

AFRO 1131
Contemporary Issues in Africa
Fall 2021

Instructor : Njeri Githire
Office : 848, Social Sciences Building
Office Phone : 612-624-9847 (main office) / 612-625-1687 (direct)
Office Fax : 612-624-9383
Office Hours : by appointment
Mailbox : 810, Social Sciences Building
Email : Canvas
Class : M/W 01:00pm-02:15pm in ____ Blegen Hall

Course Description: **Welcome to AFRO 1131!** This course aims to provide an overview of contemporary African concerns from an interdisciplinary perspective. Locating present-day realities within an historical continuum, the course covers a wide array of political, social and economic themes, including their interrogation in core fields of study. Emphasis on threats to human rights and challenges to democratic governance; political engagement and civil society activism. The rise of the middle class in sub-Saharan Africa; population growth and urbanization. Dislocation and displacement as observed in rural-urban, intra-African and international migrations; religious, ethnic and civil conflicts; climate and environmental change in terms of a sustainable livelihood framework; gender, equity and women's rights as crucial to sustainable development; postcolonial ethics of nature and nurture; technological advances, disparities and compelling factors for future growth.

Course Objectives:

- Examine the principal priorities and challenges confronting Africa as the third decade of the 21st century begins its course;
- Identify key events and causes that have shaped modern African social, political, environmental, cultural, and economic landscape.
- Reflect on the role of African philosophies and religious practices in promoting the production of knowledge of/from Africa unencumbered by the need to perpetually confront, contest, invert or subvert the invention of Africa as the ultimate “elsewhere”;
- Understand the interface of ecological processes and the multifarious crises that afflict Africa today;
- Acknowledge the correlation between environmentalism and human rights, with particular emphasis on democratic culture and political reform;
- Engage with the challenges that increased mobility in contemporary globalized world poses for environmentalism's central preoccupation with ethics of place and localized identities;
- Appreciate the complexity of the relationship between technology and democratic participation, as well as between technology and environmental impacts;
- Interrogate the intersections of contemporary environmental activism and the (in)visibility of race, class, and economic status;
- Consider the role of storytelling, orally-transmitted lore and song-based narratives in understanding social, cultural, political and environmental changes in Africa;

Required Textbooks

African Philosophy: The Essential Readings (1991), Ed. Tsenay Serequeberhan;
African Religions: A Very Short Introduction (2014), Jacob K. Olupona;
Seven Myths of Africa in World History (2017), David Northrup;
Things Fall Apart (1958), Chinua Achebe;
Lagoon (2014), Nnedi Okorafor;

Films on Reserve

Serengeti shall not die, 1959 (85 min.);
The Africans: A Triple Heritage, 1986 (60 mns)
Darwin's Nightmare, 2004 (min.);
Weather Report, 2007 (52 min.);
Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai, 2008 (80 min.);
Milking the Rhino, 2009 (83 min.);
Pumzi, 2009 (21 min.);
Climate Refugees, 2010 (86 min.);
Burning in the Sun, 2011 (83 min.);
Big Men, 2013 (101 min.);
Something Necessary, 2013 (82 min.);
Hope, 2014 (91 min.);
Lifeboat, 2014 (34 min.);
Atlantique, 2019 (102 min.);

Course Web

This course is provided with a *Canvas* course web site onto which class notes, course guidelines, announcements and other helpful information will be posted. Students are required to log on to the course web site on a regular basis and to familiarize themselves with the information and content therein. Students will be held responsible for any information defined in announcements and other formal communications on the course web. Furthermore, all course-related email communication will be conducted via the *Canvas* course web. Students who experience problems logging onto *Canvas* should contact UMN Canvas Admin & Support <help@umn.edu>

Questions & Answers Forum

It is normal to have many questions about things that relate to the course, such as clarification about assignments, course materials, or assessments. Please post these in the “Questions & Answers” forum, which you can access by clicking the DISCUSSIONS link in the course navigation links. This is an open forum, and you are encouraged to give answers to help each other. For each clear and comprehensive answer you give, you can expect to receive one (1) extra credit point for the course (up to 5 points maximum).

