

**East African environmental history: Environment, migration, identity.**

History 344  
Felicitas Becker

Spring 2007, Burnaby campus

**COURSE OUTLINE**

Within Africa, the East African region (broadly defined, to include the Horn of Africa) contains one of the most stable and best-documented societies of the continent (Ethiopia), as well as the apparently transient, barely documented societies of the Tanzanian plains and highlands. The region is considered the origin of mankind, but parts of it were until recently very sparsely populated. Nevertheless, it was home to a remarkable variety of ways of life, including different types of agricultural society as well as migrant herders and hunter-gatherers. Its coast has been in contact with other shores of the Indian Ocean for millennia, but parts of the interior were in the nineteenth century among the least-known parts of the world for Europeans. Clearly, then, there are many questions that can be asked of the relationship between humans and the environment in this region. How have people moved across and settled this landscape over time? How have they shaped it in the process? To what extent are social and cultural identities bound up with different ways of using the environment? Is it fair to describe tropical Africa as a particularly difficult environment? How have trans-regional, outside influences interacted with local environmental conditions?

East Africa's rolling plains and Maasai herders are probably the most widespread and enduring visual stereotype of the continent, and we all bring to the topic of environmental history our own ideas of how environments function and how they should be protected or exploited. In this class, we will therefore also have to examine our own perceptions of both Africa and the environment.

**Required readings:**

- James McCann, *Green land, brown land, black land*
- Custom Courseware

All are available at the SFU Bookstore.

**Professor's contact details:**

Office: AQ 6008

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 12-1pm

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**Assessment:**

In-class midterm	20%
Short paper	20%
Tutorial presentations	20%
Participation	15%
Final exam (take-home)	25%

### **More on the assessments:**

The mid-term: this will be a written exam, asking you to reproduce from memory certain geographical features as well as facts *and* arguments from the lectures and your readings. All questions will be answerable in a third of a page *at most*; for some the answer may be one or two words.

The short paper: will discuss one of the films/videos viewed in class. It should be 600-800 words in length, 1,5-spaced, with a bibliography at the end (the word limit does not include the bibliography). I do not insist on any particular format for footnotes/references, as long as you supply complete information and use one system consistently.

Tutorial presentation: each one of you will be asked to team up with one other person from their tutorial group and prepare a presentation, *10 minutes at least and 15 minutes at most in length*, on the readings assigned for one week. I expect the presentations to clearly state the question each reading addresses and the main thesis. Besides that, it is completely up to you how you fill your time. I do not expect you to use power-point.

Tutorial participation: this encompasses both attendance and actual contributions to class. Each tutorial will be divided into four groups, which will be asked to provide regular input to the tutorials in the form of questions circulated at least one day in advance.

Final exam: this will take the form of a paper of 1200-1500 words in length. Topics will be supplied round about the tenth week of classes.

### **THE PRINCIPLES OF ACADEMIC HONESTY APPLY TO ALL ASSIGNMENTS.**

#### **Week-by-week outline:**

#### ***January 8-14 Week 1: Methods and Problems in African environmental history***

##### **Lectures:**

- 9/1 Introduction: problems and methods
- 11/1 Historical geography of East Africa

Film: 'The origins of homo sapiens', on the evidence of human evolution in East Africa.

**Readings:** D W Cohen, *Siaya*, chapter 1.  
David Schoenbrun, 'We are what we eat'

NOTE: as many people will not have read the texts before tutorial, class discussion of these texts may not be conclusive. You are expected to read (and understand) these texts after the tutorial if you did not get around to them before. You are free to email me if you have queries.

***January 15-21 Week 2: People and Plants moving into East Africa***

**Lectures:**

16/1 human origins, agricultural communities, agricultural systems  
18/1 The monsoon and Columbian exchanges

Film: 'The Hadza', on a hunter-gatherer community surviving among agriculturalists.

**Readings:** John G Galaty, 'Maasai expansion and the new East African pastoralism'

TUTORIALS IN THE LIBRARY.

***January 22-28 Week 3: Culture and coping with the environment: healing, teaching, exchange.***

**Lectures:**

23/1 The 'hardships' of African environments (incl. origins of famine)  
25/1 Landscapes of the mind: environment and culture

Film: 'East Africa: two life styles', 'The Masai': ethnographic films on different ethnic groups in the region.

