

**BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY**  
Department of Anthropology  
Department of African and African-American Studies

## **ANTH 31B: AFRICAN WAYS OF KNOWING**

### **Spring 2020**

*INSTRUCTOR:* Doug Bafford

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*OFFICE LOCATION AND HOURS:* Brown Social Science Center 219, Tuesdays 2:00-4:00 PM and by appointment

*MAILBOX:* Brown Social Science Center 223

*CLASS MEETING TIME AND LOCATION:*

Tuesday and Friday, 11:00 A.M. – 12:20 P.M.,  
Brown Social Science Center 218



### **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course surveys the variety and diversity of knowledge production across Africa south of the Sahara. Through readings, films, written essays, and rigorous conversation, seminar participants will consider the difficulties in defining “knowledge” and how writers from philosophy, literature, and the social sciences (especially anthropology) have approached this question from various African perspectives. We will consider the distinctiveness and overlap between various ways of knowing, from sciences to religion to embodied sentiments, and how these are put into practice within various African countries, with case studies from West Africa, East Africa, and southern Africa. Special attention is given to the social contexts of epistemology and how knowledge is produced within cultural and structural architectures. The semester concludes with a consideration of the global politics of knowledge and the challenges of translating epistemologies across cultural, national, and continental boundaries. The course offers an exploration of what Africans can teach the rest of the world about contemporary social phenomena and about the human condition more broadly.

### **PREREQUISITES:**

There are no formal prerequisites for this class. However, a certain basic understanding of anthropological methods and African geography are presumed. If this is your first course focusing on Africa and/or your first course in anthropology, you are recommended to review some of the basics of African history and social science methods on your own time (a comprehensive introductory article will suffice); I am happy to offer suggestions that will not be a burden to read. No other specialized knowledge is presumed at the start of the course, but I hope we can learn from one another to help share our existing expertise.

### **REQUIRED READINGS:**

The following required books are available in the campus bookstore and on reserve at the library. They are also readily available online in multiple editions, all of which are acceptable. All other required and

supplementary readings will be available online via the course site, LATTE. If you are having difficulty purchasing course materials, please make an appointment with your Student Financial Services or Academic Services advisor to discuss possible funding options.

Head, Bessie. 1968. *When Rain Clouds Gather*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kenyatta, Jomo. 1938. *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu*. London: Harvill Secker.

## LEARNING GOALS:

By the end of this semester, you should be able to

- Understand various definitions of “knowledge,” as well as some of the practical difficulties in delimiting it as an abstract concept
- Describe recent history and social changes in West Africa, East Africa, and southern Africa and their influence on cultural transformation
- Explain the roots of misunderstandings that emerge at the intersection of alternative epistemologies
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills in the construction of written essays, especially the ability to critically analyze an author’s implicit assumptions
- Apply insights embedded in one medium to another, such as more artistic or non-verbal media
- Provide ethnographic examples of how ways of knowing often intersect in practice within African societies
- Grapple with the epistemological insights and underpinning of African fiction as a genre
- Synthesize multiple lines of evidence collected through independent research to support an argument centered on an in-depth knowledge of one African society

## CLASS POLICIES:

In order to create the most effective learning environment possible and for the consideration of your fellow students, I ask that we all follow these simple guidelines while in class:

1. Arrive on-time having read the assigned materials and completed any projects due that day. Since our group is relatively small, not being in class ready to discuss the course material will have a sizable effect on everyone’s experience. Out of respect for all of our preparation, please make every effort to arrive on time.
2. Turn off all cell phones and other electronic communication devices. This simple step is a common courtesy to fellow classmates and mitigates the temptation to check in continuously with electronics. If you must have your cell phone on (e.g., you are waiting for an important call or otherwise need use of your device), please let me know at the start of class. This course demands your full presence, undistracted by concerns outside the room.
3. Always have a notebook and writing utensil in front of you. We will be writing in every class, and having quick access to something with which to jot down notes will help cultivate a habit of writing, which will serve you well in other coursework. **Laptops should not be used except in cases of documented disability (see below in “Students with Disabilities”).**

4. Allow for an atmosphere of respectful academic discourse. This course covers challenging and potentially controversial themes on which many people (including me) have strong opinions. Try your best to debate respectfully and sympathetically, even when you disagree with your classmates or with me. We want to allow everyone to express his or her perspective in a safe yet academically critical setting. You may find it helpful to think of our job as to debate *ideas*, not other people.
5. Ask questions about anything (terms, concepts, history, etc.) you do not know or are unsure of. Even if it seems like a silly question, chances are that other people have the same uncertainty.
6. If you have concerns with anything in the course, please see me as soon as possible. Concerns that build over the course of the semester become more difficult to address; it will be much easier to deal with them as early on as possible. I am always available to find a solution that works best for you, regardless of what issues come up.

