

PERSON AND COMMUNITY IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA
ANTHROPOLOGY 228
Winter Term 2009
Mondays and Wednesdays 2:40-4:00 p.m.
Pettengill 127

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"The most important African cultural characteristic is the great value placed on communal fellowship in our traditional society." Kwasi Wiredu, Philosophy and African Culture (1980)

African societies are often characterized as emphasizing the importance of duties to the group—communal ownership and collective responsibility—rather than individual rights or personal conscience. This course focuses on tensions between communalism and individualism, and in so doing, explores indigenous and imported notions of power & corruption, prosperity & disease as they are lived and understood within contemporary Western and Southern Africa. How do kin-ordered social systems respond to the incursions of global capitalism and the advent of the nation-state? How have chieftaincy, slavery, and state-structures emerged within them? How have such new organizational forms as political parties, religious congregations, ethnic groups, and occupational associations been constructed under changing historical conditions?

The aim is to give you insight into indigenous responses to contemporary Africa's sociopolitical challenges. Coverage of the entire continent in one semester is out of the question; I have chosen to focus on one set of themes, and even then, still narrowing further, that is, to West and South African material.

As many immigrants and refugees from Africa have recently resettled locally, I have devised a community-based research project for us—a follow up to the recent Maine Department of Labor report on Somali employment in L/A.

REQUIREMENTS (note the term—it means each and every piece is required in order to pass the course)

- In class exercises (TBA) = 5%
- Class attendance (after 2 absences, participation also affected) = 6%
- Active, constructive, participation in class discussion = 25%
- Weekly written reading responses:
 - Shorter reading responses (7 @ 2%) = 14%
 - Longer essays (2 @ 10%) = 20%
- Community-Based Research (tasks/dates/details TBA) = 30%

Most class time will consist of discussion, and I expect you to talk to each other, NOT to pass all commentary through me. If you find you cannot or prefer not to participate in a loosely structured discussion class, then I recommend you find another elective for yourself. Here is my schema for participation credit: The awarding of high participation points come with good attendance and active, thoughtful, consistent class participation, the kind that reveals your thorough preparation and engagement with class material. This means contributing your own ideas as well as providing constructive responses to other students' comments. B-level work means your participation may be of high quality, but inconsistent, or you share your own ideas frequently but may not pay much attention to other students' comments. You would receive C-level points if your participation were thoughtful but infrequent, or regular but perfunctory. Few points would be awarded if your participation were rare and/or revealed poor or careless preparation.

I envision your reaction papers and formal essays as individualized responsibilities, but the classroom atmosphere during large and small group discussions, as well as the entirety of our CBR project, I see as group endeavors, with all the messiness such processes entail. Be prepared for a certain level of messiness and ambiguity.

The following books should be available in the bookstore: **Bohannon & Curtin Africa and Africans (4th ed.); Bowen Return to Laughter; Kwakye The Clothes of Nakedness; Mofolo Chaka; and Mpe Welcome to Our Hillbrow. Sembene's The Money Order is on Lyceum, as are all of your assigned articles. Films are on reserve. Readings are listed on the day they are due and should be read in the order they appear in this syllabus. Also, please note that this syllabus is subject to adjustment during the course of the semester, for many reasons, including student interest, ongoing feedback, and the exigencies of our community based research project.**

- Jan. 12: Introduction
- 14: What do we [think we] know about Africa?
 Reading: Finnegan "New in Town"
 Wainaina "How to Write about Africa"
 Bohannon & Curtin Chapters 1-3
 Rodney "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa"
 Bowen through Chapter 3
 Webwork: What relevant items are in the news?
- [19:] [MLK DAY attend a relevant event (e.g., Africana Club panel)]
- 21: The Idea of Community: Resources and Social Charters [Holly Lasagna visit]
 Reading: Menkiti "Person & Community..."
 Nyerere "Ujamaa..."
 Lugard "Methods of Ruling Native Races"
 Bowen Return to Laughter through Chapter 11
 Webwork: search the web for UBUNTU and see what you come up with
- [23:] [Attend the opening events for the Somali Documentary Project at the Museum]

