**Department of French Studies**

**Brown University**

**FREN 1710: Topics in Francophone Studies**

**War Machines: Violence and Social Forms in Francophone Africa**

**Fall 2014**

**MWF 3:00-5:30**

**Wilson Hall 205**

**canvas.brown.edu**

**Justin Izzo Office Hours**

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**Description:**

From civil war in Ivory Coast to terrorism in Mali, war and violence in Francophone Africa both provoke and respond to debates about France’s colonial legacy and continued presence on the continent. Yet these phenomena have much to tell us about emerging social relations, new forms of politics, and how ordinary Africans view the future—their own, that of their countries, and of the continent as a whole. For this reason, our course will proceed comparatively, exploring Anglophone Africa and Western representations of African violence while still remaining in touch with a Francophone perspective. How have philosophers, social scientists, and novelists sought to come up with a theoretical vocabulary that can address war and social formation on the continent? And how does this theoretical grammar speak to or clash with social forms in everyday life?

This course studies these and related questions in a variety of disciplines and media, including anthropological texts, graphic novels, literary fiction, documentary and fiction films, philosophy, and investigative journalism.

**Course Objectives:**

--To think critically, synthetically, and comparatively about war and social formation in post-independence and post-millennial Africa.

--To understand how “postcolonial” political histories might still impinge upon 21st-century war-making in/and African societies.

--To reflect on the ways in which violence intersects with, and is (over)determined by, questions of globalization, economic inequality, gender, and religion.

--To investigate how war and violence in Africa has been conceptualized and problematized in diverse yet interrelated genres, including: philosophy, the novel, anthropology, graphic novels, and films.

**Books (available at the Brown Bookstore):**

Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*

Joshua Dysart and Alberto Ponticelli, *Unknown Soldier*, vols. 1 and 2: *Haunted House* and *Easy Kill*

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* / *Les damnés de la terre*

Danny Hoffman, *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*

Ahmadou Kourouma, *Allah Is Not Obliged* / *Allah n’est pas obligé*

Mike McGovern, *Making War in Côte d’Ivoire*

Wole Soyinka, *Of Africa*

**Coursework and Requirements:**

**Attendance, Preparedness, Participation: 20%**

I expect students to come to class having done the required reading and ready to participate actively in discussions. This is a seminar class, a format that offers us an opportunity to go into intensive depth during a longer weekly meeting period. The benefit of this format is that we can explore thoroughly together, debate complex problems and ideas, and voice questions about issues we haven’t yet figured out—all in a long weekly session. What a seminar requires, however, is more independent work on the students’ part—that is, students should be excited to wrestle with difficult, rich material on their own, outside of class, and then to be prepared to help determine the course of in-class discussions during our weekly meetings. Regular attendance is expected, as is very active participation. Students will have an opportunity to self-evaluate their participation at the mid-semester mark and that evaluation will be averaged with a mid-semester grade determined by me. Your participation grade will also be determined by active participation on our Canvas discussion message board: students will write 250-word posts every other week (and shorter comments/responses on their “off” weeks) that critically engage with the week’s material and begin to raise questions to be addressed in class.

**Written Work: 60%**

You will write two papers for this course, the first a short essay of 7 to 8 pages and the second a longer exploration of 15 to 20 pages. The first essay is worth 20% of your grade, and the second 40%. For both essays, you will need to submit a one-sentence argument to me in advance. All essays are to be documented according to Chicago-style guidelines: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\_citationguide.html

As to your analysis, while your paper must address war and social forms in Africa, the argument you decide to make will be entirely up to you. Some of you may want to work on projects that are more literary in nature, while others might be more inclined to take up the social sciences, politics, or film/visual cultures. I will be thrilled to see a wide variety of subjects and disciplines addressed, and it is important to me that my students pursue intellectual avenues that excite them.

In all work for this class you are, of course, bound by Brown’s Academic Code.

**Leading Discussion: 20%**

You will be responsible for leading discussion during a part of one class period on a text or set of texts of your choosing from that week’s materials. You will be evaluated on the depth and rigor of your questions as well as on how you present your own perspective on the material. The care you take to generate and manage a quality discussion will also be considered.

**Reading Schedule** (subject to adjustment at my discretion)

**Sept. 8**—Introduction

**I. Theories of Violence and/in Africa in the 21st Century**

**Sept. 15** —Walter Benjamin: “Critique of Violence”

Jean-Paul Sartre: Preface to Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Frantz Fanon: “On Violence”

John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, “Law and Disorder in the Postcolony: An Introduction”

**Sept. 22** —Achille Mbembe: “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11-40

Achille Mbembe: “The Aesthetics of Vulgarity”

Achille Mbembe: “On Politics as a Form of Expenditure”

Achille Mbembe: “Reading Fanon in the 21st Century,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYXlHRez9Ao

**II. Youth, War, and Social Forms**

**Sept. 29**—Ahamadou Kourouma: *Allah is Not Obliged*

**Oct. 6**—Danny Hoffman: *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*

**Oct. 13—University holiday**

**Oct. 20**—**Films:** Kim Nguyen (dir.): *War Witch* (2012)

Mahamat Saleh Haroun (dir.): *A Screaming Man* (2011)

**III. Civil Wars, National Contexts, and Western Interventions**

**Oct. 27**—Joshua Dysart and Alberto Ponticelli: *Unknown Soldier*, vols. 1 and 2: *Haunted House* and *Easy Kill*

**Paper 1 Due**

**Nov. 3**—Séverine Autesserre: *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (chapters 1, 2, 4, 6)

**Nov. 10**— Mike McGovern: *Making War in Côte d’Ivoire*

**Nov. 17**— **Films:** Invisible Children: *Kony 2012* (2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc

Vice Magazine: *Kony, M23, and the Real Rebels of the Congo* (2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSEaTQMI5AA

Max Fisher, “The Soft Bigotry of *Kony 2012*,” *The Atlantic*, 8 March 2012, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-soft-bigotry-of-kony-2012/254194/

Teju Cole, “The White-Savior Industrial Complex,” *The Atlantic*, 21 March 2012, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/

**Nov. 24**—**Film:** France 2 TV documentary on Operation Serval in Mali (2013):

http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=4ea\_1384605775

**Workshopping of final papers in class**

**IV. Conclusions**

**Dec. 1—** Wole Soyinka, *Of Africa*

**Final Paper Due Dec. 15 at 5pm**

**Supplementary Materials and Secondary Sources**

Radio France Internationale: www.rfi.fr (available in French- and English-language broadcasts)

Resources on the 2012-13 conflict in Mali: http://africa.berkeley.edu/Outreach/Mali.php

Cooper, Frederick. *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960*.

-----. *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present*.

Piot, Charles. *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War*.

Schmidt, Elizabeth. *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror*.