MPhil in International Relations and Politics
MPhil in African Studies
University of Cambridge

The Politics of Africa
2019-20

Convenor: Dr Sharath Srinivasan (ss919@cam.ac.uk)
Drop in office hours: 4-5pm Wednesdays

Seminar leaders:

Michaelmas Term:
Dr Sharath Srinivasan (ss919@cam.ac.uk)
Others TBC

Lent Term options (depending on student numbers and choices):
Dr Sharath Srinivasan
Dr Katrin Wittig
Others TBC

Lecture and seminar times and locations:

Lectures on African politics* (optional, but highly recommended for students with little background in African politics): Wednesdays, 11-12, starting 16 October

* The Paper Guide for this 3rd year undergraduate politics course will be uploaded to Moodle. Lecture slides will also be made available.

There are other Africa focused undergraduate lecture series that students may find interesting. These will be introduced at the start of the course.

Michaelmas Seminars:
Wednesdays, 1-3pm in Seminar Room 119, Alison Richard Building
Starting 16th October

Lent Term Seminars:

Option A: Rebel groups in civil wars and peace processes in Africa (Katrin Wittig) – Room 138
Option B: Africa’s digital communications revolution: state, publics, power and politics (Sharath Srinivasan) – Room 119

Brief description of the course:

This MPhil course explores major topics and themes in post-colonial sub-Saharan African politics, with due regard for African heterogeneity. It explores the interaction
of local and international factors that have influenced social, economic and political trajectories in Africa. It assesses the relevance of theories and concepts developed in the fields of comparative politics and international relations to the study of Africa. Finally, it studies the politics of Africa in a multi-disciplinary fashion, drawing on scholarship from a range of disciplines including, politics, social anthropology, history and sociology.

The course is divided into two parts.

**In Michaelmas term**, the seminars will focus on general themes in African politics. We will explore the histories and legacies of state formation in Africa, and assess theories of the state and their relevance in different parts of Africa. We will focus on key aspects of politics in Africa, including the nature of political authority and the relationship between violence, politics, economy and identity in Africa. We will also look closely at the international politics of Africa, including the politics of development and security.

In **Michaelmas Term**, students will be required to read the following books. Students may wish to buy them, as they are all classics or important books (the list has been given to Heffers bookstore, on Trinity Street). Alternatively, the books are in the HSPS library, African studies library, and most college libraries. Some are also available as ebooks.


**In Lent term**, all students will choose one of the following options that will allow them to explore a theme in African politics in more detail.

**Note**: Further details on options will be made available at the Introductory session. If fewer than 6 students sign up for an option, that option will be cancelled. There will be a maximum of 15 students in each seminar, so some students may not get their first choice option.

**Students must sign up for their option** with the MPhil administrator.

*Option A: Rebel groups in civil wars and peace processes in Africa* (Katrin Wittig)
The last three decades have seen a proliferation of non-state armed groups in civil wars. This option aims to give students an understanding of the history and contemporary role of rebel groups in civil wars and peace processes in Africa. What are the origins of rebel movements? How do they organise and change over time? How do the characteristics of these groups shape civil war and peace processes? We will start with a look at the rebel governance literature, examining the organisation of these groups during civil wars, before diving deeper into the different ways that non-state armed groups can be integrated into mediation and peace processes. Throughout the course, we will look at several African rebel groups in depth, namely the CNDD-FDD in Burundi, the RPF in Rwanda and the SPLM/A in South Sudan. The option equips students with the analytical tools and empirical knowledge to better understand the genesis, development, organization as well as violent and non-violent strategies of rebel groups.

Option B: Africa’s digital communications revolution: state, publics, power and politics (Sharath Srinivasan, TBC)

Who exerts political power over whom in Africa’s digital age? How is digital connectivity transforming political alignments between citizens, states and corporations? These questions cannot be answered by looking at control or rule alone, or by narrowing the analytical focus to new collective actions. This option aims to take a broader look at how communication technologies are entangled into politics in Africa. It tackles head-on the growing questions around how digital communications imbricate political rule, authority and collective action in new and complex ways. What can be confidently said about the nature of political change brought about with new digital communication technologies? How are they significant in relation to both the exercise of authority, and forms of political action beyond the state? What existing ideas of the state and society, local and global, and communities of belonging are being disrupted with digital communication technologies? Which concepts are useful to making sense of politics from Africa? How does an African vantage shed light on fundamental questions about politics in a digital age?

