

Kansas African Studies Center

African Studies Seminar Series

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KU

Spring 2007

"Cities in Africa: Overcoming Stereotypes & Legacies of Crisis"

Thursdays

3:30-5:00 p.m.

Kansas Union

There is a general consensus in the scholarly literature concerned with African cities suggesting a nearly uniform urban crisis of monumental proportions. Popular outsider portrayals of African urbanism reveal a decided preoccupation with the degraded features of city life. All too often, talk of African cities is invariably turned into a dire litany of the seemingly boundless chaos, anarchy, and disorder of everyday life. This obsession with urban pathologies and enduring failures effectively reduces city life in Africa to a dystopian nightmare. Our seminar starts with the contention that limiting the study of urbanization in Africa to such bleak themes not only leaves a great deal of room for misunderstandings, misconceptions, and even inadvertent stereotypes about African cities and their residents, but also tends to ignore the resourcefulness, inventiveness, and determination of the countless millions of ordinary people who somehow manage to successfully negotiate the perils of everyday life. The real challenge is not merely to describe the failure of cities in Africa to emulate Western models of urbanization, but to seek a deeper comprehension of why these urban agglomerations have developed the way they have. In other words, what is needed is a much more nuanced and rounded view that not only acknowledges the spatial unevenness of the urbanization process but also treats African urban residents as active agents in constructing meaningful lives for themselves rather than simply passive victims of inexorable structural processes beyond their control. Our papers in the series will aim to produce this more nuanced and rounded view and this greater attention to African agency in African cities.

- **February 1, Pine Room** "Land Reform, Political-Economic Reform, and Urban Political Ecology in Zanzibar," Garth Myers, University of Kansas
- **February 8, Walnut Room** "Tuntembas versus Ultra Modern Markets: Regulating Lusaka's Informal Economy, 1972-2006," Karen Tranberg Hansen, Department of Anthropology, Northwestern University
- **February 15, Pine Room** "From Segregation to Service Provision: Overcoming Colonial Legacies in Dar es Salaam," Sarah Smiley, University of Kansas
- **March 8, Pine Room** "Making Services Work for Poor People in African Cities," Stephen Commins, Globalization Research Center-Africa, UCLA
- **March 15, Alderson Auditorium** "Planning for Changing Livelihood Strategies in African Cities: Challenges and Opportunities." Francis Owusu, Department of Community and Regional Planning, Iowa State University
- **April 5, International Room** "History of Four Cairo: Ancient, Byzantine, Early Arab, and Fatimid," Mohamed El-Hodiri, University of Kansas

For more information about the African Studies Seminar, Spring 2007, contact Garth Myers OR Khalid El-Hassan, (785) 864-1064, elhassan@ku.edu