### **WORKLOAD EXPECTATIONS:**

This course is designed with the expectation that you will spend at least nine hours each week outside of class in preparation for our discussions. The elements of this work may vary at different points in the semester and will typically include combinations of reading assigned texts, drafting or revising written essays, and preparing for the final project. Success in this class is predicated on maintaining this level of effort and engagement throughout the semester. Please let me know if you have any questions about this requirement or if you are having trouble with time management, as there are resources to help.

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

You will complete two main projects over the course of the semester: a literature synthesis and a final project. The literature synthesis will be a written essay of four to five double-spaced pages in which you bring together (i.e., synthesize) three of the assigned readings from the first half of the semester. You are challenged not only to identify similarities and differences in the authors' perspectives but to craft an argument about where points of tension lie among them, how they base their epistemological justifications on various evidential modes, or why they might help illuminate one another.

The final project, to be developed over the latter half of the semester in conversation with the instructor and fellow classmates, has two components. A written component of approximately eight double-spaced pages will examine some aspect of knowledge production with regard to a single African people group (defined however you prefer, and in fact, how people groups are "defined" could be part of your discussion). Note that this write-up should not be too abstract but should illustrate, in anthropological fashion, how epistemological assumptions become enacted in everyday life. The second component of the project can take any form *except* the written medium. Some examples include (but are by no means limited to) oral recitation, performance/dance, video, drawing, song, diagramming, or food. While you should take this component just as seriously as the written essay, it ought to be an opportunity to consider alternative ways of thinking about epistemology. At the end of the semester, you will share a portion of this non-written "dimension" of your project with the rest of the class. More details about both of these projects will be distributed in class and on LATTE.

In addition to these larger projects, you are expected to complete four "mini-essays," short assignments for which you will provide a brief reflection or analysis based in the readings and/or your personal experience. Each mini-essay, to be written on a topic listed in the "Class Schedule" and

explained further in class, should be between one and two double-spaced pages. These assignments serve as opportunities to practice concise writing, and they allow you to try out new ideas in a low-stakes setting, especially as you become accustomed to the kind of writing expected in this course.

Finally, there will be an in-class midterm exam given approximately halfway through the semester. You will have a full class period to answer a series of short-answer and essay questions based on the readings and class discussions completed thus far. A study guide will be distributed beforehand to help guide your preparation.

### **READINGS:**

As in other reading-intensive courses in the humanities and social sciences, you are expected to come to class having carefully read *all* the assigned materials. Due to our small class size, I expect everyone to contribute to discussion at each class meeting. If you have not closely read the materials for the day, it will be noticeable, and your participation grade will be affected. Since many of our readings will be available electronically on LATTE, some students find it helpful to print them out to annotate while they read and to refer to during class. While you are not *required* to print out all the readings, if you do not have them in front of you during class, I expect you to have taken notes on some of the important passages, and I may call on you to answer questions about them. Nevertheless, I want you to see the readings for this course not as a burden but as a chance to connect with ideas and ways of knowing that may be unfamiliar to you, even if approaching these themes may be challenging.

### **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:**

Attendance at all classes is expected as a basic requirement of the course. You cannot learn this material if you are not present in class, since the core of what we will be covering will be brought out through discussion and many important points are not covered in the readings. Each student will begin with an A in attendance. After the first missed class, each subsequent absence will result in lowering your attendance grade by one-third of a letter (e.g., to an A-, then to a B+, etc.). However, I realize that unexpected things may come up during the semester (e.g., illness, family concerns, etc.) that may prevent you from being in class. Therefore, if you come to see me during office hours to talk about the course content that you missed, this reduction in your grade will be waived.

Furthermore, while attendance will play a crucial part in determining your grade, there is more to being “present” than simply showing up. Your mental presence at and participation in each class period is a crucial component of this course and your participation grade, which will be calculated separately from your attendance grade. You cannot earn an A for this component simply by showing up; you must earn it through consistent, careful, thoughtful, and eager engagement in class discussions. Careful preparation does not necessarily exclude taking risks; feel free to try new ideas without fear of being wrong. Your participation grade is a function not of correctness but of intellectual boldness and effort exerted. Finally, I understand that outgoing conversation or debate is not a style suited to all learners. Therefore, if you feel you are not able to participate rigorously during class, please let me know so that we can figure out an alternative mode of participation, whether through office hour visits or other activities.

### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately at the start of the

semester. In order to provide test accommodations, I need the accommodations letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide necessary accommodations but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781-736-3470 or [access@brandeis.edu](mailto:access@brandeis.edu).

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the university’s policies on academic integrity and plagiarism (see <http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai>), most important of which is to be honest in all you do. Faculty may refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions, including but not limited to failing grades being issued, educational programs, and other consequences.

**GRADING:**

You will be evaluated based on the quality of your assignments, the degree of improvement throughout the semester, and the value of your participation in class. Each component of the course will be weighted as follows:

Literature Synthesis .....	20%
Final Project – Written Component.....	25%
Final Project – Non-Written Component.....	15%
Midterm Exam .....	10%
Mini-Essays and In-Class Assignments .....	15%
Attendance and Participation.....	15%

Your final grade will be calculated based on the average score of all these categories and will fall on the following scale, as defined by the university:

- A.....High Distinction (for exceptional work)
- A-
- B+
- B.....Distinction (for very good work)
- B-
- C+
- C.....Satisfactory (for acceptable work)
- C-
- D+
- D.....Passing, but Unsatisfactory (for poor work)
- D-
- E.....Failing Grade

## WRITING CENTER:

One of the best resources at Brandeis to improve your writing is the on-campus Writing Center, located in the Goldfarb Library, room 232 on the upper level. They offer free 45-minute sessions to help improve the organization, conciseness, and impact of your essays. (They will also work, to a lesser extent, on recurring grammatical concerns.) To register for a session, go to

<http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/register.html>

or stop by during their evening drop-in hours starting at 6:00 PM (Monday through Thursday). If you make an appointment, please be sure to keep it, since they have had problems with some students not showing up in the past. Students who attend a full session will receive an automatic 24-hour extension on one of their drafts for any of the written assignments. (Remember to ask for a sheet of paper confirming you were there!)

## CLASS SCHEDULE:

<i>Class Unit</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Reading Due</i>	<i>Submissions Due</i>
<b>Week 1: Prologue</b>	January 14	None	
	January 17	Syllabus  Amaechi Udefi, "The Rationale for an African Epistemology: A Critical Examination of the Igbo Views on Knowledge, Belief, Justification," pp. 108-117  Kai Kresse, "'Anthropology of Philosophy' in Africa: The Ethnography of Critical Discourse and Intellectual Practice," pp. 285-304	
<b><u>PART I: Knowledge from and about Africa</u></b>			
<b>Week 2: What is Africa, and Why Is It Important?</b>	January 21	Walter Rodney, <i>How Europe Underdeveloped Africa</i> , pp. 1-30  Charles Benjamin Kwabena Archampong, "Amo's Philosophy of Mind and Cartesian Epistemology," pp. 59-76	

	January 24	Savo Heleta, "Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantling Epistemic Violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa," pp. 1-8  Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Race, Pluralism, and Afrocentricity," pp. 116-118	Mini-Essay – Africa in the World
<b>Week 3: Structural and Symbolic Transformation</b>	January 28	Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, <i>Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier</i> , pp. 119-165	
	January 31	Victor Turner, "Planes of Classification in a Ritual of Life and Death," pp. 1-43	
<b>Week 4: Media of Knowing</b>	February 4	Karin Barber, "African Histories of Textuality," pp. 66-75  Matthew Engelke, <i>A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church</i> , pp. 46-78	
	February 7	Yuka Suzuki, <i>The Nature of Whiteness: Race, Animals, and Nation in Zimbabwe</i> , pp. 105-135	Mini-Essay – Ritual and Reflection
<b>Week 5: Knowing through the Senses</b>	February 11	Cati Coe, <i>Dilemmas of Culture in African Schools: Youth, Nationalism, and the Transformation of Knowledge</i> , pp. 53-84	
	February 14	Paul Stoller, "The Epistemology of Sorkotarey: Language, Metaphor, and Healing among the Songhay," pp. 117-131	

