UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Cultures and Societies of Africa

2223-2-F0101R025

Course title

Legacies of the Past, and Future Expectations in contemporary Africa

(the course is taught in English/Italian according to the linguistic skills of the classroom)

Topics and course structure

Our understanding of Africa has swiftly changed over the last ten years, moving from a paradigm of 'crisis' to Africa as “emergent”, the future of the world and of capitalistic expansion: “the highest rates of economic growth we have witnessed over the last ten years have happened in Africa” – Achille Mbembe explains and “the continent is somewhat on the verge of major demographic transformations; … it is experiencing higher rates of return on investments and is therefore attracting the attention of foreign investors at a speed we had not witnessed before … the middle class that has been decimated during the use of Structural Adjustment Programs, is reemerging as an economic force. So there is a whole set of indicators that seem to suggest that something is going on which is different from what we used to witness in the past”. But, Mbembe continues, this growth (which is largely based on the volatile market of raw resources) has not yet been paralleled by the basic infrastructural investment large parts of Africa do need in terms of roads, communication and electricity (https://africasacountry.com/2013/11/africa-and-the-future-an-interview-with-achille-mbembe/). Inequalities have grown, political instability continues to pose a threat, and the processes of pacification underway in many areas, even if partially successful, remain partial and positioned. The COVID-19 pandemic inscribes itself in a predating and difficult health history (i.e. the impact of the AIDS syndrome on many African countries or the lethality of Ebola).

This course introduces to contemporary African dynamics through the discussion of the long term historical relationship between Africa and Europe, and between Africa and other parts of the world, starting with the Portuguese discovery of Africa and reaching the contemporary discussion on Eurafrica and the new patterns of relations between Eu and Africa stemming out of the Lisbon Treaty of 2007. Our case-studies will focus on the contribution of anthropology to the understanding of changes underway in contemporary Africa, with a focus on

internal and external migrations.

Objectives

The course will enhance the knowledge and understanding of key topics and authors in the field of African Studies, with a focus on interdisciplinary dynamics.

Through the active partecipation in classes, students will learn to built up a historical and anthropological perspective on contemporary Africa; they will also learn to use the African experience as a general tool in the analysis of similar phenomena in other parts of the world.

Communication skills will be increased through problem solving strategies, and collective discussions about theoretical and practical issues, which demand the positioning of students. Learning skills are increased through active participation and discussion in the classroom.

Methodologies

The course applies different methodologies: lectures, class discussions on selected articles, slides, audio-visual materials provided by the professor or autonomously proposed by the students; participation of researchers than present their work in progress.

Online and offline teaching materials

Attending classes is a dynamic experience. The course will develop thanks to the collaboration between professor and students in the reading and analysis of the texts selected for discussion as much as through proposals of integration. The course moodle platform is a point of reference for both attending and not-attending students.

Programme and references for attending students

Students who attend classes will prepare the exam on:

1. F. Cooper, Africa since 1940: the past of the present (2019)
2. The texts discussed together in class (available on the moddle platform by the end of the course)
3. A reading and study integration on the topics discussed in the classroom to be negotiated with the professors.

Programme and references for non-attending students

This is only for students who do not speak italian

1. F. Cooper, Africa since 1940. The past of the present (2002)
2. The texts available on the moddle platform (texts will be uploaded by the end of the course)
3. J. Ferguson, The anti-politics machine (1994)

Assessment methods

Students who attend the classroom: oral interview through open questions that verifies the knowledge and understanding of the materials assigned; discussion of a topic selected by the student among those assessed in the classroom.

Not-attending students: oral interview through open questions that verifies the knowledge and understanding of the assigned texts ; discussion of a topic (selected by the student), which cuts across the reading list.

Italian students carry out the exam in Italian, expect those who ask to do it in English.

Office hours

Contact us at our e-mail adresses and we will answer rapidly

Programme validity

Two years

Course tutors and assistants

Gabriele Masi

Sustainable Development Goals

NO POVERTY | GENDER EQUALITY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES