History 301 (Section 2)

FOOD AND FAMINE IN AFRICAN HISTORY

Fall 2001

Professor Holly Hanson
314 Skinner, Mount Holyoke College
Hhanson@mtholyoke.edu

Class Time: Mondays, 1-3:50, Skinner 212
Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursdays 10:30-12:30
office phone: 538-2094 home phone 493-1716

Course Objectives

In this seminar, we explore the processes of historical change that have led to famines and "food crisis" in modern Africa. We will explore the links between famine, drought, and the social and political organization of entitlement to food using case studies of specific famines. We will examine African patterns of production over the long term and the transformation of African food systems in the last century. We will use this framework as a basis for analyzing current development and environmental management strategies: why do they fail, and what has to change in order for them to become more effective? These are difficult questions, and the course requires disciplined, diligent attention to sources ranging from historical geography to political economy.

Course Requirements and Procedures

1. Evaluation in this seminar will be based primarily on your written preparation for each class and your contribution to a productive discussion that engages fully with assigned readings. A reaction paper analyzing each set of readings is due in my office by 10:30 am Monday. You may also email it to me as an attachment.

Reaction papers should briefly recapitulate the main arguments of the reading, should relate those readings to the themes of the class as they develop, should comment on connections between the various readings in one assignment, and should note possible directions for class discussion that arise from the reading. A reaction paper should not be longer than two typed double-spaced pages of text. Since a reaction paper is intended to be a tool for discussion of a set of readings, no late reaction papers will be accepted.

Each class session (reaction paper and discussion participation) counts as approximately 10% of the final grade. (Grade on one class and reaction paper will be dropped).

2. Productive discussions are not automatic. They require a clear sense of purpose, an attitude of respect, and a commitment to the productivity of the whole group on the part of all participants. In this seminar, our purpose is understanding each of the readings, and using them to make sense of a set of tremendously serious world problems. We cannot have productive discussions unless everyone comes to class well-prepared. We will need to develop the ability to clearly articulate differences of opinion, and to base arguments on evidence rather than feelings. I expect each participant to approach each discussion with a sense of responsibility for the learning of the whole group. As the semester progresses, we will evaluate and attempt to enhance our ability to work together to create productive discussions.

The following texts are available at the Odyssey Bookshop and are on reserve. Other readings can be found in the library.

Sara Berry, No Condition is Permanent: the Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa
David Uru Iyam, The Broken Hoe: Cultural Reconfiguration in Biase Southeast Nigeria
Gregory Maddox et al., Custodians of the Land: Ecology and Culture in the History of Tanzania
Landeg White, Magomero: Portrait of a Village

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September 10. Introduction
Economic Terms
Flora Nwapa, Cassava Song and Rice Song, 1-73.

September 17. Starting in the Present: The Social Context of Production and Exchange in Biase

- Sara Berry, No Condition is Permanent: The Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa, pp. 1-18.
- David Uru Iyam, The Broken Hoe: Cultural Reconfiguration in Biase Southeast Nigeria, pp. 1-219.

Please consider: How is Berry's argument regarding access to productive resources through social networks evident in Iyam's description of Biase? How has production and exchange of food changed over time in Biase? What constrains prosperity – what do people have, and what do they lack, according to Iyam? according to themselves?

September 24: The Social Context of Hunger: Famine as Food Entitlement Collapse in Bengal and Malawi

- Amartya K. Sen, Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation, pp. 1-8, 39-35.
- Megan Vaughan, The Story of an African famine, pp. 1-165.

Please consider: Who lost their entitlement to food in the 1948 famines in Bengal and Malawi, and why? What did the famine reveal about social networks in Malawi and what impact did it have on social relationships? Pay careful attention to tables, maps and graphs, use the glossary and the index of Vaughan to keep track of agricultural forms, etc., which she describes.

October 1: African Environments and Conflicts over Knowledge: Who Defines Crisis, and with What Consequences?

