Historical approaches to Africa
Megan Vaughan

Wednesdays 2pm-4pm

Course requirements:
1. Active participation in all classes (20%)
2. Each student will be responsible for two short class presentations. We will assign these during the first session. You will prepare short analytic papers for each of these two classes, critically reviewing the literature on the reading list. These papers will be circulated to instructor and classmates in advance of the class. (40%)
3. Longer paper (c5000words) on a topic of your choice. Topics to be discussed with me in advance. Papers due 21st May.
In this course we take a historical perspective on a range of issues affecting sub-Saharan Africa today. We’ll begin by examining the nature of political power in precolonial Africa and its relationship with demography, environment, the impact of the slave trade and its abolition. We’ll then move on to address a range of topics including:
- the role of colonialism in transforming African economies and societies  
- artistic production and historical knowledge  
- the impact of the world religions  
- currents in African political thought in the twentieth century  
- aid and ‘development’, wealth and poverty  
- population, environment and climate change  
- gender and sexualities  
- the new ‘scramble’ for African resources

Throughout the course we’ll critically examine questions of the production of knowledge about Africa and ask what a longer-term historical perspective has to offer for analyses of critical contemporary issues.

General background reading:


Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: the past of the present*, Cambridge 2002


Stanford University has a very good gateway to internet resources on Africa: [http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/guide.html](http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/guide.html)
**Week 1: September 3**

For this first class we will all read Frederick Cooper’s latest book, which began life as a set of lectures at Harvard University. In it, Cooper examines both major themes in the modern history of Africa, including, crucially, its intellectual history. Please read the whole book:


Also read:


In this class we will also make arrangements for the rest of the course.

**Week 2: September 10: Africa in the longue durée: themes and methodologies**

This class focuses on the deeper history of the African continent and the methodologies used to uncover that history. We’ll ask whether the study of the African continent is blinded by ‘presentism’, and we’ll examine debates in archaeology, on the uses of historical linguistics and of oral testimony. The reading for the class includes recent studies by historians of pre-colonial Africa on such topics as violence, motherhood and healing.


Week 3: September 17: People, power and politics in pre-colonial Africa
In this class we examine the nature of political power in pre-colonial Africa. We will discuss the influential argument that sub-Saharan Africa was characterised by labour scarcity and that its societies were therefore organised to maximise 'wealth in people'. We'll discuss regional variation in 'resource endowments' and in political cultures and examine the effects of the international slave trade.

Iliffe, *Africans*, chapters 5, 6, 7, 8
Reid, *A History of Modern Africa*, chapters 2 and 3
Cooper, *Africa in the World*


On Asante:


On Buganda, Bunyoro and Great Lakes:

Kodesh, (as in Week 2)

Stephens, *History of African Motherhood*, chapters 4 and 5


Shane Doyle, *Crisis and Decline in Bunyoro: population and environment in Western Uganda*, chapters 1-2

Jan Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda*, 2005, chapters 1-4

**GC CLOSED SEPT 24 : NO CLASS**

**Week 4: October 1st: African art as history – and as art**
Visit to the Metropolitan Museum

**READING: (to follow)**

**Week 5: October 8th: Colonialism (1)**
In this class and in Week 6 we examine the legacies of colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa. Colonial rule was relatively short-lived in most parts of the continent. Does this mean that its effects were superficial? Has the impact of colonialism been over-stated?

In this class we focus on the political economy of colonial rule, comparing ‘peasant’ based economies of West Africa and Tanganyika with colonies of white settlement and mine-based industrialisation.