<b>Week 6: African Anthropology as a Site of Knowledge Production</b>	February 25	Jomo Kenyatta, <i>Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu</i> , pp. vii-221	
	February 28	Jomo Kenyatta, <i>Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu</i> , pp. 222-306	Literature Synthesis
<b>PART II: Religion and the Supernatural</b>			
<b>Week 7: Who Is a Witch?</b>	March 3	E.E. Evans-Pritchard, <i>Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande</i> , pp. 1-64  Audrey I. Richards, "A Modern Movement of Witch-Finders," pp. 448-460	
	March 6	Adam Ashforth, "On Living in a World with Witches: Everyday Epistemology and Spiritual Insecurity in a Modern African City (Soweto)," pp. 206-225  Peter Geschiere, <i>The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics, and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa</i> , pp. 69-96	
<b>Week 8: Religious Ways of Knowing</b>	March 10	Jean Comaroff, <i>Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People</i> , pp. 159-193  Parker Shipton, "Trusting and Transcending: Sacrifice at the Source of the Nile," pp. S51-S61	
	March 13	Kapya J. Kaoma, "Contesting Religion: African Religious Leaders in Sexual Politics," 47-72  Kapya J. Kaoma, "A Dance of Many Tunes," pp. 171-179	Mini-Essay – Witchcraft and Society

<b>Weeks 9/9.5: Religion, Colonialism, and Medicine</b>	March 17	None	
	March 20	David Kofi Amponsah, "Christian Slavery, Colonialism, and Violence: The Life and Writings of an Ex-Slave, 1717-1747," pp. 431-457  Norman A. Etherington, "Missionary Doctors and African Healers in Mid-Victorian South Africa," pp. 77-91	
	March 27	Douglas J. Falen, <i>African Science: Witchcraft, Vodun, and Healing in Southern Benin</i> , pp. 80-118  Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science," pp. 155-187	Midterm Exam
<b>Week 10: Healing, Authority, and the Supernatural</b>	March 31	Anita Hannig, "Sick Healers: Chronic Affliction and the Authority of Experience at an Ethiopian Hospital," pp. 640-651  Robert J. Thornton, <i>Healing the Exposed Being: A South African Ngoma Tradition</i> , pp. 263-280	
	April 3	Devaka Premawardhana, "Conversion and Convertibility in Northern Mozambique," pp. 30-57	
<b>Week 11: Religious Boundary Making and Breaking</b>	April 14	Janet McIntosh, "Rethinking Syncretism: Religious Pluralism and Code Choice in a Context of Ethnoreligious Tension," pp. 177-220  Janet McIntosh, "The Occult," pp. 179-208	Final Project – Outline of Research Plan

<b>PART III: The Politics of African Knowledge around the Globe</b>			
<b>Week 12: Diasporic Knowledges</b>	April 17	Paul Stoller, <i>Money Has No Smell: Ethnography of West African Traders in New York City</i> , pp. 1-10 and 45-63  Michael C. Mbabuiké, “Africa through the Eyes of the African Diaspora,” pp. 46-51  Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, <i>Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature</i> , pp. 4-33	
<b>Week 13: The Truths of African Fiction</b>	April 21	Bessie Head, <i>When Rain Clouds Gather</i> , pp. 7-103	
	April 24	Bessie Head, <i>When Rain Clouds Gather</i> , pp. 104-188  Anthony Appiah, “Structuralist Criticism and African Fiction: An Analytic Critique,” pp. 165-174	Final Project – Written Component
<b>Week 14: Suspicion and Law as Epistemology</b>	April 28	Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, <i>The Truth about Crime: Sovereignty, Knowledge, Social Order</i> , pp. 3-39, 125-142, and 218-223	Final Project – Non-Written Component Presentations
<b>Final Exam Week: Epilogue</b>	Wednesday, May 6 at 6:00 PM	None	Mini-Essay – Reflections on Africa and the World

**\*\*\*NB: This schedule and syllabus are subject to change as we move through the semester.\*\*\***

Source for Image on First Page: Cati Coe, *Dilemmas of Culture in African Schools: Youth, Nationalism, and the Transformation of Knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 110