Spring 2019

Political Systems of Africa

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This course provides a broad overview of African politics with a particular focus on state formation and resistance to state formation. The course focuses largely on states because patterns of state formation profoundly shape a country’s politics and the life course of its citizens. It does so largely through a mixture of academic and primary source readings.

**Class Organization:** The course is divided into two sections. The first half of the course will provide a broad overview of the history of politics on the African continent through the end of colonialism. The second half of the course will introduce students to the history of politics on the African continent since the end of colonialism. The course will blend lecture and discussion. Generally, lectures will occur on Tuesdays and discussions will take place on Thursdays (a few weeks excepted due to CUNY scheduling). Students are expected to read all work for the class regardless of whether it is a lecture or discussion day.

**Course Assignments:** The goal of the course is to improve students’ abilities to think critically about the world around them and specifically about politics in Africa. Therefore, assignments are directed at improving such skills. Students will have

- Two in-class map quizzes
- An in-class midterm exam based on the weekly lectures and discussions
- An in-class final exam based on the weekly lectures and discussions

**Grading and Evaluation:** The map quizzes will each constitute 10% of the final grade. The mid-term and final exam will each constitute 30% of the final grade. Participation will constitute 20% of the final grade. Students are expected to arrive to class each session having read and thought about the assignments and should be prepared to discuss them. Be forewarned, I tend to call on students to ask for their thoughts.

**Class Attendance:** Participation in class discussions is crucial to the success of the course. As such, students will be graded down on one full letter grade on the participation portion of the grading for each class missed (i.e. 5% off the final course grade for each class missed up to a maximum of twenty percent of the final grade). I will allow one unexcused absence without penalty. However, each subsequent unexcused absence will incur this penalty. I will take the class roll at the beginning of each class. If students are there on time, I will count them as
If a student is late and I have already completed the roll, it is a student’s responsibility to let me know that they are present after class, otherwise they will be counted as absent. I start class promptly and it is a student’s responsibility to be there on time.

If students write me *before* class letting me know about an emergency that requires them missing class (e.g. sickness, death in the family), I will generally excuse the absence. I will not accept excuses after the fact, though. **If a student misses a quiz or an exam, a note from a relevant authority attesting to the emergency (e.g. doctor) is required.** I will not allow students to take a quiz or exam if such a note is not provided and if the reason for missing the exam is not legitimate (e.g. illness; family emergency). Late work hours or a delayed train are not legitimate excuses for missing a class or exam. **To reward those who attend regularly, I will offer occasional unannounced extra credit opportunities in class.** Only students present in class will be eligible for points collected during these exercises.

**Disability Statement:** Appropriate academic accommodations will be made for students with disabilities. Students must register with the AccessAbility Center and bring documentation from the center acknowledging that you are eligible for academic accommodations. The center is located at NAC, Room 1/218 (Tel: 212-650-5913). If you are aware of a disability, I encourage you register and attain documentation as soon as possible to ensure that we develop reasonable accommodations.

**Learning Outcomes:** The primary goal of this course is for students to be able to read and critically evaluate academic and journalistic work on contemporary African politics. Secondary goals include developing knowledge of African geography and history.

**Books:** We will read the following books in total during the semester. Students may choose to purchase them, if they desire. They are also available electronically through the CCNY library for students who do not want to purchase the books, making this a zero-cost course.


**This Week in Africa:** To spark students’ interest in African current events, students are required to enroll for the This Week in Africa listserv – a widely read news summary service delivered once a week. Students can sign up here: https://thisweekinafrica.tumblr.com/

**Course Overview**

**Section 1: An Overview of Politics on the African Continent**

**Week 1 – Course Introduction**

Class 1 Jan. 29
Course Introduction
No Reading

Class 2 Jan. 31 – Overview: The Gatekeeper State, Its Opponents, and Its Opposites


**Week 2 – An Introduction to Pre-colonial Politics**

Class 1 Feb. 5 – Precolonial State Power

Class 2 Feb. 7 – Early Colonial State Making and Slavery

**MAP QUIZ** – North and West African Countries

**Week 3 – Slavery, State Making, and State Breaking**

Class 1 Feb. 12
NO CLASS – Lincoln’s Birthday

Class 2 Feb. 14 – Slavery and Its Legacies in Literature

**Week 4 – Constructing the Colonial State**

Class 1 Feb. 19 – Creating Bula Matari

Class 2 Feb. 21 – Creating Colonial State Power in Literature

**MAP QUIZ** – South and East African Countries

**Week 5 – Colonial State Power**

Class 1 Feb. 26 – Extending Colonial State Power

Class 2 Feb. 28 – Experiencing Colonial State Power in Literature
Week 6 – Colonial Rule
Class 1 March 5 – Decentralized Despotism

Class 2 March 7 – Theorizing Colonial Rule

Week 7 – Imagining a Post-Colonial Future
Class 1 March 12 – Crises of Colonialism

Class 2 March 14 – Various Visions of Liberation


Week 8 – Confronting Colonialism
Class 1 March 19 – Protesting Colonialism


Class 2 March 21 – Midterm

MIDTERM

Week 9 – Building Postcolonial States
Class 1 March 26 – Consolidating Territorial Power
Class 2 March 28 – Early Challenges of Postcolonial State Building
Watch in Class: *Lumumba*.

**Week 10 – Challenges of Post-Colonial Economic Development**

Class 1 April 2 – Theories of African Socialism


Class 2 April 4 – State Socialism, Its Crises, and Its Legacies


**Week 11 – Crises of Post-Colonial Statehood**

Class 1 April 9 – Protesting Post-Colonial States

Class 2 April 11 – Writing Against State Abuse

**Week 12 – Things Fall Apart**

Class 1 April 16 - Economic and Political Crises


Class 2 April 18 - Economic and Political Crises  


**Week 13 – Spring Break**  
Class 1 April 23  
NO CLASS – Spring Break

Class 2 April 25  
NO CLASS – Spring Break

**Week 14 – A Peaceful, Democratic Future?**  
Class 1 April 30 – War and its Institutional Legacies  


Class 2 May 2 – Tensions of Democracy  

**Week 15 – Complications of Democracy**  
Class 1 May 7 – Ways of Being Democratic  


Class 2 May 9 – Seeing Democracy  
WATCH In-Class: *An African Election*.

**Week 16 – Final Exam**  
Class 1 May 14 – Final Exam  
**FINAL EXAM**