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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

Literature and Race

Course Code: ENG5EJ303(2) • Module 2 Notes

Unit 5: Africa: "If You Want to Know Me" – Noémia de Sousa

Noémia de Sousa and the Poetics of Mozambican Liberation

Noémia de Sousa (1926–2002), widely revered as the "Mother of Mozambican Poetry," was a pioneering Lusophone African writer whose fiery verse laid the intellectual and spiritual foundations for Mozambique's national liberation struggle (FRELIMO) against Portuguese colonial fascism. Writing under the pseudonym *Vera Micaia* during the late 1940s and 1950s, de Sousa courageously defied the brutal surveillance of the Portuguese secret police (PIDE), aligning her poetics with the Pan-African Négritude movement launched by Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor.

Somatic Reclamation and Anti-Colonial Resistance

In her iconic poem "If You Want to Know Me" (*Se me quiseres conhecer*), de Sousa crafts an uncompromising manifesto of African selfhood. Rejecting European colonial exoticism that viewed the African woman through patronizing anthropological gazes, de Sousa directs the reader to examine her body as a living archive of colonial atrocity and collective survival: her skin is made of dark wood, her hair is coarse and resilient like forest shrubs, and her eyes carry the accumulated agony of centuries of transatlantic slavery, forced labor in the cotton fields (*Chibalo*), and the starvation of miners in the Witwatersrand. The poem transforms suffering into militant dignity: the African woman is not a broken victim, but an untamable volcanic spirit whose rising consciousness will inevitably shatter the colonial oppressor.

Unit 6: Canada: "Resistance" – Connie Fife

Connie Fife and First Nations Indigenous Poetics

Connie Fife (1961–2017) was an acclaimed Cree (First Nations) poet, activist, and editor who dedicated her literary life to articulating the enduring sovereignty, spiritual resilience, and resistance of North American indigenous peoples. Fife's poetry confronts the traumatic legacy of Canadian settler colonialism, specifically the catastrophic cultural genocide perpetrated through the Canadian Indian residential school system, compulsory land expropriation, and systemic state erasure.

The Living Continuum of Indigenous Survivance

In "Resistance," Fife articulates what indigenous scholar Gerald Vizenor terms "survivance"—an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and victimry. The poem rejects the colonial myth of the "vanishing Indian," boldly affirming that every drum beat, sacred chant, prayer bundle, and living child constitutes an act of revolutionary resistance. Fife's verse pulsates with terrestrial power: resistance is encoded in the earth, the rivers, the wind, and the red blood flowing through indigenous veins. Settler colonial laws and barbed-wire fences cannot extinguish an ancient cosmological relationship with Turtle Island that predates European arrival by millennia.

Unit 7: Australia: "A Song of Hope" – Oodgeroo Noonuccal

Oodgeroo Noonuccal and the Aboriginal Civil Rights Movement

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker, 1920–1993) of the Noonuccal people of Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) was the historic pioneer of Australian Aboriginal published literature. Her landmark 1964 poetry collection *We Are Going* broke white Australian cultural hegemony, giving unprecedented national and

global resonance to the indigenous struggle against colonial dispossession, racial apartheid, and the horrors of the Stolen Generations.

From Mourning to Militant Optimism: A Song of Hope

In "A Song of Hope," Noonuccal pivots from the tragic elegies of colonial devastation toward a luminous, unyielding vision of indigenous emancipation. Addressed directly to her "dark brothers" and the Aboriginal nation, the poem acknowledges the long, bloodstained night of colonial terror, chains, flogging, and racial humiliation under the brutal White Australia Policy. However, Noonuccal proclaims that the dawn of justice is arriving: "Look up, my people, / The dawn is breaking, / The world is waking / To a new day falling." The poem is an anthem of cultural survival, demanding equal civil rights, land sovereignty, and human dignity while asserting that indigenous Australians will never be erased.

Unit 8: UK: "The Race Industry" – Benjamin Zephaniah

Benjamin Zephaniah and the Dub Poetry Revolution

Benjamin Zephaniah (1958–2023) was a titan of British dub poetry, Rastafari culture, and political activism. Born in Birmingham to Barbadian and Jamaican immigrant parents of the Windrush generation, Zephaniah revolutionized British literature by bringing the oral cadence, heavy basslines, and syncopated rhythms of Jamaican reggae into written verse. His performative poetry directly confronted institutional police violence, racial profiling (Sus laws), and Thatcherite racism in inner-city Britain.

