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T & Th 10:30-11:30 (drop-in),
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and by appointment

English 305: Post-Colonial Perspectives: Literature of the “Developing” World

(This course meets GE Area “C” and Diversity and Common Ground Requirements)

Goals: The chief aim of this course is for us to enjoy getting acquainted with some cultural production that, for various reasons, used to be routinely ignored by English departments—and in some instances still is. But that simple mission statement makes our project seem a lot more disinterested and a lot less complicated than it really is. For the novels (and movies and plays and poems) we’ll be studying don’t exist in a vacuum of universally acknowledged Great Literature (capital G, capital L) to which they’ve now been belatedly admitted. Rather, they have complex cultural, historical, and political relationships to two of the nations—Britain and America—that invented the very *concept* of “Great Literature.”

Many argue that the modern world has been fundamentally shaped by imperialism and colonialism, and more specifically that the current economic, political, and cultural preëminence of the West (or the North, depending upon how you look at it) is a product of Europe’s—and later, America’s—long history of global domination. And indeed: if the “First World” is the twenty-first century’s top dog, then the places it colonized generally haven’t fared quite as well: with a legacy of plundered resources, damaged cultures, and dysfunctional political structures, many of those countries are trapped in dependent relationships with their former colonial masters—relationships that have proven hard to transform, even in an ostensibly “post”-colonial era. Moreover, you don’t have to dig deep to see how many of today’s most intractable political disputes are rooted in the whims of yesterday’s imperial cartography, not to mention colonial policies built around the orchestration and intensification of ethnic ill-will.

Still, the news isn’t all bad. For instance: colonized peoples may once have had alien languages and cultures imposed on them, but they often turned those impositions into tools of anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial nation-building. Part of their figurative “profit” from having acquired such unwanted gifts, in other words, is that (to quote Shakespeare’s Caliban) they “know how to curse”—and a whole lot more, besides. African, South Asian, Caribbean and Pacific peoples, for instance, have taken English and its established literary forms, transformed them through infusions of ancestral linguistic and cultural traditions, and generally appropriated them for their own uses. In the process, sometimes deliberately and sometimes incidentally, they have shaken Western aesthetic assumptions, fundamentally destabilized the whole notion of “English” (both the language and the subject), and produced some of the worthiest literature and culture of the modern era. It’ll be our job here to begin to appreciate some of the ways in which they’ve done that.

Work: there will be times—sometimes entire classes—when I’ll need to lecture at you, do some show-and-tell, or plant some idea or other in your head. But for the most part, I’m expecting you to be enthusiastic learners who are willing to explore this territory both independently and coöperatively. Here’s one way how: on at least *four* occasions of your choice (out of roughly eleven opportunities), you’ll post a response to that day or week’s assigned texts in one of a series of Moodle discussion forums. I’m aware that our insane schedules, among other things, can rob this old-school social medium of its full potential for knowledge-pooling and community-building. Still, this is a good technology for gathering your thoughts about a text and beginning to articulate them. So, erm...what exactly do I mean by a “response”? Look for a separate, long-winded handout. For now, let me stick to logistics:

On those occasions when you choose to write a response, **you must post it to the forum no later than 10:00 p.m. on the dates specified in the calendar** (below), so that other folks have a fighting chance of digesting it—or at least tasting it—before the next day’s class. I recommend composing in Word, then copying and pasting into Moodle. (And don’t simply upload an attachment; not everyone will be able to open it.) For safety’s sake, save a copy of your work locally *and* print out a hard copy for yourself—maybe even bring that copy with you to refer to in class. Unless there’s been a system-wide network failure or a documented problem with your Internet provider or campus computer labs, late responses will incur a penalty.

Each response should be at least 500 words. Since this requirement is aimed first and foremost at getting you to think out loud, without undue pressure or judgment, about challenging and sometimes provocative texts, I will normally just read each post and silently award you credit (assuming it’s credit-worthy), unless you specifically ask me to respond to you personally about the substance of your work. Four credited responses will earn you a “C”; six will get you a “B”; eight, an “A.”

Collectively, these responses—which may be stylistically informal, but should still be thoughtful, not slapdash—may constitute freestanding, parallel discussions to those we have in class, especially if enough people build the momentum to carry them along. But even if a genuine online discussion fails to erupt, simply taking the trouble to work your amorphous gut reactions into on-screen ideas will still give you some ready-made material to draw on in class.

