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

Artisanal Mining in Congo (Source: Wall Street Journal)

Gallatin School of Individualized Study  
New York University

Professor: Rosalind Fredericks  
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Course: IDSEM-UG1648  
Semester: Fall 2016  
Time: Tues. 2:00-4:45pm  
Location: Room 508, Silver

**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, history, development studies, and political science, it offers an interdisciplinary 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 compare different trajectories of exploitation across Africa in the postcolonial period and explore the major debates concerning the development, governance, and valuation of African environments. Specific topics will include: the extractive industries; export agriculture; wildlife tourism; Asian investments and the ‘land grab’; “conflict” minerals; and urban ecologies. Most topics will be examined through the lens of a specific country case study surrounding a particular commodity or resource. Films will complement the written texts.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

• To hone critical analytical skills for exploring the dynamic intersections between environment and development

• To critique simplistic mainstream explanations for African “underdevelopment” using sophisticated historical and political analyses grounded in specific cases

• To gain a working understanding of the different “norms and forms” of colonialism in Africa and a detailed understanding of a handful of examples of how these colonial legacies played out within specific African countries

• To be able to explain key (economic, social, cultural, political) dynamics shaping postcolonial African development across the continent and develop a detailed understanding of specific case studies

• To develop an deep understanding of a specific contemporary African political ecology through individualized research on a top of special interest

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 NYU Classes 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 your classmates’ posts each week.

• 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 Sunday, October 16th.

  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 Sunday, November 13th.

**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). Paper Due: Sunday, December 11th.

**Course Grades:**
- Attendance/Participation/Responses: 25%
- Short paper 1: 20%
- Short paper 2: 20%
- Final Paper: 35%

**OFFICE HOURS and CONTACT**

I will hold office hours on Wednesdays from 12-4pm, 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, through the library’s electronic resources (with a link on NYU Classes), or in the library’s reserves. Additional readings are listed as a starting place for further research for the papers and class discussion.

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. Many of these films can be found in the library’s Avery-Fisher Center, and some are available online.

Africa: Voyage of Discovery (1984)
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)
Diamonds and Rust (2001)
Free Markets for Free Men (1985)
Garbage Dreams (2009)
Good Copper, Bad Copper (2011)
Hidden Flow, the Rising Tide of European E-Waste in West Africa (2008)
J’y Crois (I Believe in It) (2004)
Liberia: America’s Stepchild (2002)
Milking the Rhino (2009)
Diamonds of War: Africa’s Blood Diamonds
Diamond Road (2007)
Blood Diamonds (History Channel) (2007)
Double-Bladed Axe (2010)

Lagos/Koolhaas (2003)
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 Aid (2004)
The Farmers of Gaho (1998)
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 Trade Trap (2003)
The Quiet Revolution (2006)
The Cow Jumped Over the Moon
Tea Fortunes (1986)
Zambia: 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 6)


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

Additional Reading:

Week 2.  Early Contact and Extractive Economies (Congo)
(September 13)


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

Week 3.  Peasants, Labor, and Struggle in Colonial Agriculture (Mozambique)
(September 20)


Additional Reading:

Week 4.  
**Wildlife, Parks, and Pastoralists in the Colonial Era (Kenya and Tanzania)**  
(*September 27*)


Additional Reading:

Week 5.  
**Rubber, Science, and American Empire (Liberia)**  
(*October 4*)


Film: *Liberia: America’s Stepchild*

**Additional Reading:**


**FALL BREAK: October 11 (NO CLASS)**

**Week 6.** *The Cultural Politics of Safari Tourism (Tanzania)* *(October 18)*


Film: *Milking the Rhino*

**Additional Readings:**


Week 7. Artisanal Mining: Nature and Religion (West Africa)  
(October 25)

Guest lecture with Professor Robyn D’Avignon (NYU History)
Readings TBA

Week 8. Petro-Violence (Nigeria)  
(November 1)


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 9. Fish, Ecology, and Global Commodity Chains (Lake Victoria) (November 8)


Film: Darwin's Nightmare

Additional Reading:


Week 10. **Diamonds, Bushmen, and the ‘Developmental’ State (Botswana)**  
(November 15)


**Additional Reading:**

Week 11. **Asian Agricultural Investments and the ‘Land Grab’ (Zambia)**  
(November 22)


**Additional Reading:**
- French, Howard. 2014. *China’s Second Continent: How a Million Migrants are Building a New Empire in Africa.* Knopf.

Film: *When China Met Africa*

Week 12. **The Promise and Pitfalls of Fair Trade: The Case of Wine (South Africa)**  
(November 29)


*Additional Reading:*


**Week 13. **Ecologies and Garbage (Senegal)

* (December 6)

*Readings TBA*

**Week 14. **Wrap-Up

* (December 13)