An entirely different map of our continent is in the making. With its own centres and nodes, its own languages and its own flows. The old Atlantic connections might still be characterised by their vibrancy, but they are increasingly superseded by new cartographies – the ones linking places such as Johannesburg, Lagos, Kinshasa, Luanda, Dakar or Nairobi to Dubai, Sao Paolo to Istanbul, Casablanca, Mumbai, Shanghai, Khartoum or Cairo.


CONTENTS
Short description ................................................................. p.2
Weekly Schedule ............................................................... p.3
Additional reading ............................................................. p.8
This course approaches the study of African cities and urbanization through the medium of diverse texts, including fiction, non-fiction, graphic narratives and the arts, as well as scholarly work on African cities. Through these cultural “texts,” attention will be given to everyday conceptualizations of the body and the environment, as well as to theoretical engagements with the African city. We will study urban relationships as depicted in literature and popular media in relation to Africa’s long history of intercultural encounters, including materials dating back to the early twentieth century. With attention to these historical texts as well as to recent materials, the course will ask:

- In what different ways is the city produced in African literature and popular culture, and how do these representations engage with prevailing models in African urban studies?
- What theoretical lenses and interdisciplinary models of analysis are available to scholars to examine African city texts?
- What social, political and economic questions are posed by African texts?

Requirements: Students are expected to attend all seminar meetings, to make substantive contributions to seminars. Written assignment: for Seniors if this course is fulfilling a writing requirement: one final paper of 25-30 pp (double-spaced, due Dec 11); for all other students, the option of 1 x mid-term (due Oct 23) and 1 x final paper (due Dec 11), each of 12-15pp (double-spaced).

Core Texts (alphabetical order)

Chris Abani, *GraceLand* (1st edn 2004; Picador, 2014) - $8.95
Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya* (Jonathan Cape, 2007) – out of print; plenty of copies second-hand on Amazon $1.97
Peter Abrahams, *Mine Boy* (1st edn. 1946; Heinemann, 1989) - $12.95
Brian Chikwava, *Harare North* (Vintage, 2010) - $12.95
Cyprian Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (1st edn. 1961; Heinemann, 1987; Yale University Library online book)
Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero* (Zed Books, 1983) - $10.95
Okey Ndibe, *Foreign Gods Inc* (Soho Press, 2014) - $15.95
Ivan Vladislavic, *Double Negative* (And Other Stories, 2013) - $15.95
Zoe Wicomb, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2000) - $16.95

Approx total cost of books if purchased new: $125.00
Weekly Schedule

Seminar 1 (09/05): Introductory session
In the first half of the session we will discuss the shape of the course, and in the second half we will discuss the following text, available as a pdf on Canvas:


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Seminar 2 (09/12): African Urban Modernities
*Mine Boy* (1946) is described on the front cover of one edition as, ‘the first modern novel of Black South Africa’. What ‘modern’ and non-‘modern’ narratives, themes, and textual preoccupations does this positioning imply? What makes this novel ‘modern’? What other readings does *Mine Boy* invite? How does *Mine Boy*’s conception of modernity compare with that promoted in the colonial educational movie, *Boy Kumasenu* (1952)?

- Peter Abrahams (1st edn. 1946), *Mine Boy* (Heinemann, 1989)
- *Boy Kumasenu* (Colonial Film Archive, 1952, view it here: [http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/332](http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/332))

Further reading:

- Santu Mofokeng, *The Black Photo Album* (Steidl/The Walther Collection, 2013)

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Seminar 3 (09/19): For the Love of Lagos: ‘Good-Time Girls’ and Yoruba Print Culture
This seminar focuses on an iconic Lagosian heroine, Jagua Nana, a larger-than-life prostitute created by Cyprian Ekwensi in the early 1960s. What does this text say about urban cultures in the period immediately before and after decolonisation? What methods can we use to situate and contextualize this narrative?


Further reading:

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**Seminar 4 (09/26): Sexuality and the City**
Think about the tensions between Islamic and Arabic urban identities in this narrative, and how El Saadawi critiques Egyptian patriarchy through the representation of urban space.


Further reading:

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**Seminar 5 (10/03): Cultural Complexity and the Graphics of Survival**
Think about the ways African graphic novels comment on urban environments, and the ways these urban texts represent individual agency. What can graphic fiction offer that other textual forms cannot?

• Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya* (Jonathan Cape, 2007)

Further reading:


Seminar 6 (10/10): Theorizing African Cities: Creative Spaces, Urban Imaginaries and African Urban Theory
In the seminar we will debate recent works of African urban theory made available as pdfs.

- Extracts from: Kerstin Pinther et al., (Eds), Afropolis: City/Media/Art—Cairo, Lagos, Nairobi, Kinshasa, Johannesburg (Jacana Media, 2012)
- Extracts from: Achille Mbembe & Sarah Nuttall (Eds), Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis (Duke University Press, 2008)

Seminar 7 (10/17): The Underbelly of African Cities
In what ways do authors engage with and represent urban subcultures? What role do narrative, imagination, and fantasy play in the representation of urban extremes?

- Chris Abani, Graceland (1st edn 2004; Picador, 2014)

Further reading:


Seminar 8 (10/24): London…
In Brian Chikwava’s novel, Harare North (2010), we meet an unnamed protagonist who is a wandering migrant in London, ‘a stranger in a strange land’. In Okey Ndibe’s Foreign Gods, Inc., the alienated protagonists returns ‘home’ to Nigeria to find he no longer belongs. To what extent do these novels move away from cosmopolitan ideas about migration and diaspora? What urban spaces do they describe?

- Brian Chikwava, Harare North (Vintage, 2010)

Further reading:
Seminar 9 (10/31): …and New York

- Okey Ndibe, *Foreign Gods Inc* (Solo Press, 2014)

Further reading:
Ranka Primorac (Ed.), *African City Textualities* (Routledge, 2013); also available through the Library’s electronic journals database as *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 44 (1), 2008.

Seminar 10 (11/07): Gendered Visions of Cape Town

The next two sessions return to South African cityscapes with fiction by two authors for whom notions of framing and mediation form a critical part of the politics of representation.


- Ivan Vladislavic, *Double Negative* (And Other Stories, 2013)

Further reading:
- Vladislavic, Ivan (Ed.), Mikhael Subotzky & Patrick Waterhouse *Ponte City* (Göttingen : Steidl, 2014)
Seminar 12 (11/28): Outer-Space Lagos
Focusing on the emerging field of African science fiction, this session will study the ways the mega-city of Lagos is imagined as a site of planetary exploration by Deji Olukotun in his new dystopian story about what happens when a massive solar flare damages electrical systems worldwide and leaves Nigeria with the only functioning space program on the planet.


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Seminar 13 (12/05): Student Mini-Conference
5-minute presentations of your end of semester project, and feedback from your peers.
Additional Reading


Sarah Markes (Illustrator and Compiler), Street Level: A Collection of Drawings and Creative Writing Inspired by Dar es Salaam (Mkuki na Nyota, 2011).


Ranka Primorac (Ed.), African City Textualities (Routledge, 2013); also available through the Library’s electronic journals database as Journal of Postcolonial Writing 44 (1), 2008.

Ato Quayson, Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism (Duke University Press, 2014).


Jennifer Robinson, Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development (Routledge, 2005).