Occasionally I may bring your posts into the classroom, using one or more as of them as starting points for in-class discussion. But even if they stay online, it’ll be nice to have ‘em on hand. And anyway, I’m mostly interested in getting you to devote the care and attention required to cook them up in the first place. Still: a class session can be a lot more interesting if you’ve had a chance to read, hash over, and maybe even respond to what other folks are thinking before you all sit down in a room together. To that end, everyone should try to at least glance at other folks’ posts before class. (Believe me, you’ll often find some brilliant ideas there.)

I will often post reading or study questions to Moodle to help you get started. You, meanwhile, should always feel free to log on and make a spontaneous post of any length, at any time, even if you’re not doing so for credit: gripes, questions, objections or clarifications; remarks about something someone did or didn’t say in class; afterthoughts or second thoughts about the texts; etc.—it’s all fair game. Lively, even heated, debate is fine. Just don’t get personal or abusive, take care to avoid racist or sexist or other offensive language, and generally keep a civil tongue.

So, to enumerate your basic responsibilities (and how they count towards your final grade) more precisely:

1. **Regular attendance.** To contribute to a good discussion (and to get anything *out* of one), you’ve got to *be here*. So don’t cut a lot of class: we’ll miss you, there’s no telling what *you’ll* miss, and your grade will suffer. I will pass around a sign-in sheet at the beginning of each session; you should make sure you’ve initialed it. You’re entitled to miss four (4) classes to cover all the contingencies of life, both serious and trivial, with no explanation, apology, or penalty (though a courtesy e-mail is always welcome, and it’s up to you to figure out what you missed and to know what’s on tap for the next meeting). More than that will begin to hurt. Routine absences should not include days when major assignments are due. If I notice that you’ve missed more than six classes (that’s 20% of the course), I will strenuously encourage you to withdraw, assuming that’s still possible. Finally: please get to class on time, don’t wander in and out or leave early, and don’t spend your time IM’ing, Snapchatting, Facebooking, or web-surfing. (About **10%** of your course grade.)

2. Careful and on-time reading of assignments, at least four (4) informal written responses to what you've studied (as outlined above, and according to the calendar below), and active engagement in the collective talk that ensues. In addition to writing, that is, you need to do your small part to start up discussions and keep them going—to show some degree of intelligence, inquisitiveness and enthusiasm, both in responding to one another and to the materials on the table, and in helping to control the direction and flow of the conversation. (About **40%**.)
3. A midterm exam comprising several types of questions (e.g., matching, short answer, fill-in-the-blank, essay). (About **20%**.)
4. And a final project, which may take the form of either a traditional take-home essay exam or a less conventional “digital humanities” project—details to follow. (About **30%**.)

We will talk more about these requirements, as and if we need to, as the semester progresses.

Texts: Since this is an introductory survey of a sprawling field, the booklist is moderately heavy, though I think they're all great reads. There are five books you should pick up at the HSU Bookstore or anywhere else you can find them:

- Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Norton Critical edition)
- Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions*
- Emile Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*
- Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*
- Salman Rushdie, *Shame*

(If you're strapped for cash, try local and/or online used booksellers such as Half.com or ABEBooks.com, check the library, share a book or two with a friend, or ask me if I have an extra copy I can lend you.)

For those with enough gumption (and deep enough pockets) to enhance their cultural, political and theoretical understanding of things postcolonial, I highly recommend either or both of the following:

- Bill Ashcroft, et al., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 3d ed.
- Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 3d ed. These two texts are recommended, not required, so I've asked the bookstore to order just a few copies; let me know if they're running out. I can also point you towards a number of very good books about Postcolonial Studies in the HSU library.

There are four additional texts available only via the class Web Page (*not* Moodle or Oncores):

- An online course reader (a collection of essays, stories and essential background readings, some required, most highly recommended);
- Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema, and Barney Simon, *Woza Albert!* (frequently out of print);
- *Word Sound Have Power*, a multimedia online anthology of Jamaican dub poems and related readings; and
- Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (screenplay of the film; frequently out of print)

Since much of the material in the latter above texts is copyrighted, and since copyright owners often adopt (and zealously enforce) an extremely uncharitable position as to what constitutes “fair use” for educational purposes, you'll be prompted to enter a username and password (on the copy of your syllabus distributed in class) to gain access to it.