Deconstructing the Neoliberal Diversity Machine

In the scathing satirical poem "The Race Industry," Zephaniah directs his prophetic rage against the professionalization, bureaucratization, and commodification of anti-racism in contemporary Britain. He exposes how authentic grassroots anti-racist struggle has been hijacked by a self-serving "race relations industry"—a lucrative network of government consultants, corporate HR diversity officers, token committees, and academic careerists who thrive off the continued existence of racism while doing nothing to alter material inequality. Zephaniah insists that genuine racial justice cannot be achieved through corporate platitudes and diversity banquets; it requires dismantling capitalist exploitation and fighting on the streets alongside marginalized working-class youth.

Unit 9: Chinese American: "Immigrant Blues" – Li-Young Lee

Li-Young Lee and the Poetics of Diasporic Memory

Li-Young Lee (born 1957 in Jakarta to exiled aristocratic Chinese parents), who immigrated to the United States after surviving anti-Chinese pogroms in Indonesia, is one of the most haunting lyrical voices in contemporary American poetry. His verse is steeped in the diasporic condition: intergenerational trauma, exile, the loss of mother tongues, and the profound melancholia of negotiating immigrant identity within a racially foreign society.

Syntax, Language Loss, and the Trauma of Acculturation

In "Immigrant Blues," Lee explores the intimate psychic wounds of immigration through the linguistic metaphor of grammar and vocabulary. The speaker recalls his father teaching him English grammar rules—subject, verb, object—which simultaneously enacted the painful, violent displacement of the ancestral tongue. Language acquisition is experienced not as simple empowerment, but as an agonizing bereavement where names for ancestral foods, landscapes, and affections cannot be translated into American idioms. Lee

captures the "immigrant blues"—the enduring condition of living between two worlds, forever alien to the homeland left behind and perpetually marked as a racialized outsider in the adopted nation.

Unit 10: Afro-American: "Remember Me" – Alice Walker

Alice Walker and Womanist Spiritual Reclamation

Alice Walker (born 1944), Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Color Purple* and creator of the term "Womanism" (a black feminist perspective committed to the survival and wholeness of entire peoples, male and female), crafts poetry of profound ancestral grounding. In "Remember Me," Walker addresses the deep historical amnesia that threatens to bury the labor, suffering, and creative brilliance of African American women who lived and died under chattel slavery, sharecropping, and domestic servitude.

The Living Ancestral Voice and Somatic Resurrection

Walker's poem functions as an incantatory prayer and a solemn pledge of memory. The speaker demands to be remembered not as a passive victim of white racial terrorism, but as a resilient creator who planted flowers in tin cans beside slave shacks, who wove quilts of incandescent geometric beauty from discarded rags, and who passed down survival wisdom through spiritual hymns. To "remember" is to re-member: to physically piece back together the dismembered black female body across historical time, affirming that the ancestral spirit remains an eternal, guiding light for future generations of racial struggle.

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 1)

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Miranda Fricker's concept of *epistemic injustice* illuminates how racialized subjects are systematically denied credibility as knowers (testimonial injustice) and deprived of the interpretive conceptual resources needed to make their social experiences understood by dominant society (hermeneutical injustice). Literature and visual media produced by racialized writers and filmmakers function as crucial counter-narratives (or "storytelling as legal methodology") that shatter the epistemological monopoly of white supremacist metanarratives, bearing witness to subaltern survival and collective defiance.

2. Global Circuits of Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Dispossession, and Anti-Blackness

Connecting the poetic, fictional, and cinematic texts across this course reveals the interconnected global architecture of modern racial capitalism, as theorized by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism*. From the brutal slave plantations of the Americas and the diamond mines of Southern Africa to the violent dispossessions of Australian Aborigines and Canadian First Nations, the global capitalist economy was historically built upon racialized dispossession, forced labor, and racial genocide.

Achille Mbembe's concept of *necropolitics*—the sovereign capacity to dictate who matters and who is disposable, who may live and who must die—finds tragic realization in contemporary police killings of black bodies like Oscar Grant, the environmental degradation of indigenous tribal territories, and the carceral state's hyper-incarceration of racial minorities. By examining how diverse racialized communities—Black, Indigenous, Asian, and Hispanic—articulate their lived realities, literature emerges as a primary site of internationalist solidarity, forging coalitions of resistance against global imperial hegemony.

3. Aesthetic De-Alienation and the Reclamation of Radical Futurity

Ultimately, the literature of race does not merely record historical victimhood and trauma; its most profound achievement resides in the imaginative reclamation of radical human freedom and creative sovereignty. Through what Frantz Fanon termed the "disalienation" of the colonized consciousness, these writers, poets, and filmmakers deconstruct internalized colonial shame and assert the radiant beauty, intellectual complexity, and spiritual resilience of their cultures.

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 2)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 3)

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2. Global Circuits of Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Dispossession, and Anti-Blackness

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 4)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 5)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 6)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 7)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Critical Race Theory & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 8)

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