Material on Course Reserve/Course Web/World Wide Web

Various photocopies will be distributed in class throughout the semester. Further, students will be expected to download material available electronically on the library course reserve or on

designated web sites for reading on days specified in this syllabus. All reading is required in order to pass the class and students' knowledge of this material will be tested in writing exercises, analytical papers, in-class participation and any other examinations. The web links stated herewith have been tested and proven reliable. Should you fail to access a link, however, please inform the instructor as soon as possible. Students who experience problems downloading/printing electronic reserve material should log off and log on again to print each different article. If that does not work, they should change their browser (from Mozilla to Internet Explorer or vice-versa). If that still does not work, please contact Wilson Reserves, Tel: 612-624-8609 or the University of Minnesota technology helpline, Tel: 612-301-4357

Important: Required reading/viewing means that all material must be read or viewed with attentive interest. Here are some questions whose answers I would like you to consider as you read/view the assigned material: What would you say fascinated, impressed, struck you ... or piqued your interest the most about the topic discussed? What did you know the least about the society presented in the material? What was most familiar to you? Did the material excel at teaching you something new? Can you provide some examples to substantiate your answer here? It is strongly advised that you come to class with remarks/questions which will serve as a starting point of the discussion and should indicate a reasonable engagement with the course material. Special note will be made of remarks/questions shared to the class and which help pursue meaningful discussion. Again, the assumption is that you have read/viewed the material and tried to engage with it prior to coming to class. No student can hope to achieve an average grade in this class without regular and consistent preparation outside of the classroom, as well as completion of all of the assignments herewith. Please note that students are required to *bring* the assigned articles/books to class for analysis, discussion and in-class reference. Printing services are available in room 860, Social Sciences building between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm

Cellphones & Computer Use:

I encourage us to be very conservative about channeling the use of computers in classroom to other academic contexts. Cell phones and laptop computers can be disruptive in the classroom, when not utilized as a learning tool. I ask that cell phones be turned off prior to the classroom. As for computers, even when they are not loud, they rarely enhance the studious atmosphere in which the classroom is conducted. A laptop can assist your educational experience when used to take and review notes. Computers can be disruptive and encourage some students to check email, surf the web, and/or work on assignments for other courses during class time. I encourage you to take notes by hand and transcribe them electronically at a later date. No laptop computers in the classroom. No headphones. No cell phones. (No kidding.)

Films:

Please note that the instructor will *show* films in class on days stipulated on the syllabus. If you miss class on a day when a film is scheduled, you may arrange to view it at 204 Walter Library, 117, Pleasant Street S E., Tel: 612-624-1584. Students will also be *expected to view films on reserve* at the Walter Learning Resources Center and/or on designated websites. All viewings are required in order to pass the class and students' knowledge of this material will be tested on writing assignments, in-class participation, etc. Please note that while two or more copies of a film on reserve may be available, the actual access to the film will be based on a first-come, first-served basis. Should you be informed that a film is unavailable, however, check with the desk

attendants at Walter to ensure that all copies are indeed in use. Problems with online access and technical issues should be addressed to the U of M 24/7 technology helpline, Tel: 612-301-4357. Please also note that Walter Smart Learning Commons provides a group viewing room, which is a great option if a group wants to watch the film together. The room should be reserved ahead of time by going to this site: <https://www.lib.umn.edu/media/mediaviewingroom>

CLE Requirements:

AFRO 1131 is designed to meet the Council of Liberal Education's requirements of the Environment Theme.

The Environment Theme

Throughout the course of the semester, we will read texts that nudge readers to see the connections between the health of humans and healthful natural environments. These readings strongly support the idea that we attend to what can be known about the natural environment and humans' relation to it. Underscoring the problematic nature of knowledge production that entails "institutionalized" ways of seeing, our course readings stress the need for societies to interact well with the earth's biophysical processes, making ecocriticism more responsive to historical relationships of power, to colonial history and its effects on social life and natural environments.

Grading Policies

Please note that in an effort to ensure fairness, objectivity, and impartiality ALL written work will be graded anonymously. Students are expected to write the first five digits of their student ID at the top right hand corner of their papers. Next to the ID number students will write the first letter of their last name and enclose it in brackets. Students should also indicate the AFRO 1131 designator below their names.

