

# TH222-15 Theatre in the African Context

**22/23**

**Department**

SCAPVC - Theatre and Performance Studies

**Level**

Undergraduate Level 2

**Module leader**

Yvette Hutchison

**Credit value**

15

**Module duration**

10 weeks

**Assessment**

100% coursework

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

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## Description

### Introductory description

This module will introduce you to various forms theatre takes on the African continent. It will consider the influences on theatre (social, political and economic) in specific countries, while highlighting the diversity of cultural and linguistic contexts even within a country. It will consider points of comparison regarding approaches to form, engagement with history and issues of gender.

### Module aims

The aim in this module is to trace the diversity of theme and form of theatre in Africa in the post-colonial context. It will particularly focus on the influences on the development and changes (social, political and economic) that have affected the development of theatre in Africa. It will look at a diversity of cultural and linguistic contexts (North, West, East and Southern African), where necessary looking at plays in translation.

### Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be

covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Weekly break down

Primary Texts (advise you to buy these)

Jeyifo, Biodun (ed.) *Modern African Drama* (NY & London: Norton & Co., 2002)

Banham & Plastow (eds.) *Contemporary African Plays*. (London: Methuen, 1999)

Other texts referenced in individual texts or collections, and some readings available at

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/electronicresources/extracts/th/th222>

Week 1: Introduction to Theatre in Africa (08/01)

- Quiz, maps, orientation
- Videos of performance forms like *Masquerade of Burkina Faso/ Miracle Play*
- Issues of significance – Spirituality, language, gender, post-colonial identity
- Discussion of  
READ Kole Omotoso's "Concepts of history and theatre in Africa", Banham, 1-12, available <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/electronicresources/extracts/th/th222..>
- Frantz Fanon "On National Culture" (Jeyifo, 415-421)
- Sam Ukala 2000. Impersonation in some African ritual and festival performances. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 61:1 (Feb) 76-87.

Week 2: Arabic African theatre - Egypt (15/01)

Discuss translation, also place of Arabic culture in African context

Twefik al-Hakim (Egypt) – *Fate of a Cockroach*, 1974 (Jeyifo)

- *The Donkey Market* (in Hutchison/ Omotoso, on-intranet resources)

Week 3 – Workshop (22/01) – Form and ideological debate

Read in preparation

Mkotani Ruyenda (Tanzania) *The Contest* (in Hutchison/ Omotoso, at

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/electronicresources/extracts/th/th222>))

Layiwola, Dele. *Conceptualising African Dance Theatre*.

<http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/layiwola.pdf>, accessed 05/07/10

Week 4: Form and ideological debate (29/01)

Discuss *The Contest* Workshop and Layiwola reading

Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin (Ethiopia, 1970) *Collision of Altars* (Jeyifo)

See Biodun Jeyifo "Art and Ideology in the Plays of Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin", Jeyifo, pp. 574-577.

Week 5: Form and protest (05/02)

David Kerr "Art as tool, weapon, or shield?" (Jeyifo, 486-493)

Kateb Yacine (Algeria) *Intelligence Power* (Jeyifo) (compare donkey stories)

Andrew Whaley (Zimbabwe) *The Rise and Shine of Comrade Fiasco* (B & P)

Week 6 - Reading week (11-17/02)

Week 7: Use of History - Kenya (19/02)

Reflecting on issues of history, conflict and post-colonial identity reconstruction

Ngugi wa Thiong'o & Micere Githae Mugo 1975. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

Watene, Kenneth. 1974. *Dedan Kimathi*. (Nairobi: Transafrica Publishing, 1974)

Ngugi wa Thiong'o & Ngugi wa Mirii (Kenya) *I will Marry when I want*. (Jeyifo)

Research Mau Mau conflict, also relook at TS Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*.

Read Ngugi, on the politics of performance space, Jeyifo, 434-456.

