

# **Medicine, Religion and Politics in Africa and the African Diaspora**

**21A.460J/SP.620J  
T 1-4 PM  
Room 16-267B  
Spring 2008**

**Professor Erica James**

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**Office hours: Wednesdays 12:30-1:30 and by appointment**

## **Course Description**

Since the colonial period, the contact between Africans and Europeans has challenged the philosophies, moralities, and conceptions of the body – as well as ideas of illness, religion, and healing – in each context. This subject will evaluate how philosophies and religious practices within the traditions of Africa and the African Diaspora (the Afro-Atlantic) offer moral frames for experience that challenge western models of embodiment. The course will analyze the ideas of race, gender, sex, and rationality that have permeated bio-medical and psychological conceptions of the mind and body. We will also explore some of the ways these understandings have also shaped western bio-medical notions of morality and deviance. We will analyze how the constructions of race, gender, and sexuality continue to be problematic in contemporary medical diagnosis, treatment, and medical research efforts in ways that require further analysis. While acknowledging its contributions to public health, we will debate the historical role of cosmopolitan medicine as an instrument of colonial power, state dominance, or social control within the Afro-Atlantic through the study of a variety of ethnographic and contemporary clinical contexts.

## **Course Structure and Requirements**

The course will be run primarily as a seminar. There will be a period of lecture each week, followed by discussion of the readings for each ethnographic context under review. Students must come to class prepared, as class attendance and participation in discussion contributes a significant amount toward the final grade (25 percent). Each student should come with two or three written questions for discussion based on that week's reading that will be collected at the beginning of class. In addition to this, each student will give a presentation of one of the week's readings during the course of the semester (10 percent of the grade). Written assignments include three, double-spaced, 2-page reflection papers (15 percent), one 5-7 page paper (worth 20 percent of the final grade), and one 8-10 page paper (worth 30 percent of the grade). All course readings will be available at the Hayden Humanities Library or on the Stellar website. Required books are listed below.

## **Required Texts:**

Simon Bockie, *Death and the Invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief*

Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed*  
Johannes Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa*  
Paul Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame*  
Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*  
Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo*  
Lynette A. Jackson, *Surfacing Up: Psychiatry and Social Order in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1908-1968*  
Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders, *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*

**Films:**

*Congo: White King, Red Rubber, Black Death* (Peter Bate, 90 minutes)  
*The Life and Times of Sara Baartman – The Hottentot Venus*, by Zola Maseko (1998, 53 minutes)  
*Miss Evers' Boys*, Joseph Sargent (1997, 118 minutes)  
*The Nun's Story*, Fred Zinnemann (1959, 149 minutes)  
*Of Men and Gods*, Anne Lescot and Laurence Magloire, (2002, 52 minutes)  
*The Return of Sara Baartman*, Zola Maseko (2003, 55 minutes)  
*Strange Beliefs: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard*, Film for the Humanities and Sciences, Inc. (1990, 52 minutes)

**Part One: The Colonial Imaginary and Disciplinary Practices**

**Section One: Introduction to Biopolitics**

February 5:

Course overview and introduction

Recommended reading:

Michel Foucault, "The Birth of Biopolitics," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 1, pp. 73-79.

Michel Foucault, "The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, pp. 166-182.

**Section Two: The Fetish and the Colonial Imaginary**

February 12:

William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish," I, *Res* 9 (Spring 1985): 5-17.

Erica James, "Bio-Politics and the Struggle for Recognition," Ch. 2 of *The Violence of Misery: "Insecurity" in Haiti in the "Democratic" Era* (54 double-spaced pages).

Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000): 821-865.

Skim William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish," II, *Res* 13 (Spring 1987): 23-45, and III a, *Res* 16 (Autumn 1988): 105-123.

## No class February 19: Monday Schedule

### Section Three: Ecstasy and the Shock of Culture Contact

February 26:

Johannes Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa*, chapters 3-5, pp. 52-127, and chapters 8-9, pp. 180-239.

*Congo: White King, Red Rubber, Black Death* (Peter Bate, 90 minutes).

**Reflection Paper #1 Due**

### Section Four: Historical Ideologies of Sexuality, Race, and Madness

March 4:

Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*, chapters, 3-5, pp. 15-35, and 76-149.

Roland Littlewood and Maurice Lipsedge, *Aliens and Alienists: Ethnic Minorities and Psychiatry*, chapter. 2, "Medicine and Racism," pp. 26-60.

*The Life and Times of Sara Baartman – The Hottentot Venus*, by Zola Maseko (1998, 53 minutes)

## Part Two: "Colonial" Contexts of Medicine, Religion, and Politics

### Section Five: Violence, Colonial Medicine, and the Representation of Disease

March 11:

Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: Of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo*, chapters 5 and 6, pp. 196-280.

*The Nun's Story*, Fred Zinnemann (1959, 149 minutes).

**Paper #1 Due**

### Section Six: Colonial Psychiatry in Zimbabwe

March 18:

Lynette A. Jackson, *Surfacing Up: Psychiatry and Social Order in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1908-1968*.

*Strange Beliefs: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard*, Film for the Humanities and Sciences, Inc. (1990, 52 minutes).

## Spring break March 24-28

### Section Seven: Witchcraft, Sorcery, and Anti-Colonial Logic

April 1:

Simon Bockie, *Death and the Invisible Powers: The World of Kongo Belief*.

Skim E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, pp. 1-119.

**Reflection Paper #2 Due**

## **Section Eight: Cosmopolitan Medicine, Race, Sex, and Disease**

April 8:

James Jones, "The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment: 'A Moral Astigmatism,'" in *The "Racial" Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future*, pp. 275-286.

Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*, chapter 2, "The Dark Side of Birth Control," pp. 56-103.

Allan M. Brandt, "Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment," in *Tuskegee's Truths: Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study*, edited by Susan M. Reverby, pp. 15-33.

Charles S. Johnson, "The Shadow of the Plantation: Survival," in *Tuskegee's Truths: Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study*, edited by Susan M. Reverby, pp. 41-58.

Thomas Parran, "Shadow on the Land: Syphilis, the White Man's Burden," in *Tuskegee's Truths: Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study*, edited by Susan M. Reverby, pp. 59-69.  
*Miss Evers' Boys*, Joseph Sargent (1997, 118 minutes)

## **Section Nine: Power, Politics, and AIDS**

April 15:

Paul Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame*, pp. 1-141, 191-264.

*Of Men and Gods*, Anne Lescot and Laurence Magloire, (2002, 52 minutes)

**No Class April 22, Patriots Day Vacation**

## **Part Three: "Postcolonial" Medicine, Religion, and Politics**

### **Section Ten: Witchcraft, Sorcery, and Postcolonial Insecurity**

April 29:

Adam Ashforth, *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa*  
*The Return of Sara Baartman*, Zola Maseko (2003, 55 minutes).

**Reflection Paper #3**

### **Section Eleven: Power, Modernity, and Occult Economies**

May 6:

*Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, Edited by Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders, chapters 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, and 11.

### **Section Twelve: Fictions of Race, Gender, and Illness**

May 13:

Octavia E. Butler, *Wild Seed*

**Final Papers Due**