1. Class Participation (30 %). The course format being discussion based, class participation is an important element of your final grade and students are expected to come to class having prepared the readings assigned on any given day. More than being capable of formulating eloquent arguments and passionate opinions, students are encouraged to draw from the course content so as to be able to relate and to communicate their understanding of the African world in its complexity. Obviously, the course caters to learners with different levels of knowledge and experience in the area of the course content. Whatever your level of comfort vis-à-vis the course material might be, you are expected to share in class the insights you gain from course readings, etc. Furthermore, you are expected to be engaged, present, and prepared for class at all times. Structured classroom discussion, short in-class writing assignments & online discussion forums will form part of this grade. At the end of the semester I generally bump up to the next grade those students who are on the bubble grade-wise and who have regularly attended class and have been active and engaged participants throughout the semester. Please note that attendance will be taken for administrative purposes only and will have no direct impact on grades. Accordingly, no credit will be awarded for attendance. There is, therefore, no requirement that you write to the instructor asking to be excused for absences. Nonetheless, even though students are not graded for attending class, you are requested to refrain from tardiness of five minutes or more, or leaving class before the end of the class period (even during viewing of films). It is distracting, disruptive, annoying, and irritating to other students when students arrive late, after class has begun, or disappear and reappear at random while class is in progress. If you are late, or if you

absolutely have to absent yourself during class, kindly do it as quietly and as discretely as possible. If the same person repeatedly exhibits this type of behavior, a one grade notch (e.g., B- to C+) penalty for each day in question will be applied to their final grade. Please turn off your cell phones and computers during class. Students unable, unwilling or uncomfortable with note-taking by hand may record class lectures solely for personal use only in study and preparation relevant to AFRO 1131. These recordings may not be shared with any other person registered or not in AFRO 1131. As sources whose usage is regulated by policies specific to academic conduct and scholastic integrity, these recordings must be destroyed at the end of the academic session for which they are intended. Students are also requested to avoid dozing in class, browsing the Web, engaging in online transactions unrelated to the class, and/or doing any other private work during class lectures. Students who exhibit this behavior will be penalized with a disciplinary “F” grade. Please leave the last row of seats empty except during in-class writing and group exercises.

2. Homework Assignments & In-Class Writing Exercises (30%): From time to time, short questions and summaries based on the assigned readings/viewings will be assigned in class or as take-home assignments. The assumption being that students engage with the assigned text/film prior to class, these homework assignments and in-class writing exercises will be both announced and unannounced. Because the primary goal of this activity is to determine whether the basic material of the course is being read consistently and seriously, there will be NO make-up for these assignments. Students who present a valid justification for missing class on all the days on which the assignments are given will not be penalized for missing these exercises. Documented absence due to illness, injury, surgery, death in the family, a family emergency should be reported to the instructor with an appropriate written excuse *immediately* following your absence. Absences may also be excused for the observance of a religious holiday or for participation in university-sponsored events. There are NO exceptions to this rule. For clarity, the following are not considered excusable absences: sorority or fraternity events, travel, concerts, sporting events, another class, taking or studying for an exam, meetings, oversleeping, or job interviews.

3. Final Report (40%): Students will submit a 7-8 page (typed and single-spaced) essay in which they will discuss their awakening to environmental injustice, including the contribution of this class to environmental sustainability. This is a reflective essay therefore the tone will be informal yet confident and authoritative; engaging, but not colloquial; structured and consistent, yet not casual. The focus of the essay will be two-fold: (i) a reflection of the your awakening to environmental consciousness. Have you been a climate denier? Have you had to sway climate deniers within your immediate environment? Do you feel that the looming of climate apocalypse is over-exaggerated? (ii) A consideration of your commitment challenging business models that are not environmental friendly. In other words, how will the knowledge that you have acquired in this class serve you in your future endeavors. Beyond the 7-8 pages an additional page or two may be included for photos, newspaper clippings of important events (birth announcement, major accomplishment, etc.) or any newsworthy information related to your childhood and growing up.

The final grade will be determined as follows:

- Class participation 30%

- In-Class Writing Exercises/Homework Assignments		30%
- Final Report		40%

Your final grade will be determined by the percentage of score earned:

A (94-100%)	A- (90-93%)	B+ (87-89%)	B (83-86%)	B- (80-82%)
C+ (77-79%)	C (73-76%)	C- (70-72%)	D+ (67-69%)	D (60-66%)
S (70 % & above)				

Make-up

Students may NOT retake any exam.

Generally the scale is not curved. If you find that you are having trouble with any part of the course, please see the instructor early in the semester. Please seek assistance as soon as possible to resolve the specific issues that may be preventing *you* from progressing as you would like.

University Policies

Academic Integrity

Each student is expected to do his/her own work. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will not be tolerated and will be dealt with according to established University policy.

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty is defined by Student Judicial Affairs as “submission of false records of academic achievement; cheating on assignments or examinations; plagiarizing; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement.” Scholastic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for a course shall be grounds for awarding a grade of F or N for the entire course.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism occurs when students turn in work that is not their own. Plagiarism occurs when written work 1) fails to cite quotations and borrowed ideas from outside sources, including the World Wide Web and other student work, 2) fails to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks, and 3) fails to put summaries and paraphrases in the writer’s own words. The definition of plagiarism was derived from Diana Hacker’s *A Writer’s Reference*, Fourth Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999.

