

African Development: PPHA 32735

James A. Robinson (Harris School for Public Policy)

Spring 2020, M,W, 11.00-12.20 AM

This class provides an introduction to and interpretation of, African development. The emphasis is on economic and political development in the longue durée and trying to understand how Africa fits into the comparative picture. The focus of much research on contemporary African development is of course on poverty, famine, civil war and the immense economic challenges that the continent has faced since independence. We shall study these and their roots and also many of the political correlates that go along with them, such as the weakness of African states, their corruption and problems of autocracy and democracy. But to get a deep understanding of these phenomena entails understanding Africa society, how it is organized, why it is organized as it is, and how it has come into collision with global forces in the past 500 years.

My own perspective, that will emerge as the course proceeds, is that, though there is a great deal of variation, one can think of African society as organized around two main principles; the first is “wealth in people”; the second is a powerful egalitarianism. By the former term I mean that social relations were (and are) more valued than the type of material “things” (houses, land, stocks and money) that we think of as constituting wealth. To be wealthy meant having a lot of social relations, dependents and “people” (in marriage, wives, hence polygamy – though this shows that there is a strong gendered nature to this). The egalitarianism meant that Africans showed a deep mistrust of hierarchy and authority. As Mary Douglas in her seminal ethnography of the Lele of the Congo put it

“Those who have had anything to do with the Lele must have noticed the absence of anyone who could give orders with a reasonable hope of being obeyed”.¹

In consequence, Africans developed many powerful tools, both institutional and cultural such as witchcraft accusations, to control hierarchy.

These two principles interacted and in my view explain many other things, such as the nature of economics institutions, the form of property rights and markets (or lack thereof). They also explain why African lagged Eurasia in the creation of centralized state authority. Instead society was organized in a number of different ways: through kinship, lineage, age, or other types of corporate groups such as secret societies or associations. Though states did emerge they did so relatively recently and they differed in key ways from Eurasian states. The reason for this very different historical pattern of political development is that Africans came up with very creative ways of both stopping centralized authority emerging, or controlling it when it did, and also finding substitutes for what it could achieve.

¹ Mary Douglas (1963) *The Lele of Kasai*, Oxford University Press, p. 1.

This equilibrium, however, left African societies unable to provide public goods the value of which became far more apparent after the “Great Divergence” which arose with the industrial revolution. It also left Africa very vulnerable to the pernicious forces unleashed in the modern era, particularly the slave trade, colonialism, the cold war and post-colonial economic globalization. For example, the logic of wealth in people created all sorts of dependent relationships, wards, pawns, and slavery, and this control over people meant that it was very easy to supply slaves. The logic of accumulating dependents easily flipped into accumulating people for sale. Later, the very personalized nature of “wealth in people” and the logic of pre-colonial state formation allowed European powers to manipulate African rulers into signing treaties and entering into personalized relationships which ended up being very adverse for their societies. Some, like the Buganda chiefs, did manage to manipulate these relationships in their favor, and others, like the Lozi kings in Zambia, were able to use colonialism as a way to overcome the checks which their people had used to constrain them. But in neither case was this collectively a good outcome for the peoples of what was to become Uganda or Zambia. This type of relationship continued into the post-colonial world.

The combination of these things, along with the historical legacies of African institutions, has created a very difficult terrain to create prosperity and peace in the post-colonial world.

It might seem paradoxical to call African egalitarian when since independence the antics of such “kleptocratic dictators” as Mobutu have attracted so much attention in western media and social science. Yet, as we’ll see, Mobutu governed the Congo in a way which is quite familiar from many sorts of pre-colonial states. These were “weak” with little “infrastructural power” because that is the way that people suspicious of authority wanted it. In consequence rulers were only expected to provide basic services, particularly dispute resolution, and perhaps more supernatural tasks, like rainmaking. Mobutu, claimed to be a witchdoctor and was “married” to sisters which is of supernatural significance as was his leopard-skin hat. These observations also help to explain why Cameroon’s President Paul Biya is so often absent from the country and his cabinet meets so infrequently.² None of this is to argue that Cameroonians don’t want democracy or are happy with Biya’s long rule. But it does help us understand the logic of his rule. As we’ll see the biggest problem that post-colonial Africa inherited was how to use the powerful mechanisms that control power locally, to control power in the new far off national capitals.

