Environment and Development in Africa:
Political Ecologies from the Colonial Era to the Postcolony

Gallatin School of Individualized Study
New York University

Professor: Rosalind Fredericks
Office: Room 618, 1 Washington Place
Office Hours: Tues. 3:30-6:30; Weds. 2-3pm
Contact: rcf2@nyu.edu

Course: IDSEM-UG1648
Semester: Fall 2012
Time: Weds. 3:30-6:10pm
Location: Room 205, 194 Mercer

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the political ecologies 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 an inter-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. The first part of the course 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, we will then concentrate on the postcolonial period in order to compare different trajectories of exploitation across Africa and to explore the major debates concerning the development, governance, and valuation of African environments. Specific topics will include: the extractive industries; export agriculture; wildlife conservation and tourism; Asian investments and the ‘land grab’; and urban ecologies. Most topics will be examined through the lens of a specific country case study. Films will be used to complement the written texts.
REQUIREMENTS

• Class attendance, reading responses, and discussion
  o You 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 it in your own time. You will only be allowed one unexcused absence during the semester without penalty. Consistent lateness will be penalized as well.
  o 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 8pm the evening before. It should: summarize the thrust of the readings, provide specific critical reflection drawing closely from the texts, and raise questions for class discussion. You are expected to follow the Blackboard posts each week.
  o Additionally, two students will be assigned to each week’s discussion. For your week, you will be expected to do a deep read of the texts as well as some contextualizing background research into the country under consideration. You will be asked to help frame the key questions raised by the readings and present some background on context.

• 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 one of the colonial natural resource extraction regimes considered in the first part of the course and analyze its role in the early development trajectory of that region. Length: 3-5 pages (12 pt. font, double-spaced). Due Friday, October 12th.

  Short Essay #2: Representing postcolonial African environments
  Take an image or film that purports to represent one of the postcolonial dynamics considered in class. Drawing on the class 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 16th.

  Final Research Paper
  Based on primary and secondary source materials, analyze the postcolonial development trajectory of a specific African 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. Though it may concentrate on a particularly dominant economic sector or natural resource dynamic, it should give an overview of the country’s development trajectory, including all important sectors, and should take into account the key political, cultural, social, and geopolitical factors at play. You may not consider a specific postcolonial economy that we have covered in class. 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 1/2 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. Length: 10-15 pages (12 pt. font, double-spaced). **Outline:** A one-page (ungraded) outline of your paper is due on or before November 28th. **Paper Due:** Thursday, December 13th.

**Course Grades:**
- Attendance/Participation/Responses/ Discussion Prep: 30%
- Short paper 1: 15%
- Short paper 2: 15%
- Final Paper: 40%

**OFFICE HOURS and CONTACT**

I will hold office hours on Tuesday from 3:30-6:30 and Wednesday from 2-3pm in my office by appointment. You can sign up for office hours here: [http://goo.gl/5i46R](http://goo.gl/5i46R). 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](http://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, Shakespeare & Co., 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 online.

*Aiming High*  
*An African Election* (2011)  
*Bamako* (2007)  
*Burning in the Sun* (2011)  
*Clouds over Conakry* (2011)  
*Commanding Heights* (2006)  
*Congo in Four Acts* (2010)  
*Crude: The Real Price of Oil* (2008)  
*Darwin’s Nightmare* (2004)  
*Diamands and Rust* (2001)  
*Free Markets for Free Men* (1985)  
*Garbage Dreams* (2009)  
*Good Copper, Bad Copper* (2011)  
*J’y Crois (I Believe in It)* (2004)  
*Milking the Rhino* (2009)  
*Diamonds of War: Africa’s Blood Diamonds*  
*Diamon Road* (2007)  
*Blood Diamonds (History Chanel)* (2007)  
*Double-Bladed Axe* (2010)  
*Leaving Home for Sugar* (1986)  
*Our Friends at the Bank* (1997)  
*Sierra Leone’s Refugee All-stars* (2007)  
*Sowing Seeds of Hunger* (2008)  
*Sweet Crude* (2007)  
*The Price of Gold* (1992)  
*T-Shirt Travels* (2001)  
*The Price of Sugar* (2007)  
*White King, Red Rubber, Black Death*  
*The Perfect Famine* (2002)  
*The Quiet Revolution* (2006)  
*The Cow Jumped Over the Moon*  
*Tea Fortunes* (1986)  
*Zambie: A Qui Profite le Cuivre?* (2011)  
*When China Met Africa* (2010)  
*Water First* (2008)  
*Whose Agenda is it Anyway?* (2004)
Week 1.  Introduction: Political Ecologies of African Development  
(September 5)


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

Additional Reading:


Week 2.  Early Contact and Extractive Economies (Congo)  
(September 12)


Film: *Congo: White King, Red Rubber, Black Death*

Week 3.  Forest Policy and Decentralization (Senegal)  
(September 19)

Guest Lecture with Professor Jesse Ribot, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.


Films: *Weex Dunx* and *Semmiñ Naari Boor*

**Additional Reading:**


**Week 4. Peasants, Labor, and Struggle in Colonial Agriculture (Mozambique)**

*(September 26)*


**Week 5. Wildlife, Parks, and Pastoralists in the Colonial Era (Kenya and Tanzania)**

*(October 3)*


**Additional Reading:**


**Week 6. Rubber, Science, and American Empire (Liberia) (October 10)**


**Additional Reading:**

Week 7. Community Conservation, Tourism, and the Politics of Wildlife (Zimbabwe and Tanzania) 
(October 17)


Film: Milking the Rhino

Additional Readings:


Taylor, Russell. 2009. “Community based natural resource management in Zimbabwe: the experience of
CAMPFIRE.” *Biodiversity and Conservation* 18: 2563–2583.


**Week 8. Fish, Ecology, and Global Commodity Chains (Lake Victoria)**

(*October 24*)


Film: *Darwin’s Nightmare*

**Additional Reading:**


Week 9.  Petro-Violence (Nigeria)  
(October 31)


Saro-Wiwa, Ken. (Selections)

Film: *Sweet Crude* (2007)

Additional Reading:

*Economies of Violence: Niger Delta* UC Berkeley webpage:  
http://oldweb.geog.berkeley.edu/ProjectsResources/ND%20Website/NigerDelta/index.html


Week 10.  

**Diamonds, Cattle, and the ‘Developmental’ State (Botswana)**

*(November 7)*


**Additional Reading:**


Week 11.  

**Boom and Bust on the Copperbelt (Zambia)**

*(November 9)*


Fraser, Alistair and Miles Larner.  2010. *Zambia, Mining and Neoliberalism: boom and bust on the globalized Copperbelt.* Palgrave MacMillan. *(Selections)*

**Film:** *Zambia: Good Copper, Bad Copper* *(2011)*

**Additional Reading:**


Week 12.  

**Asian Investments and the ‘Land Grab’ (Sudan)**

*(November 14)*


Film: When China Met Africa

Additional Reading:


Farmlandgrab.org Website, resources on Sudan: http://farmlandgrab.org/cat/show/737


Week 13. Thanksgiving Holiday  
(November 21)

Because of the holiday, we will not hold class this week. We will make up for the class through another required Africa-related event (TBA).

Week 14. Gender and Access to Resources (The Gambia)  
(November 28)


*Additional Reading:*


**Week 15. Urban Ecologies and Garbage (Senegal and Nigeria)**

*(December 5)*

*Readings TBA.*