Environment and Development in Africa:
Political Ecologies from Colonial Extraction to Globalization

Gallatin School of Individualized Study
New York University

(Photo: Nigerian Oil Pipeline, Courtesy Reuters UK)

Professor: Rosalind Fredericks
Office: Room 618, 1 Washington Place
Office Hours: Weds. 1-3pm
Contact: rcf2@nyu.edu

Course: IDSEM-UG1648
Semester: Fall 2011
Time: Weds. 3:30-6:10pm
Location: Bobst, Room LL147

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the political ecology of African development in historic perspective. Bringing together empirical and theoretical literature drawn from diverse fields, including: anthropology, geography, environmental history, development studies, and political science, it offers a multi-disciplinary perspective on the politics of African environments. This will allow us to interrogate received wisdoms in order to provide more complex, critical, and nuanced understandings of environment-development linkages on the continent through time. Part 1 focuses on the history of human-environment relations, paying particular attention to the exploitation of the natural environment during colonialism and patterns of extraction and trade set up during that time. In particular, we will compare different “norms and forms” of colonialism—including extractive economies, plantation agriculture, and nature preservation—in light of their implications for development. Building on this history, Part 2 will concentrate on the postcolonial period in order to compare different trajectories of exploitation across Africa and to explore the major debates concerning the degradation, governance, and value of African environments. Specific topics will include: the extractive industries; export agriculture; wildlife conservation and tourism; natural resources and war; Chinese investment and the ‘land grab’; gendered access to resources; and the politics of famine. Whenever possible, the topic at hand will be examined through the lens of a specific country case study. Films and documentaries will be used to complement the written texts.
REQUIREMENTS

- Class attendance, participation, reading responses, and class reading preparation
  - Students are expected to read all assigned materials, attend all classes, and participate actively in discussions. If you are unable to attend class, you must let me know and come to my office hours that week. If you miss a film screened in class, you must view the film in your own time. You will only be allowed one unexcused absence during the semester without penalty. Consistent lateness will be penalized as well.
  - You are expected to post five (5) reading responses of approximately 1 page to the discussion page on Blackboard on the weeks of your choice. The posting should be uploaded no later than 8 pm the evening before. You are expected to follow the discussion each week.
  - Additionally, two students will be asked to help prepare the discussion of one of the assignments each week. This will involve a deep reading of the piece and framing for the class of the key debates and questions.

- Writing Assignments
  The course will be centered on three writing assignments exploring the historic and contemporary politics of the environment in African development:

  **Short Essay #1: The role of natural resources in colonial African development**
  Choose a specific colony or a particular natural resource and analyze its role in the early development trajectory of that region. Length: 3-5 pages (12 pt. font, double-spaced). Due Friday, October 7th.

  **Short Essay #2: Representing African environments**
  Take an image or film that purports to represent African environments or development. Drawing on the readings, build a critique from a political ecology perspective of the specific discourses employed to reveal another view of the problem and its solution. Length: 3-5 pages (12 pt. font, double-spaced). Due Friday, November 11th.

  **Final Research Paper**
  Based on primary and secondary source materials, the final research paper should analyze the postcolonial development trajectory of a specific country in relation to its environmental history. Using a political ecological perspective, the paper should interrogate conventional discourses regarding the relationship between resources and development in that context. It may draw from the first two in exploring same region previously selected or may consider a new region, but should but should connect the historic and contemporary dynamics of one specific location. *Outline:* A one-page outline of your paper will be due about halfway through the semester. *Late policy:* Unless you have received an extension from me (only granted for serious/medical issues), lateness will be penalized as follows: each day that your paper is late, your grade will drop ½ of a grade point (e.g. from a B+ to a B). You are required to inform me if the paper is going to be more than two days late. Due on December 16th.
Course Grades:
Attendance/Participation/Responses/ Reading Prep: 30%
Short paper 1: 15%
Short paper 2: 15%
Final Paper: 40%

OFFICE HOURS and CONTACT

I will hold office hours on Wednesday afternoons from 1-3pm in my office. These will be either on a first come, first serve, or there will be a sign-up sheet on my door. If you are unable to meet during my office hours, email me to schedule a separate meeting.

