Last term’s module focused on law and labour in colonial Africa. This term we move on to think about broader issues of law, labour and authority in late colonial and early post-colonial Africa and considers how decolonization and the construction of the post-colonial state led to the articulation of new forms of rights and obligations, new conceptions of labour and new modes of conceptualising authority in the state. This module speaks to one of the central questions in African history: how far did decolonization constitute a rupture in the history of twentieth-century Africa?

1. From nationalist opposition to post-colonial state – new conceptions of power?
2. Human rights, the OAU and the UN
3. “If we are now free, why do we still pay taxes?” Taxation in the post-colonial state
4. “Kazi ya kujenga taifa”: labour and nation-building
5. Gendering authority
6. “Traditional” authority in the post-colonial state

For each class you will find a description of the class and a series of questions to think about as you read. Essential reading and primary source reading must be completed in advance of the seminar and you should come prepared to discuss it. The primary source extracts will be available on a closed site to which members of the course have access. The further reading suggestions will enable you to develop your thinking in particular areas.

Class 1: From nationalist opposition to post-colonial state: new conceptions of power?

One of the central questions which this section of the course addresses is the extent to which independence constituted a rupture in the history of Africa in the twentieth century. This class explores recent historiography which addresses this transition. To what extent did the post-colonial state constitute a break with the past in the forms of power and authority which it sought to construct? In this class we will focus on two case studies: Tanzania and Kenya.

Primary Sources:
- Extracts from Gabriel Ruhumbika, Village in Uhuru, London: Longman Group, 1969
- Extracts from Ngugi wa Thiong’o, A Grain of Wheat, London: Heinemann, 1967

Essential reading:
Further reading:


Class 2: Human rights, the OAU and the UN

This class explores the shifting language of human rights in late colonial and early post-colonial Africa. The historian Samuel Moyn has recently sought to disconnect human rights from the anti-colonial struggles of the mid-twentieth century. Yet as Meredith Terretta has shown, in the final years colonial rule many African politicians proved adept at using the language of human rights in international forums. This class considers this debate and looks more broadly at the ways in which mid-century universalisms gave way to post-colonial arguments which claimed the inapplicability of universal human rights in Africa.

Primary Sources:


Essential Reading

- Meredith Terretta, “We had been fooled into thinking that the UN Watches over the Entire World”: Human Rights, UN Trust Territories, and African Decolonization’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, May 2012, 34, 2, 329-360

Further Reading

- Ulrich Lohrmann, *Voices from Tanganyika: Great Britain, the United Nations and the Decolonisation of a Trust Territory*, Berlin: Lit. 2007
Class 3: “If we are now free, why do we still pay taxes?” Taxation in the post-colonial state

Taxation was central to the development of the modern European state, but taxation systems were developed before democratic systems of governance and required high levels of coercion. The problem for post-colonial African states, as Jane Guyer has argued, was that they had to develop their taxation system in reverse order – consent first, then the development of a taxation system. Moreover, they had to do so in a political climate in which many expected that the end of colonial rule would mean the end of an illegitimate and ineffective system of colonial taxation. This class explores the ways in which post-colonial states sought to balance their need for revenue with the challenges of maintaining and developing political legitimacy.

Primary Sources:

- Cartoons from the Swahili-language newspaper Komkya

Essential Reading:


Further Reading:


Class 4: “Kazi ya kujenga taifa”: labour, voluntary work and nation-building

Post-colonial states defined themselves in opposition to colonial states, yet like colonial states they needed revenue to fund development. As we saw in last week’s class, raising taxes was difficult and so, like colonial states, they often made demands on the labour of their citizens instead. This class looks at the self-help and *harambee* movements in post-colonial East Africa, focusing on Kenya and Tanzania. How far did unpaid labour carried out in the name of a post-colonial nation-state mark a break from earlier forms of forced labour for a colonial state or labour demanded by a chief? How did post-colonial states mobilise unpaid labour for development projects? How was the concept of development understood in post-colonial Tanzania?

Primary Sources
Essential Reading:


Further Reading:

- Michael Jennings, Surrogates of the State: NGOs, Development, and Ujamaa in Tanzania, Bloomfield CT: Kumarian Press, 2008
- James Brennan, Youth, the TANU Youth League, and Managed Vigilantism in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania 1925-1973’, Africa, 76, 2, 2006, 221-246

Class 5: Gendering Authority

This class considers the theme of gender and generation in the post-colonial state. What did new modes of articulating and exerting authority in the post-colonial state mean for conceptions of masculinity? Was there a shift whereby the link between age and authority was broken? How did women’s access to power change over the second half of the century? What has been the role of post-colonial legal regimes in shaping access to power?

Primary Sources:

- Extracts from Meja Mwangi, Going down River Road, London: Heinemann, 1976

Essential reading:

Further Reading:


Class 6: “Traditional” authority in the post-colonial state

This class returns to the theme of authority. Post-colonial states took very different approaches to chiefs and other holders of “traditional” authority. Some swept them away and sought to create a radically new structure, others sought to co-opt them to the post-colonial nationalist project. This class explores the strategies adopted and the new political forms which resulted in the early post-colonial state, and the more recent reconfigurations of chiefship in the late twentieth century.

Primary source


Essential Reading:


Further reading: