Thinking Africa ... what do you think of when you think of Africa?
To judge from recent academic output, sub-Saharan Africa, wrapped in a cloak of impenetrability, has become the black hole of reason, the pit where its powerlessness rests unveiled. Instead of patient, careful, in-depth research, there are off-the-cuff representations possessed and accumulated without anyone’s knowing how, notions that everyone uses but of origin quite unknown – in Kant’s well-known formulations, ‘groundless assertions, against which others equally specious can always be set’. One consequence of this blindness is that African politics and economics have been condemned to appear in social theory only as the sign of a lack, while the discourse of political science and development economics has become that of a quest for the causes of that lack. On the basis of a grotesque dramatization, what political imagination is in Africa is held incomprehensible, pathological, and abnormal. War is seen as all-pervasive. The continent, a great, soft, fantastic body, is seen as powerless, engaged in rampant self-destruction. Human action there is seen as stupid and mad, always proceeding from anything but rational calculation.


... much of African Studies as it is constituted today does not facilitate the necessary intra-African cross-national learning, because its primary motive and the logic that continues to propel it are aimed at decoding Africa and Africans for the world and not vice versa, still less the African world for Africans. In this way, mainstream African Studies has constituted itself into a tool for others to master Africa, while offering very little by way of enabling Africa to master the world and its own affairs.


The above two quotes capture the views of two African scholars regarding the state of the study of Africa. If African studies presents Africa as ‘incomprehensible, pathological, and abnormal’ (Mbembe) or exists principally to ‘decode[ ] Africa and Africans for the world’ (Oluksos), how are we to approach the study of Africa? What academic texts are we to read? What are we to say?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Student Preparation: please read the following before the lecture:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon 17 Feb</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues 18 Feb</td>
<td>Rethinking Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 19 Feb</td>
<td>Rethinking the Congo I</td>
<td>Nabudere (‘The Political Economy of Conflict and War …’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 21 Feb</td>
<td>Rethinking Africa</td>
<td>Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie (‘Reframing Contemporary Africa …’)</td>
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<td>Mon 24 Feb</td>
<td>Rethinking Africa</td>
<td>Ferguson (‘Global Shadows’)</td>
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<td>Tues 25 Feb</td>
<td>Rethinking Africa</td>
<td>Mkandawire (‘The Social Sciences in Africa …’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 26 Feb</td>
<td>Rethinking Africa Workshop</td>
<td>To be announced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 28 Feb</td>
<td>Rethinking Africa</td>
<td>Okome (Listening to Africa …’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 3 March</td>
<td>Rethinking Africa</td>
<td>Mbembe (‘Time on the Move’)</td>
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<td>Tues 4 March</td>
<td>Rethinking Africa</td>
<td>Dunn (‘Imagining the Congo’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 5 March</td>
<td>Rethinking the Congo II</td>
<td>We’ll be watching the film <em>Lumumba</em> by Raoul Peck (NOTE: Film may run into lunch hour)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 7 March</td>
<td>Confronting Colonialism</td>
<td>Lumumba (‘Dawn in the Heart …’), Wa Thiong’o (‘Devil on the Cross’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 10 March</td>
<td>Confronting Colonialism</td>
<td>Nkrumah (‘Neo-colonialism: the last stage of imperialism’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues 11 March</td>
<td>Confronting Colonialism</td>
<td>Fanon (‘Concerning Violence’) and wa Thiong’o (‘The Cultural Factor in the Neo-Colonial Era’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 12 March</td>
<td>Rethinking the Congo IV</td>
<td>Sources on RUconnected</td>
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<td>Fri 14 March</td>
<td>Rethinking the African State</td>
<td>Clapham (‘Rethinking African States’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 17 March</td>
<td>Rethinking the African State</td>
<td>Dunn (‘The (Blank) African State’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues 18 March</td>
<td>Rethinking the African State</td>
<td>Jackson (‘Quasi-states, sovereignty …’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 19 March</td>
<td>Rethinking the Congo IV</td>
<td>Herbst and Mills, Englebert, Depelchin, Raeymaekers</td>
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<td>Fri 21 March</td>
<td>PUBLIC HOLIDAY – NO CLASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mon 24 March</td>
<td>Rethinking the African State</td>
<td>Grovogui (‘Regimes of Sovereignty’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues 25 March</td>
<td>Rethinking the African State</td>
<td>Wai (‘Neo-patrimonialism and the discourse of state failure …’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 26 March</td>
<td>Rethinking the Congo V</td>
<td>We’ll be watching the film <em>Blood Coltan</em> by Patrick Forestier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fri 28 March</td>
<td>The Political Economy of War in the DRC</td>
<td>Turner (‘The Political Economy of Pillage’)</td>
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<td>Mon 31 March</td>
<td>The Political Economy of War in the DRC</td>
<td>Global Witness (‘Faced with a Gun …’) and Nabudere (‘The Political …’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tues 1 April</td>
<td>The Political Economy of War in the DRC</td>
<td>Laudati (‘Beyond minerals …’)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 2 April</td>
<td>Revision</td>
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<td>Fri 4 April</td>
<td>Revision</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Theme 1: Introducing the Democratic Republic of the Congo

L’Afrique a la forme d’un revolver dont la gachette se trouve au Congo.
[Africa is shaped like a gun, and Congo is the trigger.]
- Frantz Fanon

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has made many news headlines over the last two decades. It has been in the news for its resources, for its ongoing conflict, for its flawed elections and for its relations with the external world. We will be using it as a case study in this course because the DRC serves as a very good illustration of so many of the debates within African Studies.

