



Ben Gurion University of the Negev
Department of History
Spring Semester 2022

Writing Colonial History in the 21st Century
Prof. Ruth Ginio

4 credits MA seminar
Wednesdays 10:15-13:45

Office hours: Mondays 13:00-13:45 (please co-ordinate in advance)
Building 74, room 306
rginio@bgu.ac.il

Course presentation:

Although decades have passed since most of the colonies ruled by European powers gained their independence, the debate about the colonial past does not seem to have subsided and continues to stir the spirits in both the former colonial powers and the former colonies. Within these broader debates about the legacy of colonialism, the writing of colonial history plays a significant role. The study of colonialism has undergone far-reaching changes since it began to flourish in the 1960s. It has gradually ventured beyond the historical discipline and currently occupies an important place in other disciplines such as literature and cultural studies.

This seminar will examine the main issues at the heart of the study of colonialism in the early twenty-first century. We will examine the different methods that can be employed to overcome and bypass the obstacles that colonial sources present to us when trying to “hear” the voices of colonial subjects: oral history, the use of the micro-historical method, legal sources and more. We will engage with the critiques of non-Western scholars, mainly from India and various countries in Africa, about the way that colonialism is studied in universities in the West. We will also discuss the connection between writing about the colonial past in Africa and the West, and contemporary protest movements and political discussions related to the colonial past.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the seminar, students are expected to be familiar with the main trends in colonial historiography. They will understand the various aspects of writing colonial history, the dilemmas embedded in this kind of research, the obstacles, and possible ways to mitigate against them. Students will also be able to develop critical perspectives towards colonial historiography and link this critique with current

political debates regarding the colonial past in the ex-colonies and the ex-colonial powers.

Course Requirements and Grade Composition:

Reading and Class Participation (20%)

Students are expected to attend all class meetings, complete the readings, and be prepared for discussion of the assigned reading each week. Classroom discussions are an integral part of the course, and all students are expected to participate. Students are also required to take active part in online discussions that will be posted in the course website during the semester.

A Critical Review of an Article (30%)

Each student will choose an article from a list that will be posted on the course website and will write a 1,000 words essay describing the article's main thesis, the historiographical approach, methodology, and sources used. In addition, the essay will include an evaluation of the article's contribution to the historiography of the colonial period.

Analysis of a primary source (20%)

Students will be required to write a short essay (around 800 words) analyzing a primary source, either written or oral. The essay should include a presentation of the source, its context, its potential contribution to research and its limitations as a primary source.

Final Essay (30%)

Students will be asked to write about the various approaches to a selected theme in colonial history. Students will be expected to choose such a theme (with my assistance) and prepare a list of sources. They will have to present different approaches while developing their own positions on their advantages and disadvantages. Students who are expected to write a seminar paper can turn this essay into a seminar paper.

Main Topics for Discussion:

1. Historiographical approaches to colonialism in the 20th century
2. The impact of Post-colonial Studies on the research of colonial history
3. Literature as an historical source
4. Micro-history in colonial studies
5. The lure of legal sources to expose unheard voices in colonial history
6. The debate around the significance of oral sources
7. The relationship between academic research on colonialism and political debates
8. What we write about and how? Witchcraft and the writing of colonial history
9. The debate around stolen African art in European museums
10. Colonial history, guilt, and reparations
11. Decolonizing African history

Class Schedule*

*Weekly Readings might change

23 March 2022

*Presentation of the seminar and discussion of the main themes
Historiography of colonialism in the 20th century*

As an introduction to the seminar all students must read one of the following books:

Norrie Macqueen, *Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2007)

רות ג'ניאן, *הקולוניאליזם האירופי: אידיאולוגיה, יישום, התנגדות* (רעננה: האוניברסיטה הפתוחה, 2012)

30 March

Postcolonial Studies and the writing of colonial history

Reading:

Sehlah Burney, "Conceptual Frameworks in Postcolonial Theory: Applications for Educational Critique", *Counterpoints*, 2012, Vol. 417, PEDAGOGY of the Other: Edward Said, Postcolonial Theory, and Strategies for Critique (2012), pp. 173-193

Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 1-40

6 April

Exposing unheard voices: The lure of legal sources and micro-history

Reading:

Richard Roberts, "A Case of Kidnapping and Child Trafficking in Senegal, 1916," in Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene, and Martin A. Klein, eds. *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 404-13.

13 April (Online Class)

Exposing unheard voices: The lure of oral history

Reading:

Babacar Fall, "Orality and Life Histories: Rethinking the Social and Political History of Senegal", *Africa Today*, 50:2 (2003), 55-65.

27 April

African literature and the bridging of historical gaps

Reading:

Petina Gappah, *Out of Darkness, Shining Light*

Walima T. Kalusa, "Strange Bedfellows: David Livingston, Sekeletu, Imported Goods, and the 1853-1865 Trans-African Expedition", *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 27:2 (2015), 133-145.

11 May

No class - A Tour to the Israel Museum will be scheduled after the class on African art in European museums.

18 May

What we write about and how: Witchcraft and the writing of colonial History

Reading:

Florence Bernault, *Colonial Transactions: Imaginaries, Bodies, and Histories in Gabon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019)

Watch the Film: I am not a Witch

25 May

International Workshop: Crime and Its Investigation in Imperial Contexts

Students will have to participate in at least one panel and submit a critical report on the presentations

1 June

Political Debates and Colonial History: The Participation of African Soldiers in the Two World Wars

Reading:

Martin Mourre, "African Colonial Soldiers, Memories, and Imagining Migration in Senegal in the Twenty-First Century", *Africa*, 88:3, 2018, 518-538.

Two documentaries on African soldiers in the British army:

Burma Boy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BREOezfAJSU&t=88s>

Empire's Forgotten Heroes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6jmMVPLADQ&t=3s>

8 June

Political Debates and Colonial History: Looted African Art in European Museums

Reading:

Barnaby Philips, *Loot: Britain and the Benin Bronzes* (London: One World, 2021)

Short film about contested items in the British Museum

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoTxiRWrvp8>

Trevor Noah, Satire on the debate around stolen African art in Europe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOImXQihow8>

15 June

Colonial History, Guilt, and Reparations: The Commemoration of the Colonial Past in Europe and in Africa

Reading:

Robert Aldrich, "Commemorating Colonialism in a Postcolonial World", *e-REA*, 2012

<https://journals.openedition.org/erea/2803>

Regina Menachery Paulose and Ronald Gordon Rogo, "Addressing Colonial Crimes through Reparations: The Mau Mau, Herero and Nama", *State Crime Journal*, 7:2, 2018, 369-388.

22 June

Decolonizing African History

Wukuma Wa Ngugi, "What Decolonizing the Mind Means Today", 23 March 2018

<https://lithub.com/mukoma-wa-ngugi-what-decolonizing-the-mind-means-today/>

Decolonization, Decoloniality, and the Future of African Studies – A conversation with Dr. Sabelo Ndlovu Gatsheni:

<https://items.ssrc.org/from-our-programs/decolonization-decoloniality-and-the-future-of-african-studies-a-conversation-with-dr-sabelo-ndlovu-gatsheni/>

Podcasts on Senegalese History (in French and Wolof)

<https://www.goethe.de/ins/sn/fr/kul/sup/xam-/pod.html>

George Sefa Dei and Chizoba Imoka, "Colonialism: Why We Write Back?"

<https://www.e-ir.info/2018/01/03/colonialism-why-write-back/>

29 June

Presentation of Projects and Discussion