Despite these challenges, everything isn’t bleak in Africa. Far from it. The very historical strategies that avoided or controlled hierarchy can be harnessed to build new political orders, once stereotypes of what ‘states’ are supposed to look like can be overcome. They can also help to build prospering economies once stereotypes about what economic institutions are supposed to look like can be pushed aside. Moreover, we have much to learn from African values and society, for example with respect to religious toleration. I hope that the course can convey the intellectual excitement of studying Africa and how it challenges our understanding of world historical processes. The sheer variation in

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43469758>

Africa makes it an incredible laboratory for understanding human societies and I think that is personally why I find it so interesting. In Sierra Leone you can stand in a village where everyone speaks Temne, 5 kilometers to the west everyone speaks Loko, 5 kilometers to the north everyone speaks Limba. A little to the south people speak Mende. That linguistic variation is mirrored by a great deal of institutional and cultural variation. Women can be chiefs in Mendeland, but not elsewhere in Sierra Leone. Limba chiefs have supernatural powers, Mende chiefs are secular. But it's not a simple picture of ethnic differences and polarized identities. The Mende and Loko share relationships of *cousinage*, or joking cousins, which creates ties which stretch across simple notions of "ethnicity". That isn't the only thing that cuts across ethnicity, another is the Poro secret society which helped to organize the Hut Tax Rebellion against the British in 1898. The fact that the Limba have a great deal of supernatural connections may help explain why most post-independent presidents have been Limba, despite the group making up probably no more than 6% of the population and why they have all been very active in the Freemasons!

Other attractive features of African society (to me) stem from these organizational principles. Africa has far less of the inequality and stifling obsession with hierarchy and social status of Latin America. At a recent wedding in Cali my wife, who is Colombian, was immediately asked "de que colegio te graduaste" ("what school did you graduate from?"). If you didn't go to the right school, you aren't worth talking to. At a Sierra Leonean or Congolese wedding you'd be immediately addressed as "brother" or "sister" (depending on your gender), given a big hug, and welcomed into the fictive kinship group. It's at the level of human relations that "wealth in people" creates a very different type of society.

There is a lot of ignorance about Africa, have a look at this for an example from our own government³ and a lot of nonsense is written. I will not however linger on this, life is too short and I will not talk about how confused Hegel or Trevor-Roper were about Africa.⁴ Time to get over that.

The course is not technical and open for Masters Students, undergraduates and doctoral students.

The Teaching assistant is Isaac Hock: hock@uchicago.edu

My Office Hours are Thursdays 3-5 (or longer depending on demand...) Keller 2017.

There are no textbooks but we will read all of the following books:

Vansina, Jan (2004) *Antecedents of Modern Rwanda*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Bates, Robert H. (1981) *Markets and States in Tropical Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50849559>

⁴ See Toby Green (2019) *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution*, University of Chicago Press.

Gluckman, Max (1963) *Custom and Conflict in Africa*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Not academic but rewarding and insightful and very related to my own ongoing research:

Achebe, Chinua (1958) *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann.

Achebe, Chinua (1964) *Arrow of God*, London: Heinemann.

Achebe, Chinua (1960) *No Longer at Ease*, London: Heinemann.

March 30: Lecture 1: Some Puzzles and Questions

Sahlins, Marshall (1972) "The Original Affluent Society," Chapter 2 of his *Stone Age Economics*.

Rusbridger, Alan (2007) "Can we, together, lift one village out of the Middle Ages?" <https://www.theguardian.com/katine/2007/oct/20/about>

Pinker, Steven (2011) *The Better Angels of our Nature*, New York: Viking. Chapter 2.

Bledsoe, Caroline (1980) *Women and Marriage in Kpelle Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press. Chapter 3 "Wealth in People."

Titeca, Kristof and James Thamani (2018) "How to get ahead in DR Congo Politics," <https://africanarguments.org/2018/12/18/how-get-ahead-dr-congo-politics-guide/>

Additional Sources:

A useful discussion of how poor Africa really was historically is:

Thornton, John K. (1992) "Pre-Colonial African Industry and the Atlantic Trade, 1500-1800," and "The Historian and the Pre-Colonial African Economy: John Thornton Responds," in *African Economic History Review*, 9 (1992), along with comments by four other historians.

For an interesting perspective on how Africa is different

Bohannon, Laura (1966) "Shakespeare in the Bush," *Natural History*, http://www.naturalhistorymag.com/editors_pick/1966_08-09_pick.html

April 1: No Lecture.

