Course title: THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN AFRICA - MDES W3911

Instructor: Etienne Smith
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Knox Hall, 201A

Term: Spring 2011
Course type: Seminar
Day and time: Tuesday 4:10-6pm
Hamilton 406

Office hours: Knox Hall, 201A, Wednesday, 3-5pm.

**Course description**

*Bulletin description*

This seminar examines the politics of identity and accommodation of diversity in selected countries of contemporary Africa in a historical, anthropological and political theory perspective. It eschews a narrowly institutional or short-term conflict-solving approach to favour instead a careful analysis of interwoven political, social and cultural dynamics, emphasizing the articulation rather than the dichotomization of the “above” and the “below”, the past and the present, the global and the local.

**Full description**

Throughout the different case studies, the seminar will focus on the following cross-cutting issues:

- the *political thought* of some key African leaders (Senghor, Nyerere, Kaunda, Nkrumah, Kenyatta, Sankara...) and their political language for national and local audiences, grounded in cultural contexts; the importance of choices made by the leadership weighed against the micro-logics of identification, accommodation practices and *political imaginations at the grassroots level*, as well as the long-term historical processes and social make-up both constraining and enabling the official “policies of identity”.

- the *political uses of the past in the reimagination of the present* by competing narratives, the resizing (agrandizement and shrinking) of imagined communities, the work of retrospective imagination of “traditions”, all intellectual and political agencies replaced in their wider historical and globalized context.

- the *global arena of ideas*, in which racial fantasies, historiographies, political models, media stereotypes circulate and merge with *local spheres of understanding* reprocessing the global flows; the articulation between increasingly intense diasporic mobilities and localized politics of autochtony and exclusion.
Course requirements

Attendance, reading and participation: 20%
Students must attend all classes, are responsible for completing the assigned readings before each class, and are expected to participate frequently in class in a scholarly exchange.

Midterm paper: 30%
Midterm papers are due in class 7. They should not exceed 5 pages. The paper must demonstrate the student’s ability to define and answer a central question of his/her own, identify an adequate range of sources, and present the argument in a logical and organized analytical framework.

Final research paper: 50%
Final papers are due in class 14. Students are expected to write a 20-25 page paper in length on a topic of their choice, but with prior approval by the professor no later than class 10. The paper should be comparative in scope and based on a variety of sources, engaging with theoretical issues and discussing critically the existing literature, demonstrating the student’s ability to make an original argument of his/her own.

Texts

All assigned reading materials will be posted on Courseworks.

Music, film and literature

Music and short film material will be either posted on Courseworks or shown in class. Suggestions of longer films are provided for each class, most of them available at Butler Library. Some of these films will be screened on campus during the semester.

For a list of video resources on Africa at Columbia, see the compilation by Dr Yuusuf Caruso: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/africa/videos.html

A list of novels and comic books will be provided for relevant classes.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism - or the presentation of someone else’s ideas, arguments, or evidence without attribution or acknowledgment – of materials from inside and outside of class is strictly prohibited and will be punished appropriately in accordance with the rules set by Columbia University.
COURSE SYLLABUS

Class 1 (January 18): Introduction

HISTORY AND THEORY: AFRICA’S TRAJECTORIES

Class 2 (January 25): Locating Africa in the literature on nationalism and multiculturalism

Required reading:

Further reading:

**Class 3 (February 1): Africa’s pluralism in the “longue durée”**

**Required reading:**

**Further reading:**
February 8: No class

Class 4 (February 15): The colonial moment

Required reading:
- Mahmood Mamdani, Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996 (Introduction, chapter 1, 2, 3).

Further reading:
THE FABRIC(S) OF THE NATION REVISITED: AFRICA’S ‘SUCCESS STORIES’?

