Readings for Week 7, on Postcolonial Women writing Women.

1. Read the presecribed readings:

Theory: Joyce Chadya, ‘Mother Politics. Anti-colonial Nationalism and the Woman Question in Africa’

Fiction:

Yvonne Vera, “Independence Day”

Grace Ogot, “The Middle Door”

Lesley Arimah, “Skinned”

Poetry:

Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, “Other forms of slaughter”

Stella P. Chipasula, “I’m My Own Mother, Now”

Naana Banyiwa Horne, “A Note to my Liberal Feminist Sister (1)

Watch this short video interviewing Lesley Nneka Arimah (discussing her short story collection, rather than this Caine Prize winning short story—but the interview is still useful in giving insight and context):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPEq3rjkBfQ>

Read this coverage of ‘Skinned’ on its award of the Caine Prize:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48920395>

To think about, as you read:

--the representation of postcolonial political independence, nation-building, and national culture. Yvonne Vera’s short story focuses on the historical moment when colonial Southern Rhodesia becomes independent Zimbabwe. What kind of commentary on independence does the story provide? Grace Ogot’s short story makes postcolonial independence a significant part of the social-historical background; characters comment on it in ways that merit unpacking.

Would you say that these two short stories present independence, and/or nationalism critically? Is there any overlap between Fanon’s account of independence as a political event, and as an expression of consciousness, in ‘The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness’, and the stance that these stories take towards the phenomena? Is there any overlap between Joyce Chadya’s critique of African nationalism, and these stories and poems? What function, if any, does national independence have in Arimah’s story?

--The relationship between gender inequality and socio-economic inequality, in the three stories and in the poetry. Do the stories suggest that class privilege confers material, social freedom from patriarchy, for women? Or do the stories suggest that class divisions operate more as a psychological boundary that obscures women’s recognition of their shared condition of patriarchal oppression?

 By the way, the ‘osu’ caste or class, which is featured in Arimah’s story, is a real social category in part of contemporary Nigeria. See Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s article for further info: https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-descendants-of-slaves-in-nigeria-fight-for-equality?utm\_source=onsite-share&utm\_medium=email&utm\_campaign=onsite-share&utm\_brand=the-new-yorker

--What role, if any, do the stories, and the poems, give to motherhood and reproductive labor (figurative or literal)?—think back to week 3’s readings (theory and literature) and the ways in which motherhood is explored in those texts, and compare to these. Would you say that in this week’s readings, it is sexuality, rather than maternity, that is the dominant factor in women’s gendered experience? Is it marriage?

--Think about the representation, and role, of public and private physical spaces in the stories—rooms, train compartments, streets, etc. Think back to the representation of domestic space in *The Convert*. Are there similarities? Is there significance in the fact that Arimah makes Ejem a trained architect?

--Think about the different literary styles and techniques deployed by the three short stories. Ogot and Vera take a broadly ‘realist’ approach. Arimah’s story is speculative, rather than realist, in approach, taking elements from contemporary life and developing them as part of an imaginary future. What are the different effects produced by these different approaches to storytelling? How reliable is the first-person narrator of Grace Ogot’s story? Would you describe all three stories as satirical?

--Would you describe these literary texts as examples of STIWANISM? Of Awa Thiam’s revolutionary African feminism?

1. Discussion Post prompt:

Write 300 or more words on any of the above reading pointers.