

PSC 23800: Political Systems of Africa

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Course Description

Africa is a diverse continent that consists of 54 United Nations-recognized sovereign countries, more than 1 billion people, and, by some estimates, more than 2,000 languages. Yet the word “Africa” is also a figurative expression, one that individuals both on and off the continent have deployed in myriad ways, often, as Chinua Achebe writes, “to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest” (Achebe, 1978, 2). In this course, we will study not only Africa’s varied political systems in a range of historical epochs, but also the terms through which specific actors have described and made sense of the continent’s politics. This course provides (1) a broad, chronological political history of the African continent, with a particular emphasis on the colonial and postcolonial periods, and (2) an introduction to perennial debates — organized by themes that range from race and ethnicity to economic development — about Africa within the fields of Political Science and African Studies more broadly. As we engage with these debates, we will read and critique key texts primarily as containers of logically interconnected propositions about Africa, which may or may not obtain empirically, and secondarily as historical records that reveal the language and concepts through which authors of historical import have made sense of the continent and its place in the world.

Course Organization

The first half of this course is organized chronologically, beginning with African polities prior to the Indian Ocean and Atlantic slave trades and concluding with Africa’s current independent states. The second half of the course is organized thematically around topics such as race, ethnicity, and economic development, among others.

In the first class meeting of each week, I will lecture on that week’s topic(s). In the second class meeting of each week, at least two students will organize and lead a class discussion based on that week’s readings.

Course Assignments

Each student should complete one take-home midterm exam, due by 11:59 PM at the midpoint of the semester, which will consist of an essay response to a question chosen among a set of questions provided by the instructor. Students should also complete a final 5– to 7–page paper, due at the end of the semester. For the final paper, students can choose either their own paper topics or from a list of topics provided by the instructor. If students elect for the former, then the topic must be chosen in consultation with and approved by the instructor. Students must hand in all assignments in either .doc, .docx or .pdf format. All papers must be double-spaced, with 1" margins and size 12 font.

In addition to the two aforementioned papers, each student is expected to lead (with at least one other student) one in-class discussion at the second class meeting of a given week. Students should begin the discussion with a roughly five-minute presentation that distills the central arguments from that week's readings followed by a set of questions to guide subsequent class discussion.

I will also give several "pop quizzes" at the first class meeting of certain weeks. These quizzes will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions on themes from that day's assigned readings.

Grades

I will use the standard City College of New York (CCNY) grading scale. I reserve the right to curve the scale depending on the distribution of class scores at the end of the semester. No curve will lower students' grades relative to what they would have been without the curve. Final course grades will weight the course assessments using the following percentages:

- 20% of your grade will be determined by the take-home midterm exam.
- 25% of your grade will be determined by the final 5– to 7–page paper.
- 25% of your grade will be determined by class participation over the entirety of the semester.
- 20% of your grade will be determined by your leading of at least one in-class discussion.
- 10% of your grade will be determined by in-class quizzes.

Course Readings

This class requires students to acquire the following two books via students' own means:

1. Sembène, Ousmane. (1960, 2008). *God's Bits of Wood*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
2. Steinberg, Jonny. (2011). *Little Liberia: An African Odyssey in New York City*. London, UK: Jonathan Cape.

Both new and used versions of these two books can be purchased cheaply online. All other course readings are on Blackboard.

Course Standards

Electronics

The use of electronic devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, and phones) is *not* allowed in class. Students should take notes using pen and paper. I will, however, amend this policy if there are any students for whom electronics are necessary for participation in the course. Students should inform me of their needs privately and I will adjust the electronics policy for the entire class accordingly without singling out any students.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance is required at all classes. Valid excuses for absence will be accepted only before class. In extenuating circumstances, I will accept valid excuses after class.

Incomplete and Late Assignments

If you think that you will be unable to complete an assignment by its due date because of extenuating circumstances, please let me know ahead of time. If the excuse is satisfactory, I will likely change the assignment's deadline for the entire class. No extensions are allowed for in-class quizzes. Except in cases of illness or emergency, late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade per day (e.g., an A- paper that a student turns in one day late becomes a B+).

Academic Integrity and Honesty

I will not tolerate plagiarism or violations of academic integrity under any circumstances. Any such violations are grounds for failing this course. Please familiarize yourself with [CUNY's Academic Integrity Policy](#). Another valuable resource to consult is Lipson (2008). If you are having difficulty with a written assignment, do not attempt to present another author's work as your own; please come talk to me instead.

Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1

First meeting: Introduction: "An Image of Africa"

Required:

- Achebe (1978)

Recommended:

- Chazan (1999)
- Ferguson (2006, Chapter 1)
- Mudimbe (1988)
- Conrad (1899)

Second meeting: African Polities before Modern Slavery and Colonialism

Required:

- Watch *at least two* episodes of your choice from Wonders of the African World, Episodes 1–6 (Gates Jr. et al., 1999)
- Niane (1960, originally told by the griot Djeli Mamadou Kouyaté)
- Khaldun (2011, originally written in the late 14th century)

Recommended:

- Galawdewos (1672)
- Makumbi (2014)
- Mofolo (1925)
- Usman (2006a,b)
- Vansina (1985, 1990, 2005)
- Kodesh (2010, Chapter 5)
- Austen and Jansen (1996)
- Condé (1996)
- Achebe (1958, Chapters 1–6)
- Bates (1983a,b)

Week 2

First meeting: Modern Slavery

Required:

- Barry (1998, 55–125)

Recommended:

- Lovejoy (1983)
- Davidson (1961)
- Thornton (1992)
- Patterson (1982)
- Nieboer (1900)
- Domar (1970)
- Gemery and Hogendorn (1979)
- Inkori (1982)
- Nwokeji (2010)
- Ware III (2014)

Second meeting: Modern Slavery

Required:

- Equiano (1789, Chapter II, 23–42)
- Rodney (1966)

Recommended:

- Roberts (1987)
- Carretta (1999)
- Gyasi (2016)
- Hurston (2018)
- Alford (1977)
- Scott and Hébrard (2012)
- Hartman (2007)
- Bailey (2005)

Week 3

First meeting: Slavery, Colonialism and the “Scramble for Africa”

Required:

- Cooper (1980, Chapter 2, 24–68)

Recommended:

- Scanlan (2017)
- Davis (1975)
- Conklin (1997, Chapter 3)
- On Ottoman imperialism in Africa, see Minawi (2016)

Second meeting: Colonial Encounter and Colonial Entanglement

Required:

- Osborn (2011)

Recommended:

- Comaroff and Comaroff (1991, Chapter 5, 170–197)
- Thomas (2003, 17–20, 21–51, 174–177)
- Amadiume (1987, Parts I and II)
- Laband (2014)

Week 4

First meeting: Colonial State Making and African Extraversion

Required:

- Young (1994, Chapter 4, 77–140)
- Bayart (1989, Introduction, 1–37)

Recommended:

- Bayart (2000)
- Clapham (1994)
- Cooper (1981)

Second meeting: Indirect Rule and the Projection of State Power

Required:

- Mamdani (1996, Chapter 2, 37–61)
- Herbst (2000, 58–96)

Recommended:

- Ajayi (2000)
- Ochonu (2009a, Introduction, 1–24)

Week 5

First meeting: British and French Colonialism in Comparison

Required:

- Crowder (1964)
- Geschiere (1993)

Recommended:

- Johnson (1971, Chapters 9–11)
- Diouf (1998)
- Conklin (1997, Chapters 4–7)

Second meeting: The Primacy of the Colonial State?