Credits and Workload Expectations

For undergraduate courses, one credit is defined as equivalent to an average of three hours of learning effort per week necessary for an average student to achieve an *average grade* in the course. For example, a student taking 15 credits should require approximately 45 hours of work each week. The reading and writing assignments in this class entail exceptionally detailed and sophisticated analysis of texts belonging to a literary tradition that may be new and unfamiliar to

many. Consistent and regular study outside of the classroom is a “must” in this class, an unavoidable requirement for success.

Disability Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with disabilities on an individualized and flexible basis. Disability Services determine appropriate accommodations through consultation with the student. See the instructor for information about contacting Disability Services or call DS Student Services at 612-626-1333.

Complaints Regarding Teaching/Grading

Students with complaints about teaching or grading should first try to resolve the problem with the instructor involved. Please note that no such discussion can be held at the beginning or end of class because of time constraints. Kindly, therefore, arrange to see the instructor during a mutually convenient time. The instructor may also set up mid-semester evaluations during which time students will be invited to evaluate the course and make any suggestions for improving teaching and learning. If no satisfactory resolution is reached through these venues, students may then discuss the matter with the Department Chair, 812 Social Sciences Tower, 612-624-8012, who will attempt to mediate. Failing an informal resolution, the staff in the AA&AS departmental office will facilitate the filing of a formal complaint. Official U of M information on grading can be found at: <http://www1.umn.edu/usenate/policies/gradingpolicy.html>

Miscellaneous

The instructor's office hours (by appointment) provide the forum during which students' concerns will be discussed. Because another class is scheduled to meet in Blegen # 435 after AFRO 1131, only *extremely pressing or critical issues* “of simple answer” may be addressed after class (time permitting). Questions concerning issues *not* addressed in the syllabus may also be directed to the instructor via email. In an effort to privilege face-to-face contexts of interaction, email answers will be limited to short, straightforward and simple “yes-no” type of questions unless the student is “immobile or unable to move” for documented reasons. The instructor will make a point of responding to students queries and concerns via *Canvas* email within 2-3 business days unless extraordinary circumstances dictate otherwise. The instructor will, however, *not* respond to questions fully addressed on the syllabus and in the handouts given regarding writing papers, in-class presentations etc, etc via email. For clarification on written material, concerns, and queries regarding material handed out and discussed at length in class, students will need to see the instructor as stipulated above. Students who miss class and wish to undertake a make-up of the lectures missed will need to schedule an appointment with the instructor as make-up lectures cannot be given via email. While the instructor will endeavor to post relevant announcements and class notes on *Canvas*, students are responsible for any up-to-date information missed while absent. Note too that while some reading assignments and written work may easily be made up after an absence, class interaction and its overall value is impossible to recreate in a make-up setting. Moreover, unless otherwise indicated, all written assignments must be submitted in portable document format (pdf) on specified electronic Email attachments will NOT be accepted without express permission from the instructor. Late work will be penalized one grade notch (e.g., B- to C+) for each day it is late. The weekend counts as one day. If you wish to avoid this penalty when you submit late work, please provide documented evidence of illness, etc. It is up to the instructor's discretion whether to accept late work without

documented excuse. Grades and grade-related concerns after the end of the semester will only be addressed via an official email account (umn.edu). Please note that I generally refuse to respond to emails that bear no salutations and closing signatures (properly addressed to a specific person and signed off by a particular person) because that is the characteristic of mass emails and junk mails which warrant no further action.

