

Environment and Human Rights
A Proposal for Collaboration between the Centers for
Southeast Asian Studies and
African Studies

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Introduction

Both human rights and environmental agendas are increasingly at the forefront of any number of complex globalization scenarios today, particularly those scenarios involving people displaced for reasons of resource extraction, conservation, or war. Huge flows of migrants, refugees, and the reconciliations and resettlement often associated with any kind of war or terrorist activity, as well as the various kinds of territorial claims made by “indigenous” peoples, conservation groups, and military units, demand attention to issues of both human rights and environment. Yet activists committed to both these agendas are often thwarted by the incompatibilities of international laws affecting the two areas of concern. Nevertheless, a significant subset of scholars and activists remain committed to finding ways of working with both sets of concerns toward more equitable, safe and environmentally sound living situations for the people most directly affected.

We propose a series of panels that will compare and explore the experiences of scholars and activists working in countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia on dilemmas and tensions in human rights and environmental agendas. The panels will take advantage of visitors and residents in the Bay Area in CY 2002, and include speakers as short-term visiting fellows brought in from other parts of the world. Three panels are proposed, one for spring of 2002, and two for the fall of 2002. The panels and the panelists will engage with the growing groups of graduate and undergraduate students interested in both human rights and the environment, and build on budding faculty and post-doctoral interests in the area. Visitors brought in specifically for participation in the program will be invited to stay for up to one week, during which time they will meet with students and activists in a series of lunches scheduled for this purpose. The visitors will also be invited to contribute ideas for teaching about environment and human rights for interested faculty in their existing courses or new ones.

Background and Justification

Throughout the 1990s there has been a growing interest in the environment as a source of political conflict and as *the* post Cold War security issue. Prompted by the work of Robert Kaplan (*The Coming Anarchy*, 2000) Michael Klare (*Resource Wars*, 2001), and Tad Homer-Dixon (*Environment, Scarcity and Violence*, 1999), the field of environmental security speaks to a panoply of sub-national conflicts associated with environmental degradation, rehabilitation, and conservation. In his enormously influential essay, “The Coming Anarchy: How Scarcity, Crime, Overpopulation, and Disease are Rapidly Destroying the Social Fabric of Our Planet,” journalist Robert Kaplan (1994) conjured up a surreal picture of an African continent in the throes of an apocalyptic crisis: over-populated, undernourished, and driven to barbaric acts of violence by irrational spirit power. Crushed under the unbearable weight of “eco-demographic” pressures, Africa was, as Kaplan pointed out, once again the “Dark Continent.” But the coming anarchy was not confined to Africa; it was, in Kaplan’s account, endemic to the developing world, as his brief sojourn in Cambodia, Iran, Russia, and Central Asia confirmed to him. Foreign policy would be shaped, he claimed, by: [s]urging populations, spreading disease, deforestation and soil erosion, water depletion, air pollution, and possibly rising sea levels...—developments that will prompt mass migrations and in turn incite group conflicts (p.58). This

concern with environment and security in the post Cold War world did remain an arcane academic science. Within weeks of the publication of Kaplan's 1994 essay in *The Atlantic*, Under-Secretary of State Tim Wirth had faxed a copy of the article to every US embassy in the world; top UN officials were discussing its implications behind closed doors. Kaplan subsequently was invited to the White House and Vice President Al Gore championed "The Coming Anarchy" as a model of the sort of green thinking that he had assiduously sought to promote during the 1990's. President Clinton's June 29th 1994 address to the National Academy of Sciences specifically invoked Kaplan's article, and "the academic work" of Professor Tad Homer-Dixon, as the beacons for a new sensitivity to environmental security. Within a year, James Woolsey, Director of Central Intelligence, and William Perry, Secretary of Defense, were singing the praises of "an aggressive environmental program because it is critical to the defense mission". With the establishment of the Senior Director post for Global Environmental Affairs in the State Department, environmental degradation caused by resource scarcity and population growth was enshrined within the National Security Council of the United States government. The military establishment showed equally remarkable flexibility, seizing upon environmental security as its new lodestar. Within a short period of time the Pentagon could seriously present itself as an unimpeachable advocate for sustainable development (Butts 1994). The massive toxic legacy of the military in the US West for example, rendered recently by Valerie Kuletz in *The Tainted Desert*, in which Native American and federal lands have been devastated by nuclear and other testing, now represented the basis, among other things, for the Department of Defense becoming "the federal leader in agency environmental compliance and protection" as then Secretary of Defense Cheney put it. Environmental degradation was, in short, good for military business.

Much of this work on environmental violence and security recapitulates two ideas of great antiquity: one is demographic pressure (via Malthus), and the other is environmental determinism (whose genealogy can be traced back of course to the Greeks). What Kaplan, and other policy *aficionados* had in common was the presumption of an ineluctable connection between environmental degradation, population growth, alleged resource scarcity, and the proliferation of "small wars" that haunt the post-Cold War planet. Since the Reverend Thomas Malthus's controversial prediction two centuries ago—that vice, misery, and war would be the inevitable hand-maiden of demographically-driven food scarcities—the search for a causal link between environmental scarcity and violence has been something of a Holy Grail. Current iterations of "environmental security" and "Greenwar" suffer, from both the historic failings of Malthusian thinking and an untenable theory of political economy and political action. Many of these past and present scenarios of scarcity and war are informed by a deep fear of the poor and of their claims to resources, despite radical changes in the world since Malthus' time. At the same time, contained in this work on environmental conflict and security are under-explored, but extremely important and complex questions regarding embrace human rights, entitlements, governance and discourse.

