



ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

GENERAL STUDIES COURSE PROPOSAL COVER FORM

Course information:

Copy and paste current course information from Class Search/Course Catalog.

College/School: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Department: African & African American Studies, School of Social Transformation; Prefix: AFR, Number: 466, Title: Peoples and Cultures of Africa, Units: 3; Is this a cross-listed course? Yes; Is this a shared course? No

Note- For courses that are crosslisted and/or shared, a letter of support from the chair/director of each department that offers the course is required for each designation requested.

Is this a permanent numbered course with topics? Yes

If yes, all topics under this permanent numbered course must be taught in a manner that meets the criteria for the approved designation(s). It is the responsibility of the chair/director to ensure that all faculty teaching the course are aware of the General Studies designation(s) and adhere to the above guidelines.

Course description: The course provide an in-depth study of the diversity of African people and culture from an interdisciplinary perspective. Special focus is placed on basic social, political, and economic relations, inequality, world-view, art, resource use and development, gender roles, Europe and Africa, processes of change, and impact of colonial rule.

Requested designation: Global Awareness-G

Note- a separate proposal is required for each designation requested

Eligibility:

Permanent numbered courses must have completed the university's review and approval process. For the rules governing approval of omnibus courses, contact Phyllis.Lucie@asu.edu or Lauren.Leo@asu.edu.

Submission deadlines dates are as follow:

For Fall 2016 Effective Date: October 6, 2015

For Spring 2017 Effective Date: March 15, 2016

Area(s) proposed course will serve:

A single course may be proposed for more than one core or awareness area. A course may satisfy a core area requirement and more than one awareness area requirements concurrently, but may not satisfy requirements in two core areas simultaneously, even if approved for those areas.

Checklists for general studies designations:

- Complete and attach the appropriate checklist
• Literacy and Critical Inquiry core courses (L)
• Mathematics core courses (MA)
• Computer/statistics/quantitative applications core courses (CS)
• Humanities, Arts and Design core courses (HU)
• Social-Behavioral Sciences core courses (SB)
• Natural Sciences core courses (SQ/SG)
• Cultural Diversity in the United States courses (C)
• Global Awareness courses (G)
• Historical Awareness courses (H)

A complete proposal should include:

- Signed course proposal cover form
Criteria checklist for General Studies designation(s) being requested
Course catalog description
Sample syllabus for the course
Copy of table of contents from the textbook and list of required readings/books

It is respectfully requested that proposals are submitted electronically with all files compiled into one PDF.

Contact information:

Name: Desi Usman; E-mail: usman@asu.edu; Phone: 480-727-7563

Department Chair/Director approval: (Required)

Chair/Director name (Typed): Elsie G J Moore; Date: 8/29/2017

Chair/Director (Signature):

## Arizona State University Criteria Checklist for

### GLOBAL AWARENESS [G]

#### Rationale and Objectives

Human organizations and relationships have evolved from being family and village centered to modern global interdependence. The greatest challenge in the nuclear age is developing and maintaining a global perspective which fosters international cooperation. While the modern world is comprised of politically independent states, people must transcend nationalism and recognize the significant interdependence among peoples of the world. The exposure of students to different cultural systems provides the background of thought necessary to developing a global perspective.

Cultural learning is present in many disciplines. Exposure to perspectives on art, business, engineering, music, and the natural and social sciences that lead to an understanding of the contemporary world supports the view that intercultural interaction has become a daily necessity. The complexity of American society forces people to balance regional and national goals with global concerns. Many of the most serious problems are world issues and require solutions which exhibit mutuality and reciprocity. No longer are hunger, ecology, health care delivery, language planning, information exchanges, economic and social developments, law, technology transfer, philosophy, and the arts solely national concerns; they affect all the people of the world. Survival may be dependent on the ability to generate global solutions to some of the most pressing problems.

The word university, from universitas, implies that knowledge comes from many sources and is not restricted to local, regional, or national perspectives. The Global Awareness Area recognizes the need for an understanding of the values, elements, and social processes of cultures other than the culture of the United States. Learning which recognizes the nature of others cultures and the relationship of America's cultural system to generic human goals and welfare will help create the multicultural and global perspective necessary for effective interaction in the human community.

Courses which meet the requirement in global awareness are of one or more of the following types: (1) in-depth area studies which are concerned with an examination of culture-specific elements of a region of the world, country, or culture group, (2) the study of contemporary non-English language courses that have a significant cultural component, (3) comparative cultural studies with an emphasis on non-U.S. areas, and (4) in-depth studies of non-U.S. centered cultural interrelationships of global scope such as the global interdependence produced by problems of world ecology, multinational corporations, migration, and the threat of nuclear war.

Reviewed 4/2014

Proposer: Please complete the following section and attach appropriate documentation.

