

Everyday Life in Africa

Instructor: Professor Wale Adebani

If we want to reflect critically on the borders of life and the drama of being, on what it means to be alive today, then we have to get out of the petrified systems and languages in which certain traditions of social science have imprisoned the African experience —Achille Mbembe ('Africa and the Night of Language' – Interview by Annalisa Oboe, *The Salon*, Vo. 2, p. 3, 2010).

Course Outline

This course will explore the different dimensions of everyday life in Africa. Everyday life has been described by Agnes Heller (1978) as “the secret yeast of history.” What constitutes this “yeast of history” in contemporary Africa? In exploring everyday life, we will examine the existing (in)capacities in the structures of state and society in Africa for human well-being in relation to the differences between political life (*bios*) and bare life (*zoe*). The course engages with the everyday life in terms of how social, economic and political lives are constituted and the implications of this process for whether Africans live well or not, how they die and their struggles for *alternative* lives. With (ethnographic) accounts and perspectives from different countries in Africa, the course focuses deeply on how to understand and explain the conditions under which everyday social needs and economic necessities are turned into political/existential struggles as well as the conditions under which political exigencies can transform into economic, social and bodily fatalities.

The overarching questions that will animate this course include these: What are the prevalent conditions of everyday life in Africa? What and who determines (in)eligibility regarding the everyday tools of good life and human survival? How are these determinations related to the differential distribution of potential and/or actual injury, harm, and damage to human life and the conditions of its survival? What can ethnographic insight contribute to our understanding of everydayness in Africa?

The roles of sexualities, gender, generation, humor, identities, racism, hate, memory, memorial, transactions, etc., in the construction, reconstruction, and deconstruction of daily life – and death – in the continent will be examined. Audio-visual materials will be used to analyze important themes about quotidian life in Africa.

Grading:

Attendance – 10%

First assignment – 20%

Class Presentation – 30%

Final Paper – 40%

Total – 100%

General/Background Texts:

Wale Adebani, ed. 2022. *Everyday State and Democracy in Africa: Ethnographic Encounters*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press; Wale Adebani, ed. 2017. *The Political Economy of Everyday Life in Africa: Beyond the Margins*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey Publishers; Giorgio Blundo and Pierre-Yves Le Meur, eds. 2008. *The Governance of Daily Life in Africa: Ethnographic Explorations of Public and Collective Services*. Leiden: Brill; Judith Butler. 2012. “Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life?” *Radical Philosophy*, no. 176 (November–December): 9–18; Chabal, Patrick. 2009. *The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*. London: Zed Books; Didier Fassin. 2009. “Another Politics of Life is Possible,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 26(5): 44–60; Ross, Fiona C. 2010. *Raw Life, New Hope: Decency, Housing and Everyday Life in a Post-apartheid Community*. Claremont, Cape Town: UCT Press; C. J.

Fuller and Véronique Benei, eds. 2000. *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*. New Delhi: Esha Bêteille Social Science Press; Achille Mbembe. 1992. "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," *Africa: Journal of the International Africa Institute*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (1992), pp. 3-37; Trentmann Frank, 2012. "The Politics of Everyday Life." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, edited by Frank Trentmann, 521–47. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DRAFT OUTLINE

Week 1: Theorizing and Contextualizing Everyday Life in Africa

How can the study of everyday life enrich and deepen our understanding of Africa? What are the most useful theoretical and conceptual approaches to the study of everyday life in modern Africa? What is the worth and value of life in Africa? What constitute life, chance and life chances in Africa?

Key Texts:

Sarah Neal and Karim Murji, 2015. "Sociologies of Everyday Life: Editors' Introduction to the Special Issue," *Sociology*, Vol. 49(5) 811–819; Wale Adebawu, 2022. "Introduction: The Everyday State and Democracy in Africa." In *Everyday State and Democracy in Africa: Ethnographic Encounters*. 1-46; Giorgio Agamben, 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press; Achille Mbembe. 1992. "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 62, No. 1: 3-37.

Further Reading:

John Broome. 2008. "What is Your Life Worth?" *Daedalus*, 137: 49–56; Nicolas Rose. 2008. "The Value of Life: Somatic Ethics & the Spirit of Biocapital," *Daedalus*, Vol. 137, No. 1: 36-48; Lorraine Daston. 2008. "Life, Chance and Life Chances" *Daedalus*, Vol. 137, No. 1: 5-14; Giorgio Blundo and Pierre-Yves Le Meur. 2008. "Introduction: Anthropology of Everyday Governance: Collective Service Delivery and Subject-Making." In *The Governance of Daily Life in Africa: Ethnographic Explorations of Public and Collective Services*. Leiden: Brill.

Short Documentaries:

- "The Worst Atrocity:" <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/13/opinion/the-worst-atrocity-youve-never-heard-of.html?action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=opinion-c-col-left-region®ion=opinion-c-col-left-region&WT.nav=opinion-c-col-left-region&r=1>
- "Italy's Mediterranean Mass Grave: Europe or Die:" https://news.vice.com/video/italys-mediterranean-mass-grave-europe-or-die-episode-4?utm_source=vicenewsyoutube&utm_medium=video&utm_campaign=relatedvideo

Weeks 2 & 3: Everyday Suffering, Striving and Surviving

Why is suffering pervasive among the people in Africa? What are the prevailing everyday attitudes to striving, suffering and survival? What are the key logics and processes of survival? How is survival connected to suffering?

Key Texts

Patrick Chabal. 2009. *The Politics of Suffering and Smiling* (Chapters 5, 6 & 7); Mususa, Patience. 2012. "Topping Up - Life Amidst Hardship and Death on the Copperbelt," *African Studies*, 71/2: 304-322; Marco Di Nunzio. 2012. "'We are Good at Surviving': Street Hustling in Addis Ababa's Inner City." *Urban Forum*, 23: 433-447; Adeline Masquelier. 2019. "Waiting for Tea," In *Fada: Boredom and Belonging in Niger*.

Further Reading:

Wale Ismail 2010. "Deconstructing Oluwole: Political Economy at the Margins of the State." In W. Adebawu and E. Obadare (eds.) *Encountering the Nigerian State*; David Crawford. 2009. "How life is

hard: Visceral notes on Meaning, Order, and Morocco,” *The Journal of North African Studies*, 14:3-4: 523-541; Paul U. Ugor, 2013. “Survival Strategies and Citizenship Claims: Youth and the Underground Oil Economy in Post-Amnesty Niger Delta,” *Africa*, Vol. 83, Iss. 2: 270-290.

- **Watch:** “Copper mines in Zambia - Straight through Africa,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4RJSi96oAE>

Week 4: (Dis)Order: Living in/with State and Society

Why is the question of order a perennial challenge in modern Africa? What are the connections between hardship and disorder? How can we understand people’s everyday democratic practices in relation to the nature of the state and society? How do ordinary people negotiate their everyday relationship with the institutions of the state as well as social institutions/processes?

Key Texts

Achille Mbembe. 2009. “On Politics as a Form of Expenditure,” In *Law and Disorder In the Postcolony*, Jean and John Comaroff (eds.): 299-335; Rita Barnard, 2008. “Tsotsi: On Law, the Outlaw, and the Postcolonial State,” *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 49, No. 4: 541-572; Jeffrey Paller, 2019. “The Construction of Legitimate Authority.” In *Democracy in Ghana: Everyday Politics of Urban Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Fiona C. Ross, 2010. “Teen die pad, Die Bos” (Alongside the road, The Bush).” In *Raw Life, New Hope: Decency, Housing and Everyday Life in a Post-Apartheid Community*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Further Reading:

