Postcolonial African Cities

Development and Citizenship in the Era of Globalization

Gallatin School of Individualized Study
New York University

Professor: Rosalind Fredericks
Course: K20.1634
Office: Room 618, 1 Washington Place
Semester: Spring 2011
Office Hours: W 2:00 – 4:00pm
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Location: Silver Center, Room 500

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The African metropolis represents one of the most important and challenging spaces of our time. Though common representations often presume the continued domination of the rural sphere, Africa is host to the fastest rates of urban growth in the world. The continent is quickly becoming urban, with massive implications for African economies, societies, and politics. In contrast with much of the rest of the world, urbanization in Africa is driven not by economic growth, but, rather, is taking place amidst widespread economic stagnation and poverty, and, moreover, without conventional urban planning. African urban economies are often centered, for the most part, in the so-called informal sector, raising key questions for how we understand livelihood strategies and development prospects. Diverse trajectories of urbanization also signal profound transformations under way in African social structures, cultural and religious identities, as well as political systems. This course considers a broad survey of contemporary themes in African urbanism in an effort to grapple with the contours and implications of those transformations.

Insight on African cities has driven some of the most innovative and provocative recent scholarly debates considering development, the nature of citizenship, and the postcolonial urban condition. This course draws on this burgeoning literature on African cities and rejects...
conventional representations of African cities as chaotic, decaying, or “off the map” of global interconnection. Instead, it emphasizes the terms of global connection and explores the dynamic ways that African cities actually work. A key focus will be on the emergent expressions of citizenship through which urban Africans enact, understand, and occupy their cities.

Though the course will focus mainly on the contemporary era, our explorations will consider African cities in historical perspective. We will begin with a brief history of urbanism on the continent to lay the groundwork for an examination of colonial legacies and the strategic role that African cities have played in globalization and empire, past and present. This will help us to locate urban Africans in today’s most recent era of globalization. Then, considering a wide-range of contexts across the continent (but mainly of sub-Saharan Africa) from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, we will delve into some cross-cutting contemporary themes in the study of African cities related to: infrastructure and planning, economies and livelihoods, and politics and identities—including contestations around religion, generation, and gender. Insights gained will be used to reflect on notions of the city, citizenship, and international development. The specific goals of the seminar are:

- To analyze and challenge conventional representations of African cities.
- To gain a broad understanding of the central debates in the study of African cities, grappling with the important stakes and implications held by different perspectives.
- To gain an understanding of the diverse colonial histories of African cities and reflect on how these histories have shaped present day dynamics.
- To survey the broad contours of different trajectories of urbanization, mainly across sub-Saharan Africa, and the different patterns of social, economic, and political transformation specific cities are undergoing in the era of globalization.
- To develop a deep understanding of a key “transformation” in one particular African city you are especially interested in.

**REQUIREMENTS**

- **Class attendance and participation.** Students are expected to read all assigned materials, attend all classes, and participate actively in discussions. If you are unable to attend class, you must let me know and come to my office hours that week. In the case that you miss a film screened in class, you must view the film in your own time. You will only be allowed one unexcused absence during the semester without penalty. Consistent lateness will be penalized as well.

- **Response papers.** Students are required to write a one page (max.) weekly response paper examining a selection or theme from the readings assigned for a total of 10 weeks, to be posted on Blackboard by 8pm on the Sunday evening before class. These responses are not meant as summaries of the readings, but, rather, as analysis of the way the readings relate to each other and the questions they pose for the larger themes raised in the class. Though individual responses will not be graded per se, the quality of the analysis and writing will be taken into account in the final assessment.

- **Representing African cities short paper.** Write a 3-5 page paper (double-spaced) using the Mbembe/Nuttall vs. Watts debate in Week 2 to reflect on the theme taken up in
Week 3, 4, or 5. In other words, read the question of colonial legacies, informal economies, or land-use planning through the lens of the theoretical debate outlined in Week 2 regarding how African cities should be understood and represented in general. In what ways would the viewpoints represented by Mbembe and Watts lend themselves to different insights and prescriptions towards the thematic discussion? Due March 4th.

- **Film discussion short paper.** View a film or documentary outside of class pertaining to one of the class themes and write a 3-5 page paper (double-spaced) discussing the film, as it relates to the week’s theme and larger questions in the class. You may chose the film and topic of your choice, but the film must be approved by me. It may be taken from the list of films associated with the class. The paper should analyze the perspective of the film—its approach, intended audience—and the implications of that message in relation to the week’s readings. Due April 22nd.

- **Final paper.** A final 20–25 page paper (double-spaced) due at the end of the semester. Based on primary and secondary source materials, the paper should explore themes and specific regional trajectories with reference to broader historical contexts and comparative frameworks and theories drawn from assigned and additional readings. A paper proposal (10%) will be due in the first half of the semester. *Late policy:* Unless you have received an extension from me (only granted for serious/medical issues), lateness will be penalized as follows: each day that your paper is late, your grade will drop ½ of a grade point (e.g. from a B+ to a B). You are required to inform me if the paper is going to be more than two days late. I will only consider incompletes in extenuating circumstances and with prior agreement on the date the paper will be due. Due May 12th.

**Course Grades:**
- Attendance/Participation: 15%
- Weekly response papers: 15%
- Representing African cities paper: 15%
- Film discussion paper: 15%
- Final Paper: 40%

**OFFICE HOURS and CONTACT**

I will hold office hours on Wednesday afternoons from 2–4pm in my office. These will be either on a first come, first serve, or there will be a sign-up sheet on my door.

Email: I am best reached by email at rcf2@nyu.edu. Although I do encourage you to stay in touch with issues of concern, I also urge you to be considerate with your emails. I will do my best to reply within 24 hours.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

In this class, we will be analyzing the thoughts, arguments, and evidence of others in an effort to develop our own ideas. Plagiarism—or the presentation of someone else’s ideas, arguments, or evidence without attribution or acknowledgement—of materials from inside and outside of class is strictly prohibited and will be punished appropriately.
READINGS and FILMS

Required readings for the course are listed in the weekly syllabus. Background readings are also listed, if you desire to do further research. All readings are either available through the library’s electronic resources (with a link on Blackboard), in the library’s reserves, or at the NYU Bookstore. At the Bookstore, you can purchase the Coursepack, which has most of the readings not available electronically, and the only required book for the course, listed below:


In addition to the Coursepack and Iliffe manuscript, the following key reference texts are on reserve at the library:


For some of the weekly meetings, we will supplement the written texts with relevant films and documentaries. The following is a list of films that may be screened in class or outside of class for your film discussion paper. They are on reserve at the library and listed on the syllabus for the week in which they are most pertinent.

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION (January 24)


WEEK 2: REPRESENTING AFRICAN CITIES (January 31)


Additional Reading:


WEEK 3: COLONIAL LEGACIES: Space, Labor, and the Household (February 7)


Films: Contras City, Djibril Diop Mambéty, 1968 (25 mins)
Borom Sarret, Ousmane Sembene, 1966 (20 mins)

Additional Reading:

WEEK 4: POSTCOLONIAL URBAN ECONOMIES and LABOR (February 14)


Additional Reading:


**WEEK 5: CLAIMING URBAN SPACE: Planning, Land Rights, and Housing (February 28)**


**Film:** Lagos/Koolhaas. Brooklyn, NY: First Run/Icarus Film, 2003.

Additional Reading:


WEEK 6: CONTEMPORARY ETHNIC POLITICS (March 7)

Guest lecture with Etienne Smith, Research Scholar, Committee on Global Thought, Columbia University.


Additional Reading:


WEEK 7: NEOLIBERALISM, URBAN SERVICES, and PARTICIPATION (March 21)


Additional Reading:


Gaye, Malick. 1996. Entrepreneurial Cities. Dakar: ENDA.


**WEEK 8: DISPOSABLE CITIES? GARBAGE & the URBAN ENVIRONMENT (Mar. 28)**


**Film:** Garbage Dreams, New York: Iskander Films, Inc; Cinema Guild, 2009

**Additional Reading:**


WEEK 9: RELIGION and WITCHCRAFT (April 4)


Additional Reading:


WEEK 10: GENDER (April 11)


Fuest, Veronika. 2008. “This is The Time to Get in Front’: Changing Roles and Opportunities for Women in Liberia.” *African Affairs* 107/427, 201–224. (Online)

Film: *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, Sausalito, CA: Distributed by Roco Films Educational, 2008

**Additional Reading:**


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**WEEK 11: SEX and HIV/AIDS (April 18)**

Iliffe, John. 2006. *The African AIDS Epidemic: A History* (Chapters 1, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14) (Text)


Film: *State of Denial*, San Francisco: California Newsreel, 2003

**Additional Readings:**


**WEEK 12: YOUTH and URBAN CULTURE: Hip Hop, Violence, & Democracy (April 25)**


**Additional Reading:**


**WEEK 13: MIGRATION and BELONGING (May 2)**


**Additional Readings**


[Please note: you are required to attend some part of the Art of Citizenship Conference at Columbia University, May 6–7, in Wood Auditorium, Avery Hall.]

WEEK 14: WRAP-UP (May 9)