

African Popular Cultures
RIT, Spring 2015
Dr. Conerly Casey



Dr. Conerly Casey
Course: Anth 310
Days and time: TTh 5:00-6:15pm
Location: Golisano Hall (GOL), Rm. 1455

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African popular cultures reflect and produce an amazing diversity of identities and forms of creativity and social life across the continent. As ways of knowing and experiencing, African popular cultures may also be the best or only means of social, political expression. How and when do everyday activities or shared interests and memories produce creative self-expressions and new cultural forms? How do audiences become “publics” that produce collective cultural responses? In this course, we will examine these questions, focusing on the links between popular cultures and politics. Through creative forms such as literature, music, art, cartoons and film, we will evaluate popular cultural expressions, prevalent aesthetic forms, and theories that situate arts and aesthetics in postcolonial life. By the end of the course, you will have an understanding of the enormous impact of popular cultures and the ways in which they arise, find audiences and shape social, political sentiments that, in some cases, might otherwise be suppressed.

Course Objectives

*To introduce you to African popular cultures and the political contexts in which they emerge, are performed, and find audiences, and produce public responses

*To introduce you to postcolonial and anthropological theories of popular cultures, politics and social relations in African countries across the continent

*To facilitate your analysis of African expressive forms such as novels, music, films and videos, and cartoons

*To critically evaluate the dynamics of African politics and popular cultures and global politics and cultures

Required Readings: There are three assigned books for this course available in the RIT Bookstore and in the RIT Library. All other readings are posted on the website for this course at mycourses@rit.edu or provided via an Internet link on this syllabus.

Cole, Teju
2012 *Open City*. New York: Random House.

Feld, Steven
2012 *Jazz, Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ntarangwi, Mwenda
2009 *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization*. University of Illinois Press.

The following books are recommended:

Adesokan, Akin
2011 *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics*. Indiana University Press.

Askew, Kelly
2002 *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Askew, Kelly and Richard Wilk
2002 *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader*. Malden, MA and London: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers.

Austen, Ralph and Mahir Saul
2010 *Viewing African Cinema in the 21st Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*. Ohio University Press.

Barber, Karin
2008 *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Charry, Eric.
2012 *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World*. Indiana University Press.

Ekotto, Frieda and Kenneth Harrow, Eds.
2015 *Rethinking African Cultural Productions*. Indiana University Press.

Fall, N'Gone and Jean Loup Pivin, Eds.
2002 *Anthology of African Art: The Twentieth Century*. Paris: D.A.P./Editions Revue Noire.

Krings, Mattias and Onookome Okome, Eds.
2013 *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*. Indiana University Press.

Larkin, Brian
2008 *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Mbembe, Achille
2002 *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Newell, Stephanie and Okome, Onookome, Eds.
2014 *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday*. Routledge.

Class Weekly Schedule

This is a tentative schedule. I may decide to change it, based on the pace of the class and your needs, as students. To facilitate a lively discussion, please read class materials *before* we are scheduled to cover them in class!

Week One (Jan. 27th and 29th): African Politics and Popular Cultures: Time and the Power of Narration

Tu: Introduction
Video lecture: The danger of a single story by Chimamanda Adichie
http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en

Read:
Newell, Stephanie and Okome, Onookome, Eds.
2014 Introduction. *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday*.
Routledge, pp. 1-23. **I have posted the link to this reading below:**
<https://books.google.com/books?id=1gUVAgAAQBAJ&lpg=PA1&ots=EAi5u>

Th: Film: Half a Yellow Sun (2013), directed by Biyi Bandele, Nigeria/UK, 106 min., based on the novel *Half a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Adichie

Week Two (Feb. 3rd and 5th): Political Consciousness and Postcolonial Film

Tu: Read:
Mbembe, Achille
2001 Introduction: Time On the Move. In *On the Postcolony*, pp.1-23. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Th: Film: *Faat Kine*, directed by Ousmane Sembene, DVD, 121 min., 2001, Senegal

Week Three (Feb. 10th and 12th): African Film Studies and the Nollywood Diaspora

Tu: Read:
Austen, Ralph and Mahir Saul
2010 Introduction. In *Viewing African Cinema in the 21st Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*, pp. 1-8. Ohio University Press.

Haynes, Jonathan
2010 What's To Be Done? Film Studies and Nigerian and Ghanaian Videos. In *Viewing African Cinema in the 21st Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*, pp. 11-25. Ohio University Press.