Lars Buur and Steffen Jensen. 2004. “Introduction: Vigilantism and the Policing of Everyday Life in South Africa.” *African Studies* 63 (2): 139–52; Lori Lenonard, 2022. ‘Gazomania@ Shortage and the State in Chad.’ In Wale Adebani, ed. *Everyday State and Democracy in Africa*; Nicholas Rush Smith, 2022. “The State as Golem Police Violence in Democratic South Africa.” In Wale Adebani, ed. *Everyday State and Democracy in Africa*; Harry Englund. 2007. “Pentecostalism Beyond Belief: Trust and Democracy in a Malawian Township.” *Africa*, Vol. 77, Iss. 4: 477-499.

- **Movie:** Tsotsi (2006, Dir. Gavin Hood)

Weeks 5 & 6: Mortality and Morbidity: Health, Illness and Biopolitics

How do the institutions and instrumentalities of biopower act on the individual and the social body? What are the capacities and limitations of the systems for the (re)production of life itself in Africa? Why are some lives systematically neglected? How does the social constitution of mortality and morbidity explain the attitude of power towards human vitality in different African contexts? How do biomedical discourses within and beyond Africa determine the treatment of diseases and the health of the population; and how are they affected by material and political circumstances? How are all these connected to everyday questions of life and death?

Key Texts:

Fiona C. Ross, 2010. ““Illness and Accompaniment.” In *Raw Life, New Hope: Decency, Housing and Everyday Life in a Post-Apartheid Community*; Megan Vaughan. 1991. “Introduction: Discourse, Subjectivity and Differences,” (chapter 1); “The madman and the Medicine man” (chapter 5). In *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness*; Paul Richards, 2016. “Introduction.” In *Ebola: How a People’s Science Helped End an Epidemic*; Nguyen, Vinh-Kim. 2010. “Life Itself: Triage and Therapeutic Citizenship” (chapter 4) In *The Republic of Therapy: Triage and Sovereignty in West Africa’s Time of AIDS*.

Further Reading:

Obadare, Ebenezer. 2005. ‘A crisis of trust: history, politics, religion and the polio controversy in Northern Nigeria’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 39(3): 265 — 284; Jean Comaroff. 2007. “Beyond Bare Life: AIDS, (Bio)Politics, and the Neoliberal Order,” *Public Culture*, 19/1: 197-219; Nancy Rose Hunt, 2016.

“Introduction.” In *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo*; Carla F. Rodrigues. 2016. “Medicines and therapeutic pluralism in Maputo: exploring modalities of trust and the (un)certainities of everyday users,” *Health, Risk & Society*, 18(7-8): 385-406; Vinh-Kim Nguyen. 2010. “Biopower: Fevers, Tribes and Bulldozers” (chapter 5). In *The Republic of Therapy*; Mathieu Maheu-Giroux, et. al. 2015. “Prevalence of symptoms of vaginal fistula in 19 sub-Saharan Africa countries: a meta-analysis of national household survey data,” *Lancet Global Health*, 3: e271–278; Mathieu Maheu-Giroux. 2015. “Fistula in sub-Saharan Africa – Authors' reply,” *The Lancet Global Health*, 3/8: e442; Karen, Ballard, et. 2015. “Fistula in sub-Saharan Africa,” *The Lancet Global Health*, 3/8: e441; Megan Vaughan. 1991. “Conclusion: The Changing nature of Biomedical Discourse in Africa,” (chapter 9); Adrian Flint and Vernon Hewitt. 2015. “Colonial tropes and HIV/AIDS in Africa: sex, disease and race,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 53/3: 294–314.

- **Movie:** “Yesterday” (2004, Dir. Darrell Roodt)

[First assignment due in Week 7 – Instruction to be posted on Canvas]

Week 7: Debt, Credit and Fiscal Life

Achille Mbembe argues that “The question of debt is another name for life”. How then do we (fiscally) account for life? Why is social analysis of debt necessary? How do we understand the penetration of debt and credit in everyday life? How can we develop a complex history of the present in relation to everyday indebtedness and credit worthiness? How does debt create, sustain and complicate everyday social relations? Do debt and credit systems constitute a form of governmentality? How does the ‘impersonal arithmetic of debt’ demean life – and lead to social death? How does the capacity to pay (including pre-payment) dictate access to sustainable good life?

