

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
Spring 2015**

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Off. H.:  
(and by appointment)**

**History 861  
Monday, 3:45 pm-5:30 pm  
Humanities 5245**

**MATERIAL CULTURE, MAGIC AND THE SENSES IN EQUATORIAL AFRICA**

Reflecting a broader change in African studies, exciting new work is looking at the rise of new moral and sensual imaginations in Equatorial Africa. In countries where poverty, ethnic strife and lack of prospects remain a challenge for most, people continue to create opportunities for addressing the risks and hardships of everyday life, and for imagining a better future. They strive for maximizing social networks, economic prospects and spiritual protection. Part of these strategies borrows from long-standing ideas and practices. Most engage with modern settings and resources: the media (TV, videos, music), diasporic networks, church life (Pentecostalism) and new technologies of the self (cosmetics and fashion).

**Course Objectives:** Combining history and anthropology, the seminar will help students to acquire basic tools for approaching religion, material culture, subjectivity, love, intimacy and the senses in Equatorial Africa. Because some of the most exciting work on visual culture, media studies, history of the body, moral imaginations and technologies of the self has been conducted outside of this specific region, we will use a few readings from other parts of Africa. Students will have the opportunity to write a research paper on a topic of their choice.

Requirements and Grading

1. **Leading the discussion for two sessions** (you can choose to do this with another seminar member). This involves being able to contextualize the required readings by looking at some of the recommended readings for that week.
2. **Two Written Critiques** (week 2 to 10): For the week you lead discussion, you will submit a five-page critical analysis of the week's reading. Rather than summarizing the reading, your paper should engage it by raising critical questions about the methods, theories, and conclusions put forward by their authors. In short, you should critically assess and analyze the contents of the book, discuss their significance, and the contribution the book makes to the history of Christianity in Africa. You are encouraged in their papers to build upon the readings from previous weeks and the supplementary readings listed under "also." A hard copy of the paper will be due in class on the day of discussion. Electronic copies of prepared questions for the

discussion should be sent to Prof. Bernault early Sunday evening to the distributed to other seminar members before class.

3. **Writing a 20-30 page research paper** on a select topic chosen in consultation with me. A **preliminary outline and bibliography** for your research paper is due in class on week 6. On week 10, you will hand in a **two page paper on a primary source** chosen from your research essay. We will critique and discuss these essays in class.

Grading will be based on your participation to the discussions, your work as a session leader, your five-page critique of a week's reading, and your final paper.

Readings (available at UBS):

Peter Geschiere, *Witchcraft, Trust and Intimacy: Africa in Comparison*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013

Filip De Boeck and Marie France Plissart, *Kinshasa, Tales of the Invisible City*, Ghent: Ludion, 2004

Bob White, *Rumba Rules! The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu's Zaire*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2008

Katrien Pype, *The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama: Religion, Media and Gender in Kinshasa*, New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2012

Emmanuel Dongala *Johnny Mad Dog*, New York: Picador 2006

Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law*, Oxford: James Currey, 2000



\*\*\*SCHEDULE\*\*\*

**Week 1- Technologies of the Self [01/22]**

*The seminar will start with a discussion on Western sociological and historical theories to describe the construction of the self. How can these theories apply to Africa? What are their benefits and limitations for African disciplines?*

Research the following notions, either by reading some of the original essays listed below, or by finding explanations in your library or on the internet. The point is not to discuss any of the original essays in detail but to start constituting your own analytical toolbox. Come to class prepared to discuss the notions. Choose two of them and write a paragraph-long, critical definition for each in your own words. I will collect the assignment.

- *Technologies of the Self and Arts of Existence* [Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2; pp. 10-11] – You can look at L. H. Martin et al., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, (1988), pp. 16-49, uploaded on Learn@UW
- *Subjectivity*. For a reflection on the notion in a colonial context, see Megan Vaughan, “Introduction: Discourse, Subjectivity and Differences,” *Curing Their Ills* (1991), pp 1-28: read esp. pp. 1-4 and 8-19 [available as e-book: <http://books.google.com/books?id=K3hnAgAAQBAJ>]
- *Habitus* [Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge UP, 1977, pp. 78-95 - read particularly pp. 81-83]

Recommended:

- *The Practice of Everyday Life* [Michel de Certeau, 1980, available on UW MadCat as E-Book]. Also research De Certeau’s distinction between “tactics” and “strategies.”
- *Techniques of the Body* [Marcel Mauss, *Economy and Society*, 1935, pp. 70-88]
- *The Civilizing Process* [Norbert Elias, 1939]

We will watch a video by Filip De Boeck, *Cemetery State* (2010) that documents life around Kintambo, one of the oldest and largest cemeteries in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

**Week 2- Skin-Deep Subjectivity [01/29]**

*How did Africans craft tactics of subjectivation at the intersection of global capitalism, colonial policies and individual or collective aspirations and practices? What was the role and status of the objects that mediated such processes? What kind of consumer culture emerged in the colonies and in postcolonial Africa, and how did it articulate with the “prior meanings” of local techniques?*

Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society and Colonial Brazzaville* (1995), chapters 5-7, pp. 127-200 [e-book available on MadCat]

Timothy Burke, "Cleanliness and Civilization" and "Bodies and Things," in *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women* (1996), pp. 17-34 & pp. 166-216

Charles Didier Gondola "Dream and Drama: The Search for Elegance among Congolese Youth," *African Studies Review*, 42-1 (1999), pp. 23-48

Recommended:

Lynn Thomas, "The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability in South Africa," *Journal of African History*, 47-3 (2006), pp. 461-490

Jean and John Comaroff, "Fashioning the Colonial Subject", in *Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 2, 1997, pp. 218-273

