



Contemporary Africa Re-Represented: Perspectives from Ghana

AFRS 3500 (3 Credits / 45 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:

Ghana: Africa in the 21st Century

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

Narratives and perspectives of Africa are shaped as much by mainstream debates and popular representations as they are by socio-political realities on the continent. Drawing on theories of representation this course brings a critical perspective to how popular images and discourses have represented the social realities in Africa today. The course will connect back to the galvanizing frameworks of imperial and colonial representations and then explore how western imaginations, colonialists and colonization, development discourses, and the popular media have contributed to constructing a space and place called “Africa” and an identity of “Africanness”.

The course draws on visits to sites that Ghanaian society designates as historically and culturally significant, media organizations, government and non-government organizations, to obtain empirical insights into Ghana’s social realities. The course exposes students to alternative frameworks for conceptualizing African social realities and equips them with a knowledge base and with new ways to engage with international or “exotic” locations. By interrogating contemporary popular discourses on Africa, how policy and development theory and practice frames and engages with Africa, students obtain new insights and perspective on Africa’s social realities and students’ positionality in relation to them. Students with interests in international careers or international development work should find this course essential to their professional careers.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Apply theories of representation to an understanding of the ways in which popular media and development discourses have conceptualized social realities in Africa;
- Account for the discrepancy between popular images and African social realities; and

- Appreciate the historical process through which Africa and “Africanness” has become constructed and the media influences that perpetuate this construction.

The course will introduce students to theories of representation and central debates in the study of contemporary Africa. As we examine dominant frameworks in development debates, students will learn that the way ‘Africa’ is represented shapes the kinds of questions asked and the projects and policies pursued.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content as well as the nuances of economic change and development through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Course Schedule

***Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers’ availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.**

Module 1: Theories of Representation and the Invention of “Africa”

This module draws on Stuart Hall’s work on representation to introduce students to theories of representation. The module also explores how cultural and historical experiences shape language and ultimately how particular situations are perceived and how they are naturalized. Students discuss assigned readings and practice the activities listed in Stuart Hall’s Chapter, “*The Work of Representation*”. The second session is intended to build a sensibility, and critical awareness, of the historical processes by which the notion of “Africa” becomes a material reality.

Session 1: Theories of Representation

Required Reading:

- Wainaina, B. (2005). How to Write About Africa. *Granta*. 92, pp.92 - 95.
- Miner, H. (1956). Body Ritual Among the Nacirema. *American Anthropologist*. 58(3), pp. 503-507.
- Hall, S. (1997). The Work of Representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* pp. 15-30. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Watch and discuss: “Representation and the Media (Stuart Hall) Part 1:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBVYtylWnvc>

Session 2: The Invention of “Africa”

Required Reading:

- Said, E. (1979). Introduction. In E. Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 1-28. New York, NY: Random House.
- Mazrui, A.A. (2005). The Re-invention of Africa: Edward Said, V.Y. Mudimbe and beyond.” *Research in African Literatures*. 36(3), pp. 68-82.

Module 2: Western Imaginations and Their Influences

This module builds on module 1 to examine imperial ideas and structures of power as critical influences on popular and contemporary perceptions of ‘Africa’ and the meaning of “Africanness”. The module reviews, first, the discursive and material impacts of imperialism and then second, colonization and colonialism and its lasting impacts.

Session 1: The Imperial Gaze

Required Reading:

- Comaroff, J and Comaroff, J. (1997) Africa Observed: Discourses of the Imperial Imagination. In R. Grinker and C. Steiner (Eds.), *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History and Representation* pp.689-703. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Egmann, R.A.A. (2012). Under imperial eyes, black bodies, buttocks, and breasts: British colonial photography and Asante "fetish girls." *African Arts*. 45(2), pp. 46-57.

Session 2: Colonialists and Colonization

Required Reading:

- Colchester, M. and Grier, R.B. (2012). Has the Colonial Experience Negatively Distorted Contemporary African Development Patterns? In W. Moseley (4th Edition), *Taking Sides, Clashing Views on Controversial African Issues* pp. 18-33. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Mudimbe V Y (1988). Discourse of Power and Knowledge of Otherness. In *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*.

Module 3: Re-representation and Development Discourses

Emerging from the World War II global order, development discourses have played a central role in shaping Africa as a space for all kinds of "improvement" projects. Drawing on various government and NGO development projects, this module explores and critically examines the projects and associated discourses emerging from them, and the contested meanings of development that emerge from them and their material implications for the construction of "Africaness".

Session 1: Development Discourses Part I: Development and the Invention of the Third World

Required reading:

- Rist, G. (2014). Introduction & Definitions of Development. In G. Rist (3rd Ed.) *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* pp. 1-24. London, UK: Zed Books.
- Leonard, D.K. and Straus, S. (2003). The Contemporary African State The Politics of Distorted Incentives. In D. Leonard and S. Straus, *Africa's Stalled Development: International Causes & Cures* pp. 1-20. Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner.
- Escobar, A. (2012). Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Preface, Ch 1 & Ch 2.

Session 2: Development Discourses Part II: Development and the Art of De-politicization

This session draws on local perspectives on development. With support from program staff, students will conduct a focus group with selected residents in rural and urban locations on the broad subject of development and the lack thereof. The academic director uses insights emerging from those discussions for a critical reflection on assigned reading.

