

# Africa in Theory

## Graduate Course

This course considers the influence of the African continent on the production of “Western” critical theory and surveys some of the major intellectual works produced by African scholars. In the first part of the semester, we will ask to what extent certain constructions or “ideas” of Africa appear to have influenced the central assumptions of different intellectual traditions and theoretical schools. Key topics will include: Hegel’s exclusion of the continent from the progress of history and the ways in which that assumption has been challenged by subsequent African theorists; the influence of the Algerian war upon deconstruction; and world-systems theory’s affiliations with the African continent. We will then consider works that are traditionally the domain of “African Studies,” yet offer important insights into both the study of the continent and broader theoretical debates. These include attempts to bring an understanding of “animist” philosophies to discussions of African literature and culture; the ways in which gender and sexuality have been theorized for and in African contexts; the alleged “construction” of African philosophy; and a variety of African Marxisms. The aim is to provide students with an understanding of the presence (or conspicuous absence!) of constructions of Africa in critical theory and to introduce important contributions from African Studies.

### Week 1:

V.Y. Mudimbe – *The Idea of Africa* (1994)

“Africa in Theory: A Conversation Between Jean Comaroff and Achille Mbembe” (2010)

### Week 2: Hegel, Africa, History

Hegel – Selections from *The Phenomenology of Mind* and *Lectures of the Philosophy of History*

Susan Buck-Morss – *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (2009)

M.A.R. Habib – *Hegel and Empire: From Postcolonialism to Globalism* (2017)

Michel-Rolph Trouillot – *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1997)

### Week 3: Détournements

Frantz Fanon – Selections from *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*

M.A.R. Habib – “Frantz Fanon: An African Reading of Hegel” (2017)

Babacar Camara – “The Falsity of Hegel's Theses on Africa” (2005)

Cheikh Anta Diop – *Precolonial Black Africa* (1988)

Léopold Sédar Senghor – *The Foundations of "africanité" or "Négritude" and "arabité."* (1971)

### Week 4: The “African Worldview”

Wole Soyinka – *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976)

Harry Garuba – “Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society” (2003)

### Week 5: Derrida and Algeria

Jacques Derrida – *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (1998) and selections from *Of Grammatology* (1976)

Lee Morrissey – “Derrida, Algeria, and “Structure, Sign, and Play” (1999)

Alexander Fyfe

Edward Baring – “Liberalism and the Algerian War: The Case of Jacques Derrida” (2010)  
Christopher Wise – “Saying ‘Yes’ to Africa” and “Deconstruction and the African Trace” (2009)

Week 6: African Philosophy

V.Y. Mudimbe – *The Invention of Africa* (1988)

Paulin J. Hountondji – *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (1983)

Week 7: African Marxisms

Adam Mayer – *Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria* (2016)

George M. Gugelburger (ed.) – *Marxism and African Literature* (1985)

Walter Rodney – “Marxism and African Liberation” (1975)

Week 8: World-Systems Theory’s African Connection(s)

Immanuel Wallerstein – *Africa: The Politics of Independence and Unity* (1961)

Giovanni Arrighi and John S. Saul – *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* (1973)

Samir Amin – “Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa-Origins and Contemporary Forms” (1972)

Week 9: Theorizing Gender

Oyeronke Oyewumi – *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (1997)

Ifi Amadiume – *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987)

Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (eds) – Selected essays from *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities* (1998)

Week 10: Globalization, Africa, Theory

Jean and John Comaroff – *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa* (2011)

Achille Mbembe – “Africa in Theory”