PERSON AND COMMUNITY IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA
Anthropology 228
TuTh 1:10-2:30 Pettengill G63

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"The most important African cultural characteristic is the great value placed on communal fellowship in our traditional society." Kwasi Wiredu, Philosophy and African Culture (1980)

African societies are often characterized as emphasizing the importance of duties to the group—communal ownership and collective responsibility—rather than individual rights or personal conscience. This course focuses on post-colonial tensions between communalism and individualism, and explores indigenous and imported notions of power & corruption, prosperity & disease as they are lived and understood within contemporary West and Southern Africa. How do kin-ordered social systems respond to the incursions of global capitalism and the advent of the nation-state? How have chieftaincy, slavery, and state-structures emerged within them; and how have such new organizational forms as political parties, religious congregations, ethnic groups, and occupational associations been constructed under changing historical conditions?

The aim of the course is to give you an understanding of problems confronting African peoples and nations in the world today and an insight into indigenous responses to these challenges. Inevitably, we will find that some historical perspective is necessary and helpful. Coverage of the entire continent in one semester is out of the question, so I have chosen to focus on West African and South African material.

Requirements:

- Presentation in class (details TBA) = 5%
- Written work in class (prompts, quizzes, TBA) = 5%
- Attendance at outside events (details TBA) = 5%
- Class attendance (2 absences ok, deductions start at 3rd) = 6%
- Weekly short reading responses (7 @ 2% each) = 14%
- Two longer reading response essays (10% each) = 20%
- Participation in class discussions (very, very important!) = 25%
- Cumulative Final Essay = 20%

Most class time will consist of a mixture of lecture and discussion. If you cannot participate in discussion, or if you devalue a discussion format, then this is not the right course for you. Fairly often, you will work in small groups. Each week each of you will either be writing a short reading response (x7), a longer reading response (x2), or presenting to the class (x1). Some videos may have to be screened in class, but most of them will be on reserve. Barring unforeseen circumstances, we should have a true reading week, with a final synthesizing essay at the end of term.

At least one copy of each of the books and up to five copies of each of the articles has been placed on reserve. The following books are available in the bookstore: Ashforth Madumo: A Man Bewitched;
Bohannan & Curtin *Africa and Africans*; Bowen *Return to Laughter*; Kwakye *The Clothes of Nakedness*; Mofolo *Chaka*; and Tlali *Between Two Worlds*. Readings are listed on the day they are due and should be read in the order they appear in this syllabus. Also, please note that this syllabus may be subject to adjustment during the course of the semester, for many reasons, including student interest and ongoing feedback.

Jan. 11: Organizational meeting (possible screenings: clips from *Tarzan & Afro@Digital*)

(note: 12) (Phillips Fellowship winner Rachel Silver on Kenya 7:30 pm—credit for attending)

13: What do we think we know about Africa? (possible screening: *Benin The Present*)
reading: Bohannan & Curtin (B & C 4th edition) Part One, Chapters 1-3
Bowen through Chapter 3
Webwork: What relevant items have been in “the news” this week?

(note: 17): (MLK Day Celebration--credit for attending at least two events)

18: The Idea of Community
reading: Menkiti "Person & Community..." and Nyerere "Ujamaa..."
Bowen *Return to Laughter* through Chapter 11
Webwork: search the web for UBUNTU and see what you come up with

20: Resources and Social Charters
reading: Bowen through Chapter 14
L. Bohannan “Shakespeare in the Bush”
B&C, 4th ed., Part Two, Chapters 5-7
webwork: www.africapolicy.org/bp/ethnic1.htm

25: Secular Power and Mystical Power (screening of clip from Let My People Go)
reading: P. Bohannan "Extra-Processual Events..."
Evans-Pritchard "Witchcraft Explains..."
Magesa (handout)
Bowen to Chapter 19

27: And What about the Ethnographer Herself?
Reading: Return to Laughter entire book due
Writing: first chance to turn in a longer essay on reading

(note: 31): (Entrepreneurship series includes Rommel Padanou ’01 on import/export from Gabon)

Feb. 1: Introduction to Pre-Colonial Processes of State Formation
reading: B & C, Part Three, Chapters 10-15
Kunene's Introduction to Mofolo's *Chaka*
Mofolo to Chapter 8
Webwork: Search the web for Shaka, Chaka or Tchaka—what comes up?
Feb. 3: Secular Power and Mystical Power, second round
reading: Chaka through Chapter 15