April 6: Lecture 2: An African Society

Lewis, Ioan (1961) *A Pastoral Democracy*, New York: Oxford University Press. Chapters 1 and 7.

De Waal, Alex (2016) *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power*, London: Zed Books. Chapters 7 and 8.

Additional Sources:

Little, Peter D. (2003) *Somalia: Economy without State*, Oxford: James Currey. Chapters 1 and 5.

Acharya, Avidit, Robin Harding and Andy Harris (2017) "Security in the Absence of a State: Traditional Authority, Livestock Trading and Maritime Piracy in Northern Somalia," <http://stanford.edu/~avidit/somalia.pdf>

Somalia has become quite a testing ground for theoretical debates

Leeson, Peter (2007) “Better Off Stateless: Somalia Before and After Government Collapse,”

http://www.peterleeson.com/Better_Off_Stateless.pdf

Africa Watch (1990) “Somalia: A Government at War with its own People,”

https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/somalia_1990.pdf

April 8: Lecture 3: Another African Society: The Igbo

Northrup, David (1978) *Trade Without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria*, New York: Oxford University Press. Introduction and Chapters I, II and V.

Meagher, Kate (2010) *Identity Economics: Social Networks and the informal economy in Nigeria*, Oxford: James Currey. Chapters 3 and 6.

Additional Sources:

Historical Igboland:

Achebe, Chinua (1958) *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann.

I’m not saying it’s an accurate historical record but it is wonderful. We’ll read the whole trilogy. You can’t be interested in Africa and not read it. Invaluable is

Wren, Robert M. (1980) *Achebe’s World*, Washington: Three Continents Press.

Another great source is the volume of the multi-volume indispensable Ethnographic Survey of Africa. Start with

Forde, Daryll and G.I. Jones (1950) *The Ibo and Ibibio Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*, Ethnographic Survey of Africa; West Africa Part III, London:

International African Institute.

Modern Igboland:

Smith, Daniel Jordan (2018) *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria*, another relevant take on a supposed African predicament, staying in Igboland.

April 13: Lecture 4: Confronting a Fundamental Problem

Bohannan, Paul (1958) “Extra-processual Events in Tiv Political Institutions,” *American Anthropologist*, 60, 1-12.

Bohannan, Laura and Paul Bohannan (1968) *Tiv Economy*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press. Chapters 5, 6, and 16.

Colson, Elizabeth (1974) *Tradition and Contract: The Problem of Social Order*, Chapters 3 and 4.

Additional Sources:

I will talk a bit about stranger kings (like King Shyaam in the Kuba kingdom)

Sahlins, Marshall (2018) “The atemporal dimensions of history: In the old Kongo Kingdom, for example,” Chapter 3 of *On Kings* by David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins, Chicago: Hau Books.

And secret societies

Little, Kenneth (1965) "The Political Function of the Poro. Part I," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 35, 4, 349-365.
Little, Kenneth (1966) "The Political Function of the Poro. Part II," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 36, 1, 62-72.
And masks....

April 15: Lecture 5: Political Orders

Southall, Aidan (1956) *Alur Society: A Study in Processes and Types of Domination*, Cambridge: W. Heffer. Chapters 8 and 9.
Gluckman, Max (1965) *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company. Chapters III and IV.
Spencer, Paul (1965) *The Samburu. A Study of Gerontocracy*, New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 4 "The Structure of Samburu Society."

Additional Sources:

Grappling with the same issues
MacIntosh, Susan K. ed. (2005) *Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
Lowes, Sara, Nathan Nunn, James A. Robinson and Jonathan Weigel (2017) "The Interaction of Culture and Institutions: Evidence from the Kuba Kingdom," *Econometrica*, 85(4), 1065-1091.
Vansina, Jan (1973) *The Tio Kingdom of the Middle Congo, 1880-1892*, New York: Oxford University Press.
European analogies
Wilks, Ivor (1966) "Aspects of Bureaucratization in Ashanti in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of African History*, 7, 2, 215-232.
Reid, Richard J. (2003) *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda: Economy, Society, and Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford: J. Currey.

April 20: Lecture 6: Economic Structures: The Dalton-Hopkins Debate

Hopkins, Anthony G. (1973) *An Economic History of West Africa*, London: Longman. Chapter 2. pp. 8-77.
Dalton George H. (1976) "Review: An Economic History of West Africa by A. G. Hopkins," *African Economic History*, 1, 51-101.

