African Urban Cultures
SOCY S204 / URBN S334
Yale Summer Session A
(June 7 – July 9, 2021)

Instructor: Dr. Denise L. Lim
Meeting Times: MW 1 – 4:15 pm EST
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Office hours: By appointment via Zoom

Course Description

Definitions of the urban often vary according to country and culture. In the United States, the city is often broadly defined by sociologists as a relatively large and dense human settlement composed of heterogenous individuals embedded in an autonomous social unit. Cities have their own state of mind, customs, norms, and values. In some definitions of the urban, these can include spatial constructs of the “town”, “suburb”, “city”, or “megacity” with populations as small as 200 or as large as 10 million people. This seminar aims to explore how socially-constructed notions of space, time, and the city inform African urban theory, practice, and cultures. This course will first delineate methods of visual sociology and explore how postcolonial theory challenges Western concepts of
contemporary urban cultures throughout Africa. As spaces with complex colonial legacies and transnational connections, this course will introduce students to a visual sociology of a rich collection of cultural artifacts such as film, photography, and visual art. These are used to research the cultural politics of urban life in Cape Town (South Africa), Lagos (Nigeria), Swakopmund (Namibia), and Johannesburg (South Africa).

**Goals and Learning Objectives**

Each week, students will engage in a mix of writing and discussion exercises that engages with both the weekly assigned academic reading and a cultural artifact from one of our African city case-studies. Students will be asked to think about each of the cultural artifacts and the cities they embody by focusing on the theoretical questions and issues raised in each week's academic reading.

All written assignments are designed to be cumulative and encourage students to draft their ideas early, receive feedback from both the instructor and peers, and encourage a habit of revising drafts that will culminate in a final research project. Students will be expected to complete three major writing assignments over the course of the semester: one short essay, one mid-term essay, and a final essay or multi-media project.

**Academic Integrity**

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. We will discuss integrity in academic writing and research, and how to avoid unintentional plagiarism. Students should review definitions of plagiarism, cheating, and documentation of sources on the [Yale College Undergraduate Policies webpage](https://本科生政策/yale.edu). All students will be required to complete the [Poorvu Center Plagiarism quiz](https://本科生政策/plagiarism.yale.edu) before their first short essay is due.

**Yale College Advising and Writing Resources**

There will be three major written assignments, two of which you will be given opportunity to revise your first draft. Grading will be determined by improvement over the course of the various assignments. Please take advantage of the following resources:

- [Yale College Advising Resources](https://本科生政策/advising.yale.edu)
- [Writing Tutoring and Programs](https://本科生政策/writingcenter.yale.edu)
- [Writing with Turnitin](https://本科生政策/turnitin.yale.edu)
- [Writing Advice](https://本科生政策/writingadvice.yale.edu)
- [Using Sources](https://本科生政策/usesources.yale.edu)
- [Humanities & Social Sciences](https://本科生政策/humanities.yale.edu)
- [Academic Strategies](https://本科生政策/academicstrategies.yale.edu)

**Requirements**

**Class participation and attendance** (20% of grade): Attendance during the summer session is absolutely crucial. No unexcused absences can be tolerated, and will factor into the final grade for the course. In the case of extreme illness or special circumstances, arrangements can be made, but too many absences may result in a student’s withdrawal from the course. As this is designed as a focused discussion seminar, participation is absolutely essential to the success of the course. During
some class meetings, students will be asked to engage in a reflective writing exercise, breakout groups, or participate in special virtual activities with guest speakers during our scheduled class times.

**Weekly reflections and discussion questions** (10% of grade, 1 – 2 paragraphs and 2 – 3 discussion questions): Every Sunday and Tuesday evening by 9 pm EST, students are expected to submit a 1 – 2 paragraph writing reflection that analyzes one of the assigned cultural artifacts with one or more assigned readings. Students may also pose 2 – 3 discussion questions at the end of their reflection for further discussion during class.

