

Michigan State University
James Madison College
MC 377, sec. 01 Spring 2006

Professor C. Tremonte (tremonte@msu.edu)
304 South Case Hall, 355-8448
Office: T 10:00-noon; Th and F by appt.

Culture, Politics and Post-Colonialism

Course Overview and Objectives

If global politics in the 19th and early 20th centuries were marked by the effects of European colonialism, the second half of the 20th century and the 21st century are often characterized as belonging to the era of post-colonialism. *Post*-colonialism, of course, implies the struggle for national liberation from colonial rule has been ‘successful,’ that the formerly colonized ‘state’ and its people are now independent. But how is independence or post-colonialism achieved? What was colonialism? When does it end? What are its repercussions for the colonizer and the colonized? What is the meaning of post-colonialism?

Critic Edward Said has suggested one way of probing these questions is to look at the interaction between culture and politics. Specifically, Said emphasizes the ways in which literature provides a means for understanding the struggle for national liberation as well as collective identity construction and inter-national politics in the late twentieth century. He writes:

[In the] struggle to achieve decolonization and independence from European control, literature has played a crucial role in the re-establishment of a national cultural heritage, in the re-instatement of native idioms, in the re-imagining and re-figuring of local histories, geographies, communities. . . . literature not only mobilized active resistance to incursions from the outside but also contributed massively as the shaper, creator, agent of illumination within the realm of the colonized.¹

Though focusing primarily on literary texts, Said’s observations can be applied to other texts as well. And in one manner or another, many of these texts serve to critique the colonial context which gave rise to institutional English studies—the context in which literature becomes not only a means of imparting cultural literacy and writing otherness but a way of exercising power.

This course explores the work of cultural texts and narratives in constructing, deconstructing and/or reconstructing national or cultural identities and politics in colonial and post-colonial experiences. We will begin by looking at notions of culture—what it is, what it means, how it works—and at issues of representations by surveying some central concepts in the field of post-colonial theory. Writings by Raymond Williams, Franz Fanon, Edward Said and Stuart Hall will provide the initial theoretical ground and frames. We will then turn our attention to one type of cultural text, the novel, focusing on how it *writes* the particular experiences of colonialism and post-colonialism in Africa. These sections will be informed by theoretical readings by scholars such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, Robert J. Young, and Gayatri Spivak, and by standard accounts of colonial history and economics, anti-colonial struggles, and national liberation. In the final part of the course, we revisit our initial question about the interaction between culture and politics and the possibility of a variety of material cultural texts (films, literature, television, music, photography etc.) to query the meaning of post-colonialism. In addition, because this course is cross field and interdisciplinary, we will draw on our own various field-specific knowledge and expertise throughout the semester.

The course has three main objectives:

- To examine the cultural forms that emerged from the context of colonialism in order to demonstrate the connections between culture and the study of international politics;
- To explore the complexity and range of a growing field of critical theory on the post-colonial perspective, from early voices like Fanon and Memmi to recent theorists like Bhabba, Spivak and Parry;
- To understand post-colonialism as a reading strategy, and therefore acquire the literacy skills and competencies necessary to read and critique any cultural text.

¹ From Edward W. Said’s “Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations.” In Commonwealth to Post-Colonial, edited by Anna Rutherford (Sydney, Australia: Dangaroo Press, 1992: 3-17).

Required Texts

The following texts are available through the Student Book Store (Grand River).

Achebe, Chinua. *Man of the People* (1968, 1989).

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914, 1990).

Coetzee, J. M. *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980, 1999).

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness and Selections from the Congo Diary* (1899, 1987).

Emecheta, Buchi. *The Joys of Motherhood* (1980).

Head, Bessie. *A Question of Power* (1987).

Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, second edition. (1998; 2005).

Memmi, Alberti. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. (1965, 1991).

In addition, students should purchase a notebook in which to keep assigned articles and/or essays posted to ANGEL.