Required reading:

- Fisher, W.F. (1997). Doing Good? The Politics and Anti-politics of NGO Practices. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 26: 439-464.
- Gilman, N. and Ticktin, M. (2014). From Antipolitics to Post-Neoliberalism: A conversation with James Ferguson. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*. 5 (2) pp. 247-259.
- Watch Movie: Black, S., Becker, B., Manley, M., Fischer, S., Witter, M., Aristide, J.-B., Coore, D., ... New Yorker Video (Firm), (2003). *Life and Debt*.

Session 4: Development Discourse Part II: Hope and Despair

- Mulwo, A.K., Tomaselli, K.G., and Francis, M.D. (2012). HIV/AIDS and discourses of denial in sub-Saharan Africa: An Afro-optimist response? *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. 15(6), pp. 567-582.
- deGrassi, A. (2007). Envisioning futures of African agriculture: representation, power, and socially constituted time. *Progress in Development Studies*. 7 (2), pp. 88-93.

Session 5: Framing Foreign Aid: Friend or Foe?

- John, A. and Storr, V.H. (2009). Can the West help the rest? A review essay of Sachs' *The End of Poverty* and Easterly's *The White Man's Burden*. *Journal of Private Enterprise*. 25 (1), pp. 125- 140.
- Easterly, W. (2006). Correspondence: The White Man's Burden. *The Lancet*. 367(9528), pp 2060.
- Moyo, D. (2009, March 21). *Why Foreign Aid Is Hurting Africa*. *The Wall Street Journal*.
- Provost, Claire. (2013, May 31). *Bill Gates and Dambisa Moyo spat obscures the real aid debate*. *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2013/may/31/bill-gates-dambisa-moyo-aid>

Module 4: The Media, Popular Images and Representation

In this module students will draw on the ways in which Africa is portrayed in mainstream media and in popular western culture.

Required reading:

Session 1: Conceptual Frame

- Rebecca de Souza (2007) *The Construction of HIV/AIDS in Indian Newspapers: A Frame Analysis* *Health Communication* Vol. 21, 3
- Moeller, Susan. 1999. *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*. New York, NY: Routledge. Ch 1.
- Ojo, Tokunbo (2014). "Africa in the Canadian media: The Globe and Mail's coverage of Africa from 2003 to 2012". *Ecquid novi* (0256-0054), 35 (1), p. 43

Session 2: Case Studies:

- Yevak, E, et al (2015) *Mass media constructions of 'socio-psychological epidemics' in sub-Saharan Africa: The case of genital shrinking in 11 countries*. *Public Understanding of Science*. Vol 24, 8.
- Malaolu, Patrick O. (2014). "Sources and the news from Africa: Why are there no skyscrapers in Nigeria?" *Ecquid novi* (0256-0054), 35 (1), p. 25.
- Conrad D, (2015). *The Freelancer-NGO Alliance* David Conrad, *Journalism Studies*, 16, 2, 275-288.

Module 5: Re-making Ghana: Neoliberalism, the State and Community life

The students will visit the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development in Ghana to explore the history and nature of Ghana's current development policy and practice, its theoretical underpinnings, its origins and its influences both how Ghanaian perceive themselves and how they are perceived.

Session 1: Africa Rising

- Rothmyer, K. (2011, March 17). *Hiding the Real Africa: Why NGOs prefer bad news*. *Columbia Journalism Review*. Retrieved from http://www.cjr.org/reports/hiding_the_real_africa.php
- Collier, P. (2006). Editorial: Rethinking Assistance for Africa. *Economic Affairs*. 26(4), pp. 2 – 4.
- Dolan, C. and Roll, K. (2013). *Capital's New Frontier: From "Unusable" Economies to Bottom-of-the-Pyramid Markets in Africa*. *African Studies Review*. 56(3), pp. 123-146.

Session 2: Market Fixes

Required reading:

- Moseley, W. (2012). *Have Free-Market Policies Worked for Africa?* In W. Moseley (4th Edition), *Taking Sides, Clashing Views on Controversial African Issues*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Okeowo, A. (2014, July 10). Review of *China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants are Building a New Empire in Africa*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/13/books/review/chinas-second-continent-by-howard-w-french.html?_r=0

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Description of Assignments:

Assessment:

Op-ed	25%
Reading responses	25%
Final research paper	40%
Participation	10%

Grading Scale

94-100%	A	Excellent
90-93%	A-	
87-89%	B+	
84-86%	B	Above Average
80-83%	B-	
77-79%	C+	
74-76%	C	Average
70-73%	C-	
67-69%	D+	
64-66%	D	Below Average
Below 64	F	Fail

Grading Criteria

An "A" grade for an assignment entails superior (not just "very good") performance in terms of structure and organization of assignments, analysis, logical argumentation and consistency, and the provision of factual, numerical and/or historical evidence. In terms of class participation, an "A" grade refers to full attendance, punctuality, evidence of having completed assigned readings, attentive listening and active engagement in all lectures, discussions, field visits and other activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior. The level, frequency, and quality of the students' participation will be monitored and taken into account

Expectations and Policies

Class Participation

Participation in class refers to attendance, punctuality, attentive listening and active engagement in all lectures, discussions, field trips and other activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior. In addition, the following are expectations of all participants:

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.

- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

Disability Services: Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at disabilityservices@sit.edu for information and support in facilitating an accessible educational experience. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services, including a link to the online request form, can be found on the Disability Services website at <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/disabilityservices>.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the Program Dossier given to you at Orientation.