Communication: I will frequently send official communiqués (questions, clarifications, schedule changes, afterthoughts or announcements I forgot to make in class, etc.) via the course “Updates” page, which you should get in the habit of monitoring regularly. I will make every effort to post updates by 12:00 midnight Tuesdays and Thursdays. Information on the Updates page always trumps the syllabus. If *you* have something for general distribution, feel free to send it to me, and I'll post it there.

Grading: Here's where the oppressive substructure of my seemingly benign classroom shows through. I try to go by the book, which was written in the days before rampant grade inflation: "A" is reserved for truly stunning and outstanding work; "B" work goes (qualitatively) beyond mere course requirements; and "C" is standard and normal—i.e., it meets the basic course requirements in every way. "D" is worthy of credit but substandard, and I guess we all know what "F" means. If you're taking this class CR/NC, you need the equivalent of a "C" to pass. I don't expect to give any incompletes.

I'll read and respond to anything you ask me to, and I'll grade all your formal work. You're welcome to come see me at any point in the term to discuss your progress, prospects, enthusiasms or anxieties. If a personal disaster befalls you in the course of the semester—your home burns down, your computer crashes, a marauding horde carries off your livestock—please don't be embarrassed, and don't just disappear: let me know, and as soon as humanly possible. At the very least, I can direct you to campus resources that may help, and together we may be able to devise a plan to get you through the semester in one piece. I don't guarantee that I can accommodate every unexpected turn of events; you should also be prepared to withdraw from one or more courses, or from the university entirely, if the situation is dire enough. But there are sometimes contingency plans that can be put into effect if students alert their faculty *promptly* of personal crises that threaten their academic performance.

As for more routine problems: if you're getting behind in the class, feeling as if you're not "getting" something, or just having an intangible problem either mild or severe, ***don't sit around fretting and cowering: come and talk to me without delay.***

Disabilities: Please let me know of any documented disabilities and recommended accommodations that would promote your success in this class.

Plagiarism: I take academic dishonesty *very* seriously. Passing off part or all of someone else's words or ideas as your own will result—at the very least—in a failing grade for the course. The university definition of and policies regarding academic dishonesty can be found in the HSU catalog. Please be aware that plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty can result in expulsion from the University.

FOR ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES AND OTHER MORE GENERAL INFORMATION (ON CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, MINIMUM OUTSIDE PREPARATION REQUIRED FOR THIS COURSE, PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC DISHONESTY, DETAILED DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS, SEXUAL HARASSMENT & DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR, SUNDRY UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND "LEARNING OUTCOMES," SAFETY INFORMATION, ETC.), LAID OUT IN EVEN MORE EXCRUCIATING DETAIL, SEE THE "COURSE POLICIES AND SYLLABUS ADDENDA" PAGE ONLINE AT <http://users.humboldt.edu/mseldridge/engl305/305policies.htm>
IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL STUDENTS TO READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS INFORMATION.

CALENDAR

(Danger! Highly volatile—schedule, deadlines, and assigned readings subject to change! Always check the online "Updates" page!)

Aug. 23 & 25	t Helloes and classroom bureaucracy. th Introduction: what we're studying and some of the issues involved. Course Reader: Stavrianos "Introduction," Prashad, Ashcroft et al., Harlow, and Brennan (all highly recommended).
Aug. 30 & Sep. 1	GET UP, STAND UP. t Screening of a documentary about Mtwā, Ngema and Simon's <i>Woza Albert!</i> th Discussion of <i>Woza Albert!</i> (reading response due Wed., Aug. 31). Course Reader: <i>Woza Albert!</i> (required); <i>Anti-Apartheid Reader</i> selections (recommended); Nixon, et al. (highly recommended).

