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of the  
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**APCG**

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**Chair's Report**

Dear Colleagues,

I am sending you my greetings from the snowy, cold Midwest where we are struggling with one of the harshest winters on record.

Sad news: My chair's report is as gloomy as the Midwest winter weather, for APCG and the discipline of political science have lost several fellow colleagues recently-Aristide Zolberg, Patrick Chabal, and Joel Barkan. Each of these scholars contributed to enriching and invigorating the study of politics in Africa and we mourn the loss of their creativity and their intellectual vitality. On behalf of APCG, I would like to send condolences to their families and friends.

Aristide Zolberg:

Aristide Zolberg was the Walter A. Eberstadt Professor of Political Science and University in Exile Professor Emeritus at the New School for Social Research. Professor Zolberg's influential publications in the 1960s on party politics in West Africa were foundational texts for understanding how parties worked in the newly independent countries of Africa. Professor Zolberg also made a lasting contribution to the study of immigrants, refugees, and the politics of exile. His 2006 book on US immigration policy received widespread acclaim. Professor Zolberg passed away April 12, 2013 at the age of 81.

**Symposium:  
Teaching about  
Africa through  
Film and Media**

Features contributions  
from

**Jennifer Brass,  
Kim Yi Dionne,  
Adrienne LeBas,  
Cara Jones, James Long,  
Stephen Marr and  
Kristin Michelitch**

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## Symposium: Teaching about Africa through Film and Media

*Although we published symposium on teaching African Politics (APCG Newsletter 9, no 2), in recent months among many of our members have been several conversations about teaching with films. This symposium started as a Facebook conversation among several just looking for suggestions for classes, but we feel that opening the conversation to a broader one with our colleagues in the APCG will greatly increase our resources, and to potentially create a 'master list' of African Films and availability on the website for future use. We welcome your contributions to both this discussion and to the list of syllabi and 'innovative assignments' found on the APCG website. Please contact any of the editors or our website manager if you are interested in doing so. - Editors*

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### Using Film to Teach about International Trade Policies

*Jennifer Brass, Indiana University, jbrass@indiana.edu*

#### **Film: T-Shirt Travels**

Info: <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/tshirttravels/film.html>

I teach an introductory undergraduate course on international policy, and draw on my knowledge of Africa in that course. For example, I use the film "T-Shirt Travels" to discuss issues of international trade and international poverty. The film discusses the second-hand clothing market in Zambia, looking at how clothing donated to charity in the United States ends up being sold by entrepreneurs for profit in the Zambia. In doing so, it examines the effects that liberal trade policies, such as those supported during structural adjustment programs, have on the clothing industry and marketing in one African country (Zambia no longer has a clothing manufacturing industry). For an introductory course, this allows us to discuss in detail

what it means for both the U.S. and its trade partners to have more liberal vs. more protectionist trade policies, and the range of subsidies and tariffs that various countries have as part of their trade policies. At a broader level, it allows us to grapple with some of the bigger questions of power relations within the international trade regime, and how countries like Zambia could get out of it. This relates to an earlier unit in the course on poverty and inequality policies, so it not only allows us to discuss trade issues, but also to understand how they might related to international poverty, aid, debt relief and attempts to bolster economic growth as a means of global poverty reduction. The film is easy to watch and very engaging, even for first-year college students who may have no particular interest in Africa.





## Recommended Films and Videos Related to HIV/AIDS in Africa

Kim Yi Dionne, *Smith College*, [kdionne@smith.edu](mailto:kdionne@smith.edu)

A lot of media features the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa, and it can be daunting to determine which of these would accurately and appropriately convey the lived experience of ordinary Africans navigating the AIDS epidemic, as well as governmental and non-governmental responses to HIV. In this brief note, I share a few of the films that I have used in my classes on African Politics and Comparative Responses to AIDS in Africa, with some explanation as to why I screen them.

The films listed below are all documentaries, though there is also a feature-length film in isiZulu (with English subtitles) that could also be used.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the first and last film listed, the films stream online for free. I have seen more films on HIV than the average moviegoer, but I have not seen them all. If you have a recommendation you don't see on my short list, please email me.

