After Afro-Pessimism
Fashioning African Futures
Anne-Maria Makhulu, Organizer
Princeton Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts

Schedule

Friday, April 15, 2005
Chinua Achebe
Keynote
Friend Center 101, 4:30pm

Saturday, April 16, 2005
Workshop
McCormick 106, 10:00am - 6:00pm

Speakers

Chinua Achebe
Novelist, Poet, and Charles P. Stevenson, Jr. Professor of Languages and Literature Bard College

*Insider Perspectives On Afro-Pessimism: Rethinking Our Role As Contemporary Self-Critics*

Stephen Jackson
Anthropology & Policy, Democratic Republic of Congo
Social Sciences Research Council

"It Seems To Be Going" : Living With And Within The State Of Emergency

Adam Ashforth
Political Science, South Africa
Institute for Advanced Study

*Occult Violence, Spiritual Insecurity, And Democratic Governance In Post Apartheid South Africa*
Beth Buggenhagen  
Anthropology, Senegal and the U.S.  
University of Rochester  

*Textiles Not Texts: Cloth Wealth, Home Building, And The Global Circuits Of Senegalese Muslims*

Charlie Piot  
Anthropology, Togo  
Duke University  

*West African Pentecostalism And The End Of History*

Brian Larkin  
Anthropology, Nigeria  
Barnard College  

*Nigeria And The Domains Of Piracy*

Jesse Shipley  
Anthropology, Ghana  
Bard College  

*The Scent Of Political Agency: Mass Mediation, Racial Imaginaries, And Hip Hop In Ghana*

**Discussants:**

John Comaroff, University of Chicago  
Carol Greenhouse, Princeton University  
Anne-Maria Makhulu, Princeton University

**Roundtable:**

Janet Roitman, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

**Sponsors:**

Program in African Studies  
Program in African American Studies  
Department of Anthropology
Workshop Theme:

If much current scholarship focuses on two apparently distinct, yet interrelated, features of contemporary capitalism—"neoliberalism" and "globalization"—scholars of Africa confront a third, namely the uncertain conditions of "postcoloniality." It is at the conjuncture of all three that this workshop proposes to examine the possibilities for a theoretically committed scholarship, certainly, but more importantly to transcend highly normative explanations of so-called "African crisis." While acknowledging many of the challenges facing contemporary Africa—the deeply uneven terms of North-South relations, the limits of political authority, and the extent of HIV/AIDS—the notion of emergency not only limits our analytical capacities, but distorts the reality of lived experience.

Where in the configuration of neoliberalism, globalization, and postcoloniality, can we situate forms of social agency and popular practice that construct worlds within and beyond the language of predicament? Can we conceptualize alternative spaces, where the "imaginative and social practices of African agents show that other orders of reality are being established"? Or, that concepts of "invisible governance," "regimes of unreality," and religious imaginaries offer new theoretical vistas from which to derive some better formulation of African political possibility. This is not to suggest that we can ignore cultural and institutional mechanisms of global hegemony within which African marginality is configured and constituted. Rather, by moving beyond such over-determinations of Africa's place in the world order, the limits of its freedom, and the partiality of its sovereignties, we can pose alternative questions. What "practices of self" are at stake in the making of African subjects, and what futures might these bring into being? What forms of aspiration are suggested by the tremendous appeal of Pentecostalism, the prosperity gospel, and new and emergent forms of Christianity and Islam in Africa? How do we respond to the transnational movement of people, goods, and ideas and what impact might these have on social, literary, and cinematic forms?
The African Studies Program, the Anthropology Department, and the Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts at Princeton University invite you to a two-day conference on Africa, the African condition, and the possibility for new theoretical commitment.

**Readings:**


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