

PAVS 4500: THE AFRICAN CITY
Spring Semester 2017

Location: Pavilion VIII, 103
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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

While the phenomenal growth of cities in China and India captures global headlines, an equally significant—but much less heralded—urban transformation is taking place on the continent of Africa. In the last 50 years, the urban share of Africa’s population has doubled, rising from 19% to 39%, an increase of 360 million new city dwellers. Perhaps surprisingly, the percentage of people living in cities in Africa today is actually higher than that of India and is expected to reach 58% by 2030. A number of Sub-Saharan African cities (e.g., Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Kinshasa) are amongst the fastest growing in the world (African Development Bank, 2014).



The colonial imprint of the Sultan of Oman in Dar es Salaam, source: <http://i2.cdn.turner.com/gallery.jpg>

Sustained, rapid urbanization presents tremendous challenges to residents and leaders alike, including overcrowded and substandard housing, inadequate provision of health infrastructure like potable water and sewerage, poorly maintained and congested roads, and severe degradation of common pool resources, namely air and water.



Modern urban aspirations, Kenya’s Konza Techno City, source: <http://www.konzacity.go.ke/>

But the growth of African cities is not all doom and gloom. Cities on the continent—like cities elsewhere—are engines of economic growth, social mobility, and prosperity. They are centers of intense creativity and innovation—captured in the continent’s burgeoning presence in music, film, theater and literature. This cultural production, moreover, is that of a youth culture as over half the population of the continent is under the age of 20. Once cast as globally marginal, the continent’s cities are heavily networked and outward facing with a nascent tech industry aggressively producing mobile apps and other products for its expansive market. Global capital flows, such as those from the tech industry and international real estate, are rapidly transforming the face of the African city—creating a landscape of intense deprivation and extraordinary privilege with potentially dire global implications for social stability, economic growth and environmental sustainability.

The course will explore the many dimensions of the African City. Specifically, we will explore the city both as a static representation (as in the statistics cited above), as a built space (so city form, design dimensions), as a lived experience (as much as possible), and as an aspirational space (e.g., a place of striving, a place of nation-building, political expression, etc.) The class will be primarily focused on the cities of Sub-Saharan Africa, although cities from North Africa will be integrated thematically (e.g., Casablanca and colonial planning).

The objectives of the seminar are:

- To analyze and challenge conventional representations of African cities in both scholarship and the media.
- To explore the central debates in the study of African cities, across urban studies, geography, urban planning, and anthropology (to name some central disciplines) and to understand the implications of these different perspectives to residents of the city, international relationships, and so on.
- To understand the varied colonial histories of African cities and reflect on how these histories have shaped city form, social interactions and other present day dynamics.
- To understand the of different trajectories of urbanization and depict and analyze different patterns of social, economic, and political transformation wrought in and by African cities
- To develop a deep understanding of a key sector or one area of transformation/change in an African city selected by you.

READINGS

There are three required texts. Other readings will be available on-line in the electronic reader. Readings are a mixture of cases, texts, journal articles, and other essays/commentaries.

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

Myers, Garth. 2011. *African Cities: Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice*. London: Zed Books. (Online)

Parnell, Susan and Edgar Pieterse (eds.) 2014. *Africa's Urban Revolution*. London: Zed Books. (Online)

GRADING POLICY AND GRADING SCALE

The class is structured as a seminar so your participation in discussion, premised on keeping up with the readings is essential! The class will be reading intensive but I've tried to count pages so you can pace yourself as I DO realize you have other courses.

There are four components to the course grade. These are:

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| 1. Class attendance and participation. | 25 points |
| 2. Reaction Posts (There are 8 of them, you need to do 5) | 15 points |
| 3. Colonial Legacies Short Paper | 10 points |
| 4. Insider/Outsider Views of the African City | 20 points |
| 5. Final Project: City or Sector Profile | <u>30 points</u> |
| | 100 points |

Assignments are briefly described below.

Note that more detailed directions/assignments will be posted on Collab website and discussed in class. The descriptions below are simply intended to give you a sense of what you can expect to be doing over the semester.

For the written assignments, they must be turned in at the beginning of class on the date due. I'd also like you to upload a copy into your Collab dropbox. In written composition, usage and punctuation count. The professor has several handouts of common (and unacceptable) mistakes that will result in a lower grade. Use these handouts when you write!

Late Assignments: Late assignments are a problem. They raise ethical issues (*Equal protection: if I give you more time, do I need to give everyone more time?*); they affect the pacing of the course (*since assignments endeavor to build upon each other*); and they raise the specter for the professor of being taken advantage of or played for a fool (*did your grandmother really die?*) On the other hand, I hate to read hastily scrawled, ill thought-out papers. Please endeavor to turn your papers in on time; it will make everyone happier. If you have a legitimate reason for a late paper, I will certainly consider extensions. But I do need to be approached before the assignment is due and not on the day that the assignment is due. If you turn something in without a previously agreed upon extension, late assignments will be reduced 10% by every day they are late.

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment 1: Class Attendance and Participation

Objective: To facilitate intellectual growth, foster lively exchange in class, and generally to make this an interesting and rewarding experience for everyone.

Task: 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 in advance. You will only be allowed one unexcused absence during the semester without penalty. Consistent lateness will be penalized as well. (I know all this tough language is really not necessary. But ground rules are important.)

Assignment 2: Reaction Posts (Forum function on Collab will be used)

Objective: To facilitate reflection on the readings and enhance preparation for in-class discussion.

Task: You are required to write a one page (so 500 words single spaced) weekly response paper examining a selection or theme from the readings assigned for a total of 5 times, to be posted on Digication by 8pm on the day before class. (So Monday or Weds. night.) 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. **(5 pp total)**

Assignment 3: Colonial Legacy Short Paper

Objective: To facilitate reflection on and understanding of the readings and their arguments; to enhance preparation for in-class discussion.

Task: Write a 3-5 page paper (double-spaced) exploring the legacies of colonialism for contemporary African cities. Although you should give an overview of the overall legacies, you should draw from the readings (assigned and additional) to zero in on a couple of key historical residues affecting contemporary urbanism. You can draw from multiple cities or start to hone in on a city or a country of your choice. (This could serve as a building block for your final paper.) **(3-5 pp total)**

Assignment 4: Insider/Outsider Views of the African City.

Objective: To critique representations of African cities (specifically) and Africa (in general) in the media. To interact with an African urban resident and learn more about life there.

Task: In this two-part (total 8 page) assignment you will be asked to test/react to a famous essay written by the Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina called “How to Write about Africa.” (Source: <http://granta.com/how-to-write-about-africa/>) **(8 pp total)**

- a. *Representations of The African City in the Popular Press/Electronic Media (Outsider Perspective).* You will identify a city of interest to you; you will look for visual representations of the city that have been produced in the last year (note: dating might be difficult); in a short essay (3 pp.) you will be asked to interpret/present the outsider view of the city and relate it to Wainaina’s work.
- b. *The View from Inside the African City: Personal Interview and Imagery.* In this second part of the assignment, you will be asked to interview (via Skype, no money for airline tickets, alas) a resident (key informant) of your city. If your informant is game, ask for 4 pictures that typify/represent his/her lived experience there. (The professor will facilitate this.) In a short essay (5 pp.) you will present your research findings/insights gleaned from your interview and photographic evidence. The final part (1 page of the 5) you will be asked to reflect on the two parts—the insider versus the outsider view.

Assignment 5: Final Project – City Profile / “Sector” Analysis

Objective: To enable you to learn in some depth about a specific city and/or area (I’ll call it sector) associated with African cities.

Task: This assignment asks you to do independent research to delve into the history, politics, cultural life, and development challenges. While each project will require a written submission of at least 10 pages double spaced, the medium/media used can vary by your interest and technical capacity (e.g., could be mini-film, musical montage, simple narrated Prezi, etc.) You will be asked to speak about your final project on one of the last two days of the class. **(10 pp total)**

To give a couple of examples: say you want to learn more about hip hop music as a form of political speech—that can be done from the literature and also from websites. Hip hop is an urban phenomenon and so you could look across countries and cities. You might be interested in issues of sexual identity, human rights and LBGTQ life in African cities. Explore that. You might want to do a straight up study of a certain city—how it was established, grew, what its role is in the national economy or psyche. Maybe you’ve got great GIS skills and can figure out some time-lapse map to illustrate your findings. Super exciting! Get as creative as you can.

You need to think about your project and submit a short (1 page) proposal to the professor. She will confer with you to identify resources, think about the structure, media to use, etc.

COURSE WEBSITE

There is a Collab website for the course. I will use the website to communicate and post class information, including powerpoints. I will also use it to keep track of grades.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION

UVA has an honor code, which must be followed. Please sign each assignment using the honor code. But just to drive some details home, all work done for the course must be your own. The work must be original and prepared for this class. Plagiarism is unacceptable. Copying the work of another and not citing it; lifting text from the Internet; or even presenting ideas that are not your own without proper attribution are all examples of plagiarism. Submitting work for this class that has been done for another class also counts as plagiarism, it is called “plagiarizing oneself.” Don’t do it!

If you have a disability and are in need of academic accommodations, please notify me as soon as possible to arrange needed support.

THE WRITING CENTER AS A RESOURCE

From the Writing Center:

The UVA Writing Center is a writing resource staffed by undergraduate and graduate student tutors and available to all UVA students. Tutors work one on one with students in 50--minute appointments. We can help with drafting, revision, argument structure, and other special concerns. Several of our tutors are trained specifically for ESL. Though we can offer help at every stage of the writing process, we do not offer proofreading or editing services. Unless your instructor has clearly given you permission in writing (e.g. on the syllabus or assignment), you are not allowed to bring any part of a take--away exam into the Writing Center for help. We cannot work with you on any assignment given under exam conditions, and bringing such an assignment to an appointment may be an honor code violation. To register and schedule an appointment, please visit our website: <http://www.engl.virginia.edu/undergraduate/writing/center>