Core Reading

Additional Readings


Websites and Blogs
- Congo Siasa, http://congosiasa.blogspot.com/
- Friends of the Congo, http://www.friendsofthecongo.org/
- Congo Boston, http://www.congoboston.com/
- Ota Benga Alliance, http://otabenga.org/

Theme 2: Rethinking Africa

Speaking rationally about Africa is not something that has ever come naturally. Doing so, at this cusp between millennia, comes even less so. It is for all the world as if the most radical critique of the most obtuse and cynical prejudices about Africa were being made against the backdrop of an impossibility, the impossibility of getting over and done ‘with something without running the risk of repeating it and perpetuating it under some other guise’. What is going on?

- Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p.1

Mbembe suggests that even once we recognise that Africa has been studied in a problematic way, it is difficult to study it in a new way – in a way that does not repeat and perpetuate the same prejudices ‘under some other guise’. It is, he suggests, a real challenge just to figure out how we should study Africa.

Core Readings

**Additional Readings**

Theme 3: Confronting Colonialism

A new morning breaks in our old Africa.
Ours alone will now be the land, the water, mighty rivers
Poor African surrendered for a thousand years.

Hard torches of the sun will shine for us again
They’ll dry the tears in eyes and spittle on your face.
The moment when you break the chains, the heavy fetters,
The evil, cruel times will go never to come again.
A free and gallant Congo will arise from black soil,
A free and gallant Congo—black blossom from black seed!
- extract from ‘Dawn in the Heart of Africa’ by Patrice Lumumba

One of the most prominent themes in African Studies is the question of colonialism. Some scholars debate the long-term effects of the colonial period. Others talk about the process of decolonisation often arguing that even years after colonialism has ended, the process of decolonisation continues. Here, there are scholars who stress the importance of ‘decolonising the mind’. Some talk about how the current African situation is one of neo-colonialism – in other words, that Africa remains colonised only that the form of colonialism has changed. In particular there is much debate today about the role of China in Africa – is China a neo-colonial power or a development partner?

Core Readings

Additional Readings
- The rest of Fanon’s Wretched of the Earth and Ngugi’s Moving the Centre are good places to start. There are also a number of recent books on Fanon’s legacy today and on thinking about the post-colonial situation today. See for example:
Theme 4: Rethinking the African State

The Democratic Republic of Congo embodies many of the tensions and ambiguities of post-colonial Africa. Studying the DRC makes us wonder, firstly, about statehood. What is the nature of statehood in Africa? Is the African state somehow different from states in other parts of the world?

Core Readings

On Statehood in General:

On Statehood and the DRC:
- Depelchin, J., 2009, And now they have decided that the DRCongo could be, just like property, written off, OtaBenga Alliance, available at [http://www.otabenga.org/node/160](http://www.otabenga.org/node/160).

Additional Readings

Theme 5: The Political Economy of War in the DRC

In the DRC, as well as elsewhere in Africa, natural resources and their extraction play an important role in the conflict, leading to questions about how conflict in Africa should be understood and how we ought to respond to it.

Core Readings
- Reread Nabudere

Additional Readings
Assessment

This course will be assessed as follows:

**Term Mark**
- *Tutorials and reading exercises* 10
- *Essay* 40
  Adds up to a term mark of 50

**Exam Mark**
One, closed-book 3 hour exam 50

**TOTAL** 100

All of the assessed term work is a DP requirement. Failure to submit any of the above will result in your DP being removed.

Tutorial and reading exercises are available on RUconnected. Tutorial exercises are submitted at the beginning of each tutorial. Reading exercises are submitted at the beginning of class each Monday morning.

Your essay should be between 2500 and 3500 words long. Please pay careful attention to the Department guidelines on referencing and presentation (available on RUconnected). The due date is Thursday 27 March, 12 midday. Hard copies must be submitted to the Teaching Assistant and electronic copies through RUConnected (using Turnitin). Both copies are due by 12 midday. Essays that are submitted within 24 hours of the deadline will be marked, but 10% will be deducted. After that, essays will be accepted for DP purposes only.

Essay topics will be announced in class. These topics will be discussed at length in class. The class discussion of the topics ought to guide your interpretation of them. All essays should include reference to a total number of at least ten texts of which at least four should come from your Reader.

This cartoon is by Congolese cartoonist Thembo Kash. For more by Kash, see [http://www.rnw.nl/africa/category/tags-africa/thembo-kash](http://www.rnw.nl/africa/category/tags-africa/thembo-kash).