Reading/Viewing Schedule

SEPTEMBER

- Wed 08:** Distribution & explanation of the syllabus followed by an introduction to the course; a brief survey of Sub-Saharan African history;
- Mon 13:** Sub-Saharan African history continued; **eReserve Reading:** “How to Write about Africa” by Binyavanga Wainaina; “On a Croc's Back, America-Bound” by Okey Ndibe; “Weary Professors Give Up; Concede that African is a Country”; “Problematic Terms”;
- Wed 15:** (Re)presenting a Continent –**eReserve Reading:** *Seven Myths of Africa in World History* by David Northrup (vii – 21); **Film viewing online:** *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*;
- Mon 20:** Defining African Philosophy; **eReserve Reading:** “African Philosophy as the Practice of Resistance” by Tsenay Serequeberhan; “Knowledge of Africa, Knowledge by Africans: Two Perspectives on African Studies” by Paulin J. Hountondji;
- Wed 22:** African Cosmology & Religious Worldviews; **eReserve Readings:** *African Religions: A Very Short Introduction* by Jacob K. Olupona (pgs. xix-19/ 89-122); *Seven Myths of Africa in World History* by David Northrup (pgs. 22-38 / 103-127); **Film viewing online:** *Serengeti shall not die*;
- Mon 27:** Religious, Ethnic and civil Conflicts: Focus on Kenya; **eReserve Readings:** Excerpts from *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011* by David Branch;
- Wed 29:** Religious, Ethnic and civil Conflicts: Focus on Kenya; **Film viewing in Class:** *Taking Root*;

OCTOBER

- Mon 04:** Religious, Ethnic and civil Conflicts: Focus on Kenya; **Group discussion:** *Taking Root*;
- Wed 06:** Religious, Ethnic and civil Conflicts: Focus on Kenya; **Film viewing online:** *Something Necessary*;

- Mon 11:** Religious, Ethnic and civil Conflicts: Focus on Côte d'Ivoire; **eReserve Readings:** Excerpts from *Making War in Côte d'Ivoire* by Mike McGovern;
- Wed 13:** Religious, Ethnic and civil Conflicts: Focus on Côte d'Ivoire; **eReserve Readings:** “Following the Money: The Cocoa-coffee *Filière*” by Mike McGovern;
- Mon 18:** Religious, Ethnic and civil Conflicts: Focus on Côte d'Ivoire; **Film viewing online:** *Bittersweet: The Bitter Cost of Chocolate*;
- Wed 20:** Human Rights, Food Sovereignty & Environmental Sustainability: Focus on Niger; **Film viewing online:** *Arlit, Deuxième Paris* = *Arlit, The Second Paris*
- Mon 25:** Human Rights, Food Sovereignty & Environmental Sustainability: Focus on Niger; **eReserve Readings:** “Food Wars” by Walden Bello & Mara Baviera;
- Wed 27:** Human Rights, Food Sovereignty & Environmental Sustainability: **eReserve Readings:** “Globalization and Environmental Conflict in Africa” by Cyril I. Obi;

NOVEMBER

- Mon 01:** Rural-Urban, Intra-African and International Migrations: Focus on the Sahel: **eReserve Readings:** “The Mediterranean Sieve, Spring and Seametry” by Hakim Abderrezak;
- Wed 03:** Rural-Urban, Intra-African and International Migrations: Focus on the Sahel **Film viewing in class:** *Lifeboat*;
- Mon 08:** Rural-Urban, Intra-African and International Migrations: Focus on the Sahel: **eReserve Readings:** Excerpts from *Water Graves* by Valérie Loichot;
- Wed 10:** Rural-Urban, Intra-African and International Migrations: Focus on the Sahel **Film viewing online:** *Hope*;
- Mon 15:** Rural-Urban, Intra-African and International Migrations: Focus on the Sahel **Film viewing in class:** *Atlantique*;
- Wed 17:** Rural-Urban, Intra-African and International Migrations: Focus on the Sahel: **Film viewing in class:** *Climate Refugees*;
- Mon 22:** The Curse of Oil? Focus on the Niger Delta: **eReserve Reading:** “Toxic Discourse” by Lawrence Buell;
- Wed 24:** The Curse of Oil? Focus on the Niger Delta: **Film viewing in class:** *Big Men*;

Mon 29: The Curse of Oil? Focus on the Niger Delta: **eReserve Reading:** Excerpts from *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy* by Ken Saro-Wiwa;

DECEMBER

Wed 01: The Curse of Oil? Focus on the Niger Delta: **eReserve Reading:** *Lagoon*;

Mon 06: The Curse of Oil? Focus on the Niger Delta: **eReserve Reading:** *Lagoon*;

Wed 08: The Curse of Oil? Focus on the Niger Delta: **eReserve Reading:** *Lagoon*;

Mon 13: The Curse of Oil? Focus on the Niger Delta: **eReserve Reading:** “Intimate Objectivity: On Nnedi Okorafor’s Oceanic Afrofuturism” by Melody Jue;

Wed 15: Review & Conclusion;

Wed 22: Final Report due on *Canvas*

Updates, Changes, Modifications and/or Revisions:

The instructor reserves the right to make changes in this schedule to facilitate student learning. Any changes in the schedule will be communicated to students in advance. This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request.