<b>ASU--[G] CRITERIA</b>			
<b>GLOBAL AWARENESS [G]</b>			
YES	NO		Identify Documentation Submitted
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Studies <b>must</b> be composed of subject matter that addresses or leads to an understanding of the contemporary world outside the U.S.	
		2. The course must match at least one of the following descriptions: (check all which may apply):	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	a. In-depth area studies which are concerned with an examination of culture-specific elements of a region, country or culture group. <b>The area or culture studied must be non-U.S. and the study must contribute to an understanding of the contemporary world.</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	b. The course is a language course for a contemporary non-English language, and has a significant cultural component.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	c. The course is a comparative cultural study in which most, i.e., more than half, of the material is devoted to non-U.S. areas.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	d. The course is a study of the cultural significance of a non-U.S.-centered global issue. The course examines the role of its target issue within each culture and the interrelatedness of various global cultures on that issue. It looks at the cultural significance of its issue in various cultures outside the U.S., both examining the issue's place within each culture and the effects of that issue on world cultures."	

Course Prefix	Number	Title	Designation
AFR	466	Peoples and Cultures of Africa	Global Awareness (G)

Explain in detail which student activities correspond to the specific designation criteria. Please use the following organizer to explain how the criteria are being met.

Criteria (from checksheet)	How course meets spirit (contextualize specific examples in next column)	Please provide detailed evidence of how course meets criteria (i.e., where in syllabus)
<p><b>SAMPLE:</b> 2d: study the cultural significance of a non-U.S. centered global issue</p>	<p><b>SAMPLE:</b> The course examines the cultural significance of financial markets Japan, Korea, and the UK.</p>	<p><b>SAMPLE:</b> Module 2 shows how Japanese literature has shaped how Japanese people understand world markets. Module 3 shows how Japanese popular culture has been changed by the world financial market system. Modules 4 &amp; 5 do the same for Korea and modules 6 &amp; 7 do the same for the UK.</p>
<p>Study the cultural significance of African centered global issue - women and gender, religion, AIDS, environment, terrorism, economy and globalization, colonialism and social changes.</p>	<p>The course examines the cultural significance of African continent focusing on a number of countries.</p>	<p>Module V (topic V) discusses Europe and Africa -the beginning of contact, atlantic slave trade, and African colonization. Module VII shows African Nationalist movement -the struggle for independence, and the impact of America civil rights on the African nationalist movement. Module VIII discusses African Economy and Globalization. Module X discusses African migrations and return migrations, both within Africa, and migrations outside Africa, starting from the forced migration associated with the slave trade.</p>

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College/School	College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	Department	African & African American Studies, School of Social Transformation
Prefix	AFR	Number	466
Title	Peoples and Cultures of Africa		Units: 3
Is this a cross-listed course?	Yes	If yes, please identify course(s)	ASB 466 (Peoples and Cultures of Africa)
Is this a shared course?	No	If so, list all academic units offering this course	

Note- For courses that are crosslisted and/or shared, a letter of support from the chair/director of each department that offers the course is required for each designation requested. By submitting this letter of support, the chair/director agrees to ensure that all faculty teaching the course are aware of the General Studies designation(s) and will teach the course in a manner that meets the criteria for each approved designation.

Is this a permanent numbered course with topics? Yes

If yes, all topics under this permanent numbered course must be taught in a manner that meets the criteria for the approved designation(s). It is the responsibility of the chair/director to ensure that all faculty teaching the course are aware of the General Studies designation(s) and adhere to the above guidelines. Chair/Director Initials (Required)

Course description: The course provide an in-depth study of the diversity of African people and culture from an interdisciplinary perspective. Special focus is placed on basic social, political, and economic relations, inequality, world-view, art, resource use and development, gender roles, Europe and Africa, processes of change, and impact of colonial rule.

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Checklists for general studies designations:

Complete and attach the appropriate checklist

- Literacy and Critical Inquiry core courses (L)
- Mathematics core courses (MA)
- Computer/statistics/quantitative applications core courses (CS)
- Humanities, Arts and Design core courses (HU)
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Contact information:

Name Desi Usman E-mail usman@asu.edu Phone 480-727-7563

Department Chair/Director approval: (Required)

Chair/Director name (Typed): Date:



ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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Chair/Director (Signature):

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## PEOPLES AND CULTURES OF AFRICA

AFR /ASB 466, AFR 598

Fall 2017  
Session C

**Class Time: T/Th 3p – 4:15p**  
**Room: Tempe WXLR A203**

Professor: Dr. Desi Usman  
Office: African & African American Studies (Wilson Hall 145)  
**Office hrs: MW: 9:30 am – 11:30 am.**  
Phone: Office: (480) 727-7563  
E-mail: [Usman@asu.edu](mailto:Usman@asu.edu)

### SYLLABUS

#### **Course Description**

This is an upper division course designed to provide an in-depth study of the diversity of African people and culture from an interdisciplinary perspective. Those societies covered range from simple foraging and traditional ones to complex, industrializing nations. Special emphasis is placed on basic social, political, and economic relations, inequality, world-view, art, resource use and development, gender roles, slavery and slave trade, Europe and Africa, processes of change, and the impact and legacy of colonial rule are considered. How relationships between men and women are contextualized and negotiated is a theme found throughout the readings and films, as well as struggle of people in different circumstances to build new relationships with traditional beliefs and practices. The course meets social/behavioral, historical and global requirements.