- Sharon E. Nicholson, "Climate, Drought, and Famine in Africa, in Art Hansen and Della E. McMillan, eds., Food in Sub-Saharan Africa, pp. 107-128.
- Jeremy Swift, "Desertification: Narratives, Winners and Losers", in Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns, eds., The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment, pp. 3-90.
- Allan Hoben, "The Cultural Construction of Environmental Policy: Paradigms and Politics in Ethiopia", in Leach and Mearns, pp. 186-208.
- Paul Richards, Indigenous Agricultural Revolution: Ecology and food production in West Africa, pp. 41-84.
- William M. Adams and David M. Anderson, "Irrigation Before Development: Indigenous and Induced Change in Agricultural Water Management in East Africa, African Affairs, pp. 519-535.

Please consider: How do Nicholson, Swift, and Hoben disagree with commonly accepted perceptions of drought, desertification, and environmental crisis in Africa? What power relationships are evident in the interactions they describe? Pay close attention to graphs, tables, and maps. How do Richards and Adams understand African knowledge about agriculture?

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October 8: Pre-colonial Forms of Ecological Control and Agricultural Knowledge

Maddox, et. al., Custodians of the Land, pp. 1-14, 67-151, 171-199.

- James Giblin and Gregory Maddox. "Introduction : Custodians of the Land
- Isaria N. Kimambo "Environmental Control and Hunger"
- Christopher Conte, "Nature Reorganized"
- James Giblin, The Precolonial Politics of Disease Control"
- Michele Wagner, "Environment, Community and History"

Please consider: What systems of ecological control did Tanzanians create, and what were the social and political elements of those systems?

October 15: **The Arrogance of Intervention: Europeans in Malawi, 1850-1985**

Landeg White, Magomero, entire.

Please consider: What assumptions did foreigners make about the people of Magomero and their productive capacity? How do these assumptions change (or not change) over time? How does agricultural production change in this period: in what is produced? in political and social structures that govern production, including gender structures?

Read this book looking for broad patterns, not details. Use the index to find definitions of terms (which are sometimes introduced before they are defined). It may be helpful to make a glossary, and the glossary to Vaughan may also be useful).

October 22: **The Power to Disrupt: Early Colonial Rule and Food Production**

- Thaddeus Sunseri, "Famine and Wild Pigs: Gender Struggles and the Outbreak of the Maji Maji War in Uzaramo (Tanzania), Journal of African History, 38 (1997) pp. 235-259.
- Jane I. Guyer, "The Food Economy and French Colonial Rule in Central Cameroun," Journal of African History, 19 (1978), pp. 577-597.
- John Tosh, "Lango Agriculture During the Early Colonial Period: Land and Labour in a Cash-Crop Economy," Journal of African History, XIX 3 (1978), 415-439.
- Sara Berry, No Condition is Permanent, 22-66.

Recommended Reading:

- Juhani Koponen, "Population" in Maddox et. al., Custodians of the Land, pp. 15-42.

Please do this reading in two parts. First, read Sunseri, Guyer, and Tosh. Then, read Berry. Regarding Sunseri, Guyer, and Tosh, please consider: How are patterns of food production disrupted by colonial interventions? Specifically, what changes in the social dimensions of production? How are power relations changed **inside** of Lango, Uzaramo, and Central Camerounian societies? Regarding Berry, please consider: How, exactly, did colonial regimes attempt to influence African patterns of production (including use of land and labor), and what were the actual consequences of their actions? What does Berry consider to be the most significant consequence of post-colonial development efforts, and why?

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October 29: Conflict over the Social Meanings of Land, Markets, and Law

- Berry, pp. 67-134.
- Martin Chanock, "A Peculiar Sharpness: an Essay on Property in the History of Customary Law in Colonial Africa," Journal of African History, 32 (1991) pp. 65-88.
- Steven Feierman, "The Struggle over Erosion Control: Women's Farming and the Politics of Subsistence," Peasant Intellectuals, pp. 181-203.
- Jamie Monson, "Canoe-building Under Colonialism" in Maddox et al., Custodians of the Land, pp. 200-212.
- Holly Hanson, "Showing the Land, Survey and Registration: Mechanisms for Land Transfer in Buganda Fifty Years after the Individualization of Tenure, pp. 1-11.
- Thomas Spear, "Struggles for the Land: The Political and Moral Economies of Land on Mount Meru," in Maddox, et. al., Custodians of the Land, pp. 213-240.

