

African Issues in Anthropological Perspective

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Class meets: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30-3:50 p.m.
Office hours: Wednesdays, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Science Library lobby
(or by appointment)

Course description

Western depictions of contemporary sub-Saharan Africa are dominated by images of famine, refugees, child soldiers, corruption, and crushing poverty. In this course, rather than shy away from such images, we will engage with them head-on through an anthropological lens—the better to confront and transcend prejudices about a portion of humanity long seen as monolithic despite its tremendous cultural diversity. As we read local-level ethnographic accounts, analyses of continent-wide developments by Western and African scholars, and some African fiction, we will consider a range of questions including: How do ordinary Africans cope with problems such as food scarcity, political violence, AIDS, and corrupt government? How do issues of identity and belonging affect life in modern African countries? Where does Africa fit into the current neoliberal world order? And what role, if any, does “African culture” play in shaping all these issues? For millions of Africans, these are not “academic questions” but matters of life and death. Using contemporary studies and current events to explore these questions, we will strive to replace stereotyped generalizations and objectifications of the continent with practical knowledge for understanding events and transformations underway in African societies.

Course goals

The course seeks to use anthropological research and analysis to help students explore several of the complex problems facing African societies today. At the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- apply a set of analytical tools (including various aspects of critical and social theory) to analyze events in sub-Saharan Africa;
- apply inductive and deductive reasoning to a broad range of social issues using specific African case-studies; and
- participate critically in contemporary public debate about African problems and Africa’s place in the world.

Course format

This is a course designed to enable students to play an active role in their own learning experience. Most class sessions will include presentations by the instructor as well as interactive exercises. Students will also participate in weekly discussion sections outside of course lectures.

Student assessment

Students are expected to read the required texts, to play an active part in regular class discussions, and to complete written/oral assignments in a timely manner. Student performance on assignments will be evaluated with respect to the course goals outlined above (see grading rubric for details). Assignments will be weighted as follows:

- Section attendance & participation 15% of course grade
- One group presentation to class 15% of course grade
- Three short essays 30% of course grade
- Final research project 40% of course grade

Class participation: Please come to discussion section meetings punctually and prepared. To make for fruitful discussion of the week's text, please prepare two written observations or questions which have come to mind through your reading. You're always encouraged to be critical in your approach to these readings, though it's useful to look at a text's strong points as well as its weaknesses. More than one absence during the semester will adversely affect your grade. Students will also independently monitor African current events via the Web and be prepared to discuss them in class.

Group presentation: This will be a 7-10 minute briefing to the class about an African country or issue. Students will sign up on-line for presentation groups by date and subject, and their performance will be evaluated by their peers. See website for details.

Response papers: Write three 3-4 pp. critical responses to reading assignments (you may choose to concentrate on one text alone, or compare it to other readings). Note that you must submit a response paper about a particular reading during the week that reading is due. The first must be turned in by the week of February 12, the next by the week of March 20, and the last by the week of April 24.

Research project: This will be a 15-20 pp. paper on a subject of your choosing. You must meet or e-mail with the instructor or TA to discuss your topic by March 13. Grading criteria will be provided on the website.

Guidelines for learning and participating in this course:

- Be enthusiastic and respectful during class lectures and discussion.
- Follow rules of academic honesty (i.e. cite correctly and do not plagiarize).
- Follow anthropological citation style in your written work; see course texts for examples.
- If you have a disability that affects your ability to participate fully in class or to meet all course requirements, please tell me at the beginning of the term so that we can make appropriate accommodations.
- If you have any other concerns which merit special consideration (e.g. little/no anthropology background, not a native speaker of English, special family circumstances), please also bring this to my attention early in term.
- Hand in assignments and be prepared for oral presentations on time. If you talk to me *before the due date* about extenuating circumstances, I will try to accommodate your needs within the bounds of fairness.

Required texts

Most of our readings will be drawn from anthropological monographs, i.e. book-length, in-depth studies of particular subjects. Students should read these monographs in their entirety unless

otherwise instructed. The following titles will be available from the Brown University Bookstore:

- Chabal, Patrick and Jean-Pascal Daloz. 1999. *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Chernoff, John M. 2003. *Hustling is not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (selected chapters)
- Cliggett, Lisa. 2005. *Grains from Grass: Aging, Gender, and Famine in Rural Africa*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Dongala, Emmanuel. 2005. *Johnny Mad Dog: A Novel*. New York, NY: Farrar Strauss Giroux.
- Fassin, Didier. 2007. *When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Ferguson, James. 2006. *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. (selected chapters)
- Geschiere, Peter. 1997. *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- Smith, Daniel Jordan. 2007. *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sommers, Marc. 2001. *Fear in Bongoland: Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.

Additional readings, including selected journal articles and book chapters, are available for download via E-Reserves (OCRA) on the course website. These include:

- Bayart, Jean-Pierre. 2000. "Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion." *African Affairs* 99:217-267.
- Bazenguissa-Ganga, Rémy. 1999. "The Spread of Political Violence in Congo-Brazzaville." *African Affairs* 98:37-54.
- Carling, Jørgen. 2002. "Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28(1):5-42.
- Cooper, Frederick. 2001. "What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective." *African Affairs* 100:189-213.
- Freeman, Luke. 2007. "Why Are Some People Powerful?" In *Questions of Anthropology*, eds. R. Astuti et al., pp. 281-306. New York: Berg.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. 2001. "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43(4):651-664.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2001. "Of Commandement." In *On the Postcolony*, pp. 24-65. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2002. "African Modes of Self-Writing." *Public Culture* 14(1): 239-273.
- Olivier de Sardan, J. P. 1999. "A moral economy of corruption in Africa?" *Journal of Modern African Studies* 37(1):25-52.
- Riccio, Bruno. 2004. "Transnational Mouridism and the Afro-Muslim Critique of Italy." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30(5):929-944
- Saul, Mahir. 2006. "Islam and West African Anthropology." *Africa Today* 53(1):3-33.

CLASS MEETINGS	READINGS (*denotes text available via course website)
Thurs. January 24	N/A
FAMINE	
Tues. January 29 Thurs. January 31	Cliggett (2005)
REFUGEES & MIGRANTS	
Tues. February 5 Thurs. February 7 Tues. February 12	Sommers (2001) Carling (2002)*, Riccio (2004)* Links from website: Barry (2007), "Exiled to a War Zone, for His Safety"; Jobard (2006), "Kingsley's Crossing"; DeParle (2007), "Border Crossing"; note that the latter 2 feature audio narration & require headphones or speakers [Note: 1st response paper due on or before this date]
WARFARE	
Thurs. February 14 - No class Tues. Feb. 19 - Thurs. February 21	Bazenguissa-Ganga (1999)* Dongala (2005); <u>author in class</u>
POLITICS & POWER	
Tues. February 26 Thurs. February 28 Tues. March 4	Chabal & Daloz (1999) Bayart (2000)*, Freeman (2007)* Mamdani (2001)*, Mbembe (2001)*
CORRUPTION	
Thurs. March 6 Tues. March 11 Thurs. March 13	Olivier de Sardan (1999)* Smith (2007); <u>author in class</u> [Note: Final paper topics due by this date]
HIV/AIDS	
Tues. March 18 Thurs. March 20	Fassin (2007) [Note: 2nd response paper due on or before this date]

- Spring break -

GENDER
& SEXUALITY

Tues. April 1 *Film "Awa: A Mother in West Africa" in class*
Thurs. April 3 Chernoff (2003), pp. 121-472

WITCHCRAFT

Tues. April 8
Thurs. April 10 Geschiere (1997)

AFRICA IN HISTORY,
AFRICA IN THE WORLD

Tues. April 15 Cooper (2001)*, Saul (2006)*
Thurs. April 17 Mbembe (2002)* & optional responses
Film "Les Maîtres Fous" in class
[Note: 3rd response paper due on or before this date]

Tues. April 22 Ferguson (2005) pp. 1-49/113-175; *"Bamako" film in class*
Thurs. April 24 Ferguson, pp. 176-210; *"Bamako" film (cont.)*

Tues. April 29 Concluding discussion, review of issues, & class evaluation