

Department of Political Science  
Faculty of Arts and Science  
**University of Toronto**

Fall 2022

## **Topics in Comparative Politics IV - *Identities*** **POL 492H1/2392H F, LEC0101**

**Instructor:** Prof. Ato Kwamena Onoma  
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**Class time:** Thursday 12:00 – 2:00 p.m.

**Class location:** SS 2114

**Office Hours:** Thursday 10-11 am (or by appointment through email)

The broad goal of this seminar is to raise and explore important questions about identities. These will include but not be limited to the following: How are identities formed? How do they evolve over time? What do identities do in political economic life or what do people do with identities in political economic life? Why are some identities more politically salient than others? When do certain identities gain salience? What are the epistemological and ethical consequences of various ways of conceptualizing identities? We will discuss readings that focus on cases from around the world, even though dynamics in Africa will receive particular attention.

**Format:** This course will be in-person. It will be driven by student participation. Students should complete all readings before each class and be ready to critically engage with assigned readings as well as with the comments of other class participants. Readings are available electronically either as links through the library's website or as PDFs. You can locate the electronic links and PDF files under library resources on the course page in Quercus. Books that are not available electronically can be found on short term loan – Course Reserve at Roberts Library. They may also be purchased online or at the University of Toronto Bookstore.

### **Breakdown of requirements and contribution to your final grade**

- *Class attendance:* 12%
- *Seminar participation:* 24%
- *Responses to weekly readings :* 50%. These are supposed to be critical responses to the readings and should *not* summarize course materials. Each should be 2-3 double-spaced (Font 12, Times New Roman) pages long and should be handed in *before* the class whose readings it engages. Hand in a printed copy of your response to the instructor during the first 3 minutes of class. More than half of the responses should be submitted before week 7. It is better to critically engage one thread in the readings in a deep manner than to touch

on multiple issues in a shallow way. Undergraduates should submit 5 responses. Graduate students should submit 7 responses. Submit your printed responses to the instructor *before* the start of the class whose readings you are responding to. Responses sent after class will not be accepted. Keep copies of all responses until the corrected assignment is returned to you.

- *15-minute joint class presentation by pairs of students:* 14%: Discuss and agree with another student to do a joint presentation. Then discuss and agree on a date for your presentation with the instructor by the end of week 3 of the course.

### **Plagiarism**

*“Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will be dealt with accordingly. For further clarification and information on plagiarism please see Writing at the University of Toronto <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources>”.*

### **Accessibility Needs**

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/> as soon as possible.

**Absence:** Students who absent themselves from class should complete the Absence Declaration form available to them directly on ACORN. Students should also inform the instructor of their absence.

### **Course materials**

The materials below are required readings that must be completed before class. Most are available electronically either as links through the library’s website or as PDFs . You can locate the electronic links and PDF files under library resources on the course page in Quercus. Books that are not available electronically can be found on short term loan – Course Reserve at Roberts Library. They may also be purchased online or at the University of Toronto Bookstore.

## **Week 1 : Essentialism**

- **Preoccupation:** How does one define the pure and authentic substance of an identity?
- **Reading:**
  - Senghor, Leopold. 1956. “African-negro aesthetics,” *Diogenes* 4 (16): 23-38.

## **Week 2 : Anti-essentialism**

- **Preoccupation:** *What are the pitfalls of the conceptualization of identity as a substance? Is identity best thought of as a quest?*
- **Readings**
  - Mbembe, Achille. 2002. “African modes of self-writing,” *Public culture* 14 (1): 239-273.

- Diagne, Souleymane Bachir. 2002. "Keeping Africanity open," *Public Culture* 14 (3): 621-623.
- Diagne, Souleymane Bachir. 2001. "Africanity as an open question," in *Identity and beyond: Rethinking Africanity*. Nordic African Institute Discussion Paper 12: 19-24.