#### **Approaches to the course material and Examination**

In learning about Africa, the themes transcend local events and personalities to reveal recurrent patterns of historical change that extend throughout the continent. The thematic approach means students studying the first weeks' lectures and readings carefully to identify the "key themes" that will develop during the remainder of the term. It also means that the examination will test students' abilities to draw these themes together into a coherent understanding on how and why people in Africa behaved as they did, both in their distinctiveness and in ways comparable to history in more familiar parts of the globe.

The course will follow four complementary approaches: (1) the lectures provide overviews of large themes and periods; they illustrate general points with examples and case studies. The lectures thus present the instructor's interpretation of the subject but make no systematic attempt at comprehensive coverage; (2) the readings which are to be completed before the week for which they appear in the syllabus, provide detail and texture to the themes covered in lecture; (3) class discussions give students opportunity to contribute and ask questions about parts of the readings and lectures that either confuse or

inspire their interest. (4) Finally, examinations consist of 3 sets of multiple-choice questions and short answers, one in-class map quiz, and a 10-15 pages paper, including bibliography.

## **Requirements**

### Research Paper

Students will be required to research and report in type-written form on any one of these African groups – Kikuyu, Igbo, Ashanti, Nuer, Yoruba, Zulu, Hausa, Tuaregs, and Dogon – focusing on one or combination of the following: history, socio-political organization, religion, art, music, dance, economic activities, European colonization, and changes in the society. Students must obtain the instructor’s agreement for their topics by the end of the third week of class (**September 12**). The paper assignment should include the following:

- Titles, introduction, main issues, conclusion
- Relevant geographical and demographic information
- Importance to African history and culture
- Important to the world civilization
- Most important contribution
- Lesson learned (personal)

For your paper, use 12 point, Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with no more than 1.25” margins. Include in-text references, and bibliographic references at the end. For writing style, use **APA format**. Your sources **MUST** be in the form of Books and Journal articles. Avoid lengthy online sources such as Wikipedia or related form.

The topic or title of your research paper is **DUE** by **5pm** on **Tuesday September 12**. Your title or topic must include your name, student identification number, and a half-to-one-page description of your topic; stating your methodology, what kind of sources to be used, etc. Please, submit hardcopy. No electronic submission. Final paper is **DUE Tuesday November 28**.

## **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY!**

Plagiarism and other form of cheating will result in automatic failure, and may lead to students facing serious penalties imposed by the University.

In the “Student Academic Integrity Policy” manual, ASU defines “Plagiarism” [as] using another’s words, ideas, materials or work without properly acknowledging and documenting the source. Students are responsible for knowing the rules governing the use of another’s work or materials and for acknowledging and documenting the source appropriately.” You can find this definition at:

[http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/studentlife/judicial/academic\\_integrity.htm#definitions](http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/studentlife/judicial/academic_integrity.htm#definitions)

## **Disability Policy Statement**

Qualified students with disabilities who will require disability accommodations in this class are encouraged to make their requests to me at the beginning of the semester either during office hours or by appointment. Note: Prior to receiving disability accommodations, verifications of eligibility from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) is required. Disability information is confidential.

Students who feel they will need disability accommodations in this class but have not registered with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) should contact DRC immediately. Their office is located on the first floor of the Matthews Center Building. DRC staff can also be reached at: 480-965-1234 (V), 480-965-9000 (TTY). For additional information, visit: [www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc](http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc). Their hours are 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

## **POLICY AGAINST THREATENING BEHAVIOR**

Threatening behavior of any kind is not tolerated by the university and will not be allowed in this class. Please refer to ASU's policy against threatening behavior (Student Services Manual [SSM 104-02](#) "Handling Disruptive, Threatening or Violent Individuals on Campus"):

*All incidents and allegations of violent or threatening conduct by an ASU student (whether on-or off campus) must be reported to the ASU Police Department (ASU PD) and the Office of the Dean of Students. If either office determines that the behavior poses or has posed a serious threat to personal safety or to the welfare of the campus, the student will not be permitted to return to campus or reside in any ASU residence hall until an appropriate threat assessment has been completed and, if necessary, conditions for return are imposed. ASU PD, the Office of the Dean of Students, and other appropriate offices will coordinate the assessment in light of the relevant circumstances.*

### Exams

In addition to the research paper, there will be one in-class map quiz, and three online tests. Tests will consist of multiple choice questions to come from both readings and class lectures.

