

**Winter 2015**

**ENGL 5004**

**Postcolonial Life-Writing from Africa: Memory, Nation, Vulnerability**

**Instructor:** Dr. Pius Adesanmi  
**Office Hours:** Tuesday: 1:00pm -2:30pm  
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**Classes:** Monday 6:05 pm - 8: 55 pm  
**Location:** Dunton Tower 1816

**Course Description**

Welcome! This seminar will explore the genres of African life-writing (mapping the theoretical tensions between autobiography and life-writing) against the backdrop of the historical contexts of the emergence of Africa into modernity (slavery, empire, colonialism) on the one hand, and the discontents of the postcolonial condition (statehood, identities, conflict, hope) on the other hand. We shall also pay attention to theoretical frameworks such as the postcolonial, abjection, theories of subjectivity and ethnicity, globalization, and race, insofar as they underwrite the genre of African life-writing.

**Required Texts**

**(Buy your books at Octopus Books, 116 Third Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1S 2K1, 613-233-2589. Ask for ENGL 5004)**

Sindiwe Magona, *To My Children's Children*  
Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone*  
Wole Soyinka, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*  
Rian Malan: *My Traitor's Heart*

**Evaluation**

Group Project (Critical Trends): 20 points  
Mid Term Research Essay: 30 points  
Final Exam (take home essay): 50 points

\*Assignment submission and deadlines will be discussed and agreed upon in class

**Distribution**

A+ 90-100 B+ 77-79

A 85-89 B 73-76  
A- 80-84 B- 70-72  
C+ 67-69 D+ 57-59  
C 63-66 D 53-56  
C- 60-62 D- 50-52  
F 0-49

## **Requirements and Procedures**

Requirement: read and reflect on each text well ahead of the date we begin to study it in class.

Attendance: as this course strongly requires students' active participation, regular attendance is imperative. The course shall be delivered in such a way that your continuous involvement shall be necessary at every stage. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class period. Reasonable circumstances sometimes force people to be late. By all means do come to class if you're late and be sure to explain things to me after class. Absence will be excused only for certifiable medical reasons and religious observances. **One percentage point will be deducted for every unexcused absence.**

Conduct: we will strive to create a convivial class atmosphere in which you will be at ease to express your opinions and participate fully in the learning process. Any disruptive conduct will, however, not be tolerated. You are required to avoid habitual lateness, reading newspapers during class, working hurriedly on an assignment due for submission in your next class, sleeping during class, leaving the classroom before the end of the class period, chatting with others on issues not related to the ongoing class discussion, or any other behaviour that interferes with the learning process and distracts everybody else.

Assignments: it is required that students do all assigned tests and examinations according to the instructor's specifications. Except in cases where necessary permission is granted or a student is able to present evidence of illness or any form of incapacitation, any student who fails to submit assignments on schedule will lose a determined percentage of his/her final grade point.

**Note: If one of your assignments is lost, misplaced, or not received by the instructor, you are responsible for having a backup copy that can be submitted immediately upon request. There shall be no electronic submission of essays and assignments. Hard copies only!**

Academic integrity: academic dishonesty will be dealt with according to University Policies. See the statement on Instructional Offences in the Undergraduate Calendar.

Access statement: Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must contact a coordinator at the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities to complete the necessary *Letters of Accommodation*. After registering with

the PMC, make an appointment to meet and discuss your needs with me in order to make the necessary arrangements as early in the term as possible.

Students requiring academic accommodation on the basis of a religious observance should make a formal, written request to the instructor for an alternate date and/or means of satisfying academic requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist but no later than two weeks before the compulsory academic event. Accommodation is to be worked out directly and on an individual basis between the student and the instructor(s) involved. Instructors will make accommodations in a way that avoids academic disadvantage to the student.

Students or instructors who have questions or want to confirm accommodation eligibility of a religious event or practice may refer to the Equity Services website for a list of holy days and Carleton's Academic Accommodation policies, or may contact an Equity Services Advisor in the Equity Services Department for assistance.

Pregnant students requiring academic accommodations are encouraged to contact an Equity Advisor in Equity Services to complete a letter of accommodation. The student must then make an appointment to discuss her needs with the instructor at least two weeks prior to the first academic event in which it is anticipated the accommodation will be required.

Registration policy: during the drop/add period at the beginning of the semester, the Department of English encourages students to visit this and other courses in order to make informed judgments about which courses to take. After the last day for course changes, however, only students registered in the course may remain; no student may late-add (or restore a dropped registration) after the deadlines without petitioning the, instructor, the Department of English, and the Registrar's office.

Communication: we shall use several lines of communication to ensure a vibrant rapport throughout the course. They include: (1) email to the instructor – please allow a window of 48 hours for me to reply. Students are welcome to send me emails regarding any issue they like to discuss about the course. Sometimes this facility may be used to submit assignments with my permission; (2) students can see me at my office or give me a phone call during office hours, or leave a message on my answering machine. I'll return calls as necessary.

### **Class and Reading Schedule**

Jan 5 **General Survey: Theory, Postcolonial Life-Writing, Auto/biography**

Readings:

Sandra Lila Maya Rota, "The Limits of Postcolonial Autobiography and the Empowering Capacity of Life-Writing for the Postcolonial Subject" (<http://www.ledonline.it/linguae/allegati/linguae0901Rota.pdf>)

Sneja Gunew, "Between Auto/Biography and Theory: Can "Ethnic Subjects" Write Theory?" *Comparative Literature Studies* 42.4 (2005): 363-378 (Project Muse)

Philip Holden, "Other Modernities: National Autobiography and Globalization" *Biography* 28.1 (2005): 89-103 (Project Muse)

Lisa Lowe, "Autobiography out of Empire" *Small Axe* 13.1(2009): 98-111 (Project Muse)

**Suggested Further Reading:**

Bill Ashcroft et al. *The Empire Writes Back*. (Library electronic resource)

Introduction and Chapter One

12 **General Survey: Theoretical/Historical Frames of African Discourse**

Achille Mbembe, "African Modes of Self-Writing" *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002): 239-273 (Project Muse)

Abiola Irele, "Dimensions of African Discourse" *College Literature* 19/20.3/1(1992-1993): 45-59 (JSTOR)

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Something Torn and New* (course reserve)

Chapters One & Two

**Suggested Further Reading:**

Frantz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth* (course reserve)

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind* (course reserve)

19 Wole Soyinka, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*

26 *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*

Feb 2 *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (Critical Reception Presentation)

9 Ishmael Beah, *Long Way Gone*

23 *Long Way Gone* (Critical Reception Presentation)

March 2 Rian Malan, *My Traitor's Heart*

9 *My Traitor's Heart*

16 *My Traitor's Heart* (Critical Reception Presentation)

23 Sindiwe Magona, *To My Children's Children*

30 *To My Children's Children*

Apr 6 *To My Children's Children* (Critical Reception Presentation)