Course Format

This course will be an active seminar grounded in collaborative pedagogy, the logic of which suggests that students work together to master class materials, to generate questions and approaches to course themes and issues, and to stimulate new ideas. Since successful collaborative learning cannot occur unless all class members are regularly present and engaged, it is ESSENTIAL that all students come to class. But presence alone is not sufficient for productive and generative discussions and knowledge production. Each of us MUST be prepared to discuss materials and to interact with one another; prepared to share our interpretations and critical assessments of theoretical readings, historical information, and the novels. We will extend this collaborative learning outside of the classroom space by engaging regularly in email dialogues and reflections that, in turn, will loop back into class discussions. THIS IS A CRUCIAL COMPONENT OF THE COURSE DESIGN—AND IT IS AN EXPECTATION OF A COURSE THAT IS WORTH 4-CREDIT HOURS.

Course Requirements

The final course grade will be determined as follows:

Informed Participation: Meaningful participation is evidenced by sustained contribution to class discussions, sustained contribution to group discussions, sustained engagement with peers in various structured and non-structured ways (including informal written assignments, film exercises, and collaborative work on questions that carry over from one class to another). Because of the heavy emphasis on student participation and interaction, and on the viewing experience (of watching films together), *anyone with more than two unexcused absence will not receive a final course grade higher than 1.0.* Informed participation is worth **15%** of final course grade.

Reflection Papers: Beginning the third week of class, students will rotate writing reflection papers in which they identify and describe the major ideas and themes encountered in the readings for the upcoming week, including questions prompted by the previous classes' readings and/or films. [Members will alternate papers and commentaries.] These papers should be typed, single-spaced and not more than three pages. **These papers are due electronically to your commentators and to me by 6:00pm the Sunday before Tuesday class** (via email and/or ANGEL); commentaries are due at the beginning of Tuesday's class (hard copies should be brought to class, then posted to ANGEL). I will evaluate these papers and commentaries as either satisfactory or not depending upon the clarity of the writing and the depth of the engagement with the ideas you are encountering. An individual assignment sheet will be distributed. Reflection papers and commentaries are worth **20%** of final course grade.

Situating the Text: This collaborative assignment has written and oral components. Students will be divided into groups and asked to *situate* one of the novels we are reading. You will be asked to learn about the general AND specific historical and political contexts in which the text was written, about the production history of the novel, and about the initial and subsequent critical reception AND interpretations of the novel. You are then expected to set this discrete information into the larger context of postcolonial politics. The group will present its findings to the class as well as prepare a short written summary of

findings to be posted to ANGEL. Our work with *Heart of Darkness* will serve as a model. This assignment is worth **15%** of final course grade.

Mid-term Theory Exam: In-class exam over film theory and readings in history and nation/nationalism. This exam is worth **10%** of final course grade.

Critical Interpretation Essay: This assignment asks you to write a lengthy essay that analyzes and critiques one or more of the novels in light of the conceptual/theoretical literature we have examined in the course. The essay may be a rhetorical or representational analysis or an issues-oriented critique, and it should take into consideration the connections between the study of literature to international politics. This essay is worth **15%** of final course grade.

Cultural Artefact Project: This collaborative assignment asks you to produce a case study of another colonial site (India, Australia, Ireland, Vietnam). It should engage in comparative analysis of at least two culture artefacts (e.g. a novel, short story, music, film, documentary, etc.) by situating and critiquing them in light of theoretical questions and issues of post-colonialism. As with the situating the text assignment, you are to provide a history of the artifacts material production and reception, initially and subsequently, to explain how they constitute and/or represent a particular power relation or relationship within a specific geopolitical and cultural context; and, to critique them in light of course readings and any other appropriate field-specific theoretical reading (e.g. international relations, politic theory, economics, history). In short, it asks you to deconstruct the artefacts' meanings and to speculate as to whether and how these meanings are constitutive of a colonial or post-colonial relation. There will be works-in-progress presentations on these projects during the month of April. The final paper should be of appropriate length and is worth **25%** of final grade.

Evaluation is based on the following criteria; both instructors will be involved in all aspects of assessment.

4.0--Your work is excellent relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements; it is probing, perceptive, "original" and well expressed.

3.0--Your work is good relative to the level of course requirements; it demonstrates very good command of the materials, is well written and insightful.