### Attendance/Participation:

Since both attendance and participation are required for the successful completion of this course, I will be taking attendance at the end of each class. Remember, it is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet during class. If your name does not appear on the attendance sheet for any reason, you will not receive the attendance and participation points for that class. More than 2 absences will result in the lowering of your grade by a

significant amount. I also expect you to read and be ready to contribute to the discussion and dialogue each and every day. Sometimes it becomes necessary to make changes in the assignment schedule and requirements of the course. It is your responsibility to be in class if and when such announcements are made.

Tardiness will also not be tolerated, so please come to class at the scheduled class time. If you come to class late on a consistent basis, your grade will be lowered accordingly. I understand that emergencies do sometimes occur; therefore, emergency absences will be excused at the discretion of the instructor. Please, inform me if you need to miss class because of sickness, a religious holiday, or some other legitimate excusable reason.

++ NO CELL PHONE (must be turned off while in class), NO TAPING OF LECTURE, NO FOOD in class.

Make-up exams. – Make-ups will be given only when exams are missed for unavoidable reasons, and when you provide documentation.

You are responsible for getting me all of your work by the time and date it is due. All assignments are due by the end of class time on the assigned due date. Anything submitted after that time is considered late and will not be accepted. All assignments must be handed in to me in hardcopy and cannot be sent over e-mail.

Extra Credit: If you need extra credit, you must discuss this with me latest three weeks before the end of the semester. Also, there will be numerous campus and community events this semester that you can attend for extra credit points. I will give you more information about these events as the semester begins.

Requirements for superior achievement in the course (i.e. an A or better) include regular attendance with no unexplained absences, always completing the reading for each week before the class meeting, regular and active participation in discussions, and thoughtful and well-written papers.

Your primary responsibility as a student is to attend class regularly and master the material presented in class and in the readings. If you have ANY questions or feel unclear of any class material, see me after class or during office hours. DON'T wait until the end of the semester to discuss your problems.

#### Graduate Requirements

Students registered for graduate credit are expected to perform at graduate levels. Graduate students are expected to exhibit leadership in class discussion and may be asked to comment on key issues raised in class. In addition to class attendance, readings, participation in discussion, and test, graduate students will do a 20-25 pages research on a topic approved by me (**Please see me for further discussion on this**).

Summary of Evaluation Criteria:

A- 3 Exams (70 points each, 210 points total) (52.5%)

B- Paper 100 points (25%)  
 C- Map Quiz 50 points (12.5%)  
 D- Attendance/participation 40 points (10%)  
 Total = 400 points

Percentage	Points	Grade
98-100%	400-390	A+
90 avg	389-370	A
88-89 avg	369-355	A-
85-87 avg	354-340	B+
80-84 avg	339-320	B
	319-310	B-
	309-300	C+
70-75 avg	299-278	C
60-69 avg	277-270	D
<60%	<270	E

**Texts (All Required)**

1. Gordon April, and Gordon, D. L. (eds.), Understanding Contemporary Africa, 5th edition, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013.  
 ISBN: 978-1-58826847-1 (paper)
2. Ba, Mariama, So Long a Letter. Heinemann Educational Books, 2008. ISBN: 9780435913526.
3. Ngugi wa Thiongo, The River Between. Heinemann, 2008, paperback. ISBN: 978-0435905484.

**Lecture, Examinations, and Readings Schedule**

The following schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class.

I. General Introduction

**Thu: 8/17**

- Introduction of students and instructor. Syllabus Review
- Goals and aims of the course

**Tue: 8/22**

- Africa: Myths and Realities
- Africa: geographical diversities (peoples, countries, languages, etc.)

Readings:

- \* Gordon & Gordon, chps 1-2
- + Michael McNulty 1995, 'The Contemporary Map of Africa,' pp.10-45

**Thu: 8/24**

- Africa, geographical diversities contd.

**Tue: 8/29**

++ **Map Quiz** (20 minutes)

- **VIDEO:** Africa (Tripple Heritage): the nature of a continent (Ali Mazrui).

## II The Peopling of Africa

**Thu: 8/31**

- Overview of major developments in African prehistory, Stone Age, Agricultural beginnings, and Iron Age.

Readings:

\* Gordon & Gordon, chp 3 (read p25-33)

+ Newman 1995, 'Becoming Human', (part 1)

+ Newman 1995, 'Cultural Origins', (part 2)

**Tue: 9/5**

- Lecture: Overview of major developments in African prehistory contd.

+ **Video:** The mystery of Mankind – National Geographic: watch video posted on **blackboard**

## III Traditional Social and Political Organizations

**Thu: 9/7**

- African family, kinship, marriage, sex, age

Readings:

\* Gordon & Gordon, chps. 9, 3 (p.33-46), 5 (p.115-117)

+ Polygamy –Boserup

+ Ancestors – Kopytoff

+ Lele economy – Mary Douglas

**!!!Note:** Start reading Mariama Ba, 'So Long A Letter'

**Tue: 9/12**

- Family and Kinship contd.

