'You write in order to change the world ... if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change it.' - James Baldwin

FYSEM-UA 215
Reclaiming the Narrative: (Contemporary West African Writers unleash their Africa upon the world).
SPRING 2019
Tuesdays 3:30 p.m – 6:00 p.m.
20 Cooper Square, Room xxx

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Office hours by appointment on Tuesdays 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

COURSE DESCRIPTION/OBJECTIVES
Africa covers a vast area of 55 countries and 1.1 billion inhabitants. There are countries that are emerging economic powers and heading towards industrialization.

In other cases, some countries are taking the lead in developing technology hubs, and testing out new forms of mobile banking and virtual money. Other countries wield considerable “soft power” via their film, music and contemporary culture and they are driving the way Africans present themselves to the world.

Comprehensive news coverage of Africa is scant. The sparse coverage is often a variation of an incomplete portrait that has dominated the Western media for the last 50 years: tales of starvation, political instability and disease are mainstays. There is often little or no historical or political context in most of this coverage.

Even with the Internet and global access to African journalism, the stereotypical portraits of a ‘dark continent’ persists. But in recent years, a cadre of West African writers have begun to change that narrative.

These writers, sometimes educated in the West, and comfortable on the streets of Lagos, Accra, Rome and New York have churned out fiction books as well as non-
fiction essays about their homelands that center on a nuanced balanced portrait of contemporary African life.

These works have been effective because their primary audiences are in the West. They have been able to have some success in their literature in ways that contemporary journalism from the regions cannot or has not been able to in the last 50 years.

This course will provide students with an understanding of contemporary issues around the various regions on the African continent. As well as how modern literature is tackling these issues. We will also focus on the challenges of telling stories from Sub-Saharan Africa that are not the same old stories, with the same tired clichés.

Together we will accomplish this by reading books that combine history, political analysis and even narrative journalism. We will compare this with current journalism from mainstream Western media outlets from the region. We will also on occasion look at other creative endeavors to change the narrative in film, television, and even advertising. While our focus is on West Africa, on occasion we will look at similar work coming out of other regions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This historical and political background will help students to eventually write about the region with depth and nuance, and to evaluate the coverage that they read.

Today, Africa is poised for an era of political and cultural renewal. The continent’s population is expected to double by 2050 and its influence on the world stage is growing. We also will strive to, on occasion, have guest speakers who have worked as foreign correspondents or editors managing news coverage of Africa. And where possible, a writer whose work we are studying. By the end of this course, you will hopefully be a more informed reader and analyst of events in the continent.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

The Purple Hibiscus, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Black Ass  A. Igoni Barret

Born on a Tuesday by Elnathan John

Africa 39: New Writing From South of the Sahara
(There will be weekly supplemental readings emailed each week for class analysis. There are likely to be recent journalistic articles.)

*The New York Times has consistent coverage of sub-Saharan Africa, and has a West Africa correspondent whose work we will examine regularly. You are required to keep up with current developments.*

*** PLEASE NOTE You are eligible for student subscriptions of the New York Times. Please call (888) 698-2655 to order or visit NYTimes.com/student. ***

**RECOMMENDED TEXTS**

*Ghana Must Go*, by Taiye Salase, Penguin Press

*Half of A Yellow Sun*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

*The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s wives* by Lola Shoneyin

The required texts are available at the **NYU Bookstore** and at **Shakespeare & Co, The Strand**, and on **Amazon.com**. All required and recommended texts are available on Amazon.

**ASSIGNMENTS & COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Since this is a seminar course, attendance and class participation are essential. (The only acceptable excuse for missing a class is a severe illness, which you can document with a doctor’s note, or a death in the family.) To do well in this course, you must keep up with the readings and participate regularly in the class discussions. **Note: No student will obtain a grade of “A” or “A-” without active participation and that includes the weekly response papers AND ORAL PRESENTATIONS.**

For the **first eight weeks (approximately)** each student will be required to submit a brief written response (about 3 paragraphs) to the readings.

Every week one or two students will be responsible each week for making a presentation on the work that is due. I will also go around the room and ask you to read out the highlights of your response, which will help direct our discussion. Your responses must not simply be a summary of the readings; you must offer an evaluation of the author’s main arguments and/or an analysis of the author’s reporting techniques.
There will be a midterm paper and a final paper that will involve analyzing themes that emerge from the class readings; a book review; or a critique of a significant piece of journalism about the region. **Papers should be up to 1250 words.**

The paper must use a variety of sources: if you are focusing on one major book or piece of reporting from the region, you must include other sources. You may do original reporting for these papers, but that is not required. Even if you plan to do a reported paper, you must supplement your original reporting with other sources. All papers must include a bibliography and proper footnotes.

For your final paper, you can write a media analysis/critique focusing an issue or country in Sub-Saharan Africa, and how one of the new voices from the region has tackled it in his or her work.

**GRADING**

Your final grade will be based on your written assignments and your participation in class discussions. If you show progress and strong effort during the course of the semester, I will consider that in your final grade.

