AN285: Coping with Crisis in Contemporary Africa

Professor Parker Shipton     TR 3:30-4:45

Africa, to some, has lately meant crisis. But not everyone in Africa lives an imperiled life of misery, nor are African cultures and societies all on the verge of collapse. In this course we explore challenges of livelihood facing African people, examining the enduring values and novel strategies by which they have sought to avoid, overcome, or transcend them. We focus on wealth and poverty in the region south of the Sahara, a region of remarkable cultural diversity.

This is a course on long-term processes and patterns rather than one on current events. Instead of skipping from disaster to disaster as journalists often do, we look more slowly and deeply into African ways of life and thought, as represented in a few selected settings in more depth, on better times and worse. Observing how wealth and poverty, and ideas about them, weave through the lives of people concerned just as much with other things, we look upon rural African people not just as helpless victims, but also as active planners, managers, and dreamers, sometimes highly successful.