Week 8: Use of History - Nigeria (26/02)

Wole Soyinka – Death and the King's Horseman (in Wadsworth, review year 1)

Femi Osofisan - The Chattering and the Song (Banham & Plastow)

See Soyinka's view of the role of theatre for a culture's survival, Jeyifo 421-433.

Week 9: Gender: Women's domestic role (05/03)

Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana) The dilemma of a ghost (Jeyifo)

Anowa (Banham & Plastow)

For context and further reading in relation to literature see, Caroline Rooney's Decolonising Gender (London & New York: Routledge, 2007)

Week 10: Gender and conflict (12/03)

Alemseged Tesfai (Eritrea) The Other War (Banham & Plastow)

Andiah Kisia (Kenya) Homecoming (in African Women Playwrights, ed. Kathy A. Perkins (Urbana: Uni of Illinois Press, c2009) at

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/electronicresources/extracts/th/th222>

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- By the end of this module the students should be able to articulate the role colonialism has played on the development of post-colonial theatre in Africa.
- By the end of this module the students should be able to analyse the range of forms and foci that have developed in various theatrical practices across the continent.
- By the end of this module the students should be able to critically evaluate the impact socio-political, historic and economic changes have made on the theatre-makers and audiences of the plays.
- By the end of this module the students should be able to independently undertake both primary and secondary reading and articulate research findings orally (possibly as presentational work) and in writing

## Indicative reading list

Key critical reference work

Banham, M. A History of Theatre in Africa (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Jeyifo, Biodun (ed.) Modern African Drama (NY & London: Norton & Co., 2002)

On contexts, see Banham, M. A History of Theatre in Africa (Cambridge Uni Press, 2004).

Useful secondary readings

Aidoo, Ama Ata (interview) in Cosmo Pieterse, African Writers Talking (New York: Africana Publishing, 1972).

Appiah, A. In my Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture. (New York/ Oxford: OUP, 1992)

Ashcroft, B. Griffiths, G. Tiffin, H. (eds) The Empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures. (London: Routledge, 1989)

Banham, M. & Wake, C. African Theatre Today (London: Pitman Publishing, 1976)

Banham, Martin, Gibbs, James, Osofisan, Femi. *African Theatre: Playwrights & Politics*. (Oxford: James Currey, 1999)

Barber, K. Collins, J. Ricard, A. *West African Popular Theatre*. (Oxford: James Currey, 1997)

Boon, R. & Plastow, J. *Theatre Matters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

Breitinger, E. (ed.) *Theatre and Performance in Africa*. (Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies 31, 1998)

Connell, R.W. *Hegemonic Masculinity - Rethinking the Concept*. *Gender & Society*, (Dec. 2005), 19:6, 829-859.

Connell, R.W. *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995)

Conteh-Morgan, J. *Theatre and Drama in Francophone Africa* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994)

Conteh-Morgan, John & Olaniyan, Tejumola *African Drama and Performance* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana Uni Press, 2004)

Dunton, C. *Make Man Talk True: Nigerian drama in English since 1970*. (London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1992)

Elder, Arlene. 'Ama Ata Aidoo and the Oral Tradition: A paradox of form and substance', in *African Literature Today*. Vol. 15, (ed.) E.D. Jones (London: Hans Zell, 1987)

Etherton, M. *The Development of African Drama*. (New York: Africana, 1982)

Fanon, F. *Black Skin, White Masks*. (Trans.) C.L. Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986)

Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Preface by JP Sartre. New York: Grove Press, 1963)

Galle, E. Wole Soyinka and ritual drama. *Commonwealth*, 7:1 (1984), 20-28.