Your final grade will be based on the following:

- Class Participation/presentations: 15 percent
- Reading Responses: 22 percent
- Midterm Paper: 30 percent
- Final Paper: 33 percent

**ATTENDANCE**

This class meets only once a week. It’s essential to attend every class. Students who miss two or more classes without a valid excuse will face a reduction in their final grade. (The only acceptable excuse for missing a class is severe illness or a death in the family or a religious observance.)

**Please note:** Since this is a seminar course that is heavily based on our discussion and analysis of the readings, please refrain from texting or other distractions to your classmates.

**DEADLINES**

In journalism, you must meet your deadline. All assignments for this class must be turned in on time. Late assignments will be subject to grade reductions, and any missed assignment will receive an F.
PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism, fabricating quotes, or inventing sources will not be tolerated. Anyone caught doing so will fail the course and the department chair will be notified. For more information, see the NYU Journalism Handbook for Students: http://journalism.nyu.edu/ethics/handbook/

Assistance
It is very important for you to know that I am here for you. This is about learning, it’s about making mistakes, and it’s about growing. If you are struggling, unsure about anything, or just want to talk I am not hard to find, come talk to me.

***** Because of the volume of material we will be covering, if at anytime you feel overwhelmed or extremely stressed you can come to me or speak confidentially with the Wellness Exchange consultants. 212-443-9999. They are available 24-hours a day.*******

WEEKLY SCHEDULE (This will be provided on the first day of class.)

A NOTE ABOUT THE SCHEDULE: There might be a few changes to this schedule (some additional, short readings) as we attempt to keep up with developments in Africa We will also occasionally have to work around the availability of guest speakers.

WEEK 1: January 29 2019

Topics: Introduction to major issues in Sub-Saharan Africa today. How do contemporary journalist cover Africa? How do writers present their version of these same stories? How do we analyze and write the reading responses?

In-Class Assignment: Write a 300 to 400-word autobiographical essay explaining why and if you have any interest in contemporary nonfiction foreign reporting and, specifically, Africa? Have you had any previous experience traveling or living in Black Africa? How has that experience affected your outlook on the region? Do you pay attention to media coverage of Africa? (This assignment will not be graded.)

WEEK 2: Feb 5, 2019

Living as an ‘other.’ Protecting sexual minorities in the age vibrant religiosity.
**Reading:** African 39 Chapter 1, The Shivering: Apollo by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The New Yorker 2015; also a selection of weekly readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes) Reading response needed.

**WEEK 3: Feb 12, 2019**
The African metropolis in media.
**Reading:** Africa 39 Chapter 5 page (41) Why Djs are superstars in Lagos. Also a selection of weekly readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes) Reading response needed.

THEN

BEGIN READING *The Purple Hibiscus*. You are to use the rest of class time to complete the first 200 pages of the *Purple Hibiscus*

**WEEK 4: Feb 19, 2019**
An African City and a modern Family
**Reading:** The Purple Hibiscus. Pg 1-109 Also a selection of weekly readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes) Reading response needed.

**WEEK 5: Feb 26, 2019**
The modern family and trying out Democracy.
**Reading:** The Purple Hibiscus. Pg 110-216 Also a selection of weekly readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes) Reading response needed.

**WEEK 6: March 5, 2019**
Culture or Failure
**MID-TERM SESSION**
**Reading:** The Purple Hibiscus. Pg 217-307 Also a selection of weekly readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes) Reading response not needed, but a book review of *Purple Hibiscus* and the issues raised in the text is due at midnight

***MIDTERM PAPER DUE at Midnight ON NYU CLASSES***

**WEEK 7: March 12, 2019**
**IN-CLASS DIRECTED READING SESSION**
The many layers of African traditional marriage.
**Reading:** Africa 39 Chapter 34 page 298. Harlot. A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes) Reading response needed on NYU Classes at Midnight
BLACKASS page 3-168
MARCH 19 FALLS DURING SPRING BREAK: FINISH READING BLACKASS & START READING BORN ON A TUESDAY

WEEK 8: March 26, 2019
Contemporary Pop Culture
Reading: BLACKASS. A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes) Reading response needed.

WEEK 9: April 2, 2019
Reading: How To Write About Africa by Binyavanga Wainaina. A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes) Reading response not needed.
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes) Reading response needed.  BORN ON A TUERSDAY

WEEK 10: April 9, 2019
Unheralded successes!
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)
BORN ON A TUERSDAY Strategizing for Finals due on May 7

WEEK 11: April 16 2019
Discuss topics for final paper.
Reading: The Sex Lives of African Girls
Echoes of Mirth (Africa 39 pg 147
Where are we locals?
(Mythologies and family branches)

WEEK 12: April 23, 2019
Backlash
Reading: How To Write About Africa by Binyavanga Wainaina
African 39 pg 208. Kinshasha-Makanbo

A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)

Reading response not needed. Discuss topics for final paper. Strategizing for Finals due on May 7.

WEEK 13: April 30, 2019
Unheralded successes!
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)
Discuss topics for final paper due NEXT WEEK @ midnight A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)

WEEK 14: May 7 2019
Final Wrap up. Potential Documentary/Film Viewing: Topics: Review of semester.
***FINAL PAPER DUE @ midnight***