Instructor: Eric N. Mvukiyehe  
Email: enm1@nyu.edu  
Office Hours: by appointment  
Class Time: Mondays, 6:20 - 8:50 pm  
Location: 25W4, C-11

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course provides an overview of issues and problems confronting contemporary Africa. The course will examine five core questions: (i) Why are some African state structures weaker than others? (ii) Why are some African countries more prone to pervasive economic crises than others? (iii) What explains variation in democratic transitions and consolidation in Africa? (iv) Why do some African countries suffer from violent civil wars while others are spared? And (v) Why are new threats such as diseases or environmental problems so prevalent in some African countries, but not in others? Throughout this course, we will learn that, contrary to the sensational international news coverage of Africa, there is in fact great variation and diversity in the social, economic and political realities within Africa. That is, in spite of severe political and economic crises in several African countries, many others manage to maintain stronger state structures, experience higher levels of economic growth, get spared from violent civil wars and so forth. Our aim will be to explain these differences.

The main objectives of this course are: (i) to help students gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex social, economic and political issues and problems confronting contemporary Africa; and (ii) to provide students with analytical skills enabling them to challenge their previously held beliefs about the way Africa works and become critical consumers of news coverage of Africa. In view of this, focus in this course will be less on individual cases (though we will discuss many such cases) and more on social science tools (i.e. concepts and arguments) from diverse fields such as political science, economics, history and others.

The course is divided in four substantive parts. In the first part, we will conduct a quick historical review of Africa’s past, focusing on pre-colonial and colonial contexts in which structures and politics of contemporary Africa might have formed. In the second part, we will examine the socio-political forces such as the state, ethnicity, race, religion, classes and civil society that shape contemporary African politics. In the third part, we will focus on five major aspects of Africa’s current conditions: (i) weakness or failure of state structures; (ii) pervasive economic crises; (iii) democratic transitions and consolidation; (vi) civil wars; and (v) other threats to Africans such as HIV and AIDS, Malaria and environmental issues.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and Readings:  
Regular class attendance and arrival on time are required. Beepers, cell phones, ipods must be turned off during class. This will be a very demanding course. The reading, research and writing assignments are on the heavy side. To make the course successful, you will be
expected to do all the required reading for the week before class session for that week and come prepared to take an active role in discussion. The syllabus has both required and further readings. The latter are optional, but I highly encourage you to at least skim them through as they provide a different perspective.

To ensure that you are doing the reading closely and reflectively, I will be sending out a question or two during the week before each session and you will be asked to write a short, but thoughtful paragraph in response to one of the questions. These responses should be posted on the course’s blackboard by Midnight every Sunday. While these responses will not be graded, I will consider them when determining your participation grades (more on this below).

2. Current Events
While this is not a course on current events, you will realize that many issues related to the topics of this course will be developing in real time somewhere on the continent. Therefore, in addition to doing all the required readings, you will be expected to read African sections of at least four major international news papers (e.g. the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Guardian, the London Times etc.) and listen to programs such as BBC’s Africa Today (http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/) or Voice of America (http://www.voanews.com/english/africa/index.cfm). You will be especially responsible for tracking the news for your country of expertise (see below). These news readership and listenership will provide you with background knowledge necessary for your country case and class discussion. We will be spending 10–15 minutes at the beginning of each class to discuss current events.

3. Country expertise:
The emphasis in most lectures will be on concepts and arguments rather than on individual cases. However, given that knowledge of what goes on in particular countries is necessarily to evaluate the arguments and explanations that will be discussed in this course, each student will be required to pick a country of his or her choice and develop expertise on it. Your role as a country expert will be to apply the concepts and arguments discussed in class on your country-case. This expertise will allow you to get a richer understanding of the readings and help you in your research and writing assignments (more on this below). The countries will be allocated on a first-come-first-served basis, I may ask you to volunteer for important countries that were left out.

4. Grading:
Your final grade for the course will be determined by the following:

Participation in class discussion: 20% of your grade will be based on your participation (not just the quantity, but also the quality) in class discussions and responses to weekly readings or to films that we will be viewing in class. A key component of your participation grade is the reaction paragraphs to each week’s readings that you will be required to post on the course’s blackboard.

Map and “basic knowledge” quiz: 15% of your grade will be based on a map and “basic knowledge” quiz that will take place in third week of the course. The quiz will test your basic knowledge of the names, locations and capitals of all African countries as well as their
official languages and names of their chiefs executive. Most of this background knowledge can be found of the CIA’s World Factbook page: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/ and at http://www.africa.upenn.edu//Home_Page/Country.html

**Individual presentations: 25%** of your grade. Students will be required to prepare a 20 minutes power point presentation. The presentation should evaluate arguments from one or more weekly topics covered in the first six weeks of class, using empirical evidence from one’s country of expertise. Students will do the presentations on Monday, **March 09 in class.**

**Final Written Assignment: 40%** of your grade. Each student will be required to research and write an 8-12 pages research paper on one or more contemporary topics (i.e. topics from weeks 6-15), focusing on their country of expertise. You will be expected to draw on the lectures and class readings to develop an argument and conduct a genuine test of this argument on your country case. This means that your paper should: (i) raise a specific issue or problem confronting your country case (e.g. economic turmoil or civil war); (ii) discuss two or more explanations addressing the issue or problem in question; and (iii) evaluate the different explanations (i.e. use empirical evidence from your country case to adjudicate between the explanations).

**Note:** The paper will be due on May 4, 2009 in class. If you are interested in writing about a topic that won’t be covered until latter in the semester, you may do the reading for that topic in advance and discuss them with me.

**Alternative Assignments:**

**Option1:** Students may trade power-point presentations for community service-learning. Participants in community service-learning will be required to spend 10 to 15 hours over the course of the semester working in a community-based program with one of the many African refugee or immigrant communities in the New York City area. The goal of the community service component is to provide students with an alternative venue to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the diversity of African politics by interacting with and learning about people from different African countries. Students electing this alternative must write a 1-2 page proposal of the project they intend to do and discuss it with me for approval. They will also be required to document their experiences and to share these with the rest of the class after completion of the project.

**Option2:** In lieu of the final written assignment, students may elect to research and write a 5-7 pages policy memo addressing a real-world issue or challenge confronting their country of expertise. The memo should succinctly summarize the issue or challenge in question, discuss how it impacts the country’s population and outline policy prescriptions (practical ways) of how it might be dealt with. Policy prescriptions should be more than “opinions!” Rather, they should be informed by arguments from the various themes and topics discussed throughout the semester. **Policy memos will be due on May 4, 2009 in class and the authors will be asked to present their memo to the class on the same date.**

All assignments will be graded according to their thoughtfulness (i.e. how well students develop and defend their arguments) and originality.
TEXT BOOKS

There is no coursepack for this class. Many of the readings are available online (through JSTOR or in the libraries). The following three text books are required and can be purchased at the University Bookstore or on-line:


The following books are recommended, but not required (significant portions of these books are assigned and so you may wish to purchase them):


COURSE SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

Week 1 01/26  Housekeeping & Course Logistics

Week 2 02/02  Introduction & Pre-colonial Political Structures


Film: Life on Earth or the Gods Must be Crazy

Further reading


Week 3 02/09 Colonization, Decolonization, and Legacies of Colonialism


Film: Battle of Algiers or Lumumba

Further reading

**Week 4 02/16** The African State Part I (Independence – 1989): The Big Men and Political Kingdoms


_**Film:** Mobutu, King of Zaire (original French title: Mobutu, Roi du Zaïre)_

**Further reading**


**Week 5 02/23** Political Forces Part I: The African State and Identity Politics (Ethnicity, Race, Class and Religion)


Further reading


Week 6 03/02 Political Forces Part II: The African State and Civil Society


Further reading


**Week 7 03/09 Political Forces Part III: The Cases**

**NOTE: THIS WEEK’S SESSION WILL BE DEVOTED TO INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS IN CLASS.**

**03/16 SPRING RECESS**

**Week 8 03/23 Economic Development Part I: Patterns and Explanations of Economic Growth**


**Further reading**


Week 9 03/30 Economic Development Part II: Foreign Aid, Structural Adjustment Programs and Beyond