- Jan. 26: Secular Power and Mystical Power [Ismail Ahmed's first visit]
 Reading: Bowen through Chapter 19
 P. Bohannan "Extra-Processual Events"
 E.E. Evans-Pritchard "Witchcraft Explains"
 Bohannan and Curtin Chapters 5-7
 Webwork: www.africapolicy.org/bp/ethnic1.htm
- 28: And What about the Ethnographer Herself?
 Reading: Bowen's entire book due
 Writing: first chance to turn in a longer essay on reading—due by Fri Jan 30th
- Feb. 2: Processes of State Formation [Ismail Ahmed visits again]
 CBR deadlines: Crafts Grant Proposal and I.R.B. due
 Reading: B & C, Part Three, Chapters 10-15
 Thompson "The Zulu Kingdom and the Mfecane"
 Kunene's Introduction to Mofolo's Chaka
 Mofolo to Chapter 8
 Webwork: Search the web for Shaka, Chaka or Tchaka—what comes up?
- 4: Secular Power and Mystical Power, second round
 Reading: Mofolo due
 Writing: second chance to turn in a longer essay on reading—due Fri Feb 6th
- 9: Competing Moralities in Contemporary Africa
 Reading: Sembene "The Money-Order"
 Eames "Navigating Nigerian Bureaucracies"
 Video: Sembene's filmed version, *Mandabi*, is also required
 Writing: third chance to turn in a longer essay on reading—due Fri Feb 13th
- 11: More on Money and Morality in Contemporary Africa
 Reading: Barber "Popular Reactions to the Petro-Naira"
 Shipton "Bitter Money"
 Bohannan and Curtin, Part Three, Chapters 16-19
 Real World Research (both excerpts)
- 23: Community Based Research Focus Groups
- 25: Community Based Research continues
- March 2: Community Based Research continues
- 4: Community Based Research continues

- March 9: Class and Gender Politics in Urban West Africa
 Reading: begin Kwakye The Clothes of Nakedness
 Video: *Witches in Exile* on reserve
- 11: Class and Gender Politics in Urban West Africa, continued
 Reading: Finish Kwakye
 Video: *Ghanaian Video Tales* on reserve
 Writing: here is your fourth chance to write a longer essay—due Fri March 13th
- 16: Morality and Medical Diagnosis: the example of HIV/AIDS
 Reading: Rodlach “Westerners, Witchcraft and HIV”
 Makuchi “Slow Poison”
 Bohannan and Curtin Epilogue
 Video: *Thunderbolt* on reserve
 Webwork: read www.virusmyth.net/aids/data/rcafrica.htm
- 18: Introduction to Apartheid: Migration, the Pass System and Forced Resettlement
 Reading: Re-read B&C on "race" (pp. 11-13 and 37-41 in 4th edition).
 South Africa summary material on Lyceum TBA
 Mpe’s Welcome to Our Hillbrow
 Video: *Girls Apart* on reserve
- 23: South Africa, continued
 Reading: Walker “Reconstructing Tradition”
 Video: *Mapantsula* on reserve
- 25: City Life in Contemporary South Africa
 Reading: Mpe Welcome to Our Hillbrow due
 Writing: fifth chance for your longer essay—due by Friday March 27th
- 30: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission
 Reading: CSMonitor handouts on reconciliation
 Videos: *The Family That Does Not Speak; Long Night’s Journey into Day*
- April 1: Contemporary South Africa, conclusion
 Reading: TBA
- 6: CBR
- 8: CBR
- 18: everything due by noon April 18th, the end of the winter 2009 semester

AN 228: Person & Community in Contemporary Africa

COMMUNITY BASED LEARNING PROJECT

Winter 2008

The goal of our project is to gather information in the L/A community in order to expand, update and enrich the recently released Maine Department of Labor Report entitled “Analysis of the Employment Patterns of Somali Immigrants to Lewiston from 2001 to 2006.” Our project will dovetail with and embellish upon the report on “Perceived Barriers to Somali Immigrant Employment in Lewiston” produced last semester by the students of *AN 339 (Production & Reproduction: Economic Anthropology)* for the Androscoggin County Chamber of Commerce and the Lewiston Career Center.

Students in AN 228 will research and develop their own focus group project to elicit some of the culturally constituted perspectives of Africans in L/A on waged employment. Students will develop the questions and, with the help of our community partners, organize and run the focus groups. In addition, they will transcribe and, as appropriate, interpret their data, reporting back to the community in a form as yet to be determined. Someone in this class will write a Crafts Grant proposal, another will compose our I.R.B. application. Some will be responsible for handling the recording equipment, others for transcribing what is recorded. We will share the data and jointly and severally analyze it. I hope to employ a T.A. from amongst you to help with the organizational work, so let me know if you are interested in turning some of this work into your own waged labor.

The proposed research topics listed here derive from page 22 of last semester’s report by my economic anthropology students—specifically, questions #17-20:

- We should learn something of the various economic contexts/employment contexts in their homeland of Somalia as well as in their more recent location of the refugee camps in Kenya.
- What is the meaning of wage labor for Somali refugees? What is formal employment actually good for? What, if any, role do religion or spiritual beliefs play in the evaluation of the meaning of work? Is there any stigma associated with particular activities?
- Distinct notions of time and timeliness in Northeast U.S. and East African workplace cultures would appear to be a major cross-cultural stressor. What are some others?
- What is the human/cultural dimension of the enforced individuation of formal waged employment?

These research questions will be refined during the first half of February; actual focus groups will be held right after February break; our information will be transcribed, coded, and interpreted during the month of March; and we will report to the community in April.

SOME ISSUES TO CONTEMPLATE AS YOU READ RETURN TO LAUGHTER

NOTE: Eleanore Smith Bowen is really Laura Bohannan. She lived and worked in the Tiv region of Nigeria in the 1950's.

QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE:

1. Think of one example of a dispute and consider the conflicting loyalties every Tiv must face. What social ties cross-cut lineage membership?
2. Notice the prominence of gift-exchange and both its moral and utilitarian dimensions. How does gift-giving relate to prestige and loyalty in this community? Note the extension of fictive kin ties based on these exchanges.
3. What does marriage seem to be about here? What appear to be some of the social and emotional benefits and costs of polygyny? What seems to be the division of labor in this society? How might you characterize women's status in Tiv society? What is the role of children? Who was able to mobilize labor? For what purposes?
4. Was Yabo a witch? An mbaTsav? Why or why not?

QUESTIONS CONCERNING STYLE AND METHOD:

1. What do you think are the meanings of the book's title?
2. Pay close attention to the author's numerous shifts between feelings of kinship and alienation with the community. When, why and how does she use the word "savage"? How does it make you feel?
3. Why do you think she published this book pseudonymously? What are some of the mistakes Bowen/Bohannan made? Should she have discussed them so openly? Who was her intended audience? Why did she use this style of presentation? Towards what aspects of her presentation might a new millennium audience be more sympathetic, and to what aspects might we be less sympathetic?
4. What ethical implications derive from the fact that Bowen (arguably, by extension, all anthropologists) seemed to thrive on gossip, betrayal, scandal, tension and political rivalry?
5. What have you learned about ethnographic methodology from reading this book?

SUGGESTED TOPIC FOR LONGER ESSAY (if you neither make your own nor use a discussion question):

Forge connections between Bowen/Bohannan's text, *Return to Laughter*, and Ifeanyi Menkiti's claims concerning "African" ontological theories.

Note that in such a course essay as this, you should endeavor to demonstrate to me that you have been paying attention—refer to course material. Do not hesitate to disagree with my interpretations of our texts, but either way, clearly explicate your position in a logical fashion and (in contrast to your shorter efforts) use a formal prose style, academic citations, etc.

PERSON AND COMMUNITY IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA

Chaka Discussion and/or Essay Questions

1. What did you uncover in your web-sleuthing?
2. Who was Thomas Mofolo? When and under what circumstances did he write the novel *Chaka*?
3. In what major ways does Mofolo's account of Shaka's rise differ from other accounts?
4. Why might Mofolo (and some of the oral accounts collected some generations after his death) exaggerate Shaka's illegitimacy? How else is he portrayed as an unnatural child?
5. Why does Mofolo twist the record on Shaka's relationship with women? Why does the author appear to be more outraged at Shaka's killing of his wife than his killing of his brother?
6. Who is Isanusi? Where does he come from? What does he symbolize? What pact does Shaka make with him? What might Isanusi, and each of his "helpers," personify?
7. How is "medicine" used in the novel other than for curing individual physical ailments?
8. What were some of Shaka's military innovations?
9. What were some social changes instituted by Shaka?
10. Why might Mofolo begin calling Shaka "originator-of-all-things-evil" when he notes that young men "went to war understanding that they were not the children of their parents, but of the king"? Is there a universal tension between "big government" and "family values," to use rhetoric derived from recent American political campaigns?
11. What is the *mfecane/difeqane*? How does Mofolo characterize it? Why might he have used such imagery?
12. What are some ways that Shaka's rise at the turn of the 19th Century might have affected subsequent events in Southern Africa?

The following two questions are more like longer essay topics:

13. Consider the place of the individual in Zulu society during the early decades of the 19th century. How is personal idiosyncrasy treated? What possibilities are there for personal ambition? What are the means of acquiring power? How are such powerful individuals looked upon by others? Does it seem consistent with Menkiti's philosophical statements about individual and community?
14. For the two stages in the state-building process presented to us in the readings, outline briefly: the principles of inclusion and exclusion and different kinds of membership within the community, paying attention to those based on gender, kinship and age. Are any other principles discernable? Does this case seem consistent with Menkiti's philosophical statements about individual and community?