2.0--Your work meets requirements of the assignment and is fairly well expressed.

1.0—Your work meets minimum requirements for credit but shows definite weaknesses in thought and expression.

0.0--Your work is unsatisfactory for credit because of major problems in thought or expression.

Note: Plagiarism is a grave offense and very easy to detect (even when using Internet sources or the Web). The James Madison and Michigan State University policies on academic integrity and plagiarism (as stated in the catalog of **MSU Academic Programs** and the **JMC Student Handbook**) will be strictly enforced.

Honors Option: Students may pursue an H-option in this course. If enough students are interested, we will schedule a special honors session that will be open to all students in the class and that will examine issues present in a particular set of "colonial/post-colonial" texts, as agreed upon by the group. In order to earn an H in the course, students must earn a course grade of at least 3.5.

Syllabus

Please note the syllabus will be divided into four sections, schedules to be distributed separately.

Unit I: "Culture, Representation, and (Post-) Colonialism"

Critical readings in culture and theory; Burrough's *Tarzan*; and, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Unit II: "Post-Colonial Musings and the Novel in Nigeria"

Critical readings in post-colonial theory and criticism; Achebe's *Man of the People* and Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. Situating the text presentations begin; midterm theory exam.

Unit III: "Post-Colonial Musings and the Novel in South Africa"

Critical reading in post-colonial theory and criticism; Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Head's *A Question of Power*. Situating the text presentations continue; critical interpretation essay due.

Unit IV: "Re-assessing the Post"

Re-visiting theoretical pieces and post-colonialism. Cultural artifact projects due.

Syllabus: (Unless otherwise noted, all required and recommended readings are posted on ANGEL.)

Unit I: "Culture, Representation, and (Post-)Colonialism"

- Jan.** T 10 *Introduction to the class.*
- Th 12 **In-class reading:** "Culture," from Raymond Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford UP, 1983), pp. 87-93. Handout.
Readings: Chapter 2, "Culture and the History of Difference," from Robert J. C. Young's *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (Routledge, 1995), pp. 29-54.
Recommended: Chapter 1, "Versions of Culture," from Terry Eagleton's *The Idea of Culture* (Blackwell, 2000), pp. 1-31.
- T 17 **Readings:** Chapter 1, from Stuart Hall's *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (The Open University 1997), pp.1-63; Stephen Slemon's "Post-colonial Critical Theories," in Castle's *Postcolonial Discourses* (1996) pp. 100-116.
Recommended: Deepika Petraglia-Bahri's "Representation," at <http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/Representation.html>.
- Th 19 **Readings:** Burrough's *Tarzan*.
Recommended: Carey-Webb, "Heart of Darkness, Tarzan, and the 'Third World'," *College Literature* 19.3 (1992): 121-141.
Due: 2-page (typed-double space) response to representations in *Tarzan*.
- T 24 **Readings:** "Introduction" to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979), pp. 1-28.
Recommended: Abdul JanMohamed's "The Economy of the Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 59-87.
Due: First set of reflections and commentaries (between 5:00pm on Sunday and class Tuesday).
- Th 26 **Readings:** Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; chapter 8, "Where There Aren't No Ten Commandments," and chapter 9, "Meeting Mr. Kurtz," from Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost* (Houghton/Mifflin, 1999): 115-139, 140-150. Chapters 1 & 7 from Aristotle's *Politics*, translated by Carnes Lord (University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp.35, 42-44 (handout).
Recommended: Introduction to *Heart of Darkness* by Caryl Phillips.
- T 31 **Readings:** Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; Said's "Two Visions of Heart of Darkness," from chapter one, "Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories," in *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage, 1993), pp. 19-31.
Due: Second set of reflections and commentaries (between 5:00pm on Sunday and class Tuesday).
- Feb.** Th 2 **Readings:** Chinua Achebe's "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in Achebe's *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (Anchor/Doubleday: 1989), pp. 1-20; entry on 'Congo Free State,' in 1902 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness* (2006), pp. 99-113.
Recommended: Said, from chapter one, "Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories," in *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage, 1993), pp. 1-18.