**Easterly, William (2007). The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good? Penguin Press. Chapter1**


Further reading


Week 10 04/06 The African State Part II (1990 – Present): Causes and Consequences of State Decay & Collapse


**Chabal, Parick and Daloz, Jean-Pascal (1999) Africa Works. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Chapters1 and 10 [“Whiter the State” and “the Political Instrumentalization of Disorder”]**


Further reading


**Week 11 04/13 Political Transitions and Democratic Consolidation in Africa: Key Patterns, Explanations and Popular Responses**

**“Political Transitions and Patterns of Change,” Chapter8 in Naomi Chazan et al., *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999), pp221-239.**


Further reading


**Week 12 04/20  Understanding Civil War Part I: Causes and Consequences**


Film: The Lost Children of Chechnya or Lumo

Further reading


**Week 13 04/27 Understanding Civil War Part II: Termination and Peace-building**


Film: Buying Time for Peace (MDRP)

Further reading


**Week 14 05/04 Other Threats to Africans: Diseases and Environmental Challenges**


Further reading


Week 15 05/11 Africa and the World: Patterns of Relations and the Future of the African Continent


Further reading


RESOURCES

Most books and articles can be found in NYU libraries ([http://library.nyu.edu](http://library.nyu.edu)) and/or through databases which can also be accessed directly from NYU Libraries website. Most articles (not book chapters) assigned in this course can also be accessed directly through JSTOR—the online system for archiving academic journals ([www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org)). Do not hesitate to ask librarians for help if you experience trouble finding a book or locating an article. They are always glad to provide assistance.

In developing this syllabus, I benefited greatly from syllabi of Columbia University professors Macartan Humphreys and Kimuli Kasara, which I encourage you to use as resources! [http://www.columbia.edu/~mh2245/Syllabus.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~mh2245/Syllabus.pdf). I also encourage you to check out NYU’s Politics Professor William Easterly’s page, which contains many book reviews and op-Ed pieces he has written for popular magazines and policy journals. [http://www.nyu.edu/fas/institute/dri/Easterly/Media.html](http://www.nyu.edu/fas/institute/dri/Easterly/Media.html)
To keep up with the day-to-day politics there is a host of new on-line resources that we can use. We have no excuse not to be able to keep up with the news: Regular news sources available online include:

- http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/default.stm
- http://allafrica.com/
- Africa news (LexisNexis)

In addition you can sign up for the United Nations IRIN (http://www.irinnews.org/) news bulletins for Africa here: http://www.irinnews.org/subscriptions/subslogin.asp. These will give you regular feeds of news on the continent as soon as it comes in.

There is even a host of radio stations you can listen to:

- http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/default.stm

Other rich portals for information on Africa include:

- http://www.africa.upenn.edu/AS.html
- http://www.afrika.no/
- http://www.africaonline.com
- http://worldviews.igc.org/awpguide/

Many of the academic journals writing on Africa are available on-line to New York University Libraries.

**POLICY ON PLAGIARISM**

Students are expected to do their own work, as outlined in the SCPS statement on Academic Integrity and Plagiarism on http://www.scps.nyu.edu/students affairs/undergraduate/academicpolicies/#scps-statement —on-academic-integrity-and-plagiarism. The SCPS defines plagiarism as follows: “Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s work as though it were one’s own. More specifically, plagiarism is to present as one’s sequence of words quoted without quotation marks from another writer; a paraphrased passage from another’s writer’s work; creative images, artwork, or design; or facts or ideas gathered, organized, and reported by someone else, orally and/or in writing and not providing proper attribution. Since plagiarism is a matter of fact, not of the student’s intention, it is crucial that acknowledgement of the sources be accurate and complete. Even where there is no conscious intention to deceive, the failure to make appropriate acknowledgement constitutes plagiarism. Penalties for plagiarism range from failure for a paper or course to dismissal from the University.”

Please familiarize yourself with this policy because it will be strictly enforced.