Iliffe, *Africans*, chapters 9 and 10

Reid, *A History of Modern Africa*, Parts 4 and 5

Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge and History*, Berkeley, 2005, 3-33


Mamoud Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*, 1996, chapters 1-3

**Peasant production:**


Sara Berry, *Fathers work for their sons: accumulation, mobility and class formation in an extended Yoruba community*, Berkeley, 1985

**Settler capitalism and labour**

J. Crush, A. Jeeves and D Yudelman, *South Africa’s Labour Empire: a History of Black Migrancy to the Gold Mines*, 1991 : chapters 1, 2, 3, 4


John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, ‘Coping with the contradictions: the development of the colonial state in Kenya’, *Journal of African History*, 20 (1979), 487-505


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**Week 6: October 15th: Colonialism (2)**

In this class we focus on modes of governance in colonial Africa, comparing French and British rule. We will analyse ‘indirect’ methods of rule and examine debates around coercion. How far were colonial regimes dependent on the active participation of sections of African society? Did this ‘collaboration’ contribute to the ethnicisation of African politics?

(see general reading for week 6) PLUS:


Christopher Gray, *Colonial Rule and Crisis in Equatorial Africa* (2002), 94-133


**Week 7: October 22nd: Political futures**

In this class we examine the history of African political and intellectual thought in the late twentieth century. Fred Cooper (amongst others) has recently emphasised that not all Africans imagined the future in terms of the nation state – for some a reconstituted and reformed empire seemed the way forward. In this class we’ll examine those debates, as well the histories of African socialist, nationalist and pan-Africanist thinking.

Frederick Cooper, *Africa in the World: Capitalism, Empire, Nation-State*, 2014, chapters 2 and 3


G. Martin, *African Political Thought*, 2012, chapters 4-6


A Biney, *The political and social thought of Kwame Nkrumah*, 2011, chapters 2, 6, 7 and 8


**Week 8: 29 October: Development, knowledge and power**

This class examines the idea of ‘development’ and its practice in late colonial and postcolonial Africa. Development interventions in Africa have been widely critiqued, from both the right and the left. In this class we examine the debates around international aid, NGOS, and the role of the state in African economic development. We’ll examine the effects of structural adjustment policies on Africa and the arguments of those who argue that African development is best left to ‘the market’.

Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*, (2002), chapters 1,3.5.


P. Lal, ‘Self-reliance and the state: the multiple meanings of development in early postcolonial Tanzania’, *Africa*, 82 (2012), 212-34


Alex de Waal, ‘Democratizing the aid encounter in Africa’, *International Affairs*, 73 (1997), 623-639


**Week 9: November 5: Religion in colonial and postcolonial Africa**

In this class we examine the importance of religious organisations and belief systems to the social and political history of modern Africa. We trace the impact of Christianity and Islam and assess the arguments for the role of spiritual beliefs in Africa’s contemporary politics.


B. Meyer, ‘If you are a devil, you are a witch and, if you are a witch, you are a devil’, *Journal of Religious History*, 22 (1992), 98-13


Felicitas Becker, ‘Rural Islamism and the “War on Terror”: a Tanzanian case-study’, *African Affairs*, 2006: 583-603

P. Geschiere, *The modernity of witchcraft* (1997), chapters 1, 5, 6


**Week 10: 12 November: Gender and sexualities**

In this class we take a historical perspective on current debates on gender and sexuality in Africa. How far did colonial regimes transform gender roles and sexualities?

Mark Hunter, *Love in the Time of AIDS: Inequality, Gender and Rights in South Africa*, 2010, chapters 1, 3, 5, 6


Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas (eds), *Queer Africa Reader*, 2013

Week 11: 26 November: Poverty, wealth and the new ‘scramble for Africa’

Africa is a continent widely associated with the problem of poverty, yet in the last decade or more many parts of the continent have been experiencing high growth rates. In this class we examine the historical patterns of poverty and wealth creation on the continent and ask whether the ‘new scramble’ for African resources will produce sustainably higher living standards for the continent’s growing population.


Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: the past of the present*, 2002, chapters 5 and 7


P. Bond, *Looting Africa: the economics of exploitation*, 2006, chapters 1-4


**Week 12: 3 December: class presentations**