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PSC 326H.01: Politics of Africa

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The University Of Montana

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The University of Montana
Department of Political Science

PSC 326 - Politics of Africa
Fall Term 1996 - 1997

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Class: LA 337, TTh 11:10-12:30
Office Hours: MT 1:10-2:40PM
or by appointment

Course Description

This is a discussion course in which we seek understanding of the problems of economic and political (under) development which every so often puts Africa in the headlines. The course begins by examining the nature and characteristics of African politics. It then seeks explanation in the colonial inheritance, the continuing neo-colonial political economy and the nature of the post-colonial state. For this purpose we spend a few weeks discussing European contact with Africa and its impact on social structures and institutions. The greater part of the course is devoted to the analysis and discussion of critical issues, institutions, processes and trends in the post-colonial era. In the final part of the course, we debate the current and proposed solutions to the more critical contemporary problems of economic and debt crises, human rights, structural adjustment, democratization, population, and environmental crises.

Running through the course are certain fundamental questions such as the feasibility of liberal democracy in Africa, and under what conditions? Is liberal democracy a prerequisite of development or is it the other way around? How can leadership accountability be institutionalized in Africa? Is insistence on internationally recognized human rights the answer? The dilemma such questions pose for Western policy in Africa are discussed.

The course is in three parts. In Part One, approximately two weeks, students are introduced to Africa and to the nature and characteristics of its politics. In Part Two, lasting approximately five weeks, we seek understanding of African politics and political life by examining the socio-economic, cultural and religious contexts. And finally, in the third part, the course focuses on critical contemporary problems. Students will debate proposed solutions.

Course Format and Requirements

The course will be organized as a discussion seminar. After the initial preliminaries, students will take turns leading discussions on key issues, concepts and themes from the assigned readings for the relevant class sessions. The discussion leader launches the discussion by presenting a summary of the readings and posing the key issues. Discussion leaders are not expected to answer all questions in their presentations; their task is to identify important issues and areas of controversy for discussion.

Meaningful discussion and rewarding class sessions can only

occur if we all faithfully do the assigned readings when due; otherwise we would only be exchanging ignorance and have boring sessions. Everyone is therefore responsible for the material assigned for each session. The oral summary by the discussion leader is only a convenient way of launching the discussion, not a substitute for a careful reading of the materials. To ensure adequate preparation for and quality contribution to class discussions, you will be required periodically to write short (no more than 3 pages) reaction papers to some of the reading assignments. These will constitute a part of the course grading.

Evaluation of Student Performance

There will be three components to the grade you earn in the course. The first component comprising 40 percent will be based on your classroom performance, including the quality of class discussions you lead, your contributions to other class sessions, and your general preparation for class as reflected in the quality of your reaction papers. Obviously, your regular attendance will also count, perhaps as much as ten percent.

The second component, counting for 20 percent, is a mid-term exam. The third component is your choice of either a term paper or a final examination (40 percent).

The Term Paper

For those who prefer a term paper to a final exam, the paper will be on a topic of your own choice, provided it deals with an aspect of the African experience. The paper is expected to break new ground, that is, go beyond the assigned class readings and discussions. It may cover topics left out or insufficiently covered in the course. It may be a research paper, or a "thought" paper. The better research papers are more analytic than descriptive, empirical than normative or prescriptive. Typically the research paper implicitly or explicitly offers a hypothesis linking two ideas or concepts, collects evidence for or against it, and evaluates its worth. An example might be a study linking ethnic or class interests to the abortive transition to civil rule in Nigeria in 1993 or the impact of ethnicity on the 1993 national elections in Kenya. Another example might be the effect of female circumcision on the reproductive health of say, Kikuyu women.

A "thought" paper, on the other hand, carefully examines one or two concepts in terms of either their clarity or accuracy, their linkages with other important concepts, their ease of operationalization or their ability to explain other phenomena. For example, perhaps you want to explore the concept of corruption in Africa in general or in a specific African country. You identify the several components of corruption, ask whether it makes sense to treat these components as part of the concept, and ascertain what it is that can be explained through the concept. Or perhaps you may want to criticize the way the concept has been used by an author or authors to explain underdevelopment in Africa in general or in a specific country. Another example might be to examine the way the concept of tribalism has been used to explain political crises in Africa.

There are many different forms an analytic or thought paper might take, but I hope you get the general idea from these illustrations.

Texts

The basic texts are:

- 1) Chinua Achebe's political novel, A Man of the People, which vividly describes national characteristics and the flavor of African political life. It should be read immediately.
- 2) April & Donald Gordon (eds), Understanding Contemporary Africa (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992) discusses major institutions, issues and trends needed for a proper grasp of the reality of the continent today and the foreseeable future.
- 3) Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Washington, DC: Howard Univ. Press, 1974) is a classic on the international socio-economic parameters within which the African political drama is shaped and played.
- and 4) Wekesser, ed., Africa: Opposing Viewpoints (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1992), which presents opposing arguments and interpretations of issues in Africa.