Email: I am best reached by email at rcf2@nyu.edu. Although I do encourage you to stay in touch with issues of concern, I also urge you to be considerate with your emails. I will do my best to reply within 24 hours.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

READINGS and FILMS

Required readings for the course are listed in the weekly syllabus. All readings are either available at the NYU bookstore, through the library’s electronic resources (with a link on Blackboard), or in the library’s reserves. Additional readings are listed as a starting place for further research for the papers and class discussion.

Required Books


Related Films

The following is a list of some films relevant to the course. They will either be screened in class, or you are encouraged to watch them in your own time. Whenever possible, they have been placed on reserve at the library. Those films in **bold** can be found in Avery-Fisher, some of the others are on order or available on Netflix.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Aiming High</strong></td>
<td><strong>Leaving Home for Sugar</strong> (1986)</td>
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<td><strong>Bamako</strong> (2007)</td>
<td><strong>Sierra Leone’s Refugee All-stars</strong> (2007)</td>
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<td><strong>Burning in the Sun</strong> (2011)</td>
<td><strong>Sweet Crude</strong> (2007)</td>
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<td><strong>Free Markets for Free Men</strong> (1985)</td>
<td><strong>White King, Red Rubber, Black Death</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Diamond Road</strong> (2007)</td>
<td><strong>The Cow Jumped Over the Moon</strong></td>
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<td><strong>When China Met Africa</strong> (2010)</td>
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<td><strong>Water First</strong> (2008)</td>
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<td><strong>Whose Agenda is it Anyway?</strong> (2004)</td>
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COURSE SYLLABUS

Week 1.  **Introduction: The Political Ecology of African Development**  
(September 7)

Film: *Africa: Voyage of Discovery (This Magnificent African Cake)* (1984)

Additional Reading:


THE COLONIAL ERA

Week 2.  **Early Contact and Extractive Economies (Congo)**  
(September 14)


Film: *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death*
Week 3. Peasants, Labor, and Agriculture (Mozambique)  
(September 21)


Week 4. Wildlife, Parks, and Pastoralists (Kenya and Tanzania)  
(September 28)


Additional Reading:


THE POSTCOLONIAL PERIOD

Week 5. Community Conservation, Tourism, and the Politics of Wildlife (Zimbabwe and Tanzania) (October 5)


Film: Milking the Rhino

Additional Readings:
Week 6. Desertification, Deforestation, and the Politics of Environmental Science (West Africa) (October 12)


Films: The Cow Jumped Over the Moon; Double-Bladed Axe; The Farmers of Gaho (1998)

Additional Reading:


Week 7. **Postcolonial Economies 1:** Fish (Lake Victoria)  
 *(October 19)*


Film: *Darwin’s Nightmare*

**Additional Reading:**


Week 8. Postcolonial economies 2: Oil (Nigeria)
(October 26)


Saro-Wiwa, Ken. (Selection, TBA)

Film: Sweet Crude (2007)

Additional Reading:


Week 9. Postcolonial Economies 3: Diamonds (Botswana)
(November 2)


Film: The Diamond Road (2007); Diamonds and Rust (2001)

Additional Reading:


Week 10. War, Natural Resources, and Youth (Sierra Leone)
(November 9)


Films: Diamonds of War: Africa’s Blood Diamonds; Blood Diamonds (History Chanel) (2007)

Additional Reading:


**Week 11. Gender and Access to Resources (The Gambia) (November 16)**


**Additional Reading:**


Week 12. The Politics of Famine (Somalia)
(November 23)

Additional Readings:
Aljazeera program on the famine in Somalia.
Watts, Michael. Silent Violence.

Films: The Perfect Famine (2002), The Quiet Revolution; Sowing Seeds of Hunger (2008); The Price of Aid

Week 13. Chinese Investments and the ‘Land Grab’ (Zambia)
(November 30)
Carmody, Pádraig and Godfrey Hampwaye. 2010. “Inclusive or Exclusive Globalization?
Zambia's Economy and Asian Investment.” *Africa Today* vol. 56, no. 3 (Spring 2010), p. 84. [Bboard]

Film: *When China Met Africa*

*Additional Reading:*


Rice, Andrew. 2009. “Is there such a Thing as Agro-Imperialism?” *New York Times Magazine*


*Week 14. The City (Nigeria and Zimbabwe)*

(December 7)


Film: *Welcome to Lagos*; Amnesty International Film on Operation Murambatsvina

*Additional Readings:*


**Week 15. Wrap-up**

*December 14*