OVERVIEW

This class provides an introduction to contemporary African politics. The core questions that motivate the course are: (i) Why are state structures weaker in Africa than elsewhere? (ii) What accounts for Africa’s slow economic growth? (iii) Why do some African countries suffer from high levels of political violence while others are spared? In the course of the class we will see that there is in fact great variation within Africa in the strength of states, the levels of economic growth and the amount of violence; we will aim to explain that variation. To do so we will study many individual cases but we will also stand back and try to apply the tools of political science and economics to try to find some general answers to these questions.

The course is structured in three parts. In the first part we take a quick tour of Africa’s recent political history, examining pre-colonial structures, the impact of colonialism and the form of post colonial states. We then examine the social forces that now shape contemporary politics: ethnic groups, race, economic classes, religion, civil society. With an understanding of the political background and the political forces in operation we then turn to examine contemporary topics: the structure of states, policy choices and violent conflict.

To answer these questions we will draw on writing from journalists, anthropologists, psychologists, economists and historians as well as on the work of political scientists. And, insofar as it is possible in New York, we will immerse ourselves in the day-to-day politics of contemporary Africa.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Reading: The Syllabus lists both required reading and further reading. You will be expected to have completed all the required readings for the week before you attend section for that week. The reading loads are not especially heavy but you should aim to read them carefully and reflectively. Before approaching each reading think about what the key questions are for the week and about how the questions from this week relate to what you know from previous weeks. Then skim over the reading to get a sense of the themes it covers, the countries, the periods, the methods and, before reading further, jot down on a piece of paper what questions you hope the reading will be able to answer for you: what do you hope to be able to learn from reading the article? Next, read the introduction and conclusion. This is normally enough to get a sense of the big picture. Ask yourself: are the claims in the text surprising? Do you believe them? Can you think of examples of places that do not seem consistent with the logic of the argument? Is the
reading answering the questions you hoped it would answer? If not, is it answering more or less interesting questions than you had thought of? Next ask yourself: what types of evidence or arguments would you need to see in order to be convinced of the results? Now read through the whole text, checking as you go through how the arguments used support the claims of the author. Keep an eye on the sorts of unstated assumptions that the author uses: what does she assume about how humans behave or think? What does she assume about the ability of groups to act collectively, and so on. It is very rare to find a piece of writing that you agree with entirely. So as you come across issues that you disagree with or are not convinced by, write them down and bring them along to section for discussion. Also note when you are pleasantly surprised, when the author produced a convincing argument that you had not thought of.

Many of the readings are available on-line. In most places this is indicated. For those that are not, all readings are available in the libraries. A course pack will contain many readings that are otherwise difficult to access. For the remainder, the following books are recommended for purchase:


2. Listening: **Focus on Africa.** You will be required to listen to **Focus on Africa** every day, Monday-Friday [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/default.stm). It’s a 40 minute listen and will keep you well up to date with what is going on on the continent. While there will be no test or other way of checking whether you will do this, the content of Focus on Africa will be treated as background knowledge for class and section discussions. If you’re not up with the week’s programs you won’t be able to keep up with the discussions. [http://allafrica.com/partners/bbc/focus_on_africa.ram](http://allafrica.com/partners/bbc/focus_on_africa.ram)

3. **Develop Country Expertise:** We expect that you will become our class expert for one country. For each of the topics that we will look at throughout the course of the term you should read up especially on the situation for your country for that topic. So if you become our expert on Uganda you should try to find out information for Uganda on each of the weekly topics: the class relations, the ethnic relations, the economic policies and so on. In developing this expertise you will be able to get more out of the readings, and you will also be a resource for the rest of the class who will then be able to call on you for your evaluation of the situation in your country. In most cases at least one of your written assignments (see below) will be on your country of expertise.

4. **Quiz. (10%)** We will have a short quiz in-class in Week 3. This will not be a “concepts” quiz but a “basic facts” quiz. These basic facts will be easy enough to learn but will provide a useful knowledge base and will help you in your listening to the news and in your reading of texts. The basic facts that you will be expected to have mastered by week 3 are: the names, locations and capitals of all African countries, the official language and the name of their heads of state.

5. **Vignette Authoring (10%).** On your own or possibly together with a small group of colleagues you will be asked to research a “focus” topic. Each of the topics looks an interesting episode in African politics that can provide insights into the broader themes of the course. The topics are quite obscure and will require some investigative work on your part—for your topic you should try
to establish the main facts and the political and social implications of the episode at hand. You will be asked to write up your study in the form of a short vignette that you will present to the class in a week corresponding to that vignette (see below). Presentations of each of these vignettes should take no more than 10 minutes (and this limit will be held to strictly!). Your write-up of the vignette should be handed in on the day of the presentation and this write-up will be posted on the class website alongside all other vignettes, so put care into your writing! The following are the themes of the vignettes, these will be assigned during the second week of class.

VIGNETTES

Vignette 1  Von Trotha’s Orders, 2 Oct. 1904
Vignette 2  The Return From Exile of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, 11 Nov. 1902
Vignette 3  The Death of Dag Hammarskjold, 18 Sept. 1961
Vignette 4  Hassan’s Green March
Vignette 5  The United States of Chad and Libya
Vignette 6  Conakry Attacked, 22 Nov. 1970
Vignette 7  Tombalbaye Reintroduces Scarification
Vignette 8  The Ganda Koy’s Voix du Nord #0
Vignette 9  Thomas Sankara and the Renault 5
Vignette 10  The Fatwa against Isioma Daniel
Vignette 11  Set Setal
Vignette 12  The National Conference in Benin, Feb. 1990
Vignette 13  The Overthrow of Moussa Traore
Vignette 14  Nkrumah and Houphouët-Boigny’s Wager
Vignette 15  Houphouët-Boigny’s Cathedral
Vignette 16  A model for governance? The Chad-Cameroon Pipeline
Vignette 17  Lettre ouverte au Président Biya, 27 Dec. 1990
Vignette 18  The collapse of Mozambique’s cashew industry
Vignette 19  Third termism: the case of Chiluba
Vignette 20  The Death of Samuel Doe
Vignette 21  Sao Tome’s Buffalo Battalion
Vignette 22  Nkomo’s Exile and the “Disturbances” in Matabeleland
Vignette 23  ELF in Congo Brazzaville
Vignette 24  The Burial of S.M.

6. Participation in Section (20%). You will be expected to participate in section each week. Attendance at section is very important for discussing the themes of the course in greater depth. The section leader may ask that you prepare material for discussion or debate or may ask that you present some of your own research during section times.

7. Written Assignments (60%). Undergraduate students will be expected to write three short papers of 10-12 pages each in length. Topics and guidelines for these assignments will be handed out during the course and posted on the website. They will be due 27 February, 2 April and 7 May 2004. Graduate students will be expected to write a single 20-30 page research paper displaying original research and probing in depth one of the themes of the course and due on 7 May 2004. In all cases these research papers will contain (i) a theoretical argument, engaging with one of the key themes of the course, (ii) an empirical test of that argument and (iii) a discussion of policy prescriptions resulting from the argument. The empirical part does not have to be quantitative but it does have to constitute a genuine test of your argument.
RESOURCES

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 on-line include:

- [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/default.stm)
- [http://allafrica.com/](http://allafrica.com/)
- [http://www.africanews.org](http://www.africanews.org)
- Africa news (LexisNexis) [http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio3324754](http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio3324754)

In addition you can sign up for the United Nations IRIN ([http://www.irinnews.org/](http://www.irinnews.org/)) news bulletins for Africa here: [http://www.irinnews.org/subscriptions/subslogin.asp](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:


Fortunately, Columbia University Libraries has a very rich page of links to on-line resources on Africa:


Other rich portals for information on Africa include:

- [http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/AS.html](http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/AS.html)
- [http://www.afrika.no/](http://www.afrika.no/)
- [http://www.africaonline.com/site/](http://www.africaonline.com/site/)
- [http://worldviews.igc.org/awpguide/](http://worldviews.igc.org/awpguide/)

And fortunately too, many of the academic journals writing on Africa are available on-line to Columbia students. Make use of these resources! See the listing of on-line journals here: [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/africa/ejournals.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/africa/ejournals.html)

Browse through:

- *Africa Confidential* [http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?ATT2410](http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?ATT2410)
- *Africa Insight* [http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio4113541](http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio4113541)
- *Africa Recovery* (UN) [http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?ANJ4439](http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?ANJ4439)
TOPICS

Lecture 1: Tue 20 January: Introduction


ONLINE! The Economist. 13 May 2000. The Heart of the Matter


Further reading


Lecture 2: 22 January: Pre-colonial Political Structures


Further reading


Film: King Solomon’s Mines (Marton, Bennett, 1950), Battle of Algiers (1965),

Lecture 3: 27 January: Colonization, Historical Aspects


Further Reading

Films: Camp de Thiaroye (Sembene, 1987), Noirs et blancs en couleur (Annaud, 1976)

