



## Modernization and Social Change in Cameroon

AFRS-3000 (3 credits / 45 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:

### Cameroon: Development and Social Change

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

#### Course Description

Modernization and Social Change is an interdisciplinary seminar exploring the social, economic, cultural and political transformations that have taken place in Cameroon as a result of western influence. The introduction of Christianity and later colonial rule has had unprecedented and diverse effects on various communities and groups. This course will explore in depth the effects of modernization on two ethnic groups, a linguistic group, and women. It will explore the technology revolution, the internet and how smartphones contribute to political expression and inclusion. Students will stay in various communities, receive lectures, attend workshops and take on field trip visits to further their knowledge of these issues. Visits to various organizations and cultural centers are also a central part of this course. The course will also explore how communities, exercising their agency, shape new identities. The course addresses the following major questions: How has modernization been articulated in Cameroon and with what consequences? How do the various Cameroonian communities respond to western influence? How has the nation-state been shaped by modernization? What is the efficacy, relevance and utility of the modernization agenda?

In addition to lectures and seminar discussions, the course integrates multiple learning methods including assigned readings, excursions to a wide range of sites, ethnic communities, group discussions and processing sessions, student presentations and independent assignments. These experiences provide opportunities for deeper examination of social change processes, transformation of indigenous cultures and gender relations in the face of modernization, and their unintended effects. Through this, students ultimately explore tensions between modernity and indigeneity in Cameroon.

#### Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the seminar, students will be able to:

- Describe modernization projects being implemented in Cameroon and how local communities have responded to these projects;
- Demonstrate critical insights on the relevance of a modern development agenda to Cameroon's indigenous social-cultural realities;
- Critically examine relationships among ethics, belonging, and modernity in Cameroon; and
- Analyze the impact of modernization on Cameroon's traditional cultures and social fabric.

### **Language of Instruction**

This course is taught in English, and students will be exposed to local vocabulary related to course content through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales. When necessary, lectures would be translated from a local language to English. Some of the thematic topics will be presented in workshop formats. Participatory activities such as traditional dances and reviews of Cameroonian/African film series and other topics will be covered through carefully designed case studies. Students are required to participate in all scheduled workshops, discussions, lectures and case studies.

### **Readings**

Students are responsible for all the assigned readings, and should be prepared to bring them to bear on scheduled reading discussions. The readings will help you place the classes in their context, to challenge and engage lecturers, to generate questions for further discussions and to deepen knowledge of the various empirical case studies and experiences on the program.

### **Course Schedule**

**\*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.**

### **Module 1: An introduction to modernization and social change in Cameroon**

This module first introduces students to the concept of modernity both as an analytical tool and as an idea, emanating from the Enlightenment, from which contemporary ideas of development have been derived. Students draw on local people's understandings and the tensions that they express about development to further examine the modernity and its related concepts. Some case studies are covered via lectures, some via site visits and scheduled debriefing complemented with readings discussions.

*Assigned Reading:*

Wagner, P. (2012). *Modernity: understanding the present*. Cambridge, UK: Polity. Part I, Pp 1-78.

Bhambra, G. K. (2007). *Rethinking modernity: Post colonialism and the sociological imagination*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave. Ch 1 & 2.

Nkwi Paul Nchoji (1997) *Rethinking the role of elites in rural development: A case study from Cameroon*, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 15:1, 67-86.

Latour, B. (1993). *We have never been modern*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. Part one.

### **Module 2: Indigeneity in a broader context of modernization projects**

This module examines both the limits and potential of modernization projects. The module draws on two case studies, one with the Bamileke and a second with the Bagyeli ethnic groups.

*Case Study I: The Bamiléké* – explores the culture, politics, and social organization of the Bamiléké ethnic group, with a specific look at the Batoufam community. The Bamileke are a vibrant and hardworking ethnic group in Cameroon; they have remained attached to their cultural values and are using western tools to foster progress in their community. The case study includes a visit to a Bamiléké chief's palace, experiencing rural community life through homestays with local families, and an excursion to a sacred waterfall. Topics include: understanding the Bamiléké, indigenous development organizations, indigenous systems of savings and credit, cultural associations.

*Assigned reading:*

Ndobegang Mbatndah, M. (2008). Colonial Background to the Economic Empowerment and Political Mobilization of Africans: The Case of the Bamiléké of the Cameroon Grassfields, 1920-1950. *Journal of Third World Studies*, XXV (2), 177-188.

Nyamnjoh, F. B. (2004). *Our Traditions are Modern, Our Modernities Traditional: Chieftaincy and Democracy in Contemporary Africa*. 1-28. [www.Codesria.org](http://www.Codesria.org)

Simo, J (2009). Challenges to Chieftaincy Today: Governance Issues and how Fons Strategize to Overcome the Obstacles of Overarching Structures in the Western Grass fields of Cameroon.” In E. Tamajong, (Ed.). *Les Mutations en Afrique*, Yaoundé: Presses d’UCAC, pp. 159-193.

Terretta, M. (2010). Chiefs, Traitors and Representatives: The Construction of a Political Repertoire in Independence Era Cameroun. *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 43 (2).

*Case Study II: The Bagyeli: South Region - Kribi*. This case study examines the social, economic and political transformation of the Bagyeli, an indigenous group commonly called the pygmies. In addition to studying Bagyeli culture, dances, and aesthetic features, we discuss the changes in the community intensified by state pressures to leave the forest and “modernize,” with a focus on the rhetoric of modernization deployed by the Cameroon government and NGOs. Topics include: Bagyeli culture meeting the modern world, issues of citizenship and access to education, outside intervention with foreign companies and the state, national inclusion.

*Assigned Reading:*

Aili, P. (2012). *What Future for the Baka? Indigenous People’s Rights and Livelihoods Opportunities in the South East of Cameroon*. Copenhagen: Eks-Skolens Trykkeri.

Leonhardt, A. (2006). Baka and the Magic of the State: Between Autochthony and Citizenship. *African Studies Review*, 49 (2), 69-94.

Tucker, S. (2011). A Study of Cameroon’s Bakola-Bagyeli. The Helvidius Group, *Journal of Politics and Society*, 22 (1), 89-116.

*Case Study III: Cameroon’s Anglophone-Francophone paradox:*

North-West Region – Bamenda. Two of the ten regions of Cameroon are English speaking and were colonized by Britain. How are Anglophones integrated into the country? How do their unique political, linguistic and cultural features fit into the broader Cameroonian national identity? The program spends time in this Anglophone region of Cameroon, as students familiarize themselves with tensions and struggles related to marginalization, national integration and politics in Cameroon. Topics include

Anglophone history and identity, Anglophone and Francophone relations, political participation, national inclusion, and comparative development in Anglophone and Francophone regions

*Assigned Reading:*

Fonchingong, T. (2013). The Quest for Autonomy: The Case of Anglophone Cameroon. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol 7, 224-236.

Kam Kah, H. (2012). *The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon: The North West/South West Dichotomy from 1961-1996*. CJDHR 6 (1).

Konings, P. (2004). Opposition and Social-Democratic Change in Africa: The Social Democratic Front in Cameroon. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 42 (3), 289-311.

Konings, P. & Nyamnjoh, F. B. (1997). The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35 (2), 207-229.

### **Module 3: Internet and Social media as a tool for political expression and inclusion**

Drawing on resources from social media applications, journalists' publications, Facebook groups and twitter accounts, students will learn the ways in which the internet and the rising usage of smart phones are supporting conversations and narratives on Cameroonian politics. Access and participation to key information is easier and raise awareness and more interest in national debates and political decisions. We will use case studies, workshops, group discussions and lectures to further students' understanding of political discussions and participation from Cameroonians in national debates.

*Case Study I: Internet as a tool for progress or hindrance*

*Case Study II: Meetings and discussions with opinion leaders on the social media platform*

*Case Study III: Critical examination of the most followed groups and pages on social media*

*Case Study IV: The government's take on monitoring of social media communication*

### **Module 4: Modernity and the production of hybrid identities: A comparative study of Cameroon immigrants in France**

Cameroon maintains strong, albeit contentious, cultural, social and economic ties with France, which exerted colonial influence over Cameroon until 1960. A significant Cameroon immigrant community lives in Paris, having established businesses and various vibrant service industries. This module draws from the concepts and debates encountered in Module 2 to ask: How do Cameroonian immigrant communities negotiate Paris's cultural terrain, as they strive to maintain their indigenous cultural identities? What does this negotiation reveal about both the power and limits of Francophone modernity? What moral ethics inform a continuous flow of remittances, and how do these ethics unsettle the premises upon which a discourse of modernity has been constructed?

#### **Evaluation and Grading Criteria**

Timely completion of all assignments is expected and students can submit assignments in either English or French. Late hand-ins will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, depth of understanding, argumentation, presentation of evidence, proper citation and clear formatting.

Reflection paper on modernization and indigeneity	40%
Reflection paper on ethics and Francophone modernity	40%
Readings presentation and leadership discussion	10%
Participation	10%

### **Reflection Paper on Modernization and Indigeneity**

Drawing from lectures, observation, interviews, class discussions, and excursions, you will write a 4-6 page comparative paper analyzing and discussing the ways that modernization projects are unravelling among the Bagyeli and the Bamiléké and how these communities are responding to these projects. The paper should elaborate on the following topics:

1. Bamiléké culture and dynamism in the 21st century;
2. The nation–state issue;
3. Indigenous development structures and their pertinence in contemporary Cameroon.

### **Reflection paper on ethics and Francophone modernity**

Drawing from the French excursion, students write a 4-6 page paper analyzing the patterns of cultural norms and practices that sustain Cameroon’s immigrant communities in Paris, and what these norms and practices reveal about the potential and limitations of Francophone modernity.

### **Readings Presentation and Leadership of Discussion**

Summarize the article. Identify key arguments or issues that the article raises and, possibly, the assumptions that the author makes, as well as their broad implications for our understanding of causes, prevention and mitigation of conflict. Identify key questions that you note, in ways that will provoke discussion.

### **Grading Scale:**

94-100% A  
 90-93% A-  
 87-89% B+  
 84-86% B  
 80-83% B-  
 77-79% C+  
 74-76% C  
 70-73% C-  
 67-69% D+  
 64-66 % D  
 below 64 F

### **Grading Criteria**

An “A” grade for an assignment entails superior (not just “very good”) performance in terms of structure and organization of assignments, analysis, logical argumentation and consistency, and the provision of factual, numerical and/or historical evidence. In terms of class participation, an “A” grade refers to full attendance, punctuality, attentive listening and active engagement in all discussions, lectures, educational excursions, and other activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior. The level, frequency, and quality of the students’ participation will be monitored and taken into account.

### **Expectations and Policies**

#### **Class Participation**

Participation in class refers to attendance, punctuality, attentive listening, and active engagement in all course lectures, seminar discussions, educational excursions, and other activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior.

**Disability Services:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at [disabilityservices@sit.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@sit.edu) for information and support in facilitating an accessible educational experience. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services, including a link to the online request form, can be found on the Disability Services website at <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/disabilityservices>.

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