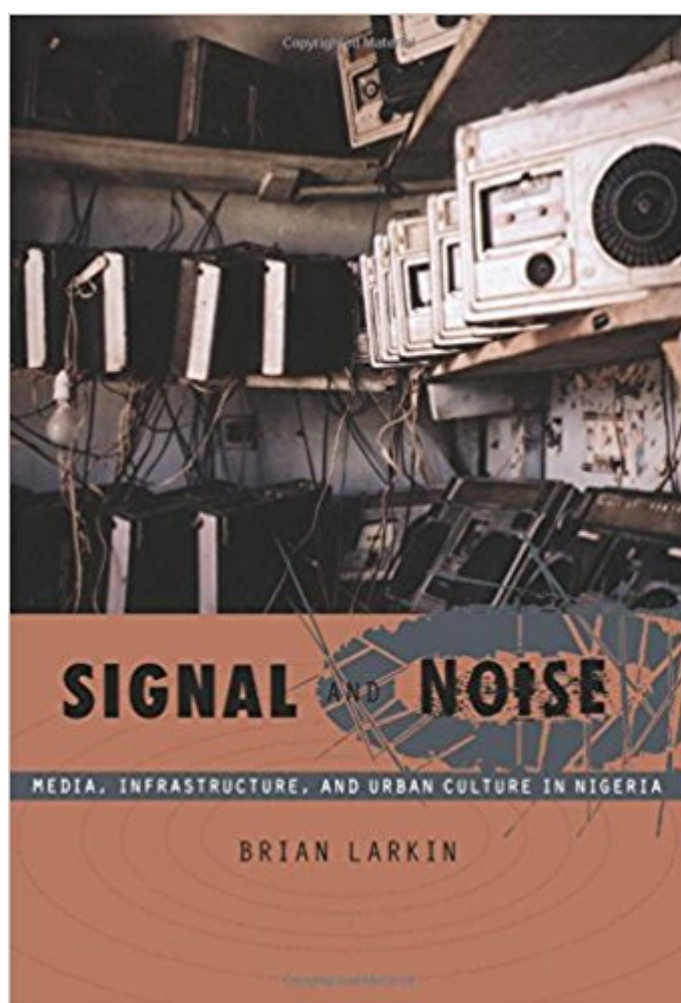


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Signal And Noise: Media, Infrastructure, And Urban Culture In Nigeria (a John Hope Franklin Center Book)



Synopsis

Mainstream media and film theory are based on the ways that media technologies operate in Europe and the United States. In this groundbreaking work, Brian Larkin provides a history and ethnography of media in Nigeria, asking what media theory looks like when Nigeria rather than a European nation or the United States is taken as the starting point. Concentrating on the Muslim city of Kano in the north of Nigeria, Larkin charts how the material qualities of technologies and the cultural ambitions they represent feed into the everyday experiences of urban Nigeria. Media technologies were introduced to Nigeria by colonial regimes as part of an attempt to shape political subjects and create modern, urban Africans. Larkin considers the introduction of media along with electric plants and railroads as part of the wider infrastructural project of colonial and postcolonial urbanism. Focusing on radio networks, mobile cinema units, and the building of cinema theaters, he argues that what media come to be in Kano is the outcome of technology's encounter with the social formations of northern Nigeria and with norms shaped by colonialism, postcolonial nationalism, and Islam. Larkin examines how media technologies produce the modes of leisure and cultural forms of urban Africa by analyzing the circulation of Hindi films to Muslim Nigeria, the leisure practices of Hausa cinemagoers in Kano, and the dynamic emergence of Nigerian video films. His analysis highlights the diverse, unexpected media forms and practices that thrive in urban Africa. *Signal and Noise* brings anthropology and media together in an original analysis of media's place in urban life.

Book Information

Series: a John Hope Franklin Center Book

Paperback: 328 pages

Publisher: Duke University Press Books; unknown edition (March 31, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0822341085

ISBN-13: 978-0822341086

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #323,508 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #14 in Books > History > Africa > Nigeria #205 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Africa #643 in Books > Textbooks > Communication & Journalism > Media Studies

Customer Reviews

“[A]n impressive study. . . . The study represents a door-opener into a wider analysis of the ways in which various parts of the urban society, from colonial times until most recently, negotiate technical and economic changes, create meaning, develop modes of coping and resistance and local cultural styles beyond a simple adaptation to new technological projects.” – Tilo Gräffatz, *Social Anthropology* “This insightful, highly stimulating, and well-written book examines how media technologies entered into 20th century northern Nigeria society, and how their initial association with colonial rule, and also their material qualities and the cultural possibilities they enabled, transformed public and social life in sometimes unexpected ways. . . . [A] highly innovative study of colonial and postcolonial urban culture in Africa. It also makes it a highly welcome contribution to scholarship on modernity and postcoloniality, on media and public culture, and to analyses of global media forms and consumption. It will fascinate a wide range of readers, granting stimulating analytical insights into the place of media in urban life.” – Dorothea E. Schulz, *American Ethnologist* “With considerable analytical power, Larkin explains how to locate cultural texts in an urban space, understand the leisure of social bonding, connect the household into powerful structures of capital and state, and relate technologies of radio and electricity to the political order and the critique of the state and political holders. Recommended. General collections, graduate students, faculty.” – T. Falola, *Choice* “Larkin’s work is impressive in its theoretical and analytical depth, rich empirical details, and astute observations and summaries about cinema and modernity in urban Nigeria. This work is as much a development communication project as it is an anthropological study or a cinema studies project. . . . [T]he book makes excellent reading for students and scholars in a series of disciplines and sub-disciplines, including international and development communication.” – Sujatha Sosale, *Global Media Journal* “Larkin has developed a richly researched study of media cultures in Nigeria. Equipped with language skills and a nuanced understanding of local Muslim religious practices and traditions, Larkin offers a vivid account of the emergence of modern Nigerian media infrastructures. . . . Signal and Noise inspires new ways of thinking about what media technologies are, how they have emerged in different ways in different parts of the world, and how local and national Nigerian actors have contended with the forces of the global media economy.” – Lisa Parks, *Cinema Journal* “A true intellectual tour de force, Signal and Noise should have a major impact on the way we understand Africa in the contemporary period.” – Kenneth W. Harrow, *African Studies Review* “This eagerly anticipated book is a wonderful contribution to several fields: media studies, cultural studies, African studies, anthropology, and analyses of globalization. Brian

Larkin writes with eloquence and passion, and he compels us to rethink our assumptions about the work of transnational media and the formation of identity.

—Purnima Mankekar, author of *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India*

“This thoughtful, scholarly, and original book links the transnational traffic of media forms to the logics of the colonial state and to the vulnerabilities of large cities in Africa. It will provoke new thinking among Africanists, urbanists, anthropologists, and all students of globalizing media processes. Brian Larkin is a major new voice in the study of media as lived infrastructure in a world of uneven connectivity.

—Arjun Appadurai, author of *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*

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A well-written and subtly argued examination of the social position of film and radio in a complex postcolonial context. The author's ideas about the ongoing use of older technology (and technology that doesn't work the way it was designed to) are particularly fascinating, as is his documentation of all the diverse cultural practices that circulate in and around Kano's movie theaters. Highly recommended for those interested in film spectatorship and radio listening - much of what is here challenges the common Euro/American based generalizations we are used to reading.

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