Afrofuturism and the Political Aesthetics of Development Economics in African Cinema

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2:35 –3:25 pm
Clark Memorial Library Learning Lab

Dr. Nyawalo is an assistant professor of world literature at Shawnee State where he also serves as the director of the Honors Program. He earned his bachelor's and master of arts degrees in English (with specializations in literature, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies) at West University and Gothenburg University (respectively) in Sweden. He completed his second master's as well as a Ph.D. in comparative literature with a focus on media and globalization studies at the Pennsylvania State University. He is fluent in French, English, Swedish, Swahili, and Luo. His areas of specialization are globalization studies, postcolonial criticism, African literatures (including audio and visual cultures from the continent), and media studies. He has published articles in the Journal of the African Literature Association, the Journal of Popular Music and Society as well as The Comparatist (Journal of the Society for Comparative Literature and the Arts), among other venues. He is also a member of the advisory board for the Society of Comparative Literature and the Arts.

Presentation Summary:
Both Jean-Pierre Bekolo and Wanuri Kahiu (from Cameroon and Kenya respectively) have been celebrated as belonging to the new generational vanguard of African filmmakers in the region. This presentation examines how both Bekolo and Kahiu deploy Afrofuturist aesthetics in their films Les Saignantes (2005) and Pumzi (2009) in order critique afro-pessimist perspectives from which socio-economic realities on the continent are often framed. Les Saignantes confronts the viewer with a series of questions: “How can you make an anticipation [or futuristic] film in a country that has no future? How can you make a horror film in a place where death is a party? How can you make an action film in a country where acting is subversive? How can you make a crime film in a country where investigation is forbidden?” It is therefore by juxtaposing political realities against the narrative and aesthetic conventions of film genres that Bekolo seeks to interrogate the seemingly immutable perspectives from which African realities are examined or perceived. Both Bekolo and Kahiu’s films are set in dystopic futures and critique dominant ways of conceiving the African present.