Additional Sources:

This debate is of a course just an application of the bigger debate between 'substantivists' (Dalton) and 'formalists' (Hopkins). The seminal book is
Polanyi, Karl (1944) *The Great Transformation*, New York: Farrar & Rinehart.
Also invaluable
Douglas, Mary (1962) "Lele economy compared with the Bushong: a study of economic backwardness," in *Markets in Africa*, ed. by Paul Bohannan and George Dalton, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

April 22: Lecture 7: The collision with the slave trade

Miers, Suzanne and Igor Kopytoff eds. (1977) *Slavery In Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. Chapter 1.
Nunn, Nathan (2008) "The Long Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123 (1): 139--176.
Nunn, Nathan and Leonard Wantchekon (2011) "The Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa," *American Economic Review*, 101 (7): 3221-3252.
Nwaubani, Adaobi Tricia (2018) "My Great-Grandfather, the Nigerian Slave-Trader," *New Yorker*, July 18.

Additional Sources:

Teso, Edoardo (2019) "The Long-Term Effect of Demographic Shocks on the Evolution of Gender Roles: Evidence from the Transatlantic Slave Trade," *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 17(2), 497-534.

The best books on the impact of the slave trade on African society are

Lovejoy, Paul E. (1983) *Transformations in Slavery*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Stilwell, Sean (2014) *Slavery and Slaving in African History*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

On the enduring effects of slavery in Africa

Bellagamba, Alice, Sandra E. Greene and Martin Klein eds. (2012) *The Bitter Legacy*, Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers.

April 27: Lecture 8: The Scramble for Africa

Dike, K. Onwuka (1956) *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter VII.

Hargreaves, John D. (1985) *West Africa Partitioned*, Volume II, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. Chapters 9 and 12.

Additional Sources:

Ajayi, J. F. Ade (1968) "The Continuity of African Institutions under Colonialism," in Terence O. Ranger, ed., *Emerging Themes in African History* (London, 1968), 189-200.

Lonsdale, John (1985) "The European Scramble and Conquest in African History," in Roland Oliver and G. N. Sanderson, eds., *Cambridge History of Africa*, Volume 6: From 1870 to 1905 (Cambridge, 1985), 680-766.

April 29: Lecture 9: The collision with Colonialism: Settler Colonies

Feinstein, Charles H. (2005) *An Economic History of South Africa*, New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 3, 4, 7.

Lundahl, Mats (1982) "The Rationale of Apartheid," *American Economic Review*, 72, 5, 1169-1179.

Dalton, George H. (1965) "History, Politics, and Economic Development in Liberia," *Journal of Economic History*, 25(4), 569-591.

Additional Sources:

Apartheid as seen from bottom up by the oppressed

Van Onselen, Charles (1996) *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894-1985*, New York: Hill and Wang.

Powerful reading and a first-hand account of the implementation of the Native Land Act
Plaatje, Sol (1916) *Native Life in South Africa*, London: P. S. King and Son Ltd.

May 4: Lecture 10: The collision with Colonialism: Indirect Rule

Mamdani, Mahmood (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

Robinson, James A. (2019) “Consequences of Colonial Rule in Africa: Rethinking Indirect Rule in Sierra Leone,” Unwritten.

Additional Thoughts:

Busia, Kofi A. (1951) *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Colonial Igboland:

Achebe, Chinua (1964) *Arrow of God*, London: Heinemann.

May 6: Mid-Term**May 11: Lecture 11: Making and Fortifying Identities**

Vansina, Jan (2004) *Antecedents of Modern Rwanda*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Maquet, Jacques J. (1970) *The Premise of Inequality in Ruanda: A Study of Political Relations in a Central African Kingdom*, New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter VIII “The Premise of Inequality”

Additional Thoughts:

Identity is a complicated thing and has been brilliantly studied by

Posner, Daniel (2005) *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ranger, Terence O. (1983) “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, New York: Cambridge University Press., 211-62.

May 13: Lecture 12: Ethnicity versus Wealth in People.

Jonas Hjort (2014) “Ethnic Divisions and Production in Firms,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 129, 4, 1899–1946.

Habyarimana, James, Macartan Humphreys, Daniel N. Posner and Jeremy M. Eeinstaein (2007) "Why Does Ethnic Diversity Undermine Public Goods Provision?" *American Political Science Review*, 101, 4, 709-725.

