Syllabus

Geography 475/575 Africa: Politics, Development, and Environment

Prof. Peter Walker, Winter 2015

From Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* to the present crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan, the continent that is now composed of 47 independent African nations has long been seen as a place of despair—a place of suffering, poverty, hunger, disease, violence, and environmental crisis. Despite—or perhaps because of—repeated Western interventions (from colonialism to modern ‘development’), Africa is the only region in recent decades to show a decline in indicators of human development. Some international development organizations have “written off” Africa—a continent consigned to the dust bin of history.

Yet the general public in the West is often unaware that Africa also has a rich history, and extraordinarily diverse, vibrant, and dynamic cultures and societies. In the 1990s no other continent saw more dramatic improvements in human rights, political freedom, and economic development in some countries—from the overthrowing of apartheid in South Africa to the revitalization of economies in countries such as Ghana and Uganda. Although development and environmental challenges are real, African societies have proven their capacity to survive, and sometimes thrive, against the odds. Thus, today, Africa is caught between despair and hope. This course will explore what’s ‘wrong’ and what’s *right* with Africa, and examine why Africa has emerged as a place of such deep contrasts between crisis and hope.

The course is organized around two broad themes. The first sketches in broad terms the history and development of African societies, with emphasis on *Africa South of the Sahara* desert, from the advent of the colonial period in the 19th century to the present. The course examines how history has shaped the contemporary political, social, and cultural dimensions of development and environmental challenges today. The second theme explores specific topics in development and environment. These will include discussions of Africa’s place in the global economy, the impacts of debt and structural adjustment, the causes of hunger and famine, problems of conservation and environment, women in development, the HIV/AIDS crisis, and prospects for democratization and reform.

Course requirements: *No prior coursework in African geography is required.* The course grade will be based on two short essay assignments (20% each), attendance and participation (20%), and a 10-page research paper due during finals week (40%). The course uses four main texts: 1) *Africa South of the Sahara*, Second Edition (2004) by Robert Stock; 2) *Black Man’s Burden* (1993) by Basil Davidson; 3) *Citizen and Subject* (1996) by Mahmood Mamdani; and 4) *Global Shadows* (2006) by James Ferguson. These books are available at the UO Bookstore. The course will also use a selection of individual readings that will be available on Blackboard.
Short essay assignments:

For each essay assignment you will be asked to synthesize (weave together) ideas from required and additional readings for one or more class themes. You must include the required readings plus at least one book or two articles or book chapters from the lists of additional readings or any other relevant readings that you find on your own, with approval from either the professor. For example, if you choose to write about the theme of ‘How the West sees Africa’ (Lecture 3, January 15), you must read the required readings plus one book such as Out of Africa, or The Heart of Darkness; or you must read two articles such as 'Waiting for Oprah' and any article on Africa from National Geographic (or, anything else you find, with advanced approval).

If you choose, you may write on two different themes if you think they relate to each other (you may reduce the additional readings on each theme to one article).

The short essays must be no more than 5 1/2 pages and no less than four pages. The essays must answer the following questions:

1. What are the key ideas presented by each of the authors? (be very, very brief—a paragraph or two for each reading)
2. How do these readings relate to each other—are they saying the same things, or different things? Are they contradictory or complementary? (keep to one page or less)
3. How does your greater knowledge of your chosen theme help you to better understand other themes discussed in the class? For example, if you choose the theme 'Western views of Africa' (Lecture 3, January 15), how does this relate to our readings and discussion of, say, Precolonial Africa (Lecture 4, January 17? Are our Western views consistent with the realities of precolonial Africa, or have Western views distorted those realities? In what specific ways? This discussion should be the bulk of your paper, 3-4 pages, and it must specifically cite the articles or books you read (for example: "Isak Dinesan's portrayal of colonial Africa is misleading because...").
4. Extra credit: How does your discussion help explain recent news stories from Africa?