Gibbs, J. Wole Soyinka. (Houndmills: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1986)

Gunner, L. (ed.) *Politics and performance: Theatre, Poetry and Song*. (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994)

Jeyifo, B. 'Tragedy, History and Ideology: Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman and Ebrahim Hussein's Kinjeketile', in *Marxism and African Literature*. G.M. Gugelberger (ed.), 94-109. London: James Currey Ltd., 1985)

Kanneh, Kadiatu. *African Identities* (London & NY: Routledge, 1998)

Kerr, D. *African Popular Theatre* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1995)

Lindfors, B. (ed) *Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Literatures* (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1980)

Matzke, Christine. 'Trying to find the stepping-stones: Writing Tigre and Bilen dancing in Eritrea', in Hutchison, Y. & Breitinger, E. *History and Theatre in Africa*. Bayreuth African Studies 50, 1999) 73-101.

Mda, Zakes *When People Play People: Development Communication Through Theatre*. (London: Zed Books)

Morell, Robert (ed.), *Changing Men in Southern Africa (Global Masculinities)* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press; London & New York: Zed Books, 2001)

Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*. (London: James Currey, 1988)

Ngugi wa Thiong'o *Decolonising the Mind*. London: James Currey, 1986)

Ngugi wa Thiong'o *Moving the Centre*. (London: James Currey, 1993)

Olaniyan, T. *Scars of Conquest/ Masks of Resistance - the Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American, and Caribbean drama*. (NY/Oxford: OUP, 1995)

Owomoyela, O. (ed.) *A History of Twentieth Century African Literatures*. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993)

Plastow, Jane. *African Theatre and Politics: the Evolution of theatre in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe*. (Rodopi, 1996)

Richards, S.L. *Ancient Songs Set Ablaze: The Theatre of Femi Osofisan*. Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1996)

Schipper, M. *Theatre and Society in Africa*. (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1982)

Soyinka, W. *Myth, literature and the African World*. (London/ New York: Cambridge Uni Press, 1976)

Tamale, Sylvia, ed. *African Sexualities – A Reader* (Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi, Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 2011)

#### Journals

Research in African Literatures have many relevant articles.  
African Theatre Series.

### **Research element**

Each session requires students to contextualise the plays being engaged in their specific African national context - including evaluating the place of religion, language, socio-political and historic background.

it also requires exploring and researching specific embodied performance forms.

### **Interdisciplinary**

It requires engaging political, historic and gendered research.

### **International**

This module considers plays from across the African continent - Egypt, Nigeria, Cameroon, Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, etc.

### **Subject specific skills**

A knowledge of specific of African Theatre form and how they differ from Western theatre forms.  
A critical awareness of the role colonialism has played on the development of post-colonial theatre in Africa.

Some experience of the range of forms and foci that have developed in various theatrical practices across the continent.

A critically awareness of the impact socio-political, historic and economic changes can make on theatre and audiences of plays.

Specific approaches to gender in Africa.

### **Transferable skills**

Research, practical skills of communication, wider intercultural skills as students learn to compare social values, communication forms and negotiate in so different histories and identities.

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## **Study**

## Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	9 sessions of 2 hours (26%)
Tutorials	2 sessions of 1 hour (3%)
Private study	50 hours (71%)
Total	70 hours

## Private study description

Preparation for class - reading plays, theoretical material and watching videos of performances.

## Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

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## Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

## Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
Essay	50%	40 hours
Students are invited to choose from a list of topics that explore specific issues around theatre practiced across the continent. From both a theoretical and practical perspective it asks students to critically discuss these from a specific angle, using one or two examples, and include a full bibliography. They may also negotiate a specific, personally defined topic with me as an alternative.		
Performance presentation	50%	40 hours
Students are asked to demonstrate they understand the choice of form for affect with reference to specific material they have learned about on this module and demonstrate this practically.		

## Feedback on assessment

Written for the essay, with the option of oral feedback

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## Availability

## Courses

This module is Core for:

- Year 2 of UTHA-W422 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UTHA-QW34 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies
- UFRA-R1W4 Undergraduate French with Theatre Studies
  - Year 2 of R1W4 French with Theatre Studies
  - Year 2 of R1W4 French with Theatre Studies
- UTHA-W421 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies
  - Year 2 of W421 Theatre and Performance Studies
  - Year 2 of W421 Theatre and Performance Studies