Vignette 1 Von Trotha’s Orders, 2 Oct. 1904
Lecture 4: 29 January: Independence


Further Reading


Film: Lumumba (Raoul Peck, 2001), (Zaire, DRC)

Vignette 2 The Return From Exile of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, 11 Nov. 1902

Lecture 5-6: 3, 10 February*: Colonial Legacies


Further Reading


Basil Davidson, 1992, The Black Man’s Burden, Chapter 7

* Note: No class on 5 February

Vignette 3 The Death of Dag Hammarskjold, 18 Sept. 1961

Vignette 4 Hassan’s Green March
Lecture 7 - 8: 12, 17 February: The State


Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz “Whither the State?” Chapter 1 in: Africa Works. Indiana University Press.


Further Reading


Novel: Anthills of the Savannah

Vignette 5  The United States of Chad and Libya
Vignette 6  Conakry Attacked. 22 Nov. 1970

Source: Mitchell, [Link]

Lecture 9: 19 February. Ethnicity


Further Reading
Suberu, Rotimi “Ethnic Minorities and the Crisis of Democratic Governance in Nigeria.” In Olowu et al Governance and Democratization in West Africa (Dakar: Codesria, 1999)

! Film Screening, 19 Feb: Sankofa

Vignette 7 Tombalbaye Reintroduces Scarification

Lecture 10: 24 February: Race

Further Reading
Jared Diamond, Guns, Germs and Steel, Ch 19.
Cheikh Anta Diop. The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality

Vignette 8 The Ganda Koy’s Voix du Nord #0

Lecture 11: 26 February: Class


Further Reading


Vignette 9  Thomas Sankara and the Renault 5

! 27 FEBRUARY: FIRST PAPER DUE !

Lecture 12: 2 March: Religion


Further Reading


Film: Ceddo (Sembene, 1976)

! Film Screening: 2 March Zan Boko (Burkina Faso, 1988)

Vignette 10  The Fatwa against Isioma Daniel

Lecture 13: 4 March: Civil Society


Vignette 11  Set Setal
CONTEMPORARY TOPICS

Lecture 14-15: 9-11 March: Forms of Government and Political Change


Further Reading


Vignette 13  The Overthrow of Moussa Traore

[Note: Spring break on 16, 18 March.]

Lecture 16: 23 March: Policy Choices


Further Reading


Film Screening 23 March: Everyone’s Child (Zimbabwe)

Vignette 14  Nkrumah and Houphouët-Boigny’s Wager
Lecture 17: 25 March : Pork Politics


Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa* (Cambridge UP, 1997), Chapter 2.


**Further Reading**


Vignette 15 Houphouët-Boigny’s Cathedral

Lecture 18- 19: 30 March, 1 April: Structural Adjustment


**Further Reading**


Ayittey, George *Africa in Chaos*, (New York: Saint Martin’s Griffen, 1999), Chapter 7


Susan George. *A Fate Worse than Debt or Faith and Credit*.

Film Screening: 1 April Taafé Fanga (skirt power) (Mali)

Vignette 16 A model for governance? The Chad-Cameroon Pipeline

Vignette 17 Lettre ouverte au Président Biya, 27 Dec. 1990

! 2 APRIL: SECOND PAPER DUE !

[Note: No class on 6 April]
Lecture 20: 8 April*: Policy Impacts


Further Reading


*! This class may be postponed until 12 April.

Vignette 18  The collapse of Mozambique’s cashew industry

Lecture 21: 13 April: AIDS


Further Reading
Lots of resources here: allafrica.com/aids/ and here worldviews.igc.org/avpguide/aids.html

Vignette 19  Third termism: the case of Chiluba
Lecture 22- 23. 15, 20. April: Civil War: Analysis


Further Reading
More resources: http://allafrica.com/peaceafrica www.preventconflict.org/portal/economics

Film Screening: April 15, Faat Kine (Senegal: Sembene, 2000)

Vignette 20 The Death of Samuel Doe
Vignette 21 Sao Tome’s Buffalo Battalion

Lecture 24- 25: 22, 27 April: Civil War: Cases

Sierra Leone


Angola:


Sudan
Further Reading

Vignette 22  Nkomo’s Exile and the “Disturbaces” in Matabeleland
Vignette 23  ELF in Congo Brazzaville

Final Lecture: 29 April [Open]
Final Film Screenings:
  29 April Mobutu, Roi Du Zaire (Thierry Michel, 1999)
  3 May Our friends at the Bank (Peter Chappell)

! 7 MAY: FINAL PAPERS DUE!

Vignette 24  The Burial of S.M.