These essays are asking you to be a critical thinker. That means you must put the pieces of knowledge that we collect together in your own, original way that is 'greater than the sum of the parts,' and doesn't simply accept the 'conventional wisdom.' You will be graded based on how well you demonstrate that you’ve read and understood the ideas from the readings, and how well you put the pieces together in a way that shows your own thinking. But remember, you must clearly demonstrate that your own thinking is supported by facts presented in the readings and you must appropriately identify the sources of your information. This is an exercise in critical, informed thinking—not simply a chance to give your opinions. In critical writing, opinions are fine if they are clearly informed by facts and arguments—even if you don't agree with them—presented by other scholars.
Term paper:

The final project for this class consists of a 10-page term paper that explores one or more of the topics covered in the second half of the course ('Africa in the global economy', 'Debt and Structural adjustment', 'Hunger and famine', 'Conservation & environment', 'Women in development', 'The HIV/AIDS crisis', 'Conservation & environment', and 'Democratization'). The basic idea of the term paper is the same as the short essays: you should choose one of these topics (or another topic you choose, with approval from the professor) and develop a greater knowledge of it using additional readings (from the syllabus or others approved by your instructors). However, for the term paper, you must relate the topic you choose to our discussions of African history and society as presented in the first half of the course (Lectures 1 through 10). For example, if you choose the topic 'Women in development,' you must relate your discussion to one or more of the themes from Lecture 1 to Lecture 10—such as 'The legacy of colonialism' (in this example, you might explore the ways colonialism re-shaped the role of women in Africa society). Again, the idea is to critically synthesize, or integrate, ideas from different parts of the course to show how the picture that emerges is 'greater than the sum of the parts.' You should include critical discussion of the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the analysis presented in our readings.

For the term paper, you are encouraged to explore other readings beyond those on the lists of 'Additional readings,' but remember to get approval from the professor first. For the term paper you must read at least two additional books or four additional articles. You must summarize and critically evaluate these readings in your term paper, specifically citing the authors by name. Extra credit will be given for relating to current news items from Africa.

Special note for graduate students: Written assignments for graduate students will be different, and will be based on the status and individual needs of each graduate. You must meet with the professor to discuss these requirements not later than the third week of the course.

Attendance and participation:

Attendance and participation are a major part of your grade (20%). Good attendance means getting to class on time and not skipping class unless you have a documented medical or family emergency or you have made prior arrangements with the professor. In this class we will make every effort to start on time and finish on time—please do not disrupt class by coming late or packing up to leave early. If you must come late or leave early, make sure you have told the professor in advance.

Participation means making a sincere effort to contribute to the overall quality of the learning experience for yourself and others in the class. First, this means coming to class having read all readings for that day. It becomes obvious to the professor who is really reading and who is not—no student who does not do the readings will do well in this course, guaranteed. If you have fully prepared and read all assigned readings, you will do well in the course, guaranteed! Also, There will be people with different levels of experience, so people with less experience should remember that they are not alone, and there really is no such thing as a 'dumb question.' If you are confused, or just not following, make sure to ask for more clarification—other students will thank you! And so will your professor. For students with more experience, remember that there are those who may know less than you, so please avoid questions that are likely to go 'over the heads' of others. Showing off doesn't get 'points.' Contributing to the discussion in a way that helps everyone in the class does.
PART ONE: AFRICAN HISTORY AND SOCIETY

Lecture 2, January 10: Socioeconomic trends in modern Africa

Videos: Hopes on the Horizon

Required readings:


Reading questions: 1) What is the trajectory of Africa in terms of human development (forward, backward, standing still)? 2) What is the position of Africa relative to other regions of the world? 3) What are the positive, as well as negative signs? 4) What are the most critical concerns?

Lecture 3, January 15: How the West sees Africa

Reading questions: 1) How do popular images and myths shape the ways the West understands and interacts with Africa? 2) Why were these myths created? 3) Do they still exist today?

Required readings:

Stock, Africa South of the Sahara (2004), Ch. 2, pp. 28-39

Videos: Africa: A Voyage of Discovery; Tarzan of the Apes

Additional readings:


Conrad, Joseph. Heart of Darkness. (on early European views of the 'dark continent') Excerpts available online at: http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Literature/Conrad/HeartOfDarkness/

Dinesen, Isak. 1938. Out of Africa. (on the colonial view of Africa)


National Geographic: almost anything on Africa: http://www.nationalgeographic.com/africa/

Lecture 4, January 17: Precolonial Africa
Required readings:


Reading questions: How did conditions of precolonial Africa shape its history, and its future?

Additional readings:


Lecture 5, January 22: *Africa under colonialism*

Question: Why was Africa colonized; what were the key characteristics of the colonial system? Video: *Africa: voyage of discovery,* Tape 3: The Bible and the Gun

Required readings:

Stock, *Africa South of the Sahara* (2004), Ch. 8, pp. 117-131


Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. *Citizen and subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism.* Princeton studies in

Additional readings:


Lecture 6, January 24: Africa under colonialism (cont.)