PSC 326 - Course Outline

Part One: Introduction to Africa and Its Politics

Week 1: Introduction

Sept. 3: Overview: scope, contents and course requirements

Sept. 5: "The Nature of a Continent" (a Video)

Reading: Begin and try to finish by the week-end
Achebe, A Man of the people

Week 2: Nature and Characteristics of African Politics

Sept. 10: Discussion of Chinua Achebe's A Man of the People
chps 1-7

Sept. 12: Discussion of Achebe continued, chps 8-13

Part Two: Understanding African Politics: The Nature and Characteristics of African Society.

Week 3: Family, Kinship and Lineage Systems

Sept. 17: (a) "A Legacy of Life Styles" (video).

(b) Are African cities and towns urban
Communities? A discussion of William B. Schwab's
case study, "Oshogbo - An Urban Community? (+)

Sept. 19: Family and Family Life: descent groups and social
order

Reading: April & Donald Gordon chp 9

Week 4: Family, Kinship and Lineage Systems continued.

Sept. 24: Marriage, Marriage payments and Divorce: The place
of women in the family and society.

Discussion of: (1) Luigi M Solivetti, "Family, Marriage
and Divorce in Hausa" (+); and (2) Januario Nabaitu
et. al. "Marital Instability in Rural Uganda" (+)

Additional Reading: (a) Charles-Henry Pradelles de
Latour, "Marriage Payments, Debt and Fatherhood Among
the Bangoua..." (+); (b) Regina Smith Oboler, "The
House-Property Complex and African Social
Organization." (+)

Sept. 26: Women and Politico-Economic Development

Reading: (1) Gordon & Gordon, chapter 10; (2) Abner
Cohen's study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns,
chapter on "The Migratory Process: Prostitutes and
Housewives." (+)

Week 5: The Religious Context

Oct. 1: Africa's triple religious heritage (a video)

Oct. 3: Discussion of triple heritage impact on Politics

Reading: Gordon & Gordon chp 11

Week 6: Religion, Occultism and Politics

Oct. 8: Witchcraft and Social Order

Discussion of: (1) Peter Geschiere & Cyprian Fisiy, "Domesticating Personal Violence: Witchcraft, Courts and Confessions in the Cameroon"; (2) Misty Bastian, "Bloodhounds Who have No Friends": Witchcraft and Locality in the Nigerian Popular Press

Oct. 10: Spirit Possession and political liberation

(October 14 is last day to drop class or change grading option).

Part Three: The Economic Context: Development of Africa's Under-Development

Week 7: Development In Africa Before The Coming of the Europeans

Oct. 15: Different But Equal (video).

Oct. 17: Discussion of video together with Rodney chp 2.

Reading: Walter Rodney, chp 2. Chp 1 also is suggested

Week 8: The Dialectics of European Development and African Underdevelopment

Oct. 22: The Impact of Pre-colonial trade in minerals and human cargoes.

Reading: Walter Rodney chps 3 + 4(pp 95-113);

Oct. 24: The Impact of "Legitimate" Trade and Imperialism

Reading: Walter Rodney chps 4(pp 135-145)+ 5 & 6;

Week 9: Impact of Legitimate and Imperialism cont'd.

Oct. 29: Debate: Colonialism is not responsible for Africa's Under-development

Reading: Carol Wekesser, chp 1, viewpoint 2 (Bauer), pp 24-30; Rodney, chp 6

Oct. 31: "Tools of Exploitation" video.

Week 10:

Nov. 5: Election Day - No classes.

Nov. 7: Mid-term Exam

Week 11: The Economic Situation Today

Nov. 12: Africa's Economic Crisis: Two Opposing Views (LPA vs Berg Report and aftermath); Exploitation vs Marginalization.

Reading: Gordon & Gordon, chp 5 especially pp 95-124

Nov. 14: Is Structural Adjustment the answer? A Debate

Readings: (1) Carol Wekesser, chp 3, viewpoints 3 (USAID) and 4 (Adedeji);

(2) J. Barry Riddell, "Things Fall Apart

Again: Structural Adjustment Programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa" JMAS 30, 1 (1992) 53-68 on Reserve

Week 12: Continuing Political Crisis.

Nov. 19: "In Search of Stability" (video)

Nov. 21: Discussion of video in the context of one-party rule and militarization of the continent

Reading: Gordon & Gordon, chp 4

Week 13: Is Democratization the Answer?

Nov. 26: The Governance Project - the rationale

Discussion of Wickessel, chp 4, viewpoints 1 (Joseph) 2 (Prendergast) & 5 (Muna)

Nov. 28: Thanksgiving Break

Week 14: Democratization Issue cont'd

Dec. 3: The Governance Project - its instrumentalities. The Foreign Aid and Civil Society Approach; The Autonomous Funds proposal

Readings: Wickessel, chp 3, viewpoints 5 (Johns) and 6 (Lancaster)

Dec. 5: Population, Environment and Famine: Causes and Linkages

Reading: April & Donald Gordon chps 6 + 7;

Week 15:

Dec. 10: Is birth control and urban population policy the answer? A Discussion of: Wickessel chp 2, viewpoint 3 (Population Institute), viewpoint 4 (Jacqueline Kasun), and Bertha Maina Ahlberg, "Is there a Distinct African Sexuality" (+)

Dec. 12: Reflections: International Politics and Africa's Future.