

The Department of Anthropology Presents:

Empty Gestures, Empty Spaces, Empty Times: Thinking Emptiness In West Africa Today

April 17, 2020
1:00-2:00pm
204 Maxwell Hall

In 2008, the Liberian Government began a campaign to clear squatters from the ruins of government buildings in Monrovia. Many of these spaces stood empty for years afterward. In 2014, security forces quarantined the city's poorest neighborhood to halt the spread of Ebola. Both the cordon and residents' violent response were referred to as empty gestures. The 2018 elections in neighboring Sierra Leone were characterized by empty promises and empty threats of a return to civil war. To the US military, the region's cities, forests and deserts are unchartable territories, a threateningly empty map. Emptiness, it seems, is everywhere in West Africa today. How do we make sense of such recurrent emptiness as a social and political category? How do we make sense *with* emptiness as a heuristic device? Drawing on examples from around this region, this talk explores a dilemma in social theory: Can emptiness be both a space of possibility and an absolute negation, the end of thinking and the end of meaningful acts?



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If you have any questions or require accommodations, please contact JoAnn L Rhoades at jlrhoade@syr.edu by 3 April, 2020.