

Donna Dunbar-Odom

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Office Hours: Before class, during morning portion of class, or by appointment

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Overview

I am obsessed with the genre of memoir. I am fascinated by the ways people choose to represent their experience to others and their motivations for doing so. When English 681 hadn't been taught in a while, it occurred to me that literary memoir would be a powerful way to approach the course. Plus I'd already been thinking about how memoir and postcolonial theory can speak to each other.

The hardest part of this course has been deciding what texts to include—which really means deciding which ones I had to exclude. I finally decided on the four memoirs listed below plus four key theoretical articles. Ahmed, Ngugi, and Said offer representations of the experiences of the colonized, but I wanted to include Fuller's bittersweet memoir as well to offer a representation of the experiences of the colonizers. In other words, I wanted to complicate things—as usual.

Textbooks:

Out of Place by Edward Said

A Border Passage – Leila Ahmed

Dreams in a Time of War – Ngugi Wa Thiong'O

Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight – Alexandra Fuller

Anything else we read will be available via pdf.

Course Objectives:

This course will address the huge arena known as “world literature” by means of memoir and postcolonial theory. The course objectives are that you:

- become acquainted with some of the main arguments made in postcolonial theory.
- Be able to develop scholarly arguments that arise from your reading and our discussion.

- Be able to make use of MLA to make your arguments appropriate to a larger academic audience.

Grading Policy and Criteria

Your grade will be determined by your contributions to the discussion, 3 position papers, a presentation, and an annotated bibliography.

Percentages per Assignment	
25%	Position papers
25%	Presentation
20%	Discussion
30%	Annotated Bibliography

Please note that I will not be using the Gradebook function on eCollege because I don't find it useful. At any time of the term, if you want to know where you stand grade-wise, just email me. I'll be happy to give you a ballpark grade. And if you're in any kind of trouble grade-wise, you can be sure I'll let you know.

Course Policies and Procedures

Classroom activities:

The work we do in this class depends on your coming each day, prepared to work. I count on you all to teach and learn from each other and to each be an important presence in our weekly discussions. If you're shy, you'll have to figure out ways to participate—maybe you can come in with questions to get the rest of us started. Everybody gets to be a star, and no one person can dominate, nor can anyone sit back and let others do the work.

By the way, being prepared means not beginning your discussion until *after* you've read the assignment. Then jump in!

I will do everything I can to make the atmosphere of our discussion a comfortable one; I do not tolerate disrespect, so you can rest assured that at no time will your comments be ridiculed or made fun of by me or anyone else in the class. I want this to be a place where intellectual inquiry is the norm. And if at any time you feel that someone has exhibited disrespect, let me know immediately. We should be able to challenge each other's reading and ideas in professional ways that stimulate discussion, not shut it down.

I'm always nervous that my humor will come across wrong or mean because I can be a tad on the sarcastic side. Let me know if you think I've been caustic or mean because I am never intentionally either of those in the classroom.

The Assignments:

Position Paper:

In Weeks 2, 3, and 4, you will turn in a 1-2 page position paper by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday night BEFORE our class. Your paper should begin with a meaty discussion question and then a page or so of how you might respond to that question, complete with quotations from the week's texts. Your turning them in on Sunday means I can read them Monday morning and use them to help prepare the day's discussion. You should be ready in class to share your argument and analysis. Each week I will ask a few of you to use your position papers to help us get the discussion started.

Presentation:

Each of you will do a 5-minute presentation over a key concept/term in postcolonial literary studies. I will provide a list for you. You may use PowerPoint or Prezi, but you may not read your presentation to us verbatim. In other words, you may use these tools as talking points but not the talk itself. The idea is to help us all work through some of the specialized terms. Where possible, offer examples from our reading, current events, your experience, etc.

Annotated bibliography

In the last week of class, you will turn in an annotated bibliography over some aspect of colonialism/postcolonialism. For example, if you're a film scholar, you might focus on the influence of the film *The Battle of Algiers*—a key text and an important film. If you're a literature scholar, you might look at ways Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has been reexamined with a postcolonial lens (Achebe figures prominently here). If you're interested in ESL issues, you might look at World Englishes or how different countries are working to integrate (or not) children of diaspora in their classrooms. You might look at how "the veil" signifies in various cultures (Ahmed has done important work here). You can also look at current events. We'll talk more about this in class.

Policies:

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. Don't skip a week. I will not let you make up the work unless you experience something dire--and I don't wish that on anyone. If something is going on that's getting in the way of your class time, please let me know.

We will begin the group time of our class at 12:30, and we will continue until class time is up or we run out of steam. The mornings are reserved for individual conferences with students in the class to talk about assignments, etc. I expect to meet with each of you at least twice during these morning times.

Yes, you can bring food/coffee/etc. to help you make it through the long afternoon.

Late assignments: You must keep up with the reading. I will not accept late assignments. If you experience truly exceptional circumstances (e.g. car wrecks, fires, and the like-- God forbid), please contact me immediately.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the unauthorized use of someone else's work. If I find a student has intentionally made use of another's work without giving that person credit, that student will fail the course.

It will be tempting to cut and paste from the internet for some of your responses. Do not. To do so without correct citation will result in an F for the entire course. Use the internet, but give your sources the credit they deserve. If you copy it from the internet, you MUST provide the citation.

If at any time you find yourself overwhelmed by the work required or you find yourself confused, please contact me. Don't feel miserable all by yourself. Share the misery with me!

Students with Disabilities:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services
Texas A&M University-Commerce
Gee Library, Room 132
Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835
Fax (903) 468-8148
StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu

Department: Apparently student behavior in some classes has deteriorated to the point that we have been asked to include statements about appropriate behavior in our course descriptions. Therefore, it is expected that you will be a civil and productive member of this class. Disruption of the class or the interference with other students'

learning will not be tolerated. If you are unsure what is expected of you, please email me immediately. As I said above, disrespect of one's colleagues or of me will not be tolerated.

SYLLABUS

Monday, July 7 – Introductions; overview; basics of memoir and postcolonial theory.

Monday, July 14– Ngugi; presentations; position paper due

Monday, July 21 – Fuller; presentations; position paper due

Monday, July 28 – Said; presentations; position paper due

Monday, August 4- Ahmed; presentations; position paper due; annotated bibliography due

Articles on pdf:

Frantz Fanon's "On National Culture"

Ngugi Wa Thiong'O's "The Language of African Literature"

Edward Said's introduction to *Orientalism*

Leila Ahmed's "The Discourse of the Veil"

List of key terms:

Diaspora

Subaltern

Third-World (note that you should problematize this term)

Alterity

Imperialism

Essentialism

Metanarrative

Mimicry

Identity

Discourse/Discursive practices