addresses). Introduce your research collection with a brief statement explaining why you chose this particular topic. Final research projects are **due on Thursday, November 20.**

RESEARCH PAPER (35 %):

In your research paper (12 – 15 pages) you will discuss two of the works (films, novels, short stories) from this semester with reference to the issues addressed in class. Please make sure that your arguments are supported by appropriate quotes from the selected works. In addition to reading the critical articles listed on the syllabus, I expect you to do secondary research on the fictional materials you are writing on. Your paper should include a bibliography of all sources you have consulted (See the *MLA Handbook* for details on citation). You will be required to meet with me at least once to discuss the topic you have chosen for your paper. Final papers are **due on the final day of class (Thursday, December 11).**

MAPPING THE FIELD: CONCEPTS, INVENTIONS AND CONTROVERSIES

WEEK 1: AUGUST 26 AND 28 – WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

Readings: Rhonda L. Callaway and Julie Harrelson-Stephens. “What are Human Rights?” *Exploring International Human Rights*. 2007. 1 – 10.

Bonny Ibhawoh. “Restraining Universalism: Africanist Perspectives on Cultural Relativism in the Human Rights Discourse. *Human Rights, the Rule of Law, and Development in Africa*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004. 21 – 39.

WEEK 2: SEPTEMBER 2 – WHAT IS AFRICA TO US?

Readings: Diverse news articles from “Exposed: Western Media Bias Against Africa – Whatever you thought about Africa, think again!” *New African*. June 2008.

SEPTEMBER 4

Library Information Session, Dr. Edward Miner, International Studies Bibliographer
*** First position paper due ***

**(POST-) COLONIALISM AND CHILDREN’S RIGHTS:
THE DYNAMICS OF RACE AND GENDER AND THE DREAM OF EDUCATION**

WEEK 3: SEPTEMBER 9 AND 11

Ferdinand Oyono. *Houseboy*. Heinemann 1966. (Cameroon)

Reading: Patrick Brantlinger. “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent. H.L. Gates, ed. “*Race, Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. 185 – 222.

*** Second position paper due ***

WEEK 4: SEPTEMBER 16 AND 18

Tsitsi Dangarembga. *Nervous Conditions*. Seal Press 1988. (Zimbabwe)

WEEK 5: SEPTEMBER 23 AND 25

Africa, I will fleece you (= Afrique, je te Plumerai). Cameroon 1992.

<http://www.newsreel.org/nav/title.asp?tc=CN0003&s=Afrique>

Reading: Melissa Thackway. “Memory, History: Other Stories.” *Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspectives in Sub-Saharan Francophone African Film*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2004. 93 – 109.

**SOUTHERN AFRICAN WOMEN AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-
DETERMINATION: THE POLITICS OF MOTHERHOOD**

WEEK 6: SEPTEMBER 30 AND OCTOBER 2

Farida Karodia. *A Shattering of Silence*. Heinemann 1993. (Mozambique)

Reading: “Mozambique.” *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara*. Middleton, John, ed. 1997. 191 – 207.

WEEK 7: OCTOBER 7

Information Session at the Center for Human Rights, International Programs, University of Iowa, Amy Weismann, J.D. and Deputy Director of the UICHR

<http://international.uiowa.edu/centers/human-rights/default.asp>

OCTOBER 9

Sindiwe Magona. “Women at Work.” *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*. Interlink Books 1991. (South Africa)

Reading: Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela “Appendix: A Short History of Apartheid.” *A Human Being Died That Night*. 2004. 143 – 148.

Film: *South Africa Belongs to Us*. 1980.

<http://www.newsreel.org/nav/title.asp?tc=CN0087&s=south%20africa%20belongs%20to%20us>

WEEK 8: OCTOBER 14 AND 16

Zulu Love Letter. South Africa 2004.

<http://www.newsreel.org/nav/title.asp?tc=CN0179&s=Zulu%20Love%20letter>

Reading: Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. "The Language of Trauma." *A Human Being Died That Night*. 2004. 79 – 103.

WEEK 9: OCTOBER 21 AND 23

Sindiwe Magona. *Mother to Mother*. Beacon Press 1988. (South Africa)

Film: *Long Night's Journey into Day*. South Africa 2003 [watch the first TRC case shown in the documentary].

