

# **Africa and Africans in Global History: new perspectives, concepts and narratives**

**Syllabus, fall 2022**

**Where:** TBD

**When:** starting on October 14 or 21, every Friday at 9AM.

**Teachers:**

**LucaPuddu,** [luca.puddu-ssm@unina.it](mailto:luca.puddu-ssm@unina.it)

**Thais Gendry,** [thais.gendry-ssm@unina.it](mailto:thais.gendry-ssm@unina.it)

**Student reception:** by appointment.

**Evaluation criteria:**

Class attendance: 15%

Participation to class discussion: 35%

Final paper on one topic discussed in classes (between 4,000 and 6,000 words): 50%

## **General description of the course**

Western university students bring with them a lot of preconceived ideas about Africa, even though it is a little known continent. Those who can situate some key dates or facts about the history of Africa do not usually realise they are mere examples in European-centred narratives. African narratives of African history and global events are absent from European universities. This class is designed to present alternative historical tools and narratives that will enable students to integrate Africa in global history, but also to look at world history from the perspective of Africa and African actors. In this class we will learn about the specificities of African history but also use them as a stepping stone to explore global history and challenge the classical writing of history.

## **Organization of the course**

This seminar is divided into four parts. In the first part, we will get acquainted with mainstream theses about African history and complexify our understanding of its history in the last 300 years. We will work on both historical theory and on-the-ground examples to question established concepts, narratives and timelines.

In Part 2, we will look into the social, political and economic consequences of the abolition of slavery in nineteenth and early twentieth century Africa. We will work onto the multiple meanings attached to the concept of slavery and the limitations of European late abolitionist campaigns.

In Part 3, we will analyse the role played by African actors in the unfolding of critical world events. We will look into the question of agency and will explore alternative historical interpretations of global phenomena that shaped the twentieth century from an African perspective.

In the last part, part 4, we will analyse contemporary institutions and forms of intervention in Africa by NGOs and Western powers, such as wildlife protection, nature reserve and humanitarianism. The aim of this section is to understand how these institutions came to be, in their forms, their aims and the discourses that they carry. Using all the tools developed throughout the seminar, we will probe the discourses and the practices of these institutions. Are they neocolonial, postcolonial, African centred ?

## **Part I: New tools and concepts for doing African and global history**

---

### **Lecture #1 (Thaïs Gendry) – What do we think we know about Africa and African history?**

**Summary:** This first class aims to challenge notions Europeans usually harbour regarding Africa, Africans and African history. We will question seemingly innocent and less innocent elements, such as archetypal views on the continent or the periodization its history, to discuss the pitfalls of established narratives and start laying the ground for an African centred history of Africa.

#### **Compulsory Reading**

Sebastien Conrad, “Chapter 8, Positionality and centred approaches”, in *What is global history*, Princeton University Press, 2016.

Jonathan T. Reynolds, “So Many Africas, So Little Time: Doing Justice to Africa in the World History Survey”, *World History Connected*, 2004. <https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uillinois.edu/2.1/reynolds.html>

### **Lecture #2 (Luca Puddu) – Reversing the colonial thesis: independent African states in the web of European imperialism**

**Summary:** Was colonialism actually a game-changer in the trajectory of twentieth century’s African polities? This class explores the economic path followed by two countries that preserved independence during the highest phase of European colonial rule in the African continent – Ethiopia and Liberia – in order to appreciate the relevance of political sovereignty in shaping the insertion of African societies within the international economic system.

#### **Compulsory readings:**

C. Schaefer, The politics of banking: the Bank of Abyssinia, 1905-1931, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 25, 2, 1982, pp. 361-389.

C. Schaefer, Rentier Capitalism: Cash, credit and urban development in Addis Ababa, 1905-1936, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 45, 2012, pp. 53-72.

L. A. Gardner, Was independence really better than colonial rule? A comparative study of Liberia and Sierra Leone, Available at: Liberia-SL2 (eh.net)

#### **Optional readings**

A. Kuroda, The Maria-Theresa Dollar in the early twentieth century Red Sea region: a complementary interface between multiple markets, *Financial History Review*, 14, 1, 2007, pp. 89-110.

C. Schafer, Competitors, yet partners: the Bank of Ethiopia and Indian informal bankers, 1931-1936, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 27, 2, 1994, pp. 45-68.

L. A. Gardner, Colonialism or super-sanctions: managing sovereign risk in Sierra Leone and Liberia, 1871-1914. CS5a Title Page.pdf (ehes.org)

L. A. Gardner, The rise and fall of Sterling in Liberia, 1847-1943, *Economic History Review*, 67, 4, 2014, pp. 1089-1112.

## **Part II: Slavery from an African perspective**

---

### **Lecture #3 (Thaïs Gendry) – Slavery from a slave’s point of view.**

**Summary:** When the slave trade and slavery were abolished throughout Europe and its colonies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century what actually happened in Africa? In this class we will explore some of the consequences of the abolition of slavery by looking at the specific story of an African women who took her former African masters to colonial court. By demanding the recognition of the fact that she had been enslaved and demanding freedom, she challenged the very definition of slavery and exposed the limits of European understanding of slavery and emancipatory policies.

#### **Compulsory reading**

Trevor Getz and Liz Clarke, *Abina and the Important Men. A Graphic History*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2012.

#### **Optional reading**

Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, “‘The Loads Are Heavier than Usual’: Forced Labor by Women and Children in the Central Province, Gold Coast (Colonial Ghana), CA. 1900-1940.” *African Economic History*, 30, 2002, pp. 31–51.

Marie Rodet, (2014). “Forced Labor, Resistance, and Masculinities in Kayes, French Sudan, 1919–1946”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 86, 2014, pp. 107-123.

### **Lecture #4 (Luca Puddu) – Slaves, *gebbars* and conquest in imperial Ethiopia**

**Summary:** Various forms of forced labour persisted in the Ethiopian empire throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, offering an entry point to Mussolini for the legitimization of the 1935 colonial invasion under the ban of the civilizing mission against slavery. But in what did actually slavery consist in Ethiopia? What were the consequences of the survival of slavery from an internal and international point of view? In this class, we will analyse the different forms of slavery and forced labour that persisted in the Ethiopian empire throughout the twentieth century, focusing in particular on the difference between slaves and *gebbars* (tribute-paying farmers) in the southern regions. We will unpack the importance of forced labour in the formation of the Ethiopian empire, the international debates surrounding the concept of slavery in sub-Saharan Africa in the first part of the twentieth century, and the implications of this debate for the Ethiopian government’s ability to defend itself before the Italian invasion. The purpose of this class is to analyse the multiple meanings attached to the concepts of slavery and forced labour in the African context and, at the same time, the importance of these conceptualizations in shaping

the competition for political supremacy between international, national, and sub-national actors in the African continent.

### **Compulsory readings:**

Gualia Bonacci, Alexander Meckelburg, "Revisiting slavery and the slave trade in Ethiopia", *Northeast African Studies*, 17, 2, 2017, pp. 5-30.

D. Donham, "Old Abyssinia and the new Ethiopian empire". In D. Donham W. James (eds.), *The southern marches of imperial Ethiopia*, Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. 3-17; 37-48.

Harold Marcus, "The embargo on arms sales to Ethiopia, 1916-1930", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 16, 2, 1983, pp. 263-279.

### **Optional readings**

Jon Edwards, "Slavery, the slave trade and the economic reorganization of Ethiopia, 1916-1935", *African Economic History*, 11, 1982, pp. 3-14.

Alexander Meckelburg, "Slavery, emancipation and memory: explanatory notes on western Ethiopia", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 48, 2, 2015, pp. 345-362.

Abdussamad Ahmad, "Trading in slaves in Belashangul and Gumuz, Ethiopia: border enclaves in history, 1897-1938", *The Journal of African History*, 40, 3, 1999, pp. 433-446.

Jean Allain, "Slavery and the League of Nations: Ethiopia as a civilized nation", *Journal of the History of International Law*, 8, 2006, pp. 213-244.

## **Part III: New narratives of classic world events**

---

### **Lecture #5 (Thaïs Gendry) – Africa in the World Wars**

**Summary:** The presence of Africa in World Wars is often told as a tale of bravery and misery of African soldiers sent to fight on European battlefields. In this class we will explore the multi-faceted and crucial roles Africa and Africans played in World conflicts, as well as touch upon local reactions to those conflicts.

### **Compulsory reading:**

Eric Jennings, *Free French Africa in World War II: The African Resistance*, Cambridge University Press, 2015. (one or two chapters TBD)

### **Optional reading:**

Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, "African agency and cultural initiatives in the British Imperial military and labor recruitment drives in the Gold Coast (colonial Ghana) during the First World War", *African Identities*, 4(2), 2006, pp. 213-234

## **Lecture #6 (Luca Puddu) - African agency during the Cold War**

The Horn of Africa was a critical hotspot of the Global Cold War. In this class, we will explore the agency of African actors in submitting the super powers' competition to their own ends. We will analyse how Ethiopia manipulated U.S. assistance to expand the international borders of the country during decolonization, as well as the Somali state's attempt to submit the African policy of the Soviet Union to the irredentist project of a Greater Somalia.

### **Compulsory readings:**

G. P. Calchi Novati, *Il Corno d'Africa nella storia e nella politica*, 1994, pp. 79-90

R. A. Yordanov, *The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa during the Cold War*, Lexington Books, New York, 2016, pp. 33-52.

### **Optional readings:**

E. Fantini, L. Puddu, *Ethiopia and International Aid: Development between High Modernism and Exceptional Measures*, in T. Hagmann, F. Reyntjens (eds.), *Development without Democracy: Aid and Authoritarianism in Africa*, ZED books, 2016, pp. 91-118

S. Vaughan, "Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Ogaden: Still a Running Sore at the Heart of the Horn of Africa". In: L. De Vries, P. Englebert, M. Schomerus, *Secessionism in African Politics*, Palgrave, 2019, pp. 91-118.

S. Mazov, "The USSR and the former Italian colonies, 1945-1950", *Cold War History*, 3, 3, 2003, pp. 49-78

## **Part IV: Rethinking the construction of international norms and practices with African history**

---

### **Lecture #7: Good "hunter" and bad "poacher": green colonialism and the global spread of a nature-centred paradigm**

Guest lecturer, Guillaume Blanc

#### **Compulsory reading (TBD)**

Chapter from : Guillaume Blanc, *The Invention of Green Colonialism*, trad. par Helen Morrison, Cambridge, Polity Books, 2022

### **Lecture # 8: Africa and humanitarian knowledge**

Guest lecturer, Joël Glasman

#### **Compulsory reading (TBD)**

Chapter from, Joël Glasman, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs*, Routledge Humanitarian Studies.