Readings:

+ The !Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari desert – Lorna Marshall

+ The Yoruba of Nigeria –P. C. Lloyd

+ The Northern Pastoral Somali of the Horn – LM Lewis

**!!!Note:** Your paper topic is **DUE** today by 5pm

**Thu: 9/14**

- Traditional political and economic institutions: Mariama Ba - So Long A Letter - Discussion

**Tue: 9/19**

- Traditional political and economic institutions contd

**Thu: 9/21**

**VIDEO:** Africa: The Legacy of Lifestyles (Ali Mazrui)

**EXAM 1**

**Sat 9/23- Sun 9/24**

**++ Test 1 – AVAILABLE ONLINE (Blackboard)**

(This exam will cover lectures from August 17 through September 21). Test will be available online from 7am Saturday 9/23 to midnight Sunday 9/24

**IV. Religion, Art, Music & Culture**

**Tue: 9/26**

--- Religion in Africa

Readings:

\* Gordon & Gordon, chp 11

+ Dele Jegede, 'Art,' (pp. 66-88)

+ McNaughton and Pelrine, 'African Art', p.223-256.

+ African music – Steven Salm

**Thu: 9/28**

-Religion contd.

**Tue: 10/3 – NO CLASS (Attending Conference)**

**Thu: 10/5**

- Art and culture.

**Fall Break – October 7-10: Class Excused**

**Thu: 10/12**

- Art and culture contd.

- **Video:** 'West African Dogon Masks Documentary by BBC.' [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

+ **VIDEO:** African Art (blackboard)

**Tue: 10/17**

- Music, Dance & Culture

V Europe and Africa

**Thu: 10/19**

- Europeans in Africa

Readings:

\* Gordon & Gordon, chp 3 (read p. 46-58), chp 4 (p. 61-92)

+ Nwauwa 2000, "The Europeans in Africa: Prelude to Colonialism," (pp. 126-139).

+ Colonial Rule – Frederick Lugard

**!!!!NOTE:** Start reading 'The River Between' by Ngugi wa Thiongo.

**Tue: 10/24**

- Atlantic slave trade and slavery, abolition of slave trade, impact and challenges

**Thu: 10/26**

- The partition of Africa, African reaction, colonial rule

**Tue: 10/31**

- Impact of colonialism, Social Change in Africa

**Thu: 11/2**

++ **Discussion:** The River Between (Ngugi wa Thiongo)

**EXAM 2**

**Saturday 11/4 and Sunday 11/5**

++ **TEST 2 ONLINE.** Exam will open from 7am Saturday 11/4 to midnight Sunday 11/5. You will be assessed on materials covered from 9/26 through 11/2.

VI Women in Africa

**Tue: 11/7**

- Women in Africa, roles of women in society and changes

Readings

\* Gordon & Gordon, chp 10

+ Igbo women – Judith Allen

**Thu: 11/9**

- **VIDEO:** Asante Market Women (watch on Youtube and provide a 2-page written report on the film). Your paper must be typed.

VII African Nationalist Movements

**Tue: 11/14**

- European settlements, apartheid, nationalist movements, protests, black majority rule

Readings



- + South Africa- Patrick Furlong
- + Mau Mau – Bruce Berman

VIII African Economy and Globalization

**Thu: 11/16**

- African mineral resources and development

Readings:

- \* Gordon & Gordon, chp. 5

IX African Population, Urbanization

**Tue: 11/21**

- population, urbanization, AIDS

Readings:

- \* Gordon & Gordon, Chap. 7

**Thu: 11/23: Thanksgiving Holiday (CLASS EXCUSED)**

**Tue: 11/28** African Population, Urbanization contd.

Readings: as above

**!!!!NOTE: Your Research Paper is DUE today by 5pm prompt. (Hardcopy)**

X Research Presentation

**Thu: 11/30** (5-7 minutes presentation)

Class Round-up

Discussion/Revision

**EXAM 3 FINALS**

**Tue 12/5 and Wed 12/6**

**++ Test 3 ONLINE** (from materials covered from 9/26 through 11/30)

**Time:** Test available from 7am on December 5 to midnight of December 6.

Keys:

\* required text books

++ important information (e.g., examination, quiz, due date)

+ items on blackboard

Important DUE Dates

- Paper Topic: Tuesday September 12
- Final Paper (Hardcopy): Tuesday November 28

FIFTH EDITION

# UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY AFRICA

UNDERSTANDING  
Introductions to the States and Regions of the Contemporary World  
Donald L. Gordon, series editor

*Understanding Contemporary Africa, 5th edition*  
edited by April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon

*Understanding Contemporary Asia Pacific*  
edited by Katherine Palmer Kaup

*Understanding the Contemporary Caribbean, 2nd edition*  
edited by Richard S. Hillman and Thomas J. D'Agostino

*Understanding Contemporary China, 4th edition*  
edited by Robert E. Gamer

*Understanding Contemporary India, 2nd edition*  
edited by Neil DeVotta

*Understanding Contemporary Latin America, 4th edition*  
edited by Richard S. Hillman

*Understanding the Contemporary Middle East, 3rd edition*  
edited by Jillian Schwedler and Deborah J. Gerner

*Understanding Contemporary Russia*  
edited by Michael L. Bressler

EDITED BY  
APRIL A. GORDON  
DONALD L. GORDON



BOULDER  
LONDON

# Contents

Published in the United States of America in 2013 by  
Routledge Publishers, Inc.  
30th Street, Boulder, Colorado 80301  
routledge.com

Printed in the United Kingdom by  
Routledge Publishers, Inc.  
100 Brook Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 8LU

Copyright © 2013 by Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**  
Understanding contemporary Africa / edited by April A. Gordon,  
Donald L. Gordon. — 5th ed.

1. Africa—Politics and government—1960—2. Africa—Social conditions—  
I. Gordon, April A. II. Gordon, Donald L. III. Series: Understanding  
contemporary world.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-58826-847-1 (alk. paper)

1. Africa—Politics and government—1960—2. Africa—Social conditions—  
I. Gordon, April A. II. Gordon, Donald L. III. Series: Understanding  
contemporary world.

30.5 U536 2012

132—dc23

2012014906

**British Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in the United States of America

This paper used in this publication meets the requirements  
of the American National Standard for Permanence of  
Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1992.

5 4 3 2 1

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MARIAMA BÂ

# SO LONG A LETTER

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH  
BY MODUPÉ BODÉ-THOMAS

INTRODUCTION BY KENNETH W. HARROW



Heinemann

delicate situation posed by her daughter Aissamou's pregnancy.

It is at this point that Ramatoulaye passes from being the maltreated victim of male indifference to being the autonomous parent whose reactions and values are to shape the life of her child profoundly. As she struggles as a mother over how to treat her daughter in need, the dictates of religion and traditional custom, and issues of becoming the New African Woman, fade into the background. Ramatoulaye tells us that at this point she seeks refuge in God, but in the end decides to act on the basis of her feelings as a mother.

One is a mother so as to face the flood. Was I frightened, in the face of my daughter's shame, her sincere repentance, her pain, her anguish? Was I?

I took my daughter in my arms. Rainfully, I held her rightly, with a force multiplied tenfold by pagan revolt and primitive tenderness. (88)

In the final chapters of *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye turns increasingly to the dicta of her grandmother. From generations of foremothers to those of their daughters, to her own situation as soon-to-be-grandmother, she embraces her fate as the woman of her times, forcefully forging the image of the New African Woman whose trajectory is delineated by the choices she makes based on both tenderness and revolt. Aissatou's financial success and career might have been thought to qualify her as the exemplar for the position of the New African Woman. But with Ramatoulaye Ba reminds us of the importance of values grounded in Senegalese ways, which account for the strengths of this most enduring figure and for the considerable influence that this novel has had upon subsequent generations of African women.

Kenneth W. Harlow  
East Lansing Michigan, 2008

FOR FURTHER READING

Novels by Mariama Ba

*Un Châle écarlate*. Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1967. Translated as *Scarlet Song*. Trans. Dorothy S. Blair. New York: Longman, 1985.

*Près de la guirlande*. Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1970. Translated as *So Long a Letter*. Trans. Mouldy Healy. London: Heinemann, 1981.

Interviews

Ba, Mariama. "Mariama Ba, Winner of the First Noma Award for Publishing in Africa." Interview by Barbara Harrell-Bond. *African Publishing Record* 6 (1980): 209-14.

Relevant novels by other authors

Bert, Mongo. *Mission terminée*. Paris: Buchet Chassel, 1957. Translated as *Mission to Kala*. Trans. Peter Green. London: Heinemann Educational, 1964.

Bugui-Kent. *Le Bôdôb fou*. Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1984.

Diallo, Nafissatou. *De Tifens au Plateau*. Dakar: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1975. Translated as *A Dakar Childhood*. Trans. Dorothy S. Blair. Harlow: Longman, 1982.

Emecheta, Buchi. *The Toys of Motherhood*. London: Heinemann, 1979.

*Head Above Water*. Bôndôn: Ogunwo Afo, 1986.

Fall, Aminata Sow. *La grève des bûtes ou Les déchets humains*. Dakar: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1976. Translated as *The beggars strike on The streets of society*. Trans. Dorothy S. Blair. Harlow: Essex Longman Longman, 1981.

Buchi Emechebe's *Head above Water* (1986) as the modernist path for the New African Woman was not defined simply by making/control of the newly independent state, a process entirely dominated by men, who emerged as the new rulers and often remained, as with El Hadj Abdou Kader Beye in *Kala*, the old patriarchs. As the date of publication of *So Long a Letter* (1979) indicates, independence for the New African Woman came a full generation after independence of the African state.

Ba's espousal of modernism entailed a project of liberation for women that had had to defer to the men's project of achieving national liberation. This project for women's liberation still engenders great conflict in North Africa. But in sub-Saharan Africa its time has clearly come, and *So Long a Letter* played a not inconsiderable role in effecting this change, especially in Senegal.

Senegal is a Muslim country, and the issue of negotiating the passage to modernity without renouncing a Muslim identity has been at the heart of much Senegalese literature from the outset, as seen especially in *Ambiguous Adventure*, as well as the early works of Abdoulaye Sadji, Ousmane Socé, Sembène Ousmane, and the philosophical and historical texts of Mamadou Dia. For Ba it was important to establish Ramatoulaye's adherence to an identity as a practising Muslim woman at the outset. The novel begins with an account of the death of Ramatoulaye's estranged husband, Modou, but it is thirty-five pages before we learn of their estrangement. Instead, we are immersed in the practice of *mirrasa*, the period of mourning and seclusion for widows, during which all the faults of the deceased are to be brought to light – hence the letters to Aissatou.<sup>3</sup> However, in the course of the accounting Ramatoulaye

<sup>3</sup> This process of disclosing the faults of the person who died was closely analysed by Mbye Cham in his seminal article on *So Long a Letter*, 'Contemporary Society and the Female Imagination: A Study of the Novels of Mariama Ba', *Women in African Literature Today*, 15 (1987), 89-101.

does much more than focus on the flaws of her faithless husband, or feed all the earlier more hopeful years in the past. She evokes most forcefully her deep distress as a believer, as a faithful wife and companion to Modou, but also her social and religious obligations as a daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and now widow. She does not challenge the order that imposes those obligations, even though she sees herself having been liberated as a child, because she did not see such a path of liberation as conflicting with the social conventions of the Senegalese Muslim traditions. It is not too much to say that this definition of the correct urban citizen was 'new' or 'modern' only to the extent that it left intact most of the architecture of the family and religion. Only at the periphery of the society, in matters concerning education, dress and social comportment, would the pressures of modernization come into conflict with the imperatives of older customs and values.

These conflicting pressures are accentuated as Ramatoulaye loses her husband, first to a younger woman and then to death, and finds herself alone and widowed, obliged to deal with her family on her own. At first, she is forced to confront a series of suitors, beginning with her husband's elder brother Iamsir, who expects to make her another one of his wives. As she responds forcefully to him, we hear the expression of a new passion, a new voice: 'My voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment. It bursts out, violent, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes contemptuous' (60). She rejects both his offer and his arrogant assumption of male superiority, and she puts in their place the brother, the suitor and the imam, along with all the former prerogatives of the patriarchal order that attempted to assert its control over her again.

As her gradual passage from wife to widow yields to the pressures of single motherhood, she comes to confront the dangers of modernism to which her children are exposed. She catches three of her daughters smoking, she has to deal with her sons recklessly playing in the street, and finally, most movingly, must handle the



functions as the interlocutor of Ramatoulaye's letters, standing in the place of the reader who shares in the accounts presented in the letters. The reader's place is defined by this address of mature sister to sister, of Senegalese woman to Senegalese woman, and thus is brought into an intimate, private space created by Bà.

Until this point in African literature, the portrayal of such women was primarily presented as that of women's 'plight', that is, as victims like those appearing in the fiction written by Senegalese men. They were seen in such films as *Xala* (1974) by Sembène Ousmane, with the epitome of this figure being El Hadji's ever-patient first wife, Adja Awa Astrou. The novels by other African women writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheha and Ama Ata Aidoo also often emphasized the images of women abandoned by their husbands, maltreated by their fathers, or even, as in *The Joy of Motherhood* (1979), ultimately ignored by their own grown children. Women were represented as disempowered or abused. The African feminist voice had not yet posed the question of how to speak beyond the confines of the suffering voice, how to give an account of the fuller life in which a woman – as first a child, then a wife, a mother and a widow – could embody all the complexities of a life confronted with courage and faith, as well as one marked by despair. *So Long a Letter* makes possible the novels of Ken Bugul, Nafissatou Diallo and Catherine N'Diaye who aspired to convey new visions of the woman's experience, especially in terms of the project of defining the New African Woman within the space of a new order of modernity.

For Ramatoulaye, 'modernity' began with the colonial period. As a child she was one of the first girls to attend the French school, and for her the experience had much that was exhilarating. Her French teacher is described as having 'love' for her charges without 'patronizing' them. These included Ramatoulaye, Aissatou and their classmates, 'with our platts either standing on end or bent down, with our loose blouses, our wrappers. She knew how to

discover and appreciate our qualities' (16). Bà's judgement of the colonial school stands in radical opposition to those voiced by the anticolonial, national liberationist authors of the 1950s and 1960s who saw in the colonial educational institutions an extension of the repressive mechanisms of the colonial enterprise. For Ramatoulaye, the path chosen for the girls' training by their headmistress has not been at all fortuitous. It has accorded with the profound choices made by New Africa for the promotion of the 'black woman' (16). Thus she judges her generation to be 'the first pioneers of the promotion of African women' (15).