Please consider: What were the social and moral dimensions of access to resources in the societies described in these works? How did colonial interventions affect those social and moral systems, and what was the result? How do Berry and Chanock disagree?

November 5: Labor, Women's Time, and the Social Relations of Production Constraints

- Berry, 135-201.
- Ann Whitehead, "Rural Women and Food Production in Sub-Saharan Africa," in Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, eds., The Political Economy of Hunger, pp., 425-473.
- Catharine Newbury, "Ebutumwa Bw'Emiogo: The Tyranny of Cassava, A Women's Tax Revolt in Eastern Zaire, 35-54.

Please consider: Why is farmer's time the most important consideration in African agricultural production? What changes over the past fifty years have caused this circumstance? How do Whitehead and Newbury elucidate Berry's argument?

November 9 – 11 Please attend the Youth in Africa Conference at Amherst College.
Professor Mamadou Diof, Keynote Lecture, 4:00 pm November 9, Converse Hall
other events on November 10 and 11, to be announced

November 12: NO CLASS

November 19: Famine Case Study—Ethiopia

- Amartya Sen, "The Ethiopian Famine", Poverty and Famines, 86-112.
- Dessalegn Rahmato, Famine and Survival Strategies: A Case Study from Northeast Ethiopia, pp. 47-247.

Please read Rahmato first, and remember to pay careful attention to graphs, maps, and tables. Please consider: why did people experience hunger in Wollo in 1973 and 1984-85? What did people do to cope with hunger? What ought to change to prevent famine like these from re-occuring?

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November 26: Famine Case Study—The Sahel

- Amartya Sen, "Drought and Famine in the Sahel", Poverty and Famines, pp. 113-130.
- Cynthia White, "Increased Vulnerability to Food Shortages among Fulani Nomads in Niger," in The Political Economy of African Famine, R. E. Downs, Donna O. Kerner, and Stephen P. Reyna, eds., pp. 123-145.

Please consider: how has commercialization affected food entitlement in the Sahel?

November 31: **Development and Power**

- James Ferguson, "Development and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho," Majid Rahnema, ed., The Post-Development Reader, pp. 223-233
- James Ferguson, The anti-politics machine: "Development," depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho, pp. 251-288.
- James C. Scott, "Compulsory Villagization in Tanzania: Aesthetics and Miniaturization," Seeing Like a State, pp. 223-261.

Video: Burden on the Land

Please consider, using not only these readings but those of the entire semester, to what degree does the ability to wield power determine production? Where would changes be necessary in order for development to not have "anti-politics" outcomes?

December 3: Development and Debt and Power

- Africa Action, "Africa's Debt" Position Paper http://www.africapolicy.org/action/debtpos.htm
- Mahmood Mamdani, "Democratization and Marketization," Kidane Mengisteab and B. Ikubolajeh Logan, eds., Beyond Economic Liberalization in Africa: Structural Adjustment and the Alternatives, pp. 17-22.
- Colin Leys, Development Theory and the African Tragedy," The Rise and Fall of Development Theory, pp. 188-196
- The World Bank, Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?, pp. 1-5 (summary).
  summary at: http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/canafricaclaim.pdf
  whole document http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/canafricaclaim.pdf (it is also on reserve.)
- Africa Action analysis of the World Bank report: http://www.africapolicy.org/docs00/ar0011.htm

Please consider: what is the logic of the World Bank's report? How is the Bank answering criticism that development assistance benefits the North? What kind of debt-relief do you feel is appropriate, and what evidence (not emotion) supports your opinion?

December 10: The Development Project Evaluation Game and Course Evaluations