Unit II: "Post-Colonial Musings and the Novel in Nigeria"

- Feb. T 7 **Readings:** "The Colonial Phase in British West Africa," from *A Thousand Years of West African History*, edited by J. F. Ade Ajari and Ian Espre (Ibada UP, 1965), pp. 405-450.

Recommended: Chapter 1 in Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, pp. 7-52.
Due: Third set of reflections and commentaries.

Th 9 **Readings:** Frantz Fanon's "On National Culture," from the *Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 1963), and excerpts from Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*.
Recommended: From chapter 1 in Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, pp. 53-90.

T 14 **Readings:** Alberti Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, pp. 3-76; from chapter 2 in Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, pp. 91-114.
Due: Fourth set of reflections and commentaries.

Th 16 **Readings:** Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, pp. 77- 118; from chapter 2 in Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, pp.115-153.

T 21 **Readings:** Achebe's *Man of the People*; from Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, pp. 119-141.
Due: Achebe situating the text presentations; fifth set of reflections and commentaries.

In Th 23 **Readings:** Achebe's *Man of the People*; Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?"
The Post-colonial Studies Reader, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (Routledge 1995, 1997), pp. 24-28.
Due: Ideas for cultural artifact assignment.

T 28 **Readings:** From chapter 3 in Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, pp.154-203.
Due: Sixth set of reflections and commentaries.

Mar. Th 2 In-class theory exam.

MARCH 6TH – 10TH SPRING BREAK

Unit III: "Post-Colonial Musings and the Novel in South Africa"

T 14 **Readings:** Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*; TBA women, history and post-colonialization (assigned by situating the text group).
Re-readings: Jan Abdul JanMohamed's "The Economy of the Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 59-87.
Due: Emecheta situating the text presentations.

Th 16 **Readings:** Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*.
Due: Working draft proposals/ideas for cultural artefact assignment.

T 21 **Readings:** TBA South African history and colonialization (assigned by *Waiting for the Barbarians* situating the text group).
Recommended: Mahmood Mamdani, chapter three, "Indirect Rule and the Politics of Decentralized Depostism," *in Citizen and Subject* (Princeton UP, 1996), pp. 62-108.
Due: Seventh set of reflections and commentaries.

Th 23 **Readings:** Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*; from Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994), pp. 102-122.
Re-readings: "Introduction" to Said's *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979), pp. 1-28.
Due: Coetzee situating the text presentation.

- T 28 **Readings:** Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*; from Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (Routledge, 1995), pp. 352-390.
Due: Eighth set of reflections and commentaries.
- Th 30 **Readings:** Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern," from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, pp. 119-124.
Due: Working draft of proposals for cultural artefact assignment.
- Apr.** T 4 **Readings:** **TBA** South African history and feminism (assigned by *A Question of Power* situating the text group); Gayatri Spivak's , "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, pp. 24-28.
Recommended: Mahmood Mamdani, chapter seven, "The Rural in the Urban: Migrant Workers in South Africa," in *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton UP, 1996), pp. 218-284.
- Th 6 **Readings:** Head's *A Question of Power*
Re-readings: Chapter 2, "Culture and the History of Difference," from Robert J. C. Young's *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (Routledge, 1995), pp. 29-54.
Due: Head situating the text presentation.
- T 11 **Readings:** Head's *A Question of Power*
Due: Rough draft of proposals for cultural artefact assignment.
- Unit IV: "Re-assessing the Post"**
- Th 13 **Readings:** Bart Moore-Gilbert, chapter one, "Postcolonial Criticism and postcolonial theory?" from *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 5-33.
Due: Critical interpretation essay.
- T 18 Cultural artefact works-in-progress presentations
Due: Final draft of research proposals to be posted to ANGEL.
- Th 20 Cultural artefact works-in-progress presentations
- T 25 Cultural artefact works-in-progress presentations
- Th 27 Cultural artefact works-in-progress presentations

FINALS WEEK: We will meet during the scheduled finals period—Thursday, May 4th, 5:45-7:45pm, to draw class to a close. The final draft of the cultural artefact project (and a self- and group-assessment) is due by 5:00pm Friday, May 5th (in electronic form and in hard copy).