

EN 6583 COURSE SYLLABUS
SUMMER 2009
July 20 – August 28, 2009

Course number: GS/EN 6583

Title: “Dispersals Now: African Fiction from ‘Abroad’”

Number of Credits: 3

Instructor: Modupe Olaogun

Telephone: 416 736 2100. Ext. 66176

Email: olaogun@yorku.ca

Class Venue: Room 203 Stong College

Time: Twice weekly -- Mondays and Wednesday, 11: 30 am – 2:30 pm

Expanded Course Description

The different circumstances of African peoples’ dispersals to other parts of the world have shaped the imaginative response in different ways. Through a study of a varied selection of fictional narratives dating from the 1960s by Africans who have lived abroad and by those who have fully migrated and their immediate descendants depicting dispersals from the continent, the course reveals the broadenings of the concepts of space, home, identity, nationality, and diaspora. It explores experimentations with, and transformations to, the fictional forms.

The imaginative text with which we begin is A Bewitched Crossroad: An Historical Saga of Africa (1984) by Bessie Head, who was born in South Africa in 1937 and in 1963 immigrated as a refugee to Botswana, which became her home until her death in 1986. A Bewitched Crossroad is set in the period 1800 to 1966 focusing on the patterns of migration that have shaped present-day Botswana and the adjoining areas linked through kinship ties, history, language and so on. Head describes A Bewitched Crossroad simultaneously as a “historical saga” and a “novel.” The aesthetic necessities for Head’s choices and their implications for the narrative are a part of our investigation. We move to “the era of independence” in West Africa and explore Ambiguous Adventure (1961; trans. English 1963), whose author, Cheikh Hamidou Kane was born in Senegal in 1928 and went to study in France (1952-1959). Both societies constitute the setting for his novel. We analyse the novel’s dramatization of the polarizations “African” to “Western,” and of the “Islamic” to the “Christian” and the animistic ways of life, and its representation of the “ambiguous” space. From a later period of the independence era, we look at Sudanese Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North (originally published in Arabic 1966), in which we witness a departure from, and an impulse to return, home. The novel’s central character departs from Sudan first to Egypt and then to England; “home” suggests a complex sign infused with hybridizations of fantasy, tradition and changing

history. Nigerian Isidore Okpewho's Call Me by My Rightful Name (2004) set in contemporary United States of America and Nigeria enables us to examine intersections between an earlier dispersal induced by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and recent retracing back.

There are trends in the fiction that show protagonists who originate from Africa staying put in the places to which they have relocated. In these settings, more recent diasporas intersect, collide and sometimes merge with older diasporas and other residents. From aesthetic, thematic and theoretical perspectives, the course explores the consequences of such intersections, collisions and merging by exploring Gwendolen by Buchi Emecheta (set in England), No New Land by M. G. Vassanji (set in Toronto (urban), Canada), The Second Life of Samuel Tyne by Esi Edugyan (set in a small town, Alberta, Canada), and The Street by Biyi Bandele (set in England). The degrees of separation of these writers from Africa range from very strong to quite slight.

As a prelude to the discussion of the imaginative texts, the course reviews some theorizations of relevant concepts, such as individual and collective identities, subjectivity, diaspora, citizenship, and so on. A short, easy-to-read course kit, which has assembled a number of relevant articles and excerpts from books, allows us to perform this exercise and constitutes the reading in the second and third meetings. Discussions of the imaginative texts in the subsequent weeks will make reference to materials in the course kit. During the first meeting we explore Kwame Appiah's Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers, a philosophical meditation that is a sign and product of the contemporary human "dispersals" that we are studying. Appiah was born in Ghana, son of a Ghanaian father and a British mother; as an adult he has settled in the United States of America, where he works as an academic and a cultural theorist and critic, and occasional fiction writer. His book suggests some contexts for a conversation about the cosmopolitan aggregations and interactions of people who originate from different parts of the world.