[\*State of Denial\*](#) (2003, South Africa, 83 min.) is a documentary that follows HIV-positive South Africans trying to access AIDS treatment in the period before the South African government approved the use of anti-AIDS drugs. In addition to capturing the rich stories of people living with HIV, the film documents the government's denial that HIV caused AIDS and the social movement that demanded that treatment be made available to pregnant mothers specifically and to the public more generally.

[\*The Troubles in Zolokere\*](#) (2006, Malawi, 23 min.) documents the work of an American Peace Corps volunteer in the northern Malawian village where he has been posted. The filmmaker (a former Peace Corps volunteer himself) talks to people who are affected by HIV while capturing everyday life in the village. During the course of the film, you witness the filmmaker learn firsthand about the impact of HIV and the role of gender inequality in HIV's spread. The film is an innocent treatment of a curious American trying to understand a complicated health and social problem in a context very different from his own; his perspective is very similar to that of an average American college student.

[\*Hans Rosling: HIV – new facts and stunning data visuals\*](#) (2009, Global/Africa, 10 min.) is a TED talk in which Swedish academic Hans Rosling uses UNAIDS data on HIV prevalence around the world to provide some nuance in understanding the relative problem across countries and within countries. The brief video provides a great introduction to UNAIDS statistics and HIV trends over time. This talk (like others by Rosling) can be particularly useful when trying to convey to students how to analyze and present data in a comparative way and by complementing data analyses with relevant substantive context.

[\*The Lazarus Effect\*](#) (2010, Zambia, 32 min.) is an HBO documentary that follows people sick with AIDS before and after they receive anti-AIDS drugs. The transformations are incredible and demonstrate the value of providing greater access to treatment in resource-poor countries. *The Lazarus Effect* was co-produced by Product (RED) and could spark an interesting conversation about global awareness campaigns for AIDS, how these campaigns are funded and implemented, and the goals and motivations of international agencies in contributing to the production of such films.

[\*The Carrier\*](#) (2010, Zambia, 88 min.) follows the story of a polygamous family in a rural area of Zambia as they deal with HIV's spread within the family and with family members falling ill. A particular virtue of *The Carrier* compared to the other films on this list is its focus on local responses to AIDS. The film captures clinic visits, the challenges of rural farming, and discussions about responding to AIDS among the local area's traditional leaders. Because of its only recent release online, I have not yet screened this film in a class; however, I think this film conveys better than most the everyday lives of people living with HIV and the people with whom they often come into contact when seeking care or assistance.

<sup>1</sup> The film is "Yesterday" (2004), a 96-minute drama filmed in South Africa and selected to the Venice Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival. My only hesitation in recommending the film is its rather stereotypical (and sometimes inaccurate and unrepresentative) portrayals of the lives of black women in rural South Africa. If screened for a course, instructors might consider a discussion before/after about the somewhat simplistic narrative and its reality in contemporary South Africa.



## War and Peace in Africa: Using Film as a Teaching Tool

Cara Jones, Mary Baldwin College, [cjones@mbc.edu](mailto:cjones@mbc.edu)

I teach two courses with significant room for film representations of conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa, one general course on African Politics, and one on Civil Wars in the International System, which I teach with a largely Sub-Saharan African focus.

In both courses, inevitably students want to talk about media representations and their perceptions of war on the continent as explained to them by films they've seen: I get a lot of questions about *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), *Blood Diamond* (2006), *Tears of the Sun* (2003, a painful imagining of a Navy Seal rescue attempt of an American doctor during a civil war in Nigeria, starring Bruce Willis), and *Lord of War* (2005). While some of these films have historical accuracy and meaning behind them, I attempt to introduce students to other representations of war and peace-making in Africa through film. I hope that by doing so, I can get them to challenge some of the assumptions they and others make when viewing some of the more mainstream depictions.

