Africa in World Affairs
IR B-6917
Spring 2017
Wednesday 7:15-9:15pm
NAC 6/293

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Office Hours
Monday 5:00-7:00
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This course provides a broad overview of African politics with a particular focus on states and their place in world affairs. Often, Africa is depicted as a homogenous entity. In much journalistic and academic writing, Africa is depicted as a unified entity which is either rising or falling, moving forward or falling backward, becoming more peaceful or descending into violence. This course starts with a different assumption. That is, politics in Africa are incredibly heterogeneous, and always have been. Diversity characterizes African politics more so than homogeneity and to describe Africa and its politics in homogenous terms is an analytical mistake. There is no African state; there are only African states.

This course provides students with analytical tools through which to understand the diversity of African politics. It does so in two ways. First, it introduces students to six different perspectives on African states – their origins, their trajectories, and their place in the world system. In other words, it begins by introducing students to different ways of analyzing African politics. There is no such thing as a neutral analytical perspective and this course enables students to see the benefits and costs of different forms of argument about African politics. Second, it introduces students to several critical topics in African politics, providing an introduction to political issues from a variety of different analytical perspectives.

The course focuses largely on states because patterns of state formation profoundly shape a country’s politics and the life course of its citizens. Among other questions, we will ask: Are contemporary African politics best understood as a legacy of the continent’s encounter with colonialism or are they better understood as a product of post-colonial institutional development? To what degree has Africa’s geography shaped the formation of African states? How does culture impact the ability of African states and international donors to implement policies? To what degree is the shape and trajectory of the African state impacted by the politics of the world system?

To explore these questions we will read foundational work by, among others, Bates, Comaroff and Comaroff, Herbst, Mamdani, and Young.

Course Assignments and Evaluation: The goal of the course is to improve students’ abilities to think critically about the world around them and specifically about politics in Africa. Therefore,
assignments are directed at improving such skills. There are two main requirements: two reading response papers and a research paper.

**Response Papers**

Students will be required to write two response papers of 4-5 pages length during the first part of the semester. The papers should engage the readings for a theoretical perspective in a given week (e.g. Colonialism and Its Legacies). Papers should lay out the argument of the readings, ask how persuasive the argument is, and examine what the perspective’s potential advantages and weaknesses are for understanding African politics.

Papers will be due at the first class for the next the theoretical perspective (e.g. papers on Geographies of Power and Prosperity will be due at the beginning of the class on Colonialism and Its Legacies). Students are free to choose to write on whatever perspective they wish.

**Research Paper**

Students must write a 12-15 page research paper on a topic of the student’s choosing in which they apply one of the perspectives discussed in class to examine an aspect of African politics.

**Grading**

The response papers constitute 20% each, the research paper 40%, and participation 20% of the final grade.

The course is designed as a seminar, hence active, thoughtful, and respectful participation on the part of students is crucial to the success of the class. Students are expected to arrive to class each session having read and thought about the assignments and prepared to discuss them.

**Learning Outcomes:** The primary goals of this course are for students to be able to assess the benefits and costs of different forms of argument about African politics and to be able to read and critically evaluate academic and journalistic work on contemporary African politics.

**Books to Purchase:**

Course Outline

Week 1 Introduction (January 30)

No Reading

Week 2 Geographies of Power and Prosperity (February 6)


Week 3 Colonialism and Its Legacies (February 15)

NOTE: Class is on Wednesday this week due to CUNY Schedule

DUE – Papers on Geographies of Power


Week 4 – NO CLASS – February 20 – Presidents’ Day

Week 5 Institutions, Choices, and Their Effects (February 27)

DUE – Papers on Colonialism and Its Legacies


Week 6 Africa in the World System (March 6)

DUE – Papers on Institutions and Their Effects


**Week 7 Culture and Power (March 13)**

DUE – Papers on Africa in the World System


**Week 8 The Patrimonial State (March 20)**

DUE- Papers on Culture and Power


**SECTION 2: TOPICS IN AFRICAN POLITICS**

**Week 9 The Politics of Ethnicity (March 27)**

DUE – Papers on the Patrimonial State


Week 10 The Politics of State Collapse (April 3)


Week 11 April 10 – NO CLASS – Spring Break

Week 12 Economic Growth and Development (April 20)

NOTE – Class Canceled Due to Professor Conflict

Week 13 Economic Growth, Development, and Corruption (April 24)


Week 15 The Politics of Law (May 1)


**Week 16 The Politics of Health (May 8)**


**Week 17 Humanitarian Intervention and Post-Conflict Reconstruction (May 15)**

Read also the comments on the article Available at: [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)


**FINAL PAPERS DUE MAY 22 – NO EXTENSIONS!!!