Video: Africa: voyage of discovery, Tape 3: This Magnificent African Cake

Required readings:


1/25 FIRST ESSAY DUE BY 5:00 IN PROFESSOR WALKER’S BOX, 107 CONDON

Lecture 7, January 29: Independence

Question: Why did independence happen, and what was the nature of the independence movements (who was represented? who was not? what was the vision for the future?)
Video: Africa: a voyage of discovery, Tape 4: The Rise of Nationalism; The Legacy

Required readings:

Stock, Africa South of the Sahara (2004), Ch. 9, pp. 132-133


Additional reading:


Lecture 8, January 31: Legacy of colonialism—Focus on the Rwanda Genocide

Question: Why did the genocide happen? To what degree was it rooted in colonial history? Video: Forsaken Cries (Amnesty International) Required readings:
Gourevitch, Philip. 1998. *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: stories from Rwanda.* 1st ed. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux. Ch. 4, pp. 47-62


Additional reading:


Uvin, Peter. 1998. *Aiding violence: the development enterprise in Rwanda*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian. Ch. 1, pp. 13-18; Ch. 2, pp. 19-39; Ch. 6, pp. 109-139; Ch. 7, pp. 141-160

**Lecture 9, February 5: Legacy of colonialism—focus on Darfur**


**Lecture 10, February 7: The crisis of the African state**

*Question*: In what ways have African governments ‘failed’? Why did this happened?

*Required readings*:


independence: ‘Real’ and ‘Pseudo-’ nation-states and the depoliticization of poverty’ and Ch. 4, “Transnational topographies of power: beyond ‘the state’ and ‘civil society’ in the study of African politics”

Additional readings:


FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 8: 2ND PAPER DUE IN PROF. WALKER’S BOX BY 5:00 IN 107 CONDON

PART II: TOPICS Lecture 11, February 12: Africa in the global economy


Additional readings:


Lecture 12, February 14, Debt and Structural adjustment

Question: In what ways is 'structural adjustment' re-shaping African society, and its future?

Video: The Moneylenders (2000)

Required readings:


**Additional readings:**

Amponsah, Nicholas 2000. "Ghana’s Mixed Structural Adjustment Results: Explaining the Poor Private Sector Response," *Africa Today* 47(2) Spring: p. 9(24) (available online at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/africa_today/toc/at47.2.html)


**Lecture 13, February 19: Hunger & famine**

**Question:** Why do so many Africans go hungry? How is this related to Africa’s social history?

**Video:** *The perfect famine* (Bullfrog Films 2002), or *The quiet revolution*

**Required readings:** Stock, *Africa South of the Sahara* (2004), Ch. 15, pp. 224-238


**Additional readings:**


Lecture 14, February 21: Conservation & environment

Question: In what ways does conservation in Africa reflect Western preconceptions? How does it relate to social and economic development?

Required readings:

Stock, Africa South of the Sahara (2004), Ch. 6, pp. 85-97


Additional readings:


Lecture 15, February 26: Conservation & environment (cont.)

Question: In what ways does conservation in Africa pose ethical questions?

Required readings:


Lecture 16, February 28: Women in development

Question: How are women’s rights and development related to each other? Video: Gender Matters (Open University/BBC, 1992)

Required readings:


Additional readings:
Lecture 17, March 4: The HIV/AIDS crisis

Question: What are the social causes and effects of AIDS? How can an understanding of these social causes and effects be used to help solve the crisis?

Required readings:


Chs.1,2, 7, 8,9

Additional reading:


**Lecture 18, March 6: Globalization, development & environment**

**Question:** How is Africa’s position in the global economy related to its (under)development, and how does this affect the environment?

**Video:** *Up in Smoke* (Bullfrog Films 2002)

**Required readings:**


**Recommended readings:**

Lecture 19, March 11: Democratization

Question: What has ‘democratization’ in Africa meant in practice? What are the limitations; what is the way ahead?

Required readings:


Additional readings:


Lecture 20, March 13: Hopes on the horizon

Video: Hopes on the Horizon (continued)

Required readings:


Recommended readings:


TERM PAPERS DUE WEDS., MARCH 19, NOT LATER THAN 5:00PM IN PROF. WALKER’S BOX IN 107 CONDON Have a great Spring Break!

Africa news links: AfricaOnline:

http://www.africaonline.com/site/index.jsp AllAfrica.com:

http://allafrica.com/ BBC News:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/africa/ CNN Africa

County Specific pages: http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Home_Page/Country.html


http://nytimes.com/pages/world/africa/index.html University of Wisconsin Africa links:

http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/afrst/links.html