**1 short essay** (15% of grade, 4 - 5 pages, due on **Friday, June 11** at 11:59 pm EST): Choose one cultural artifact and analyze it using one academic article covered in the course. Practice “slow looking” of your cultural artifact, isolate the main theoretical argument of your chosen academic article, and use your juxtaposition of the artifact and article to make a claim that expands on the author’s original point or offers a counterpoint. **Revised short essay** due on **Friday, June 18** at 11:59 pm EST.

**1 mid-term essay** (25% of grade, 5 – 8 pages including bibliography of three outside sources, due on **Friday, June 25** at 11:59 pm EST): Students may use the same cultural artifact analyzed in the first short essay, or select a different cultural artifact that engages with at least 2 - 3 academic articles that is covered in the course or a result of independent research. **Revised mid-term proposal** due on **Friday, July 2** at 11:59 pm EST.

**1 final essay** (30% of grade, 8 - 10 double-spaced pages) **OR 1 final multi-media project:** Students may elect to write a final essay that must be submitted by **Tuesday, July 6** at 11:59 pm EST or they may present a multi-media project during the last class meeting on Wednesday, July 7. Students who opt to turn in a multi-media project must write a 1-2 page reflection that should be turned in by Tuesday, July 6 at 11:59 pm.

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**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1 (June 7 & 9) | Postcolonial Theory and the “Worlding” of African Cities**

**Monday**

**Cultural Artifact:**

**Readings:**

**Wednesday**

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Cultural Artifact:
- Select images from photographer Lard Buurman’s *Africa Junctions: Capturing the City* series, which examines images that combine several snapshots in time into a single scene.

Readings:

**Short Essay is due by Friday, June 11 at 11:59 pm EST**

**Week 2 (June 14 & 16) | Material Sediments of Apartheid in Johannesburg Architecture**

Monday

Cultural Artifacts:
- *(Film)* *Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Party Harmony*.
- Review scanned images and video provided by the Haas Arts Library on Gavin Jantje’s *A South African Colouring Book* (1978) in Course Reserves.

Readings:

Wednesday

*Note: A walking tour company based in Johannesburg, Dlala Nje, will be leading us on a virtual tour of Ponte City and the surrounding neighborhoods.*

Cultural Artifacts:
- *Ponte Tower*. 2012. Directed by Philip Bloom. (Runtime: 10 minutes)

Readings:

**Revised Short Essay due on Friday, June 18 at 11:59 pm EST**

**Week 3 (June 21 & 23) | Memory, Landscape, and the Politics of Waste Between Swakopmund and Lagos**
Monday

Note: Namibian artist Nicola Brandt will lead our discussion today and engage with us in informal discussion about her book, *Landscapes Between Then and Now*, and her recent video work, *The Earth Inside*. Her large-scale photographs and video works reflect on themes of documentary lens-based practice, memory, landscape, and positionality.

Cultural Artifacts:
- Select images from her larger body of work, *The Earth Inside*, will be shared as a slideshow, and a password-protected Vimeo link to her video installation, *Indifference*, will be posted on Canvas.

Readings:

Wednesday

Cultural Artifact: (BBC Docuseries) *Welcome to Lagos*. Dir. Searle, Gavin. BBC, 2010. (60 minutes)

Mid-term essay due on Friday, June 25 at 11:59 pm EST

Week 4 (June 28 & 30) | Dystopia and African Science-Fiction

Monday

Cultural Artifact:
- (Film) *District 9*. Dir. Neill Blomkamp. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010. DVD.

Readings:
Wednesday

Cultural Artifact:

Revised mid-term essay due on Friday, July 2 at 11:59 pm EST

Week 5 (July 5 & 7) | The Afrofuturist City and Final Presentations

Monday


Final essay or multi-media project writing reflection due on Friday, July 6 at 11:59 pm EST

Wednesday

Note: Those who elected to produce a multi-media research project will be given time during both class meetings to present and discuss their work with the class.