Anthropology 228

Person and Community in Contemporary Africa

Issues for Contemplation concerning *The Money-Order/Mandabi/Le Mandat*:

Note: you need to read the novella AND watch the film to adequately address these issues

1. Who is Sembene/Sembene Ousmane/Ousmane Sembene?
2. Of what significance is the title (are the titles, i.e., see above)?
3. What does Sembene present as the impact of money on African interpersonal relationships? How have African gift-giving practices (including credit and alms) been perverted by the market economy, according to Sembene?
4. What is Sembene's attitude towards his various characters? Is anyone "innocent"? Are some more "innocent" than others?
5. Is Dieng a sympathetic character? What character flaws does Sembene attribute to him?
6. How would you characterize the three-way relationship between Dieng, Mety and Aram?
7. What are the moral lessons provided by Sembene's characterization of Dieng's three junior relatives (Abdou, Mbaye and the distant cousin with the European wife)?
8. What might the mailman represent?
9. How does Sembene explore the complex and multiple relationships between anonymity and individuality? Relate this to the overarching theme of the course—individual and community in contemporary Africa.

Possible Paper Topics for *The Money-Order*

1. Choose your own topic relating *The Money-Order* to course themes.
2. According to Sembene, what is the impact of money on African interpersonal relationships? How have African gift-giving practices (including credit and alms) been perverted by the market economy and the notion of private property, according to Sembene? Does his position seem consistent with Menkiti's philosophical statements about individual and community?
3. In *The Money-Order*, Sembene explores the complex and multiple relationships between anonymity and individuality. Discuss with relation to the overarching theme of this course—individual and community in contemporary Africa.

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Person and Community in Contemporary Africa
Issues for contemplation concerning *The Clothes of Nakedness*

In *each* case, relate your answer to other course readings:

1. How should we interpret the title of Kwakye's book?
2. How is the concept of "community" treated in this text?
3. How is the concept of "power" treated in this text?
4. How is wealth treated in this text?
5. How is social class treated in this text?
6. How is the concept of "mobility" treated in this text?
7. With whom do you sympathize in this story? Why?
8. What might Mystique Mysterious represent? Kofi Ntim? Kojo Ansah?
9. What are the moral lessons provided by the author?
10. What do we know about Benjamin Kwakye? What do you wish you could ask him?

Possible Paper Topic for *The Clothes of Nakedness*:

How might the troubling, simplistic and judgmental Western notions of "tribalism," "witchcraft" and "corruption" become redefined for you in the context of this novel? Use readings from throughout the semester to assist in our re-evaluation.

Make up your own topic. Or use a discussion question as a jumping off point.

Discussion Questions

Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

1. In light of course themes, how do you interpret the title?
2. To what extent can one say that Mpe sets up Hillbrow as a microcosm for contemporary South Africa?
3. How does the issue of migrant labor enter the narrative? How does this resonate with what you have learned about Pass Laws? Bantustans? Chieftaincy? Townships? Forced removals? Housing? Education? Language policy?
4. Give some examples of how Mpe interweaves gender, race, class and age.
5. How does enterprise enter the tale? Reciprocity? Trade? Money? Exploitation? Corruption?
6. How are informers and traitors dealt with in this story? What complicities do we uncover? Can you discern any resonances between *Mapantsula* and *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*? What of *Long Night's Journey into Day*?
7. Are there any sympathetic characters in this novel? When explaining your answer, contextualize the readership. What moral lessons do we learn from reading *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*? How do various course readings assist you in this assessment?
8. Which of the discussion questions from previous novels can be usefully posed for *Hillbrow*?

Possible Longer Essay Topic for *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*:

Demonstrate how your encounter with course material rendered you a more enlightened reader of Mpe's novella than you would have been in 2008.

Choose a discussion question as a jumping off point, or create your very own question to then answer.

Person and Community in Contemporary Africa
Anthropology 228
Final Community Based Learning Report
Winter 2009
Due to Prof. Eames no later than noon on April 18th

For this final part of our project, please provide a **descriptive assessment** of your community based learning experience, including, but not limited to:

1. A characterization of your particular part of the project. What did you do? When? With whose help? Whom did you assist? What challenges did you encounter? What ethnographic insights did you experience? Then include,
2. Any of your documents or products (e.g., the application you wrote, the text you transcribed, your analytical contributions, etc., etc.). Next, provide
3. A discussion of how the experience might be enriched for future community based learning students. What should we keep and what should we change in future? What are the most promising follow up questions to our research? And, most important of all,
4. Please discuss the connection between your community work and other course material. What might assist future students in forging such linkages?