Th: Film: *Thunderbolt*, directed by Tunde Kelani, Nigeria

Week Four (Feb. 17th and 19th): Art, Politics and Money in African Cinema

Tu: Read: Saul, Mahir
2010 Art, Politics, and Commerce in Francophone African Cinema. In *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video Revolution*, Mahir Saul and Ralph Austen, eds., pp. 133-159. Ohio University Press.

Th: Film: *Le President* (2013), directed by Jean-Pierre Bekolo, Cameroon/Germany, 64 min.

Week Five (Feb. 24th and 26th): The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Realism

Tu: Video: Fela Anikulapo Kuti: Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense.
Music: Fela Kuti and Nigerian Highlife (selected songs)
Music: Prophets of Da City (POC) and South African Hip-hop (selected songs)

Ntarangwi, Mwenda. 2009. *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization*. University of Illinois Press. (Chapters 1)

Th: Ntarangwi, Mwenda. 2009. *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization*. University of Illinois Press. (Chapters 2 and 3)

Week Six (Mar. 3rd and 5th): Creative Responses to Political Deception

Tu: Ken Saro-Wiwa's television show, *Basi & Co.*
Political cartoons (selected from news sources across the continent)

Ntarangwi, Mwenda. 2009. *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization*. University of Illinois Press. (Chapters 4)

Th: Ntarangwi, Mwenda. 2009. *East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization*. University of Illinois Press. (Chapters 5)

Week Seven (Mar. 10th and 12th): “Keeping It Real”

Tu: Ntarangwi, Mwenda. 2009. East African Hip Hop: Youth Culture and Globalization. University of Illinois Press. (Chapter 6)

Th: Film: Is it Sweet: Tales of an African Superstar in New York (2012)

Week Eight (Mar. 17th and 19th): Jazz Cosmopolitanism

Tu: Feld, Steven. 2012. Jazz, Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana. Durham: Duke University Press. (Opus and Four-bar Intro)

Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra (Steven Feld, DVD trilogy 2009)

Disc 1, Hallelujah!: Ghanaba and the Winneba Youth Choir

Disc 2, Accra Trane Station: The Music and Art of Nii Noi Nortey

Disc 3, A Por Por Funeral for Ashirifie

Th: Feld, Steven. 2012. Jazz, Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana. Durham: Duke University Press (Vamp In, Head)

Accra Trane Station, Tribute to A Love Supreme (CD, 2005)

*****Note: March 23rd-27th RIT students are on spring break and there will be no classes.*****

Week Nine (Mar. 31st and Apr. 2nd): From Afro-Jazz and Afro-Beat, to Pan-Africanism, to Afrifones, to Sculptural Paintings, to...the Aesthetics of Assemblage

Tu: Feld, Steven. 2012. Jazz, Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana. Durham: Duke University Press. (First Chorus, with Transposition)

Accra Trane Station, *Meditations for John Coltrane* (CD, 2006)

Selected sculptural paintings and sculptures

****Critical essay due** Please post your essay in the designated myCourses dropbox prior to class on March 31st.**

Th: Feld, Steven. 2012. Jazz, Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana. Durham: Duke University Press. (Second Chorus, Blow Free)

Fela Kuti, *Zombie* (CD, 1976)

Various artists, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra* (CD, 2009)

Week Ten (Apr. 7th and 9th): Polyrhythm and the Aesthetics of Assemblage

Tu: Feld, Steven. 2012. Jazz, Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana. Durham: Duke University Press. (Third Chorus, Back Inside)

Nii Otoo Annan and Steven Feld, *Bufo Variations* (CD, 2008)

Th: Feld, Steven. 2012. *Jazz, Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana*. Durham: Duke University Press (Fourth Chorus, Shout to the Groove)

The LA Drivers Union Por Por Group, *Por Por: Honk Horn Music of Ghana* (CD)
Sculptural paintings by various artists
Afrifones and selected other instruments

Week Eleven (Apr. 14th and 16th): Beyond Diasporic Intimacy

Tu: Feld, Steven. 2012. *Jazz, Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana*. Durham: Duke University Press (Head Again, Vamp Out)

Accra Trane Station with Alex Coke and Jefferson Voohees, *Topographies of the Dark*; sculptural paintings by Virginia Ryan (CD, 2008)

Th: Nii Otoo Annan, *Ghana Sea Blues* (CD, 2011)

Selected music and dance (Algerian Rai, South African Kwaito, Malian and Nigerien Tuareg, Tanzanian Mbira)

**Week Twelve (Apr. 21st and 23rd) Cosmopolitanism and Independence/
Cosmopolitanism and Exile**

Tu: Read the first half of :
Cole, Teju
2012 *Open City*. New York: Random House.

Read the second half of:
Th: Cole, Teju
2012 *Open City*. New York: Random House.

Festival au Desert—in Exile, <http://www.festival-au-desert.org/index.cfm?m=4>

Week Thirteen (Apr. 28th and 30th): Student Presentations

Tu: Student presentations

Th: Student presentations

Week Fourteen (May 5th and 7th): Student Presentations

Tu: Student presentations

Th: Student presentations

Week Fifteen (May 12th): Student Presentations

Tu: Student presentations

Office hours

My office hours are for you. Please feel free to drop by without an appointment anytime during office hours. If you are unable to see me during office hours, email me to make an appointment.

Cell Phones

As a courtesy to me and to your classmates, please turn off your cell phones prior to entering class.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to adhere to the RIT honor code. Any form of academic dishonesty, whether cheating on exams or plagiarizing, will result in a failing grade for the course.

Course Requirements

Café Posts: I would like for you to make 10 Café Posts during weeks 1-12 of our course, and to respond to at least one post by a classmate each week that you post. The initial posts should carefully consider a main theme from our weekly readings as they relate to the assigned creative forms, i.e. films, music, novels, paintings. For instance, in week two, you may want to write about Mbembe's concept of "time of entanglement" in relation to the film *Faat Kine*. How does Mbembe suggest this concept of time differs from European and American concepts? What elements of *Faat Kine* reflect and produce this idea of time? In what way does the film use contradictions of "tradition" and "modernity" to discuss politics, economics and the role of women in postcolonial life? You are free to be creative with these posts, but I want for them to demonstrate that you have a sound grasp of our readings, and are able to use major themes from our readings in analyses of creative works. Each initial post will count for 2 points, and your responses to classmates will count for 1 point, for a total of 3 points per week or 30 points total. This assignment will count for 30% of your final grade.

Critical essay: Write a brief (2-3 pages, double-spaced) critical essay to any one of the themes or debates we address in our classes. Feel free to develop your ideas for this paper from your Café Posts and interactions with other students. For example, you may choose to analyze a song by Fela Kuti, and his depictions of the vulgarity and excess of political leaders in Nigeria. I would expect you to link Fela's descriptions of political leaders and leadership in Nigeria with Ntarangwi's analysis of leadership in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Why would Fela's songs resonate with the experiences of East Africans? What major themes appear in Fela Kuti's songs and in East African hip hop that cut across time and place? What themes are specific to time and place? Please post these essays to the designated myCourses dropbox prior to class on March 31st. These essays will count for 20% of your final grade.

Student group presentations: By week two of the course, I will assign students to groups based on their interests in particular African people, cultures and/or popular cultures. Student groups will present new information about the intersections of popular cultures and politics, with particular attention to a particular expressive form such as music, dance, painting, film, etc., and to postcolonial life, cosmopolitanism or globalism. This assignment will count for 20% of your final grade.

Final paper: There will be no final exam, but rather, a final critical paper (8-10 pages), due on the day of your final exam. To further expand your knowledge of African

creativity and publics and the diversity of African politics and popular cultures, I would like for you to explore the political use of popular cultures in relation to people and places that we have not covered in class. I will provide a detailed description of what I expect, including the percentages of points you will receive for various aspects of this paper. In brief, I would like for you to assess the ethnographic materials you find about your chosen people or creative form, and the intersections of politics and popular culture, identifying major themes and debates from our readings, films and class discussions that will aid your analysis. What do popular cultures say about “culture” or the “cultural”? How do they reveal and produce aesthetics of urban experience in different time periods, across the continent or in particular places? How do they work to uncover aspects of popular and political cultures that may be suppressed or hidden? How do they mobilize political sentiments or effect political change? Please come to my office hours or make an appointment to see me with ideas about your paper no later than Week 10. I would like to have a brief outline of the topic and materials you plan to use by Week 12. The paper will count for 30% of your final grade.

Welcome to class!