8: Powers, continued
reading: Mofolo's Chaka due
writing: second chance to turn in a longer essay on reading

10: Patterns of Colonial Rule
reading: Rodney “Europe and the Roots of…”
        Lugard “Dual Mandate…”
        B&C, Part Three, Chapters 16-19
Video: Tools of Exploitation on reserve

15: Competing Moralities in Contemporary City Life
reading: begin Sembene The Money-Order (handout)
video: watch Mandabi on reserve (optional viewing: Xala and Faat Kine)

17: Contemporary City Life, continued
reading: Sembene due
writing: your third chance to write a longer essay comes now

March 1: More on Money and Morality in Contemporary West Africa
reading: Barber “Popular Reactions to the Petro-Naira”
        Eames “Navigating Nigerian Bureaucracies”
        B&C, 4th ed, Epilogue
Videos: T-Shirt Travels and Divine Carcasse on reserve

3: Class and Gender Politics in Urban West Africa
reading: begin Kwakye The Clothes of Nakedness
video: Thunderbolt on reserve
writing: here is your fourth chance to write a longer essay

8: HIV/AIDS in Contemporary Africa
reading: Kwakye due
        Makuchi “Slow Poison”
        Handouts
webwork: read www.virusmyth.net/aids/data/rcafrica.htm & research AIDS online

10: Introduction to Apartheid: Migration, the Pass System and Forced Resettlement
reading: Re-read B&C on “race” (pp. 11-13 and 37-41 in 4th edition).
        McLachlan “Apartheid Laws in Brief” and handouts
        Begin Tlali's Between Two Worlds
video: Girls Apart and Domestic Differences on reserve

15: Apartheid continued
reading: Tlali due
Writing: your fifth chance for a longer essay
March 17: City Life in Contemporary South Africa  
reading: begin Ashforth’s Madumo Walker “Reconstructing Tradition”  
video: Mapantsula on reserve

22: Current Issues in South African Society  
reading: continue Madumo

24: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission  
reading: finish Madumo  
video: Long Night’s Journey into Day on reserve  
writing: your sixth chance for a longer essay

29/31: catchup/review

April 8/10: reading week

16: final synthesizing essay due by end of term (which means noon).
SOME ISSUES TO CONTEMPLATE AS YOU READ RETURN TO LAUGHTER

NOTE: Eleanore Smith Bowen is really Laura Bohannan. She lived and worked in the Tiv region of Nigeria in the 1950's.

QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE:

1. Think of one example of a dispute and consider the conflicting loyalties every Tiv must face. What social ties cross-cut lineage membership?

2. Notice the prominence of gift-exchange and both its moral and utilitarian dimensions. How does gift-giving relate to prestige and loyalty in this community? Note the extension of fictive kin ties based on these exchanges.

3. What does marriage seem to be about here? What appear to be some of the social and emotional benefits and costs of polygyny? What seems to be the sexual division of labor in this society? How might you characterize women's status in Tiv society? What is the role of children? Who was able to mobilize labor? For what purposes?

4. Was Yabo a witch? An mbaTsav? Why or why not?

QUESTIONS CONCERNING STYLE AND METHOD:

1. What do you think are the meanings of the book's title?

2. Pay close attention to the author's numerous shifts between feelings of kinship and alienation with the community. When, why and how does she use the word "savage"? How does it make you feel?

3. Why do you think she published this book pseudonymously? What are some of the mistakes Bowen/Bohannan made? Should she have discussed them so openly? Who was her intended audience? Why did she use this style of presentation? Towards what aspects of her presentation might a new millennium audience be more sympathetic, and to what aspects might we be less sympathetic?

4. What have you learned about anthropological method from reading this book? e.g., is ethnography a scientific enterprise?

5. What ethical implications derive from the fact that Bowen (arguably, by extension, all anthropologists) seemed to thrive on gossip, betrayal, scandal, tension and political rivalry?

ONE POSSIBLE TOPIC FOR LONGER ESSAY:

To what extent is it possible to forge connections between Bowen/Bohannan’s text, Return to Laughter, and Ifeanyi Menkiti’s claims concerning “African” ontological theories?

Note that in such a course essay as this, endeavor to demonstrate to me that you have been paying attention—refer to course material. Do no hesitate to disagree with my interpretations of our texts, but either way, clearly explicate your position in a logical fashion and (in contrast to your shorter efforts) use a formal prose style.