### **Week 3 : Créolité as a substance**

- **Preoccupation:** *How do we transcend the idea of authenticity as purity? What are the epistemological and ethical benefits of the conceptualization of identities as hybrid?*
- **Readings:**
  - Bernabe, Jean, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant. 1990. "In praise of creoleness," *Callaloo* 13 (4): 886-909
  - Réno, Fred. 2018. "The Meandering Politics of *Créolité*," *Small Axe* 55: 126-136.

### **Week 4 : Creolization as a process**

- **Preoccupation:** *What are the benefits of a radical de-substantiating of discourses of Creoleness?*
- **Reading:**
  - Glissant, Edouard. 1989. *Caribbean Discourse: selected essays* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia)

### **Week 5 : Creolization in the old world I: Africa**

- **Preoccupation:** *To what extent are the "original" contributions to Creole worlds contaminated?*
- **Readings:**
  - Mark, Peter. 1999. "The Evolution of 'Portuguese' Identity: Luso-Africans on the Upper Guinea Coast from the Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century." *The Journal of African History*, 40 (2): 173-91
  - Colson, Elizabeth. 1970. "The assimilation of aliens among Zambian Tonga" in Ronald Cohen and John Middleton, eds. *From tribe to nation: studies in incorporation processes* (Scranton PA, Chandler Publishing Company, 1970)

## **Week 6 : Creolization in the old world II: Asia**

- **Preoccupation:** *To what extent are the “original” contributions to a Creole worlds contaminated?*
- **Reading:**
  - Scott, James. 2009. *The art of not being governed* (New Haven: Yale University Press)

## **Week 7 : The nativism of the exiled**

- **Preoccupation:** *Does exile always facilitate encounters and openness?*
- **Reading:**
  - Malkki, Liisa. 1995. *Purity in exile: violence, memory, and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)

## **Week 8 : The weight of ethnicity**

- **Preoccupation:** *What is the salience of ethnicity in political life?*
- **Readings:**
  - Chandra, Kanchan. 2006. “What is ethnic identity and does it matter?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (1): 397-424
  - Posner, Daniel. 2004. “The political salience of cultural difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia and adversaries in Malawi,” *American Political Science Review* 98 (4): 529-545.
  - Ekeh, Peter. 1975. “Colonialism and the two publics in Africa,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17 (1): 91-112.

## **Week 9 : Proximity and knowledge**

- **Preoccupation:** *What role does social proximity play in inter-group relations?*
- **Reading:**
  - Onoma, Ato. 2013. *Anti-refugee Violence and African Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press)

## Week 10: Links and interactions I

- **Preoccupation:** *Who is the stranger/other/foreigner?*
- **Reading:**
  - Nyamnjoh, Francis. 2016. *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa*. (Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG)

## Week 11: Links and interactions II

- **Preoccupation:** *Do self/other dichotomies obfuscate more than they elucidate social interactions?*
- **Readings:**
  - Nyamnjoh, Francis. 2022 “Citizenship, incompleteness and mobility,” *Citizenship Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2022.2091243
  - Napier, A. David. 2012. “Nonsel self help: how immunology might reframe the Enlightenment,” *Cultural Anthropology* 27(1): 122-37.
  - Napier, A. David. 2017. “Epidemics and xenophobia, or, why xenophilia matters,” *Social Research* 84(1): 59-81.

## Week 12: The turmoil within

- **Preoccupation:** *How placid and convivial are intra-group relations?*
- **Readings:**
  - Levi, Primo. 1988. *The Drowned and the Saved*. New York, NY: Vintage International.
  - Nyamnjoh, Francis. 2005. “Images of Nyongo amongst Bamenda grassfielders in whiteman kontri,” *Citizenship Studies* 9(3): 241-269.
  - Onoma, Ato. 2021. “The allure of scapegoating return migrants during a pandemic,” *Medical Anthropology* 40(7): 653-666
  - Onoma, Ato. 2018. “Epidemics and intra-communal contestations: Ekeh, ‘les Guinéens’ and Ebola in West Africa,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 56(4): 595-617.