Course aims and objectives:

- To promote a critical engagement with a wide range of theoretical literature in African politics
- To encourage reflection on popular representations of African politics and development
- To develop an awareness of the sources of authority, legitimacy, stability, violence and political change in Africa
- To provide students with a solid basis for further study in African politics or for related careers

Assessment

Students are expected to write two essays.

The first short piece (1500 words) is a review essay. It should review one of the books designated ‘seminar readings’ from Michaelmas term (including Ferguson, Global
Shadows, from the first seminar). The book review should be a commentary on the book’s argument and its disciplinary and methodological foundations, rather than a summary of its findings. It should highlight strengths, weaknesses, insights and oversights of the text, and should relate the book’s argument to wider thematic and conceptual debates in the field, and to understandings of African politics. This review is worth 25% of the final grade, and is due at noon on 15th January 2020.

The second research essay is a 4500-word essay displaying significant research and probing in depth one of the themes of the course. Questions are set by the Course Leader and released in February. This essay is worth 75% of the final grade and is due at noon on 13th March 2020.

Readings for Michaelmas Term

The reading list divides material into different categories. The General books are useful starting points for the course.

For each seminar topic you will find the Seminar reading, as well as Core and Supplementary readings.

The Seminar readings are essential readings for all students. Most weeks, the seminar reading will be a full book. There are some copies available at the libraries (including the college libraries) but if your budgets allow it you may want to consider purchasing them. You could also pool resources with other students in the seminar to share books.

The Core readings are useful for the book reviews, and the Supplementary reading lists are provided for those who want to dig deeper into particular issues. Many of the readings are relevant for more than one Section.

The texts are available either online (University Library e-resources) or at the HSPS Library on Free School Lane or the Centre of African Studies Library in the ARB. The library website is: http://www.african.cam.ac.uk/library/. You can also try libraries across the university, including college libraries, Haddon, Marshall, Seely, and Geography.

Discussion of African politics is vibrant and diverse, with rich crossover between scholarly debates and policy research and practice. Those wanting to follow the debates, from a variety of different perspectives, should explore the following specialist publications and academic journals (those in italics are particularly prominent; most or all are available either on-line, at the PPS library or at the Centre of African Studies library):

*Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*
*African Affairs*
*Africa Confidential*
*Africa Today*
African Studies Review
African Studies Quarterly
Commonwealth and Comparative Politics
Development and Change
Journal of African and Asian Studies
Journal of Modern African Studies
Journal of East African Studies
Journal of Southern African Studies
Journal of African Economies
New African
Review of African Political Economy
Round Table
Third World Quarterly

The following Internet sites are good for news and research about Africa. Also check the on-line resources on the Centre of African Studies website (http://www.african.cam.ac.uk/library/)

Pambazuka.org http://www.pambazuka.org/en/
AllAfrica.com http://allafrica.com/
Africa news online www.africanews.org/index.html
BBC news http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/default.stm
BBC Focus on Africa http://allafrica.com/partners/bbc/focus_on_africa.ram
African political resources www.politicalresources.net/africa.htm
Afrobarometer Surveys on democracy in Africa www.afrobarometer.org
IRIN news http://www.irinnews.org
Think Africa Press http://www.thinkafricapress.com
Africa Research Institute http://www.africaresearchinstitute.org

Detailed reading list

General books

We encourage you to read:


and, if possible, at least one other of the following books before the first seminar:

Weekly Readings

1. **Introduction: Africa and the World: exception or comparator?**

Is the study of African politics trapped in its past? How might the study of African politics inform our understanding of politics and international relations in the ‘North’? How can a deeper understanding of ‘Africa and the world’ help us to objectively assess current debates on ‘Africa Rising’ or the ‘Afro-Pessimism’ of recent decades?