<http://www.newsreel.org/nav/title.asp?tc=CN0056&s=long%20night's%20journey%20into%20day>

RESISTING POVERTY: MATERIAL REALITIES AND RHETORICAL TROPES

WEEK 10: OCTOBER 28 AND 30

Calixthe Beyala. *Your Name Shall be Tanga*. Heineman 1988. (Cameroon)

Reading: Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi. "Sexuality in Cameroonian Women Writers: Delphine Zanga Tsogo, Calixthe Beyala, Werewere Liking." *Gender in African Women's Writing*. 1997. 73 – 107.

WEEK 11: NOVEMBER 4 AND 6

La Petite Vendeuse de Soleil (= *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun*). Senegal 1999.

Reading: Ellie Higgins. "Urban Apprenticeships and Senegalese Narratives of Development: Mansour Sora Wade's *Picc Mi* and Djibril Diop Mambety's *La petite vendeuse de Soleil*." *Research in African Literatures* 33.3 (2002). 54 – 68.

<http://www.newsreel.org/nav/title.asp?tc=CN0209&s=the%20little%20girl>

WEEK 12: NOVEMBER 11 AND 13

Uwem Akpan. "An Ex-mas Feast." *Say You're One of Them*. Little, Brown and Company 2008. 3 – 35. (Kenya)

Film: *The Knife Grinder's Tale*. US 2006. <http://www.theknifegrinderstale.com/3.htm>

WEEK 13: NOVEMBER 18 AND 20

Hollow City (= *Na Cidade Vazia*). Angola 2004.

http://www.globalfilm.org/catalogue/hollow_city.htm

Reading: "Angola." *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara*. Middleton, John, ed. 1997. 32 – 44.

*** Research project due ***

"IT CONCERNS ALL OF US:"

ANOTHER LOOK AT CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

WEEK 14: DECEMBER 2 AND 4

Yvonne Owuor Adhiambo. "The State of Tides." (Kenya)

Recommended Reading: Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*.

WEEK 15: DECEMBER 9 AND 11

STUDENTS' PROJECTS

*** Research paper due ***

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Policies and Procedures

Administrative Home of the Course

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs such academic matters as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, issues concerning academic fraud or academic probation, and how credits are applied for various graduation requirements. Different colleges may have different policies. Students with questions about these or other CLAS policies should speak with an academic advisor or with the staff in 120 Schaeffer Hall. Also see the CLAS Academic Handbook:

www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/index.shtml

Academic Fraud

Plagiarism and any other activities that result in a student presenting work that is not his or her own are academic fraud. Academic fraud is reported to the departmental DEO and then to the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Services in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences who deals with academic fraud according to these guidelines:

www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml

Making a Suggestion or a Complaint

Students have the right to make suggestions or complaints and should first visit with the instructor, then with the course supervisor if appropriate, and next with the departmental DEO. All complaints must be made within six months of the incident.

www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml#5

Accommodations for Disabilities

A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with a SDS counselor who determines eligibility for services. A student approved for accommodations should meet privately with the course instructor to arrange particular accommodations. See www.uiowa.edu/~sds/

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. See www.sexualharassment.uiowa.edu/

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather

If severe weather is indicated by the UI outdoor warning system, class members will seek shelter in the innermost part of the building, if possible at the lowest level, staying clear of windows and of free-standing expanses which might prove unstable. The class will resume after the severe weather has ended.

Homework Expectation

For each semester hour of credit that an English Department course carries, students should expect to spend approximately two hours per week outside of class preparing for class sessions.

That is, in a three-credit-hour course, instructors design course assignments on the assumption that students will spend six hours per week in out-of-class preparation.

Student Classroom Behavior

The ability to learn is lessened when students engage in inappropriate classroom behavior, distracting others; such behaviors are a violation of the **Code of Student Life**. When disruptive activity occurs, a University instructor has the authority to determine classroom seating patterns and to request that a student exit immediately for the remainder of the period. One-day suspensions are reported to appropriate departmental, collegiate, and Student Services personnel (Office of the Vice President for **Student Services** and Dean of Students).

RESOURCES:

- **Writing Center** 110 English-Philosophy Building, 335-0188,
www.uiowa.edu/~writingc
- **Speaking Center** 12 English-Philosophy Building, 335-0205,
www.uiowa.edu/~rhetoric/centers/speaking
- **Tutor Referral Service** Campus Information Center, Iowa Memorial Union, 335-3055,
www.imu.uiowa.edu/cic/tutor_referral_service