The New African is ostensibly the one who has opted for a modern path of development. Partly 'New Africa' is seen as independent Africa; partly 'New Africa' implies passing beyond the old traditional ways. This was the choice put by the Grand Royal to the Diallobe people in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1961), when she urges her people to make the heart-rending decision to learn the white man's ways so as to avoid remaining under his domination forever. It is the choice whose negative consequences might be seen in the eventual breakdown suffered by Samba Diallo in *Ambiguous Adventure*, with his apparent suicide at the end of his itinerary to modernism. For Kane, this passage to modernity through Europe led away from the Truth of an Islamic way of life. It is also the path of loss of integrity Sem-Bène traces in the character of Nideye in *God's Bits of Wood* (1960).

The case after case, from Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala* (1957) or Ferdinand Oyono's *Hounddog* (1956) to Jean-Marie Teno's more recent film *Afrique, je te plumerai* (1992), the loss engendered by acculturation to European ways forms the subject of an anticolonial literature. However, it is also the path to liberation that Flora Nwapa traces in her own autobiographical account, *Women Are Different* (1986), as a Nigerian girl attending a British school in the colonial period. In so much of African women's literature, as with Nafissatou Diallo's *A Dakar Childhood* (1975) or

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© In translation Mouton Bode-Thomas 1981

Introduction © Kenneth W. Harrow 2008

First published by Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines 1980

First published in the African Writers Series 1981

This edition published by Pearson Education Limited 2008

1 2 1 1 0 09 08

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 435913 52 6

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Typeset by Sara Rafferty

Cover design by Tony Richardson

Cover artwork from original by John Montgomery

Author photograph by George Hallert

Printed by Multivista Global Limited

#### Acknowledgements

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## INTRODUCTION

When *Mathanta Bàs So'Long a Letter* appeared in 1979, it was one of the first novels by a Senegalese woman in French,<sup>1</sup> and in a sense became one of the foundational texts for Francophone African women's writing. It was the first African novel to win the prestigious *Noma Award* in 1980.

Written as a semi-autobiographical account, its protagonist Ramatoulaye is a woman who came of age during the period of late colonialism, married a Senegalese nationalist and gave birth to twelve children as their country passed into independence. She faced her husband's rejection and then his death as the country experienced the passage from colony to modern nation.

Both the intimacy of its address and its turn to the epistolary mode<sup>2</sup> marked *So'Long a Letter* as a unique form of fiction writing in contemporary African women's literature. Moreover, it broke new ground as a deeply personal account of the trials that are peculiar to the Muslim Senegalese woman of today. Ramatoulaye sets out the story of her present tribulations, the past events that led up to them, and the anxieties she faces as a mother in a series of letters to her 'sister' Aissatou, who herself faced the trauma of a long-term marriage coming to an end as her husband chose to take a young woman as his second wife. Ramatoulaye and Aissatou evoke the situation of the mature, troubled woman, of those who have only each other to turn to for sustenance. As such Aissatou

<sup>1</sup> Four years earlier, Nafissatou Diallo had published her autobiography *Ma Soeur Chikhanda*. In 1976, Aminata Sow Fall had published *Le Revenant* and in 1979 *Big Biggers' Strike*.

<sup>2</sup> See Christopher Miller's brilliant analysis of the novel, and especially its unique role as an epistolary novel, in *Theories of Africans* (1990). In fact, this form, common to novels of the eighteenth century, is extremely rare in African literature.

NGŪGI WA THIONG'Ō

THE RIVER BETWEEN



HEINEMANN

**N**GUĞI WA THIONG'O was born in Limuru, Kenya, in 1938. He was educated at the Alliance High School, Kikuyu, at Makerere University, Uganda and at the University of Leeds.

His novel, *Weep Not, Child*, was published in 1964 and this was followed by *The River Between* (1965), *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Petals of Blood* (1977). *Devil on the Cross* (1980) was conceived and written during the author's one-year detention in prison, in Kenya, where he was held without trial after the performance by peasants and workers of his play *Ngaahika Nderenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*). This was his first work to be published in his own language, Gikuyu, and then translated into English and many other languages. His novel *Maitiga* was published in Gikuyu in Kenya in 1986 and translated into English for the *African Writers Series* in 1989. The author has also written collections of short stories, plays and numerous essays.

Ngugi is an active campaigner for the African language and form, and he writes, travels and lectures extensively on this theme. His work is known throughout the world and has made a powerful impact both at home and overseas.

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Registered company number: 872828

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Heinemann Publishers (Pty) Limited  
PO Box 781940, Sandton 2146, Johannesburg, South Africa

© Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1965

First published by William Heinemann Ltd, 1965  
First published in the African Writers Series in 1965

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

AFRICAN WRITERS SERIES and CARIBBEAN WRITERS SERIES

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ISBN: 978 0 435905 48 4

In *The River Between*  
the form of Gikuyu is  
used correctly for  
the people and  
language of the Kikuyu area.

Printed by Multivista Global Ltd

10 11 / 37 36