Bibliography

Theoretical, Expository and Critical texts:

1. Appiah, Kwame. Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.
2. Olaogun, Modupe. Course Kit of articles and short book excerpts including the following: Excerpt on "Exile" by Paulo Freire and Antonio Faundez, from Learning to question: a pedagogy of liberation (translation from Portuguese by Tony Coates), New York : Continuum, 1989; an excerpt "Nomadism" by Rosi Braidotti from Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory; an excerpt on "Migrant" by Carole Boyce Davies – chapter 1 of Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject, New York: Routledge, 1994; Isidore Okpewho,

“Introduction,” The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities, ed. Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies & Ali Mazrui, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana U. Press, 1999, pp. xi-xxviii; Ali Mazrui, “Islam and the Black Diaspora: The Impact of Islamigration,” The African Diaspora, pp. 344-349; Chinua Achebe, excerpt, “Letters from Home,” Home and Exile, London: Oxford U. Press, 2000, pp. 91-109; Awad Ibrahim, “‘Whassup, homeboy?’ Joining the African Diaspora: Black English as a symbolic site of identification and language learning,” Black Linguistics: Language, Society, and Politics in Africa and the Americas, ed. Sinfree Makoni, Geneva Smitherman, Arnetha Ball & Arthur Spears, London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 169-185; Michelle M. Wright, “The Urban Diaspora: Black Subjectivities in Berlin, London, and Paris,” Becoming Black: Creating identity in the African Diaspora, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004, pp. 183-226;; Gilroy, Paul, Excerpt, “Diaspora as a Social Ecology of Identification,” Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000, pp. 123-133; Aderanti Adepoju, “Patterns of Migration in West Africa,” At Home in the World?: International Migration and Development in Contemporary Ghana and West Africa, ed. Takyiwaa Manuh, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2005, pp. 24-54; Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, “The African Academic Diaspora in the United States and Africa: The Challenges of Productive Engagement,” Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, 24.1 (2004): 261-275; Maureen Warener-Lewis, “Cultural Reconfigurations in the African Caribbean,” from Isidore Okpewho et al. The African Diaspora.

Imaginative Texts

Head, Bessie. A Bewitched Crossroad: An Historical Saga of Africa
 Kane, Cheikh Hamidou. Ambiguous Adventure
 Salih, Tayeb. Season of Migration to the North
 Emecheta, Buchi Gwendolen [Also published as The Family]
 Vassanji, M. G. No New Land
 Edugyan, Esi. The Second Life of Samuel Tyne
 Bandele, Biyi. The Street
 Okpewho, Isidore. Call Me by My Rightful Name

Evaluation

One seminar presentation (1800 words- about 8 pages) 30%; term paper - two primary texts (3000 words - 16 pages) 50%; participation 20%.

Schedule

1st meeting: July 20: The Context(s) of our Investigation. Read Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers. Students are required to email to the course director ahead of meeting or come to the class with a two-page critical response that they have developed.

- 2nd meeting: July 22: Articles in the Course Kit. Each student is required to develop a critical response to one article selected freely from the course kit. All students are required to have read the materials in the course kit.
- 3rd meeting: July 27: Continuation of examination of articles in the Course Kit. Students' critical responses continue.
- 4th meeting: July 29: Head, Bessie. A Bewitched Crossroad: An Historical Saga of Africa
- 5th meeting: August 3: No class. Students explore ideas for first essay.
- 6th meeting: August 5: Kane, Cheikh Hamidou. Ambiguous Adventure
- 7th meeting: August 10: Salih, Tayeb. Season of Migration to the North
- 8th meeting: August 12: Vassanji, M. G. No New Land. First essay is due.
- 9th meeting: August 17: Edugyan, Esi. The Second Life of Samuel Tyne
- 10th meeting: August 19: Emecheta, Buchi Gwendolen [Also published as The Family]
- 11th meeting: August 24: Bandele, Biyi. The Street
- 12th meeting: August 26: Okpewho, Isidore. Call Me by My Rightful Name. A retrospective of the course.