Although some of their documentaries are particularly bad, the VICE documentary "Kony, the M23 and the Real Rebels of Congo" is fairly well researched and includes some of the homegrown and foreign peacebuilding programs working in the Eastern provinces. This also has the advantage of being only 55 minutes long, so it's an easy addition to a course where it will only eat up one session. In particular, I like the de-emphasis on the easiest solutions to conflict, and the lengths that VICE reporters took to include Congolese voices in their narrative. I also like the focus on Goma as a city that has been at war for almost 2 decades- students really

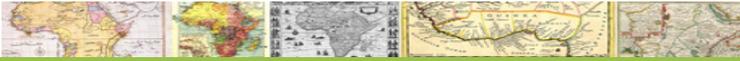
respond to the depiction of an African city that works despite chaotic violence. I think it's an interesting change from the typical understanding of what a civil war looks like- its not always violence, there are often starts and stops, and some aspects of everyday life continue for citizens. In conjunction, I often assign the chapters of Zachariah Mampilly's *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War* that talk about Goma during the war as an accompaniment.

Another film I enjoy teaching with is *War Witch*, the 2012 film from a Canadian director with Congolese actors. The film follows child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, not just the violence that becomes their lives, but also the mundane and ordinary, relationships, friendships, and the sensitivities of life that are lost in the larger discussions of child soldiers and what it means to fight. It's a great bookend to Humphreys and Weinstein's "Who Fights: The Determination of Participation in Civil War". The film is 90 minutes, so while it does require a couple of class sessions, students really enjoy this film and the nuances of participation in civil wars in a way that articles and books cannot. I myself am sometimes guilty of forgetting about the human elements of wars, and *War Witch* and the VICE documentary can help to bridge the gap between academic study and Hollywood theatrics.



### Notes on Film Availability

As many of our contributors noted, many of these films are not easily available on Amazon or Netflix, and university library collections may be limited. A great resource is [www.africanfilmlibrary.com](http://www.africanfilmlibrary.com). There is also some success, albeit limited, with finding films on YouTube, although these tend to be documentaries or produced by news networks.



## Using Film to Teach African Politics

Adrienne LeBas, American University, [lebas@american.edu](mailto:lebas@american.edu)

I've been teaching African Politics for a few years now, and my syllabus has acquired an ever-growing list of recommended films. I organize these thematically by week. For example, the week on legacies of colonialism recommends both *Xala* (Sembène, Senegal) and *Sankara: an Upright Man* (Shuffield, UK), while the week on democratic transitions recommends *Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony* (Hirsch, South Africa).

There are a few films I love for teaching. This is either because they encapsulate a problem or topic incredibly well or because they do an excellent job showing students what Africa really looks like. In terms of the latter, nothing works so well as Abderrahmane Sissako's beautiful *La Vie Sur Terre* (Mali), which chronicles daily life in a small Malian village. South Africa's *Tsotsi* and the almost entirely unavailable *Nairobi Half Life* provide a valuable window into the complexities of urban Africa's poorest communities. In terms of the task of illuminating a topic or problem, Raoul Peck's justly-lauded *Lumumba* vividly conveys the brief period of hope and the subsequent tragedy of Africa's early independence period. *Amandla!* does an equally good job as an introduction to the anti-apartheid struggle. I rarely see Djibril Diop Mambéty truly weird *Hyènes* (Senegal) appear on lists of recommended films, but it works particularly well alongside readings on international debt and corruption. Also in the political economy vein, the documentary *Darwin's Nightmare* examines the impact of international trade on fishing communities around Lake Tanganyika, and it is particularly good at including African voices.

One of the challenges I've encountered is that students generally don't watch these films on their own. Realistically, foreign films and documentaries are a hard sell. One way of coping with this is to sponsor film nights to screen individual films. Another way is to suggest and contextualize mainstream movies that average students are more likely to watch on their own. Thus, assigning and discussing Binyavanga Wainina's "How (Not) to Write about Africa" provides a new lens through which to watch *Blood Diamond*, *Captain Phillips*, or (God forbid) *Tears of the Sun*. *The Last King of Scotland* and *Hotel Rwanda* are both accessible films and also do a very good

job of casting light on personal rule and ethnic politics, respectively. Other crowd-pleasing films are even better. *District 9*, South African director Neil Blomkamp's reflection on apartheid, is especially good for talking through several issues.

The film was shot during the 2008 xenophobic riots in Johannesburg, and a few interviews about South Africans' views about Zimbabwean refugees were repurposed to serve as reactions to the arrivals of aliens. Students in my current class recently referenced the film to make a point about popular perceptions of Nigerians. Another crowd-pleaser is *When We Were Kings*, a 1996 documentary about the George Forman / Mohammed Ali "Rumble in the Jungle." The documentary has great footage of Ali and Don King, but it also grapples with the nature of Mobutu's Zaire. It's much more likely to be watched than the 1999 Thierry Michel documentary *Mobutu, Roi du Zaire*.