<http://www.columbia.edu/~mh2245/papers1/HHPW.pdf>

May 18: Lecture 13: Post-Colonial economic consequences

Bates, Robert H. (1981) *Markets and States in Tropical Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Killick, Tony (1978) *Development Economics in Action*, London: Heinemann. Chapter 9 "The State as Entrepreneur."

Additional Sources:

Heldring, Leander and James A. Robinson (2012) "Colonialism and Economic Development in Africa," <http://www.nber.org/papers/w18566>

Lowes, Sara and Eduardo Montero (2017) "Concessions, Violence, and Indirect Rule: Evidence from the Congo Free State,"

https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/slowes/files/lowes_montero_rubber.pdf

A seminal series of studies is in

Palmer, Robin and Q. Neil Parsons eds. (1977) *Roots of Poverty in Southern Africa*, London: Heinemann.

See also

Parsons, Q. Neil (1975) "Khama & Co. and the Jousse Trouble, 1910-1916," *Journal of African History*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1975), pp. 383-408.

Seminal, fun and polemical, though quite miss-conceived

Rodney, Walter (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

May 20: Lecture 14: Creating Post-Colonial Political Order

Young, Crawford (1965) *Politics in Congo: Decolonization and Independence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 12 and 13.

Turner, Thomas and Crawford Young (1985) *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. Chapter 6 "The Patrimonial State and Personal Rule, Chapter 10 "Zairianization and Radicalization: Anatomy of a Disaster".

Additional Sources:

Achebe, Chinua (1960) *No Longer at Ease*, London: Heinemann.

Chabal, Patrick and Jean-Pascal Daloz (1999) *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, Oxford: James Currey.

Mkandawire, Thandika (2015) "Neopatrimonialism and the political economy of economic performance in Africa: critical reflections," *World Politics*, 67 (03), 563-612.

Clearly relevant in this context

Fanon, Frantz (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*,

May 25: May 25: Memorial Day no class.

May 27: Lecture 15: Things Fall Apart

Richards, Paul (1996) *Fighting for the Rainforest*, Oxford: James Currey. Chapters 1 and 2.

International Crisis Group (2008) Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-anatomy-phantom-state>

Lombard, Louisa (2012) “Raiding Sovereignty in Central African Borderlands,” Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Duke University, Chapters 1 and 4.

https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/5861/Lombard_duke_0066D_11603.pdf

De Waal, Alex (2016) *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power*, London: Zed Books. Chapters 1, 2 and 5.

Additional Sources:

Reid, Richard J.(2007) *War in Pre-Colonial Eastern Africa: The Patterns and Meanings of State-Level Conflict in the 19th Century*, Athens: Ohio University Press.

June 1: Lecture 16: Africa and the International Community

Ferguson, James (1985) “The Bovine Mystique: Power, Property and Livestock in Rural Lesotho,” *Man*, 20, 4, 647-674.

Van de Walle, Nicholas (2001) *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999*, New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 7.

Humphreys, Macartan, Raúl Sanchez de la Sierra and Peter van der Windt (2016) “Social Engineering In The Tropics,”

<http://www.columbia.edu/~mh2245/papers1/20150519%20HSW.pdf>

McGovern, Michael (2011) “Popular Development Economics--An Anthropologist among the Mandarins,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 9(2): 345-355.

Additional Thoughts:

There is no substitute really for the whole of

Ferguson, James (1994) *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

June 3: Lecture 17: The Botswana Miracle

Schapera, Isaac (1940) “The Political Organization of the Ngwato of Bechuanaland Protectorate,” in M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard eds. *African Political Systems*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

June 8: Lecture 18: Reasons to be Optimistic about African Development

Ashforth, Adam (2005) *Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa*, Chapter 3 “On living in a world with witches,” University of Chicago Press.

Hill, Sam (2020) “Black China: Africa's First Superpower Is Coming Sooner Than You Think,”

<https://www.newsweek.com/2020/01/31/nigeria-next-superpower-1481949.html>

Additional Sources:

Monga, Célestin (2018) *Nihilism and Negritude: Ways of Living in Africa*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Chapter 1.

Radelet, Steven (2010) *Emerging Africa: How 17 Countries Are Leading the Way*, Washington: Center for Global Development. Chapters 12, and 3.

Africa Progress Report 2013: Equity in Extractives

<http://www.africaprogresspanel.org/publications/policy-papers/africa-progress-report-2013/>

June 10: Lecture 17: Review.