**Readings:** Michelle Wagner, 'Environment, community and history: nature in the mind'  
Sharon Hutchinson, *Nuer dilemmas*, extract.

***January 29-February 4 Week 4: Imperialism and environmental disaster: the beginning of colonial rule***

**Lectures:**

30/1 The East African environment, European exploration, and commercial expansion  
1/2 The environmental impact of commercial expansion; warfare and environment

Video: 'Quinine', on the search for reliable medication against malaria.

**Readings:** John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the discovery of the sources of the Nile*, extract.  
Helge Kjekshus, *Ecology control in East African history*, extract; John Iliffe, review of Kjekshus.

***February 5-11 Week 5: 'backward' and 'progressive' peasants: Imperial and local interpretations of the environment***

**Lectures:**

6/2 IN-CLASS MID-TERM EXAM

AND lecture on 'peasantization', sedentarization, political control

8/2 Culture and politics in conflicts over environmental control

**Readings:** Jim Giblin, 'Trypanosomiasis control in East African history: an evaded issue?'

James McCann, 'Seeds of subversion in two peasant empires'.

**February 12-18 Week 6: Environmental policy and political protest**

**Lectures:**

13/2 the origins of narratives of 'land degradation'

15/2 Peasants, profits and protest/Settlers and Africans

Film: 'A tear for Karamoja', on change and crisis in an agricultural society

**Readings:** Pamela Maack, 'We don't want terraces'

Thomas Spear, 'Struggles for the land'

**Week 7 February 19-25: NO CLASSES, but TASK: choose any of the videos and films seen so far in class and critique it on the basis of the lectures and tutorial discussions (as well as any other useful insights you may have).**

**February 26-March 4 Week 8: Demographic change in twentieth-century Africa: 'overpopulation'?**

**Lectures:**

27/2 Concepts: Malthus, 'natalism' 'carrying capacity' ASSIGNMENT DUE

1/3 diverging population histories/ What is meant by 'population control'?

**Readings:** John Iliffe, 'The origins of African population growth'

Bruce Fetter (ed), *Demography from scant evidence*, extracts.

**March 5-11 Week 9: Cash crops, labour migration, deagrarianization: the on-going restructuring of the rural economy**

**Lectures:**

6/3 rural economy: transport, labour, production, peasant households

8/3 'labour reserves' and the origins of post-colonial poverty/ 'Deagrarianization' and the scramble in Africa

Film: 'Starting from scratch', on villagization in Tanzania.

**Readings:** James McCann, 'Agriculture and African history'

Deborah Bryceson, 'The scramble for livelihood'

**March 12-18 Week 10: Food production and famine in the twentieth century: politics and production**

**Lectures:**

13/3 from acute famine to malnutrition in colonial Africa

15/3 Africa's notorious post-colonial famines: war, politics, and hunger

Film: 'Man-made famine'

**Readings:** Michael Mortimore, *Roots in the African dust*, extract.

**March 19-25 Week 11:** *Rural poverty in post-colonial Africa*

**Lectures:**

20/3 different rural ways of life

22/3 Failure of cash cropping/ declining terms of trade/Environmental degradation

Film: 'These hands', on poor women's livelihoods in Tanzania

**Reading:** Richard Waller, 'Pastoral poverty in historical perspective'

**March 26-April 1 Week 12:** *'Fortress conservation': the politics of environmentalism in post-colonial Africa*

**Lectures:**

27/3 post-colonial tourism and environmentalism

29/3 Environmental NGOs/ The 'international community' and African environments

Film: 'Surviving in Africa', on the survival of early humans in an environment such as the Serengeti

**Readings:** Gregory Maddox, 'Case study of Serengeti'

Roderick Neumann, Article on the emptying of Liwale.

**April 2-8 Week 13:** *post-colonial epidemics: the trajectories of AIDS and malaria in East Africa*

**Lectures:**

3/4 Malaria, DDT, environmental change

5/4 AIDS

Film: 'State of denial', on living with AIDS in South Africa

**Readings:** John Iliffe, *The African AIDS epidemic*, extract.

James McCann, 'Maize and malaria'.