

## **The Creation of Race and Tribe in Twentieth-Century Africa**

Neil Kodesh  
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Popular accounts of political conflict in contemporary Africa produced by journalists, policy makers, and academics are filled with stories of “ethnic strife” and “tribal violence.” Lurking in the background of these accounts lies a commonly-found narrative about the history of politics in twentieth-century Africa. According to this narrative, the efforts to build nation-states during this period – particularly in the second half of the twentieth century - have repeatedly failed because Africans continue to cling to the primordial attachments of race and tribe.

But if one looks at the histories of so-called tribal identities, this commonly found narrative fails to hold up. Not only was the emergence of many ethnic identities relatively recent, but the development of these identities often coincided, for better or worse, with efforts to build nation-states. In this course we will examine how ethnic identity has been treated in the literature on twentieth-century Africa. While we will draw on the works of anthropologists and political scientists as well as historians, the emphasis throughout will be on the historical processes by which ethnic and racial identities were created and politicized in twentieth-century Africa. Contrary to conventional wisdom, such identities are not primordial: they have precise histories, sometimes quite recent.

In the first few weeks of the semester we will examine what we (and others) mean when we use the slippery term ethnicity. Over the next several weeks we will consider several studies from various parts of the continent, including South Africa, Kenya, Sudan, and Rwanda. The seminar will culminate with the writing of a research paper on a topic developed in consultation with the instructor.