Key Texts:

Maurizio Lazzarato. 2011. ‘Understanding Debt as a Basis of Social Life.’ In *The Making of an Indebted Man*, pp. 13-35; Miranda Joseph. 2014. ‘Accounting for Debt: Towards a Methodology of Critical Abstraction.’ In *Debt to Society: Accounting for Life Under Capitalism*, pp. 1-28; Deborah James. 2015. “‘Ride the Camel’: Borrowing and Lending in Context.” In *Money from Nothing: Indebtedness and Aspiration in South Africa Paperback*, pp. 92-117; Anne-Maria Makhulu. 2017. “The Debt Imperium: Relations of owing after Apartheid,” in Wale Adebawale (ed.) *The Political Economy of Life in Africa: Beyond the Margins*.

Further Reading:

Deborah James and Dinah Rajak. 2014. “Credit Apartheid, Migrants, Mines and Money,” *African Studies*, 73 (3): 455-476; “Measuring Life: Living Prepaid and the Politics of Numbers after Apartheid,” by Antina von Schnitzler, *Democracy’s Infrastructure: Techno-Politics and Protest after Apartheid*, 132-167; Hannah Appel, Sa Whitley and Caitlin Kline. 2019. *The Power of Debt: Identity and Collective Action in the Age of Finance*. https://escholarship.org/content/qt2hc1r7fx/qt2hc1r7fx_noSplash_245df6b08cd001b9ffba604bb08696d1.pdf?t=q7pzu2; Mario Schmidt. 2017. “‘Disordered surroundings’: money and socio-economic exclusion in Western Kenya,” *Africa*, Vol. 87, Iss. 2: 278-299; Deborah James. 2014. “‘You Don’t Keep Money all the Time’: Saving Club and Social Mobility.” In *Money from Nothing*, pp. 118-146; E. Hull. 2012. ‘Banking in the bush: waiting for credit in South Africa’s rural economy’, *Africa* 82 (1): 168-86.

Week 8: Humor & Laughter: Everyday life and Levity

Is levity useful for understanding the (un)bearable heaviness/lightness of quotidian life in Africa? How does humor constitute a good account of the dynamics of life? How can travesty mirror the tragedy of life? What can what people laugh at, why and how they laugh reveal to us about the nature of everyday life?

Key Texts:

Ebenezer Obadare, 2009. "The Uses of Ridicule: Humour, 'Infrapolitics' and Civil Society in Nigeria," *African Affairs*, Vol. 108, Iss. 431: 241–261; Ebenezer Obadare, 2010. "State of travesty: jokes and the logic of socio-cultural improvisation in Africa," *Critical African Studies* 2 (4): 92–112; Daniel Hammett, 2010. "Political cartoons, post-colonialism and critical African studies," *Critical African Studies*, 2 (4): 1–26; Julia Katherine Seirlis, 2011. "Laughing all the way to freedom?: Contemporary stand-up comedy and democracy in South Africa," *Humor*, Vol. 24, No. 4: 513-530.

Further Reading:

Amanda Källstig. 2021. "Laughing in the Face of Danger: Performativity and Resistance in Zimbabwean Stand-up Comedy," *Global Society*, 35:1, 45-60; Zapiro and M. Willis. 2018. *WTF: Capturing Zuma. A Cartoonist's Tale*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media; Zapiro. 2010. Letter to the South African Human Rights Commission: A response to complaints regarding my cartoon, *Critical African Studies*, 2:4, 27-31.