Class 5 (February 22): The politics of cosmopolitism and vernacularization: Sénégal

Required reading:

Further reading:

Films
- Ceddo, by Ousmane Sembène (Butler, cataloguing in process)
- Xala, by Ousmane Sembène
- Karmen Gei, by Joe Gai Ramaka (Butler DVD3577)

Class 6 (March 1): The politics of neo-traditionalism: Mali

Required reading:

Further reading:

Films
- *Bamako Sigi Kan*, by Manthia Diawara (Butler DVD 10797)
- *Guimba, un tyran, une époque*, Cheick Oumar Cissoko (Butler DVD 3373)

**Class 7 (March 8): Leadership matters: Tanzania & Zambia**

**Required reading:**

**Further reading:**
March 15: Spring Break

Class 8 (March 22): Chiefs and revolutionnaries imagining the nation: Ghana & Burkina Faso

Required reading:

Further reading:

Films
- *Thomas Sankara: the upright man*, by Robin Shuffield (Butler DVD 6289)
- *Cuba: an African Odyssey*, by Jihan el Tahri
- *Amilcar Cabral*, by Ana Ramos Lisboa (Butler DVD 11087)

Class 9 (March 29): The politics of creolization: Mauritius & Cabo Verde

Required reading:

Further reading:

Class 10 (April 5): The politics of multiculturalism: South Africa

Required reading:

Further reading:

Films
- Behind the Rainbow, by Jihan el Tahri (Butler, cataloguing)
- Zulu Love Letter, by Ramadan Suleiman (Butler DVD 4958)
- When the War is Over, by François Verster (Butler DVD 9084)
- Children of the Revolution, by Zola Maseko ( Butler DVD 5914)
- Nothing but the truth, by John Kani

CONTESTED COMMUNITIES: PROBLEMATIC NATION-STATES?

Class 11 (April 12): The economy in lieu of nationhood? Kenya & Ivory Coast

Required reading:
Further reading:

Films
- Bronx- Barbès, by Eliane de Latour
- Les Oiseaux du ciel, by Eliane de Latour
- Who’s afraid of Ngugi? by Manthia Diawara (Butler DVD 10795)
- Mau Mau, by David Koff
- Kenyatta, by David Koff

Class 12 (April 19): Deadly binarities and the politics of genocide: Rwanda & Burundi

Required reading:
Further reading:

Films
- *Sometimes in April*, by Raoul Peck (Butler DVD 5010)
- *Lumumba*, by Raoul Peck (Butler DVD 12157)
- *Mobutu : King of Zaïre*, by Thierry Michel (Butler DVD 11784)
- *Congo River*, by Thierry Michel
- *Katanga business*, by Thierry Michel
- *L’Afrique en morceaux*, by Jihan el Tahri

**Class 13 (April 26): Contested sovereignties in Africa’s largest states: Sudan & DRC**

Required reading:
- Jeffrey Herbst & Greg Mills, “There is no Congo: why the only way to help Congo is to stop pretending it exists”, *Foreign Policy*, March 18, 2009, and “Time to end the Congo charade”, *Foreign Policy*, August 14, 2009.
- Debate on Darfur in the *London Review of Books*, 2007, from vol.29, n°5 to vol.29, n°10: [http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n05/mahmood-mamdani/the-politics-of-naming-genocide-civil-war-insurgency](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n05/mahmood-mamdani/the-politics-of-naming-genocide-civil-war-insurgency)

Further reading:

Films
- *Lumumba*, by Raoul Peck (Butler DVD 12157)
- *Mobutu : King of Zaïre*, by Thierry Michel (Butler DVD 11784)
- *Congo River*, by Thierry Michel
- *Katanga business*, by Thierry Michel
- *L’Afrique en morceaux*, by Jihan el Tahri
Class 14 (tba): The politics of federalism in Africa’s most populated states: Ethiopia & Nigeria

Required reading:

Further reading:

Films
- *An Imperfect Journey*, by Haile Gerima (Butler VIDEORES00518)
- *Teza*, by Haile Gerima
- *Delta force*, by Glen Ellis (Butler DVD 7809)
- *Fela: Music is the weapon*, by Jean jacques Flori.
- *Nigeria’s Oil War*, by Eric Campbell (Butler DVD 4893)
- *Nigeria War Against Biafra*, BBC documentary film, (available on youtube in 7 parts)