Films are great, but they're also a significant time investment. For this reason, I rarely use them in class; instead, I try to incorporate a variety of shorter-format videos in my lectures. These are a way to reengage students who may be lagging in the middle of a block class; also, once you get students talking about a video, they'll tend to keep talking about readings as well. Advertisements and advocacy videos are particularly good prompts for discussing depictions of Africa and the amount of agency ascribed to Africans by Western media. For instance, the first class of the semester always involves a discussion of the differences between Ben Affleck's advertisement for the UNHCR in Congo and the International Rescue Committee's advocacy video entitled "Refugee Journeys." Later on, we might watch Nicole Richie and John Prendergast talk about conflict minerals, or Kony 2012 could be read alongside Mamdani's critique of Save Darfur. There is an especially rich set of possibilities when it comes to development, ranging from Jeff Sachs & Angelina Jolie palling around in Nyanza to the controversial BBC documentary *Addicted to Aid*. Finally, clips from Al-Jazeera and the BBC can be used to introduce case studies or to give students a sense of how African politicians and civil society activists talk.



## La Vie sur Terre

James D. Long, University of Washington, [jdlong@uw.edu](mailto:jdlong@uw.edu)

*La vie sur terre* (“Life on Earth”), directed by Abderrahmane Sissako, is my favorite African film. I first saw it at the Zanzibar International Film Festival ten years ago, screened outdoors at the Old Fort in Stone Town. The (mostly Tanzanian) audience was mesmerized, and I knew from that moment I would show it in class if I ever taught African Politics. The film portrays a few days in the life of various characters in Sokolo, Mali in the last days of 1999 before the new millennium. News of large celebrations in Paris told over a radio are contrasted with the humdrum of everyday life in Mali. Sokolo is Sissako’s father’s home, and they both feature as characters. I think the film provides the best treatment of rural Africa I have seen on screen, where Sissako shows us the beauty and humor of daily life, subtly forcing us to question our notions of identity, poverty,

and time. Sissako’s stunning images are infused with voice-overs of Aime Cesaire’s poetry. I love to joke with my students before I screen the film: “There is little dialogue and almost nothing happens in terms of action but it’s a great movie.” But importantly, unlike most cinematic treatments of Africa that American students may have encountered, the movie is directed by an African filmmaker and told from his perspective, rather than from those of American or European characters. Sissako is perhaps better known for his films *Heremakano* (“Waiting for Happiness”) about a boy visiting his mother’s village in Mauritania; and *Bamako*, an allegory about the World Bank’s role in Africa. Both of these films are also excellent, but “Life on Earth” has staying power that makes me look forward to watching it again every year.



## Africa Speaks

Stephen Marr, Malmö University, [stephen.marr@mah.se](mailto:stephen.marr@mah.se)

When teaching about images of Africa I often return to the film *Africa Speaks* (the full-length feature is available on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-F0Z9JjlbP8>). Released in 1930, *Africa Speaks* is billed as the first talkie “documentary” shot on location by the “explorer-naturalist” Paul L. Hoefer. The fifty minute movie purports to be the “strangest adventure ever filmed,” as it follows a pair of white explorers trekking across the continent. As the narrators explore the continent, the viewer is presented with depictions of the backwardness of tribal life amidst an untamed, dangerous natural environment; the film culminates in a shoot-out with lions in which one of the guides is attacked and eaten. Yes, really.

I usually include the film in a broader, introductory discussion on the evolution of stereotypes about Africa. In

my experience (teaching in both American and Swedish classrooms), excerpts from the film are a powerful way to talk about how stereotypes have not only changed over time, but also to demonstrate how some images and expectations continue to persist and have power into the present. Inserting *Africa Speaks* into a chronology of images and primary texts has been an effective tactic: 16<sup>th</sup> century European maps of Africa, 19<sup>th</sup> century travel writing, along with more recent media representations (in this regard, films like Bruce Willis’s 2003 *Tears of the Sun* or Robert Kaplan’s *The Coming Anarchy* are especially helpful). Texts I assign in conjunction with the discussion include: Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, work by Mary Louise Pratt, or the opening chapters of James Ferguson’s essay collection, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*.