Required:

- Breckenridge (2014, Chapter 4, 115–137)
- Comaroff and Comaroff (1997, 180–217)

Recommended:

- Scott (1988)
- Szreter and Breckenridge (2012)

Week 6

First meeting: Class, Nationalism and Anticolonial Resistance

Required:

- Sembène (1960, 1–128)

Second meeting: Class, Nationalism and Anticolonial Resistance

Required:

- Sembène (1960, 128–248)

Recommended:

- Aguiar (2003)
- Cooper (1996)
- Lawrence (2013)
- Mann (2006)
- Wilder (2015, Chapter 4, 74–105)

Week 7

First meeting: Modes of Decolonization

Required:

- Senghor (1945)
- Houphouët-Boigny (1956)

- African National Congress (1955)
- Lumumba (1960)

Recommended:

- Lumumba (1961)
- Schmidt (2005)
- Diagne (2007)
- Shivji (2012)
- Nkrumah (1945, 1957)
- Tomás (2016)
- Gerard and Kuklick (2015)
- Hanretta (2008)
- Evans (2012)
- Ahlman (2017)
- For independence movements among European settlers in South Africa and Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe), see Giliomee (2010) and White (2015); for the case of Algeria, see Sutton (1977), Horne (1977) and Shepard (2008)

Second meeting: Modes of Decolonization

Required:

- Nyerere (1967) and Mazrui (1967)
- Cabral (1970)
- Touré (1979, 125–139)

Recommended:

- On the “University of Dar es Salaam debate,” see Shivji (1976), Mamdani (1976), Nabudere (1978, 1980) and Tandon (1982)
- Oyono (1956)
- Ochonu (2009b)
- Kourouma (1968)
- Wright (1956)
- Von Eschen (1997)
- Ndongu (1987); for commentary on Ndongu (1987), see Ugarte (2004a,b, 2006)

Week 8

First meeting: Postindependence Colonial Legacies of Indirect Rule

Required:

- Mamdani (1996, 102–108, 128–137, 285–301)

Recommended:

- Ekeh (1975)

Second meeting: Postindependence Colonial Legacies of the “Gatekeeper State”

Required:

- Cooper (2002, 1–19, 156–187)

Recommended:

- Alesina et al. (2011)

Week 9

First meeting: Postcolonial Statehood: Empirical and Juridical

Required:

- Jackson and Rosberg (1986)
- Debos (2016, Chapters 5–6)

Recommended:

- Bayart (1989, Chapter 9, 228–259)
- Lombard (2018)
- Menkhaus (2007)
- Mampilly (2011, Chapters 1–2 and 5–6)
- Tapscott (2017)
- Reno (1997, 2000)
- Leonard (1991)

Second meeting: Postcolonial Society: Language and Culture

Required:

- Thiong’o (1986, Chapter 1, 4–33)
- Achebe (1965)

Recommended:

- Senghor (1972)
- Garang (1992)
- al Turabi (1998a,b)
- Dlamini (2009)
- Ivaska (2011)
- Moorman (2008, Chapter 2)
- Weiss (2009)
- Coombes (2003)
- Tamale (2000)

Week 10

Spring Recess

Week 11

First meeting: Political Regimes in Africa

Required:

- Bratton and Van de Walle (1997, Chapters 2)

Recommended:

- Hyden (2005, Chapter 5)
- Ake (2000)
- Schaffer (1998)

Second meeting: The Paradoxes of Liberal, Democratic Reform

Required:

- Tripp (2010, 24–38)

Recommended:

- Opalo (2012)
- Bratton and Van de Walle (1997, Chapters 3, 5–6)
- Wantchekon (2003)
- Arriola (2009)
- Smith (2015)

Week 12

First meeting: Conceptualizing Race

Required:

- Du Bois (1897)
- Du Bois (1903, Chapter I, 37–44)
- Appiah (1992, Chapter 2, 28–46)

Recommended:

- Sartre (1946)
- Gilroy (1993)

Second meeting: The Political Impact of Race

Required:

- Biko (1978a)
- Biko (1978b)
- Fanon (1952)

Recommended:

