Contemporary Philosemitism in Africa
Time of delivery: Spring 2018
GSRL-CNRS
Paris, France

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Course level: undergraduate, graduate
Type of course: seminar
Department: Contemporary Judaism
Office:
Office hours:

Course description

From the colonial era African Christians have expressed a general feeling of admiration for and spiritual relation to the Jews. Some took this relation a bit farther than just a spiritual brotherhood and in the course of the twentieth century more than a dozen of disparate ethno-religious groups throughout Africa have started identifying themselves as descendants of Jews. They have developed versions of their tribal history that place them as part of the Jewish Diaspora. African philosemitism is the outcome of a long historical-anthropological process intertwining religious, cultural, and political strands that led, in some African societies to a contemporary symbiosis with Judaism and Jews.

My intention is to examine the multiple sources and reasons for this shaping of modern African philosemitism in a world marked by globalization, political upheaval, economic uncertainty, ecological crises and ethnic and religious conflicts. The seminar—in equal measures chronological and thematic—proposes a tripartite framework through which to characterize the phases of African philosemitism: the meaning and the adaptation of Judaism within African religion, the salient role of Western projections on African identity, the religious, intellectual and political dimensions of the affiliation to Judaism in Africa. All these issues should obviously be examined in the context of processes associated with globalization. At a time when anti-Zionist views and anti-Semitism are on the upsurge in Europe and elsewhere, hundreds of thousands of individuals have chosen to embrace Judaism in geographical areas where it hadn’t traditionally been present – in Africa but also in India and even as far as Papua New Guinea. It is obvious that these diverse phenomena are going to impact on antisemitism stereotypes and prejudices.

Course objectives

The aim of this seminar is to present my research and to establish an open-ended debate on the development of philosemitism in a global context where all the indicators seem to show
a general tendency of being in the opposite direction. It would seem evident to me that the existence of African Jewish communities on such an unexpected scale would provide scope for a whole new field of study into important developments that touch on the evolution of Judaism, notably the elaboration of the concept of a ‘Black Judaism’, just as much as it concerns the religious history of Africa. How does this phenomenon impacts on the anti-Semitic rhetoric?? Will a new black anti-Semitism come into place to aggregate with basic antisemitism? Which concrete political form will take this global trend -- including the political dimension of the absorption of new minorities by Israeli government?

**Required reading**


**Recommended Reading/ Viewing/Listening**


Re-emerging, the Jews of Nigeria, film by Jeff L. Lieberman [http://re-emergingfilm.com/](http://re-emergingfilm.com/)

The Commandment Keepers, film by Marlaine Glicksman; [http://thecommandmentkeeper.com/trailer.htm](http://thecommandmentkeeper.com/trailer.htm)

**Weekly Topics /Themes**
WEEK 1
 Affiliation to Judaism in Africa

WEEK 2
 “African Texts” of the Old Testament

WEEK 3
 Correspondences between African traditions and the Old Testament

WEEK 4
 Africans as Hebrews: The salient role of Western projections on African identity

WEEK 5
 The political aspects of the absorption of African (and other minorities) in Israel