### Join the APCG Discussion Forum!

<http://groups.google.com/group/discussionAPCG>

A public/open forum for APCG members. APCG members who sign up can communicate with each other in an open format. Want to discuss this issue’s symposium, advertise a new book, talk about an Africa-related issue, find a conference roommate, or get info on a research location? You can do that here!



## Innovations in Teaching Africa through Film

Kristin Michelitch, Vanderbilt University, [kristin.michelitch@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:kristin.michelitch@vanderbilt.edu)

Fall 2013, I took a risk and embarked on a trial run in a Freshman Seminar at Vanderbilt University. I assigned *no readings and only films* to portray African political development.

As a long-time film hobbyist and enthusiast of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's annual African Film Festival, I always thought that film would provide a very different, but very rich, medium for substantive learning in an African politics class. If a picture is worth a thousand words, and a motion picture shows 24 frames per second, then viewing a 90 minute film equates to reading at least 2,160,000 words. In addition to visual frames, the sound, editing, and plot development of a film must combine to be worth far more pages. Further, students would pay much more attention to films versus readings.

A second reason to assign films depicting development in Africa – especially those written and directed by Africans – is to bring indigenous voice into the classroom. Most social science readings on Africa are written by non-Africans, and indeed many instructors of African politics are non-Africans. I reasoned that students' learning experience would be enhanced through material created by Africans about African politics.

A third reason to use film is to connect the macro-level political events to the micro-level. How do ordinary individuals play a role in, react to, or otherwise experience colonialism, independence, military coup, structural adjustment, democratization, poor political accountability for public services, or other topics in a typical introductory course? Showing films from the perspective of individuals and families would allow students to imagine the role of ordinary individuals in the causes and consequences of major political events. The films would put a personalized face onto trials and tribulations of development.

Last, by seeing audiovisuals of Africa, students should be better equipped to understand factors that constrain or propel political developments, rather than projecting their own (mostly non-African) experience with politics onto development in Africa. Most students do not know what it means to live on under a dollar per day, have never visited an inadequate health center, and have never dealt with corrupt bureaucrats. They do not understand why things don't change quickly to become more similar to their own experience – why don't people just work harder and save their money? Why don't they just avoid HIV by using condoms, get tested, and get treated? Why don't they just refuse to give bribes to officials? The idea was to avoid such impatient questions by showing the personalization of such dilemmas through cinematic representation.

The course – save a few stragglers – was largely a success. Students were asked to respond to each week's film on a class blog, discussing how the film's plot, *mise-en-scene*, lighting, music, editing, and other features portrayed factors hindering or propelling political, economic, and social development in Africa. They were asked to do so *before* lecture or class discussion on the topic.

By watching and mulling over the films, students were able to contribute substantively to class discussion and lecture. By watching *Adangaman*, they identified the role of low population density, plentiful land, and the incentives of the external slave trade in state-building. After *Lumumba*, they were able to debate whether political instability was a feature of poor domestic leadership, the vestiges of colonial institutions, or foreign meddling. Rather than asking how FGM/C could possibly take place, *Moolaade*, led to intense discussion of factors that perpetuate village norms and the possible effects of mass media expansion on such norms.

One particularly beloved film in the class repertoire was *Come Back Africa* by Lionel Rogosin. Rogosin clandestinely filmed a portrait of life in apartheid South Africa for migrant workers in the 1950s. In his typical style, he hired non-actors to play themselves, and took real footage of daily life on location in Johannesburg. It was in this very film that famous singer and anti-apartheid activist, Miriam Makeba, made an appearance that would lead to her international notoriety.

In sum, introducing film into the classroom can be a wonderful thing, if not whole hog, on key topics for which film can enhance learning above and beyond readings.

### African Data Sources and Reviews Sought

We are in the process of compiling a list of data sources for our group.

**For the current list**, go to:

<http://africanpoliticsgroup.org/index.php/scholars/africa-data-sources/>

**To contribute a review or dataset:** Contact Vice-Chair Lauren MacLean, [macleanl@indiana.edu](mailto:macleanl@indiana.edu) or the Newsletter Editors.