**Seminar readings**


(reference will also be made to the final chapter of Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present*, 2019 edition)

**Supplementary readings:**


2. The legacies of colonialism
Did colonial rule simply reproduce European ideas of the state in Africa? Alternatively, have rulers in Africa – colonial or otherwise – encountered similar and enduring challenges to forming centralised states in mostly the same sorts of ways? In what ways and why did colonial elites ‘invent’ tradition in Africa? Are critiques of how rural Africa has been historically ruled less relevant today?

**Seminar reading:**


**Core readings:**


**Supplementary readings**


*History and Historiography*


**Critical analyses on Colonial Rule**


### 3. Nationalism and independence

Did African nationalism fail independent Africa? Whatever happened to Pan-Africanism? How did the role of violence in struggles for liberation shape the post-colonial trajectories of African states? What explains the different ways in which colonial authorities managed decolonisation across African states?

**Seminar Reading**

Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin Classics, 1961 (and preface by Jean-Paul Sartre)

**Core readings**


*NOTE: You can find excerpts from Nkrumah, Kaunda, Nyerere and others in Martin Minogue and Judith Molloy (eds), African aims and attitudes: selected documents, Cambridge University Press, 1974.


Supplementary readings


Chatterjee, Partha. The Nation and its Fragments. (Based on the Bengali experience in India, but of relevance to post-colonial nationalism more generally.)

Thomson, Alex. An Introduction to African Politics, Oxford: Routledge, Ch. 3.


4. **Democracy and political authority in independent Africa**

How is ‘democratisation’ faring in Africa and what kind of democracy matters? What, if anything, makes African politics ‘neopatrimonial’? What does clientalism explain and what does it overlook in the study of African politics? What explains differences among African states regarding the strength of party versus identity politics or degrees of patronage and personal rule?

**Seminar reading:**

Core reading


Introduction.

Supplementary readings


Young, Crawford, *The Postcolonial State in Africa*, University of Wisconsin Press, 2012, Ch. 5, 6


Young, Tom, ‘Democracy in Africa?’ *Africa* 72, no. 3 (2002): 484–496

Huntington, Samuel, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991


Part 1 of Young, Tom (ed.), *Readings in African Politics*. James Currey, 2003 contains key selections from the Bayart, Chabal and Daloz and Jackson and Rosbert, as well as a range of important related texts.


**Cases**


5. War and violence

In accounting for violence, how do we understand the roles of politics, economics and identity appeals? To what extent are global economic actors responsible for cycles of
political violence in Africa? Is contemporary political violence in Africa simply not political enough? Is violent conflict in Africa an unavoidable feature of state formation processes and of economic and political development?

**Seminar Reading:**


**Core readings:**

Christopher Cramer, *Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing: Accounting for Violence in Developing Countries* (Hurst 2006)


**Supplementary readings:**

Kaldor, Mary, *New & old wars: organized violence in a global era*


Cases


Reno, William. *Warlord Politics and African States*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, Ch. 3 (Liberia), Ch. 4 (Sierra Leone), Ch. 5 (DR Congo), Ch. 6 (Nigeria).


6. Development, aid, good governance

Has development in Africa been a political or economic project? Good governance has been characterized as a disciplinary project – is this accurate? If so, who is being disciplined and to what effect? Do the rise of the BRICS, new donors and the ‘neo-developmental state’ present a break from the past?

Seminar Reading:


Core readings:


Supplementary readings:


William Easterly. The White Man’s Burden: why the West’s efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good, New York: Penguin Press, 2006.


7. Gender, class and civil society

African states typically were formed in nationalist struggles that made claims for the nation as a community of undivided common interest. Questions of gender and class were ignored or left to be dealt with later. Efforts to raise questions of gender in
African politics or in the study of African societies have opened debates about the contextual specificity of ideas about gender, and the applicability of ideas about class struggle to societies whose experience has not been that of western-style industrial capitalism. The spread of multi-party democracy has been accompanied by a focus on ‘civil society’, but this notion has been criticised as serving a middle-class and urban section of society, and being subject to the influence of donors.

Seminar Reading:


Core readings:


Supplementary readings:


Adam Branch, Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda, Oxford University Press, 2011 Ch. 1, 3


Ian Taylor and Paul Williams (eds), *Africa in International Politics: External Involvement on the Continent*, Routledge, 2004


*Separate reading lists will be provided for the Lent term options.*