### **Week 3 - Love, Money, Relationships [02/05]**

*This session asks you to reflect on the ways in which individuals can negotiate kinship, relationships, and belonging in "communities of choice." How did intimate relationships change recently? What kind of media (including money) and objects people can use to facilitate social strategies? How do contemporary Africans imagine and invest in the future?*

Jennifer Cole, "Fresh Contact in Tamatave, Madagascar: Sex, Money and Intergenerational Transformation," *American Ethnologist* 31-4 (2004), pp. 573-588

Rachel Jean Baptiste "Faire Bon Ami," In *Conjugal Rights* (2014) pp. 162-193

Katja Elkom-Friedman, "Deserted Man and Deserted Women," in *The Liberation of the State from the People* (unpublished manuscript), pp. 245-284

Julie Livingston, "Suicide, Risk and Investment in the Heart of the African Miracle," *Cultural Anthropology*, 24-4 (November 2009), pp. 652-680

Jo Ellen Fair et al. "Crafting Lifestyle in Urban Africa: Young Ghanaians in the World of Online Friendship," *Africa Today*, 55-4 (2009), pp. 29-49

### **Week 4- The Dangers of Intimacy [02/12]**

*The two readings explore how modern witchcraft, whose enduring presence in modern Africa has been uncovered by Geschiere's 1997 seminal book, can be generated by intimacy, whether physical, emotional, familial or professional. Both readings invite us to reflect on the changing patterns of intimacy and aggression, and the danger of "Others" in today's Africa (and in the rest of the world).*

Peter Geschiere, *Witchcraft, Trust and Intimacy: Africa in Comparison*, Chicago, 2013

Basile Ndjio, "Magic, Body and Cursed Sex: Chinese Sex Workers and the Popular Invention of 'Bitch-Witches' in Cameroon," forthcoming, *African Affairs* (2015)

## **Week 5 – Witchcraft in the City [02/19]**

*We will discuss what Congolese imagine as the “second world,” a realm of divine entities and forces that parallel and intrude in daily life. In Kinshasa, the ancient practices that helped families and specialists to mediate and contain these forces (seen as both dangerous and full of potentialities) have collapsed. The book explores how people face extreme poverty and the danger of death and magic, and the life of those, like street children, who have been sucked in the void.*

Filip De Boeck and Marie France Plissart, *Kinshasa, Tales of the Invisible City* (2004)

## **Week 6 – Music, Politics and the Senses [02/26]**

**\*\*\*Outline and Bibliography for your research paper due Tuesday \*\*\***

*How do people imagine, accept and criticize leadership? How is power produced, mediated and embodied by music, spectacle, “vulgarity,” and the dancing body? How can ordinary persons’ bodies express and structure alternative political futures and social opportunities?*

Bob White, *Rumba Rules!* (2008)

Achille Mbembe; “Aesthetics of Vulgarity,” in *On the Postcolony*, U. of California Press, 2001, pp. 102-141

Marissa Moorman, “Anatomy of Kuduro: Articulating the Angolan Body Politic after the War,” *African Studies Review*, 57-3 (December 2014), pp. 21-40

## **Week 7 – Spirits, Photography and Cityscapes [03/05]**

*How did divine entities help Gabonese clans to assert preeminence on colonial urban territory? How did ancient spirits merge with Christian and global figures of wealth? How did technological mastery change hands? What were the consequences of the reversal of older regimes of visibility and invisibility in the twentieth century?*

F. Bernault, Chapter on Water Spirit in Southern Gabon, *Power and Fantasy in Equatorial Africa* (forthcoming)

Jean Deparra, Pictures of Kinshasa in the 1950s-1970s

## **Week 8 – Pentecostalism and Sensory Knowledge [03/12]**

*How are Pentecostalism and religious experiences in Equatorial Africa grounded in sensual knowledge. How do they use modern spectacle and media (video, Teleserials and TV drama)? Why is this crucial to revisit histories of religion in Africa?*

Katrien Pype, *The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama: Religion, Media and Gender in Kinshasa* (2012)

Birgit Meyer, “Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism’s Sensational Forms,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 109-4 (2010), pp. 741-63

## **Week 9 – Frontier Economies and Masculinity [03/19]**

*Readings for this week invite us to delve deeper in the violence, both productive and de-structuring, in frontier places: the Kitawalist rebellion in 1944, the recent wars in Eastern Congo and Congo-Brazzaville, and the mining field of Angola. How can we historicize the changing patterns of such volatile margins? How attention to embodied experiences can help us grasp the significance of these violent events? What kind of masculine identities and gender boundaries are exercised in these frontier places?*

Nikki Eggers, “Mukombozi and the Monganga: The Violence of Healing in the Kitawalist Uprising of 1944,” *Africa* (forthcoming)

Filip De Boeck, Borderland Breccia: The Mutant Hero in the Historical Imagination of a Central-African Diamond Frontier, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* (2000), online only.

Nancy Hunt, “Acoustic Register, Tenacious Images, and Congolese Scenes of Rape and Repetition,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 23-2 (2008), pp. 220–253

Emmanuel Dongala *Johnny Mad Dog*, Picador 2005.

## **Week 10- Arts of Existence and Modern African Diasporas [03/26]**

*How do global fluxes of commodities, ideas and persons participate in shaping modern life in Equatorial Africa? How do Congolese Sapeurs and traders create new identities in Africa and in Europe? How are these identities dependent on tactics of incorporation (bodily practices and habitus) and on access to manufactured or raw commodities? How do migration and fashion strategies help the Congolese to rewrite the history of Congo-France relations?*

**\*\*\*Two Page Paper on Primary Source due Tuesday\*\*\***

Janet MacGaffey and Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law* (2000)

## **Week 11- Spring Break**

## **Week 12- Discussion on Papers and Revised Outlines [04/09]**

## **Week 12-15: Working on your research paper**