Challenges, Issues and Ideas in Covering Sub-Saharan Africa

Spring 2014
Mondays 3:30 p.m.- 5:20 p.m.

Professor Frankie Edozien
20 Cooper Square, Room 633
Room 633
212-992-7955
edozien@nyu.edu
Office hours by appointment on XXX

COURSE DESCRIPTION/OBJECTIVES
Africa covers a vast area of 55 countries and 1.1 billion inhabitants. There are countries that are emerging economic powers and heading towards industrialization. In other cases, some countries are taking the lead in developing technology hubs, and testing out new forms of mobile banking and virtual money. Other countries wield considerable “soft power” via their film, music and contemporary culture and they are driving the way Africans present themselves to the world.

Comprehensive coverage of Africa is scant. The sparse coverage is often a variation of an incomplete portrait that has dominated the Western media for the last 50 years: tales of starvation, political instability and disease are mainstays. There is often little or no historical or political context in most of this coverage.

This course will provide students with an understanding of contemporary issues around the various regions on the African continent. We will examine the role of religion, including religious extremism that has led to the near-splintering of several societies; the struggles to develop viable democratic models; cultural norms and practices; and issues of economic development and empowerment. We will focus on the challenges of telling stories from Sub-Saharan Africa that are not the same old stories, with the same tired clichés.

We will accomplish this by reading works that combine history, political analysis and narrative journalism. This historical and political background will help students to eventually write about the region with depth and nuance, and to evaluate the coverage that they read. In addition, we will analyze the evolution and implications of the myriad of U.S. foreign policy actions on the African continent.

Today, Africa is poised for an era of political and cultural renewal. The continent’s population is expected to double by 2050 and its influence on the world stage is growing.
We will discuss the challenges of reporting from regions with competing narratives, authoritarian regimes that have little respect for a free press, and places where journalists must work under constant danger. We also will strive to on occasion have guest speakers who have worked as foreign correspondents or editors managing coverage of Africa. By the end of this course, you will hopefully be a more informed reader and analyst of events in the continent.

REQUIRED TEXTS

*New News Out of Africa*, By Charlayne Hunter-Gault, Oxford University Press

*Mandela Mobuto & Me: A Newswoman’s African Journey*, By Lynne Duke

*Black Gold of the Sun*, By Ekow Eshun, Vintage Books

*Ghana Must Go*, by Taiye Salase (novel) Penguin Press

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

*Half of A Yellow Sun*, By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

*A Continent For The Taking*, By Howard W. French

The required texts are available at the NYU Bookstore and at Shakespeare & Co, The Strand, and on Amazon.com.

ASSIGNMENTS & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Since this is a seminar course, attendance and class participation are essential. Two or more unexcused absences will result in an automatic lowering of a student’s grade. (The only acceptable excuse for missing a class is a severe illness, which you can document with a doctor’s note, or a death in the family.) To do well in this course, you must keep up with the readings and participate regularly in the class discussions. **Note: No student will obtain a grade of “A” or “A-” without active class participation.**

Every week, each student will be required to submit a brief written response (about 3 paragraphs) to the readings. I will also sometimes go around the room and ask you to read out the highlights of your response, which will help direct our discussion. Your responses must not simply be a summary of the readings; you must offer an evaluation of the author’s main arguments and/or an analysis of the author’s reporting techniques.
There will be a midterm paper and a final paper that will involve analyzing themes that emerge from the class readings; a book review; or a critique of a significant piece of journalism about the region. **Papers should be up to 2000 words.**

The paper must use a variety of sources: if you are focusing on one major article or piece of reporting from the region, you must include other sources. You may do original reporting for these papers, but that is not required. Even if you plan to do a reported paper, you must supplement your original reporting with other sources. All papers must include a bibliography and proper footnotes.

For your final paper, you can write a media analysis/critique focusing an issue or country in Sub-Saharan Africa (as long as you focus on a different issue or country than you did for your midterm paper). You can also choose to write a “policy brief,” where you analyze a current problem on the continent and build an argument that explains how U.S. foreign policy should address this problem or issue. We will discuss this further in class.

