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 that 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. It begins 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 negotiations 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. You 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. You are required to write a one page (max.) weekly response paper examining a selection or theme from the readings assigned for a total of 5 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 eachother 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 participation assessment.
Writing Assignments

- **Colonial Legacies short paper.** Write a 3-5 page paper (double-spaced) exploring the legacies of colonialism for contemporary African cities. Though you should give an overview of the overall legacies, you should draw from the week’s readings (assigned and additional) to zero in on a couple of key historical residues for contemporary urbanism. You should draw examples from specific cities and may focus on a city or country of your choice. *Due: Friday, February 24th.*

- **Representing African Cities short paper.** Compare and contrast two viewpoints regarding how African cities should be understood and represented from the texts encountered in Weeks 1 and 2, to reflect on the example of Lagos, Nigeria (Week 5). For instance, in what ways would the viewpoints represented by Mbembe/Nuttall and Watts lend themselves to different insights and policy prescriptions with regard to planning and informality in Lagos? Or, how do the representations provided by Robert Kaplan and Matthew Gandy differ in representing Lagos (and the West African city in general) and with what stakes? How does Rem Koolhaas’ reading of Lagos differ from that of Fourchard and how does this resonate with the theoretical debates? Length: 3-5 pages (double-spaced). *Due: Friday, March 23rd.*

- **Senegalese Elections short paper.** Drawing on the readings for Week 4, the two panel discussions on the elections you are required to attend (at Columbia in February and NYU in March), the film *Democracy in Dakar,* and outside research including newspaper coverage, analyze the connections between youth, hip hop, and the elections of 2012 in Senegal. Length: 3-5 pages (double-spaced). *Due: Friday, April 20th.*

- **Final paper.** Details TBA. *Due: Monday, May 7th.*

*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.

*Course Grades:*
- Attendance/Participation/Response Papers 25%
- Short Papers 45%
- Final Paper: 30%

*OFFICE HOURS and CONTACT*

I will hold office hours on Thursday mornings from 9:30-12:30 in my office. Normally, 9:30-11:30 will be on a first come, first serve basis and 11:30-12:30 will be by appointment only. Please email to schedule a meeting if you are unable to attend office hours.

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

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

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 or in the library’s reserves. Additionally, the following key reference texts are on reserve at the library:

- Murray, Martin and Myers, Garth (eds.) 2006. Cities in Contemporary Africa. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (Online)

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

• *Democracy in Dakar*, Holderness, NH: Sol Productions, 2007. (DVD 18260)
• *Clouds Over Conakry (Il va pleuvoir sur Conakry)*, 2008.
• *My Mother Built this House*, Bullfrog Films, 2002.
• *Sweet Crude*, 2007. (DVD 21492)
• *Enjoy Poverty* (Renzo Martens), 2008.
• *Good Fortune*, 2010. (DVD 18475)
Postcolonial African Cities
Space, Identity, and Citizenship in Contemporary Africa

COURSE SYLLABUS

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION
(January 23)


WEEK 2: REPRESENTING AFRICAN CITIES
(January 30)


WEEK 3: COLONIAL LEGACIES: Space, Labor, and the Household
(February 6)


Additional Reading:


**Topics in Postcolonial African Urbanism**

**WEEK 4: YOUTH, HIP HOP, and DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS (Dakar) (February 13)**

*In place of the usual class, we will attend the event at Columbia University on the Senegalese elections of 2012, including a panel discussion from 4-6pm and a film screening of Democracy in Dakar from 6:30 to 8pm, in Room 1501, the International Affairs Building. You must come to the session having read the following articles:*


**Film:** *Democracy in Dakar,* Holderness, NH: Sol Productions, 2007.

**Additional Reading:**


Moulard-Kouka, Sophie. 2009. *Le Rap à Dakar: Mise en Perspective du Local et du Global Dans Une*


WEEK 5: PLANNING and INFORMALITY (Lagos) 
(February 27)


Additional Reading:


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**WEEK 6: RURAL-URBAN LINKAGES, ETHNICITY, and BELONGING (Cameroon) (March 5)**


Additional Reading:


WEEK 7: DISPOSABLE CITIES? GARBAGE and LIVELIHOODS (Cairo) (March 19)


Additional Reading:


**WEEK 8: PETRO-CITIES (Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria)**
(March 26)

*Guest speaker: Hannah Appel, Columbia University.*


Watts, Michael. (TBA)

**WEEK 9: CLAIMING URBAN SPACE: HETEROTOPIA and SQUATTING (S. Africa)**
(April 2)


*Additional Reading:*

**Film:** *My Mother Built this House*, Bullfrog Films, 2002.

**WEEK 10: THE PENTECOSTAL REVOLUTION (Ghana and Nigeria) (April 9)**


**Additional Reading:**


**WEEK 11: SEX, SEXUALITY, and HIV/AIDS (South Africa and Madagascar) (April 16)**


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


**WEEK 12: THE WORLDING OF AFRICAN CITIES**

(*April 23*)


**Additional Readings:**


**WEEK 13: ‘SLUM UPGRADING’ and the FUTURE of URBAN PLANNING (Nairobi and Zanzibar) (April 30)**


Film: *Good Fortune* (2010).

**Additional Readings:**


WEEK 14: WRAP-UP

(May 7)