Part II, Historical Tripos: Paper 29
The History of Africa from 1800 to the Present Day


2021/22

Convenor: Dr Ruth Watson (riw21@cam.ac.uk)
Course Description

This paper explores the historical processes that have shaped the lives of Africans since 1800. It is one of the oldest papers on the Part II history syllabus and has been running for more than half a century, having been pioneered by John Iliffe in the 1960s. His textbook, *Africans: The History of a Continent* is now in its third edition, and it remains one of our core texts. The African continent, reaching to the origins of all humankind, has an extraordinarily rich and deep history, but the focus of this survey course is the internal and external dynamics of historical change in Africa from the beginning of the nineteenth century. We remain sensitive to global perspectives on Africa’s place in the world, but the key objective of this paper is to examine and understand Africa’s history from within, and from the perspective of African peoples. The programme of lectures and classes, and this list of supervision essay questions are ordered chronologically, moving from the precolonial states of nineteenth-century sub-Saharan Africa, through the tumultuous history of colonialism, liberation and independence, to the challenges faced in postcolonial Africa.

We begin by analysing political and economic transformations in precolonial Africa, focusing on the Zulu kingdom in particular and, more broadly, the impact of firearms in nineteenth-century sub-Saharan Africa. We move on to explore nineteenth-century African slavery and the slave experience, as well as precolonial trade. The paper then traces regional histories of precolonial Africa, examining the different trajectories that shaped developments in eastern, southern, and north and west Africa. The role of Christian missionaries and their interactions with Africans provides a bridge to colonial conquest, with an emphasis on investigating how Africans simultaneously resisted and adapted to European invasion. Next, the paper moves to consider the emergence of colonial states in Africa, emphasising themes of governance, violence and coercion, and economic change. We also explore the social and cultural history of colonialism though the lenses of gender, print culture and urban life. The topic of ethnicity and the making of political community in twentieth-century Africa leads us to histories of African nationalism and liberation struggles, which heralded the coming of independence and the birth of postcolonial African states. The final section of the paper assesses the challenges, triumphs and sometimes despair that characterises the recent African past. We focus on poverty and economic development, patronage politics and democratisation, civil wars and humanitarianism, health and medicine, and the growth of Pentecostalism and Islamism. Our final topic uses the theme of popular culture as a window into the vigour and dynamism of Africa’s history, past and present.

Mode of Teaching

The paper is structured chronologically. Lectures and classes in Michaelmas term focus on Africa in the nineteenth century while those in Lent term examine colonial and independent Africa during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A Revision class in the Easter term concentrates on debates in African history and historiography so as to draw together the themes of the paper. Students taking this paper are expected to attend all lectures and classes. There are 30 contact hours in all: sixteen 1hr lectures, four 90 mins discussion classes, and one 2hr revision class, as well as six 1hr supervisions for discussing weekly essays. If required, students also have the option of taking 1 or 2 additional one-hour revision supervisions in the Easter term. The paper convenor, Dr Watson, coordinates arrangements for supervisions by allocating students to supervisors. Students are taught one-to-one or in pairs. The paper is assessed by a three-hour exam in the Easter term.

Maximum supervision capacity: 20 students
General Introductory Reading

Outline histories such as *The Cambridge history of Africa* (Vols. 5, 6, 7 & 8) and the *UNESCO General history of Africa* (Vols. 6-8, print only) offer a comprehensive introduction to African history.

You should also consult the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, which has hundreds of articles on a variety of relevant themes and topics.

Useful Textbook Histories

Cooper, F. *Africa since 1940* (Second edition, 2019)


Nugent, P. *Africa since independence* (2nd ed., 2012)

Oliver, R & A. Atmore. *Africa since 1800* (5th ed., 2005)


Reid, R J. *A history of modern Africa: 1800 to the present* (2nd ed., 2012)

Lecture Topics

1. Political transformations in precolonial Africa
2. Slavery and the slave trades in nineteenth-century Africa
3. Race, labour and colonialism in southern Africa
4. Islam and state-building in West and North Africa
5. Christianity, missions and colonialism
6. Resistance and colonialism
7. Colonial states and economic change
8. Colonialism and cultural change
9. Ethnicity and political community in twentieth-century Africa
10. Nationalism and liberation
11. Poverty, economy and development in postcolonial Africa
12. The postcolonial state
13. Civil war and humanitarianism
14. Health and medicine in neo-liberal Africa
15. Christianity and Islam in postcolonial Africa
16. Histories of African popular culture
Supervision Topics

1. Political Transformations in Precolonial Africa
2. Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Africa
3. Trade, Slaves & Socio-Economic Change in Nineteenth-Century Africa
4. Race, Labour and Colonialism in Southern Africa
6. Jihad in Nineteenth-Century West Africa
7. Christianity, Missions and Colonialism
8. Resistance and Colonialism
9. Colonial States
10. Colonial Economies
11. Gender and Social Transformation in Colonial Africa
12. Colonial African print cultures and twentieth-century urban life
13. Ethnicity and political community in twentieth-century Africa
14. African nationalism, citizenship and armed struggle
15. Poverty, economy and development in postcolonial Africa
16. Postcolonial states
17. Civil wars, autochthony and humanitarianism in postcolonial Africa
18. Health and medicine in neoliberal Africa
19. Pentecostalism and Islamism in postcolonial Africa
20. Reading African history through popular culture