**GRADING**

Your final grade will be based on your written assignments and your participation in class discussions. If you show progress and strong effort during the course of the semester, I will consider that in your final grade.

Your final grade will be based on the following:

- Class Participation (including reading responses): 30 percent
- Midterm Paper: 35 percent
- Final Paper: 35 percent

**ATTENDANCE**

This class meets only once a week. It’s essential to attend every class. Students who miss two or more classes without a valid excuse will face a reduction in their final grade. (The only acceptable excuse for missing a class is severe illness or a death in the family or a religious observance.)

**Please note:** Since this is a seminar course that is heavily based on our discussion and analysis of the readings, please refrain from using your laptops and phones during our discussions.

**DEADLINES**
In journalism, you must meet your deadline. All assignments for this class must be turned in on time. Late assignments will be subject to grade reductions, and any missed assignment will receive an F.

**PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism, fabricating quotes, or inventing sources will not be tolerated. Anyone caught doing so will fail the course and the department chair will be notified. For more information, see the NYU Journalism Handbook for Students: [http://journalism.nyu.edu/ethics/handbook/](http://journalism.nyu.edu/ethics/handbook/)

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

A NOTE ABOUT THE SCHEDULE: There might be a few changes to this schedule (some additional, short readings) as we attempt to keep up with developments in Africa. We will also occasionally have to work around the availability of guest speakers.

**WEEK 1:**

Topics: Introduction to major issues in Sub-Saharan Africa today. How do we cover foreign news?

In-Class Assignment: Write a 600 to 700-word autobiographical essay explaining why you are interested in foreign reporting and, specifically, Africa? Have you had any previous experience traveling or living in Black Africa? How has that experience affected your outlook on the region? Do you pay attention to media coverage of Africa? (This assignment will not be graded.)

**WEEK 2:**

Covering the African City; From Nairobi to Abuja; Lagos to Cape Town.
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)
New News out of Africa pp1-69.

**WEEK 3:**

The underground typewriters: African journalists and their struggle to tell their own story. (Liberia & Nigeria)
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)
New News out of Africa pp 71-155.
WEEK 4:

Mandela & the World. The legacy of Robben Island.
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes) (Robben Island Mabry Profile. Multimedia viewing

Mandela, Mobuto & Me.

WEEK 5:

A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)
President Barack Obama’s speech to the Ghanaian parliament, July 2009

Mandela, Mobuto & Me.

WEEK 6:

Film Viewing. An African Election
(in-class)
Mandela, Mobuto & Me

***MIDTERM PAPER DUE***

WEEK 7: NO CLASS (NYU Spring Break)

Readings:

Black Gold of the Sun pp1-117

WEEK 8:

Contemporary Pop Culture. The soft power of West Africa
Nollywood and Afropop from Nigeria & Ghana. (P-Square, D’Banj, Azonto)
The Big Man Syndrome. Weddings.
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)
Black Gold of the Sun pp119-227

WEEK 9:
Modern Christianity and its fervor
From Catholicism to TB Joshua
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)

WEEK 10:
Islamic militancy on the continent today. Al Shabab, Boko Haram & Mali Islamists.
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)
Ghana Must Go. pp1-110

WEEK 11:
LGBT Life today in Sub-Saharan Africa.
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)
Ghana Must Go. pp-110-211

WEEK 12: Apr. 22
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)
Ghana Must Go. pp 211-318
Discuss topics for final paper

WEEK 13:
Unheralded successes.
Rwanda’s Renaissance & Uganda’s healthcare research.
A selection of daily readings from newspapers/magazines (on NYU Classes)
Ghana Must Go. pp 211-318

WEEK 14:
Documentary: The Burma Boy (or TBD)

WEEK 15:
Topics: Review of semester.
***FINAL PAPER DUE***