Week 9: Sovereign Power, Territoriality and Bare Life

Why and how does power constitute some lives differently - as either livable/valuable/preservable/grievable or injurable/disposable/dispensable/expendable? How is sovereignty over human life performed in specific contexts? How is the 'terror' of territory constitutive of either the preservation or the disposability of human lives? How do we account for everyday racial, ethnic, religious and other 'identitarian sovereignties' that determine the difference between political and bare lives?

Key Texts:

Judith Butler (2015), "Precariousness and Grievability—When Is Life Grievable?" *Verso*, 16 November. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2339-judith-butler-preciousness-and-grievability-when-is-life-grievable>; Judith Butler, "Can One Lead a good Life in a Bad Life?" In *Notes on the Performative Theory of Assembly* (Chapter 6), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015; Bradley Skelcher. 2003. "Apartheid and the Removal of Black Spots from Lake Bhangazi in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa," *Journal of Black Studies*, 33(6): 761-783; Christine Kellow and Leslie Steeve. 1998. "The Role of Radio in the Rwandan Genocide," *Journal of Communication*, Summer, 48(3): 107-128.

- **Movie:** *Diary of Immaculee* (Dir. Peter LeDonne, 2006)

Further Reading:

Graeme Rodgers. 2008. 'Everyday life and the political economy of displacement on the Mozambique–South Africa borderland,' *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 26/4: 385-399; Awa M. Abdi. 2005. 'In Limbo - Dependency, Insecurity, and Identity among Somali Refugees in Dadaab Camps,' *Refugee*, 22(2): 1-14; Wale Adebawale, 2009. 'Terror, territoriality and the struggle for indigeneity and citizenship in northern Nigeria,' *Citizenship Studies*, 13:4, 349-363; Peter Geschiere and Francis B. Nyamnjoh. 2000. 'Capitalism and Autochthony: The Seesaw of Mobility and Belonging,' *Public Culture*, 12(2): 423-452; Derek Hook. 2015. "Petrified Life," *Social Dynamics*, 41(3): 438-460.

PRESENTATIONS*

(* Each student will read one or two of the assigned article(s) and make a presentation that relates the specific issue/s in the article(s) to the overall theories/concepts discussed in the first week)

Weeks 10 & 11: Neoliberalism and Alternative Lives

How do everyday people seek alternative ways of living well within the ascendant neo-liberal order? How do they domesticate the neoliberal order and glocal governmentality in their encounters with it? What are the everyday 'exit strategies' constructed and adopted in different contexts to realize their human potentials? What are the conditions that determine the incessant flow of migrants within and outside the continent?

Key Texts:

Charles Piot. 2010. "Exit Strategies." In *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa and the Cold War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Wale Adebani and Ebenezer Obadare, 2022. "Paper Games: Consularity and Ersatz Lives in Urban Lagos." In *Everyday State and Democracy in Africa: Ethnographic Encounters*; Ebenezer Obadare and Wale Adebani, 2011. "'The Visa God': Would-Be Migrants and the Instrumentalization of Religion." In *Religion Crossing Boundaries: Transnational Religious and Social Dynamics in Africa and the New African Diaspora* Leiden, Boston: Brill, pp. 31-48.; Matteo Rizzo, 2011. "'Life is War': Informal Transport Workers and Neoliberalism in Tanzania 1998–2009," *Development and Change* 42(5): 1179–1205; Dorte Thorsen. 2017. "Is Europe really the dream? Contingent paths among sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco," *Africa*, 87, Iss. 2: 343-361.

Further Reading:

Max J. Andrucki. 2010. 'The Visa Whiteness Machine - Transnational Motility in Post-Apartheid South Africa,' *Ethnicities* 10(3): 358–370; Ebenezer Obadare and Wale Adebani. 2009 "Transnational Resource Flow and the Paradoxes of Belonging: Redirecting the Debate on Transnationalism, Remittances, State and Citizenship in Africa," *Review of African Political Economy*, 36(122): 499-517; Sasha Newell. 2012. "Paris is Hard Like a Rock." In *The Modernity Bluff: Crime, Consumption and Citizenship in Cote D'Ivoire*; Kleist, Nauja. 2017. "Disrupted migration projects: the moral economy of involuntary return to Ghana from Libya," *Africa*, Vol. 87, Iss. 2: 322-342; Alpes, Maybritt Jill. 2017. "Why aspiring migrants trust migration brokers: the moral economy of departure in Anglophone Cameroon," *Africa*, 87, Iss. 2: 304-321; "'Making a plan': Responses amongst the wealthy to declining socioeconomic conditions in suburban Harare," by Shannon Morreira, *Social Dynamics*, 41:2, 2015: 273-288; David Crawford, 2009. "How life is hard: Visceral Notes on Meaning, Order, and Morocco," *The Journal of North African Studies*, 14: 3-4: 523-541.

Weeks 12 & 13: Ordinary/Sacred Lives: Everyday Citizenship, Gender, Sexuality, and Xenophobia

How do identities, the (re)constitution of otherness and gendered relations exert and invert everyday power relations? How can sex/sexuality be mobilized to sustain or destroy lives? What are the everyday modes and means by which people affirm, reclaim and/or declaim their membership of local/national or the human community? How do spiritual matters affect and reflect everyday attitudes towards the quality of life?

Key Texts:

Jennifer Riggan. 2014. "Biopolitical Departures: A Love Story," *Journal of Narrative Politics*, 1(1): 44-60; Jennifer Riggan. 2022. "The Intimate State: Ethiopian Civics Teachers as the Fault Line between Repression and Revolution." In *Everyday State and Democracy in Africa: Ethnographic Encounters*; Sherine Hafez. 2014. "The revolution shall not pass through women's bodies: Egypt, uprising and gender politics," *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19: 172-185; Patrick Awondo. 2010, "The Politicisation of Sexuality and Rise of Homosexual Movements in Postcolonial Cameroon", *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 37, no. 125, pp. 315-328; Patrick Awondo, Peter Geschiere & Graeme Reid. 2012, "Homophobic Africa? Toward A More Nuanced View", *African Studies Review*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 145-168; Ezra Chitando & Pauline Mateveke (2017) Africanizing the discourse on homosexuality: challenges and prospects, *Critical African Studies*, 9:1, 124-140,

Further Reading:

Masquelier, Adeline. 2019. "Snapshots: Bringing (Invisible) Women into View." In *Fada: Boredom and Belonging in Niger*; Antina von Schitzler. 2016. "Performing Dignity." In *Democracy's Infrastructure: Techno-Politics and Protest after Apartheid*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Pablo San Martin. 2005. "Nationalism, identity and citizenship in the Western Sahara," *The Journal of North African Studies*, 10(3-4): 565-592; Molly Manyonganise. 2016. "'We will chip their heads off': Homosexuality versus religio-political grandstanding in Zimbabwe." In *Public Religion and the Politics of*

Homosexuality in Africa, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 49-62; Habib Tiliouine. 2014. "Gender Dimensions of Quality of Life in Algeria," In *Gender, Lifespan and Quality of Life* (Vol. 53), Social Indicators Research Series, (pp. 63-82), Springer; Christopher J. Gray. 1998. "Cultivating Citizenship through Xenophobia in Gabon, 1960-1995," *Africa Today*, 45(3/4): 389-410; Aud Talle, 2007. "'Serious Games': Licences and Prohibitions in Masai Sexual Life." *Africa*, Vol. 77, No. 3: 351-370; Christopher J. Gray, 1998. "Cultivating Citizenship through Xenophobia in Gabon, 1960-1995," *Africa Today*, Vol. 45, No. 3/4: 389-409; Jonathan Crush & Godfrey Tawodzera, 2014. "Medical Xenophobia and Zimbabwean Migrant Access to Public Health Services in South Africa," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40:4: 655-670.