INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN HISTORY SINCE 1800

Professor: Florence Bernault
Academic year 2020/2021: Common core curriculum – Fall semester (IFCO 2415)

DESCRIPTION

This course will introduce you to the history of Africa south of the Sahara, from the end of the nineteenth century to the present. It will help you to understand the role of Africans in modern history, including the slave trade, industrial capitalism, colonialism, neoliberalism, and the revival of Christianity and Islam. The first part focuses on the nineteenth century, and the economic and social reconversion of African polities after the abolition of the slave trade. The second part discusses the European conquest and the colonial era, including the struggles for independence and freedom. The last part brings the course to the present time, reviewing some of Africa’s major challenges and hopes today. Besides social and political issues, we will challenge popular misunderstandings about environmental control and pandemics in Africa; explore the reasons why foreigners keep investing in Africa, and explore the relation between development and hyper-debt.

The course does not strive for exhaustive coverage, but considers a variety of case-studies. Though we will cover nearly every major region and sub-period within these cases, some will receive particular attention in an effort to balance breadth and depth of historical knowledge.

ASSESSMENT

The mid-term will consist in a three-page, single spaced review of one of the novels listed in the Bibliography. Guidelines will be handed out early in the semester (50%)

A final written exam will take the form of an essay with a choice between two questions (50%). Please note that the final exam will take place at home: you will have 48 hours to write and upload the exam on the dedicated platform.

COURSE SCHEDULE
Session 1: Introduction. Political and Social Diversity in the mid-Nineteenth Century

What are common misconceptions of Africa, Africans, and African history? How diverse were African societies and polities in the nineteenth century? Why did European remain on the coast? How did African economies compare to European ones?

Reading:
- Curtis Keim, Africans Live in Tribes, Don't They?, 113-127

Session 2: Transitions in West Africa and in East Africa

What violent transitions took place in nineteenth century Africa? Which of these changes were externally and internally driven? Why did centralized empires of West Africa collapse in the nineteenth century? What explained the endemic insecurity in East Africa after 1800?

Reading:
- Marcia Wright, Chisi-Ndjuriyi-Sihyajunga, 81-90

Session 3: Transitions in Southern Africa

What was the broader significance of Shaka’s Mfecane in southern Africa? How did diamond and gold change the political stakes in Southern Africa? How did Whites reconcile after the Boer War, and disenfranchise non-white residents?

Reading:

Session 4: Colonialism: Conquest and Uneven Hegemony

Why did the conquest begin in the 1880s? What factors motivated it? How did it vary from place to place? What rationale underwrote colonial economies? How did Africans respond to European encroachment and violence?

Reading:
- Franz Fanon, On Violence, 1-62

Session 5: Colonial Transformations I: Land, Labor, Tribes
Was Indirect Rule more protective of African institutions than assimilation or “direct” rule? Why did famines worsen during colonialism? How did Europeans try to coerce labor? How did Africans and colonialists invent tribes?

Reading:
- John Iliffe, The Creation of Tribes, 318-341
- Frederick Lugard, Indirect Rule in Tropical Africa, 228-238
- (Start the reading for next week)

Session 6: Colonial Transformations II: Gender and Social Conflicts in the City

How did the city become a battlefield for resistance to colonial rule? Why did urban migration become a path of economic and social independence for women? What were the reasons for intensifying gender conflicts from the 1950s onwards?

Reading:
- Luise White, Prostitution, Identity and Class Consciousness in Nairobi, 255-273
- Lisa Lindsay, ‘No Need... to Think of Home?’ Masculinity and Domestic Life on the Nigerian Railway, c. 1940-61, 439-466

Session 7: Colonial Transformations III: Spiritual Battlegrounds

How did the religions of the book both strengthen and undermine colonial domination? What explains the radicalizing of Muslims in certain parts of Africa? Why did historical churches decline in the face of Pentecostal movements?

Reading: TBA

Session 8: Pan-Africanism & Negritude – Independence in Ghana

What were the major changes that Africans and Europeans experience during and after World War II? How did Pan-Africanism foster African independence? Who were the African elites able to exert pressure on colonial governments? Can we call them nationalists? Why did Nkrumah believe in mass action? Why did “Westernized” Africans harbor the most pronounced anti-colonial feelings?

Reading:
- Program of the Pan-African Congress, Manchester, 1945, 758-761
- Kwame Nkrumah, I Speak of Freedom, 1-39 & 95-110
Session 9: Settlers Colonies and Violent Decolonization: South Africa and Kenya

Did the British understand Mau Mau as a political conflict? Who were the winners and losers in the Mau Mau war? What was the rationale behind the Apartheid government’s idea of “Separate Development”? Why did the ANC resolve to use violence?

Reading:
- Frederick Cooper, Africa since 1940, 133-155
- Freedom Charter 1955, 204-208
- Robert Sobukwe, Interview and Constitution of the PAC, 506-510

Session 10: 1994: A Year of Hope and Tragedy

Was the Rwandan Genocide only based on ethnic conflict? How did the International Community react to the massacres? What challenges did the ANC government face at the dawn of the 1994 elections? What are the main problems plaguing the “New South Africa”?

Reading:
- Alison Des Forges, Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda, 1-30 (31-95 only FYI)

Session 11: Looking at Pandemics Historically

Why does Africa have the highest rate of HIV-AIDS infection? Did the coming of biomedicine during the colonial era contribute to the spread of epidemics, or did it help to contain them? Why did the South African government ignore the HIV-Aids epidemic?

Reading:
- Stephanie Nolen, 28 Stories of Aids in Africa (excerpts TBA)

Session 12: Gate-Keeper States, Economic Growth and Crises

What is the problem with African governments and “weak states”? Is there a link between development and decolonization? Why did African states get into hyper-debt? To what extent is colonialism responsible for current crises in Africa?

Reading:
- Frederick Cooper, Development and Disappointment, 91-132; and The Recurrent Crises of the Gatekeeper State, 156-190
BIBLIOGRAPHY

TEXTBOOKS (Recommended only)


NOVELS

- Teju Cole, Every Day is for the Thief, New York: Random House, 2015
- Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nervous Conditions (First ed. 1988), Banbury, UK: Ayebia Clarke Pub., 2004

WORKS CITED

- Cooper, Frederick. Africa since 1940. The Past of the Present, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002
- Fanon, Franz. The Wretched of the Earth (1963: Présence africaine), New York: Grove Press, 2004
- Peel, John. « Un siècle d'interactions entre islam et christianisme dans l'espace yoruba, » Politique africaine, No 123 (2011), 27-50