- Pillay (2004)
- Lwanga-Lunyiigo (1994)
- Marx (1998, Chapter 5)
- Sanders (1969)
- Mamdani (2001, Chapter 3, 76–102)
- Jung (2000)
- Bunche (2011, travel notes in South Africa from 1937 – 1938)
- Raeburn (1978)
- Fredrickson (1981)

Week 13

First meeting: Conceptualizing Ethnicity

Required:

- Posner (2005, 1–17)

Recommended:

- Chandra (2012)
- Fearon and Laitin (2000)
- Laitin (1986, 1–20)
- Fujii (2009, 56–75)

Second meeting: Effects of Ethnic Diversity

Required:

- Habyarimana et al. (2007)

Recommended:

- Kasfir (1976)
- Kasara (2007)
- Michelitch (2015)
- Koter (2016)
- Boone (2014, Chapters 4 –5)
- Fearon and Laitin (2003)
- Paluck and Green (2009)
- Roessler (2016)

Week 14

First meeting: Development in Historical Perspective

Required:

- Amin (1972)
- Ferguson (1994, 25–67)

Recommended:

- Rodney (1981, Chapters 1–5)
- Amin (1976, translation of *Le Développement Inégal*, 1973) and Amin (1990, translation of *La Déconnexion, Pour Sortir du Système Mondial*, 1986)
- Inkori (2002)
- Rossi (2015)
- Sen (1999, 3–11)
- Acemoğlu et al. (2001, 2002); for an insightful critique of Acemoğlu et al. (2001, 2002), see Chanda et al. (2014)

Second meeting: Foreign Aid & Development Praxis

Required:

- Moyo (2009, Chapters 3–4)

Recommended:

- Serunkuma (2014)

- Easterly (2009)
- Banerjee and Duflo (2011)
- Miguel and Kremer (2004); see ensuing debate among Aiken et al. (2015), Davey et al. (2015), Hicks et al. (2015) and Humphreys (2016)

Week 15

First meeting: Civil War and Conflict

Required:

- Sawyer (2004)

Recommended:

- Straus (2008, 2015)
- Collier and Hoeffler (2002)
- de Waal (2005)
- Blattman (2009)

Second meeting: International Intervention

Required:

- Autesserre (2012)

Recommended:

- Anderson (1999, Chapter 1–6)
- Lombard (2016)
- For work on “strategic victimhood” and the moral hazard of humanitarian intervention, see Kuperman (2005), and for applications to Rwanda, Darfur and Libya, see Kuperman (2004, 2009, 2013)
- Englebert and Tull (2008)
- Branch (2011)
- La Guma (1978)
- Rodney (2018, originally delivered as a lecture in 1971 at University of Dar es Salaam)
- On the Organisation of African Unity (1963 – 2002) and the African Union (2002 – Present), see Jeng (2012)
- For Cuban intervention in Africa, see Guevara (1964), Gleijeses (2003) and Hatzky (2012)
- For Chinese intervention in Africa, see Moyo (2009, Chapter 7), Shinn and Eisenman (2012) and Brautigam (2009, 2015)

Week 16

First meeting: Immigration and the Past in the Present

Required:

- Steinberg (2011, Parts I – II)

Recommended:

- For historical context on the founding of Liberia, see Burin (2005); Ciment (2013); Clegg III (2004); Everill (2013); Fett (2017); Power-Green (2014); Sundiata (2003); Tyler-McGraw (2007); and selections from Campbell (2006)
- Bedasse (2017)
- Lindsay (2017)
- Byrd (2008)
- Gaines (2006)
- Von Eschen (1997)
- Zimmerman (2010)
- Diouf (2007)

Second meeting: Immigration and the Past in the Present

Required:

- Steinberg (2011, Parts III – IV)

Recommended:

- Adida (2014)
- Ugarte (2013)
- Bezabeh (2015)
- Adichie (2013)
- Kidder (2009)
- Stoller (2002)
- Diawara (2004)
- Mamdani (1973)
- Steinberg (2015)

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