We hope to initiate comparisons on these issues across Southeast Asian studies and Sub-Saharan African scholars and practitioners. We propose to interrogate the assumptions of the environmental security establishment and to encourage conversations across regions to better understand the connections between environment, violence and human rights. We hope to go

beyond automatic, simplistic linkages between “increased environmental scarcity,” “decreased economic activity,” and “migration” which purportedly “weaken states” and cause “conflicts and violence” (Homer-Dixon 1999). To that end, we see violence as a site-specific phenomenon rooted in local histories and social relations, yet connected to larger processes of material transformation and power relations. We hope, however, to begin to identify patterns in both global and local practices of environmentally related violence and violated or reconciled human rights agendas. In the panels we plan over the next year, we seek to account for ways that specific environments and processes of violence and reconciliation are constituted by and in part constitute, the political economy of access to and control over resources. Focusing on environmental rights or entitlements will provide a means of understanding conflicts between customary and modern forms of access to and control over resources. Such a focus also allows us to raise important legal and practical questions about how environmental violence and human rights issues can be resolved through new forms of governance and conflict resolution mechanisms.

This project has as its intellectual scaffolding the notion, taken from Foucault (1991), of governmentality, i.e., the forms of calculated practice (in and outside of government) to direct categories of social agency in a particular manner for particular ends (Dean 1991). In his treatise of modern governmentality, Foucault was concerned to show how a centralized state and its apparatuses came to make the fostering of life and the care of population a part of a new regime of power, what he called “biopower”. Biopower brought “life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculation.” Governmentality spoke to the disciplining of “forms of life.” New sets of operations or “technologies” were brought to bear upon the functioning of institutions the purpose of which was to regulate, normalize, and discipline—to forge a particular sort of subject. Governmentality embraces, then, the calculated practices by which the state and other institutions and practices direct categories of social agency in specific ways. We wish to apply this Foucauldian notion to two realms neglected by Foucault himself, namely that of Nature and the environment and the realm of human rights as a national-international disciplinary project. We ask specifically, how do human rights discourses intersect with—or emerge from—the ways in which nature is made administrable or governable? How are both human rights and environmental agendas made governable and brought into the apparatuses of governance? We will examine the construction of relatively new institutions of state, international, and non-state disciplinary power, that is, those associated with reconciliation in the aftermath of war, and the massive numbers of international and intra-national refugees whose very existence often derives from environmental violence. Capitalism requires particular configurations of governmentality: universalistic legal codes, certain types of economic relationships and controls, or as Scott (1998) puts it, certain ways by which the state can “see” and make legible the environment and the resources contained within its territory.¹ This then relates as well to our emphasis in one panel on a key state-building and internationally contested resource, oil. Legibility as well as disciplining and surveillance play important and minimally explored roles in the politics of the

¹ Citations in this section are: Michel Foucault, in Grahame Burchell et al (eds.), *The Foucault Effect*, University of Chicago Press, 1991; James Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, Yale University Press, 1998; Mitchell Dean, *The Constitution of Poverty*, 1991; Tad Homer Dixon, *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*, Princeton University Press, 1999; Michael Klare, *Resource Wars*, Metropolitan Books, 2001; Robert Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy*, Vintage, 2000.

environment and human rights.

The Plan

Each panel will address a particular theme that has both environmental and human rights dimensions. Each will also engage with the broader political-economic, historical, and policy debates suggested above. One of our goals is to attract a broader audience, one that extends beyond the African studies and Southeast Asian studies communities. The issues of concern have important theoretical and policy relevance to other areas of the world as well. Most obviously perhaps, this means the Middle East, but includes also South Asia, Latin America, and, most recently, the United States itself. We hope the panels will serve as an initial catalyst for cross-campus and international collaborations on these topics.

The first panel in the spring, 2002, will be on “Environmental Issues Emerging in the Course of Reconciliation in Rwanda and East Timor.” This panel will take advantage of visitors with current plans to be here, including Alison de Forge and two Rwandan visitors. For this panel we will also solicit the comments of Joseph Nevins and John Roosa, both in residence in Berkeley for AY 2001-2002, and local members of the East Timor Action Network (ETAN) and the Indonesian Human Rights Network (IHRN).

The second two events, planned for the fall of 2002, will be bigger in scope as they will require funding of visitors from Southeast Asia and Africa. We expect to hold a planning meeting early in the spring semester to decide on participants to invite to those panels.

Core Participating Faculty

African Studies: Gillian Hart, Michael Watts, Louise Fortmann, Donald Moore
Southeast Asian Studies: Nancy Peluso, Jeffrey Hadler, Jeff Romm, Ashley Thompson,
Khatarya Um