Sep. 6 & 8	<p>SECOND COMING.</p> <p>Chinua Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i> (reading response due Mon., Sep. 5). Course Reader: Stavrianos on Africa (esp. Sec. i-iii), Moyers (highly recommended); Ngugi (recommended).</p> <p>Reminder: campus is closed on Monday of this week in observance of Labor Day. (Workers of the World, Unite!)</p> <p>Monday, September 5th is also the last day to drop/add a class!</p>
Sep. 13 & 15	<p>THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLONIZATION.</p> <p>Tsitsi Dangarembga, <i>Nervous Conditions</i> (reading response due Mon., Sep. 12). Course Reader: Zimbabwe “Chronology,” Dangarembga (recommended); Fanon (highly recommended).</p>
Sep. 20 & 22	<p>FROM THE NEUROTIC TO THE ABSURD.</p> <p>Emile Habiby, <i>Saeed the Pessoptimist</i> (reading response due Mon., Sep. 19). Course Reader: Habiby obituary + “The Israeli Arabs”; Black or Shuster.</p>
Sep. 27 & 29	<p>SPACE IS THE PLACE? POSTCOLONIAL DYSTOPIA</p> <p>t Screening of Kidlat Tahimik’s <i>Perfumed Nightmare</i>. Course Reader: <i>Philippines Reader</i> excerpts, esp. Ch. 1</p> <p>th Interlude: Introduction to Digital Humanities (guest presentation by Marissa Mourer, HSU Library).</p> <p>Class meets in Library 208.</p>
Oct. 4 & 6	<p>Discussion of <i>Perfumed Nightmare</i> (reading response due Mon., Oct. 3).</p>
Oct. 11 & 13	<p>t Postcolonial DigHum Braindump: proposals, feedback & critique, refinement. Go!</p> <p>th Midterm exam.</p>
Oct. 18 & 20	<p>POETRY FI DI MASSES.</p> <p>Audition and discussion of <i>Word Sound Have Power</i> (reading response due Mon., Oct. 17).</p>
Oct. 25 & 27	<p><i>Word Sound</i>, continued.</p>
Nov. 1 & 3	<p>HOT HOT HOT.</p> <p>t Kincaid, <i>A Small Place</i> (reading response due Mon., Oct. 31). Course Reader: Sunshine (highly recommended).</p> <p>th Course Reader: Cliff, “If I Could Write This In Fire” (required) (reading response due Wed., Nov. 2)</p>
Nov. 8 & 10	<p>POSTCOLONIAL COSMOPOLITANISM.</p> <p>Rushdie, <i>Shame</i> (reading response due Mon., Nov. 7). Course Reader: Burns, Rushdie (x2), Stavrianos on India, Macaulay (all recommended).</p>
Nov. 15 & 17	<p>CONTRA-COSMOPOLIS.</p> <p>t <i>Shame</i>, concluded.</p> <p>th Course Reader: Devi, “Draupadi” (required) (reading response due Wed., Nov. 16), Kumar, Devi interview (highly recommended).</p>
Nov. 29 & Dec. 1	<p>COLONIZATION IN REVERSE.</p> <p>t Screening of Hanif Kureishi’s <i>My Beautiful Laundrette</i>, time permitting. (<i>N.B.: we may need to arrange screenings outside of class.</i>) Course Reader: <i>My Beautiful Laundrette</i> (required)</p> <p>th Discussion of <i>My Beautiful Laundrette</i> (reading response due Wed., Nov. 30).</p>
Dec. 6 & 8	<p>t <i>MBL</i>, concluded. Final Project presentations: Reports from the Digital Post-Colony.</p> <p>th More final project presentations. Last remarks. Tearful farewells.</p>
Dec. 15 8:00-9:50 (ulp!)	<p>th The activities scheduled for the last week of classes <i>may</i> spill over into this, our final exam period.</p> <p>Please keep this date and time available on your calendars.</p>

ALL FINAL COURSEWORK DUE NO LATER THAN 5:00 p.m., THURSDAY, DEC. 15TH.

Addendum: Engl 305 and the Diversity and Common Ground Requirement

Given that this course is devoted to surveying the historical experience and the cultural expression of ethnically and geographically diverse groups of people united principally by their opposition to colonialism and its ideological assumptions, I hope it's fairly obvious just *how* and *why* this is a DCG course.

Specifically, through a disciplined study of a variety of thematically related cultural texts, this course aims to help you to:

- explain how the diversity of cultures creates a diversity of knowledge, experiences, values, world views, traditions and achievements;
- explain how cultural differences and identities are produced and perpetuated through a variety of social, cultural, and disciplinary discourses (e.g. literature, popular culture, science, law, etc.); and
- explain and critically analyze how differential privilege and power occurs and how it creates problems such as inequalities, prejudicial exclusion, injustices, etc.

(The above language is quoted verbatim from HSU's "Learning Outcomes" for DCG, which may be found on the web at <http://www2.humboldt.edu/academicprograms/historical-references>. That language does not necessarily or precisely express my own aims for this course, and my citation of it emphatically does not constitute my endorsement of the dubious notion of "Learning Outcomes." But if at any point in the semester you would like to discuss this course's relation to HSU's DCG requirement—which I *do* endorse—at greater length, then please say so, in class or in private.)