

Neoliberal Ebola: The agroeconomics of a deadly spillover. A talk by Robert G.

What: Wallace

Food system, Food system > Economic feasibility, Agricultural practices > Farming methods, Agricultural practices > Land use, Food justice > Health equity / disparity, Food justice > Ethnic

Keywords: or racial dynamics, Policy, NeoLiberal

October 13, 2014

When/Where: Rm. 1-149 Carlson School of Management U of MN, West Africa/USA

Who: Rob Wallace and his colleagues working on Ebola and disease research. He drew from many sources and disciplines. Event sponsored by the U of MN Institute of Advanced Study/Agrifood Collaborative and the Institute for Global Studies.

Why: The talk gave a birds eye view and an alternate perspective to the Ebola crisis that is currently filling the news. His hypothesis was that multinational agribusinesses buy up land all over the world through bullying or through being invited and create monocultures that promote disease and lower the resiliency of communities. He thinks that the current Ebola crisis was a byproduct of palm oil production in Asia driving the West African agriculture towards big intense palm oil conglomerates to

How: compete destroying bat habitat and creating bat/human interaction hot spots in palm oil fields.

Event / conversation

Type:

The talk drew from many different academic fields including economics, political science, medicine, epidemiology, geography, sociology, ecology and discussed concepts like labor, colonialism, and power so it seemed like it was put together from many different perspectives and backed up by research done by many different people. The hypothesis itself could be questioned by people sighting 'correlation doesn't equal causation' so it might need more evidence/research of how the different pieces fit together to make it more credible to skeptics. It seemed to be respectful to and 'on the side' of the people in West Africa. It was geared towards academic audiences with many high level vocabulary and terms that might need clarification of people outside the disciplines that the terms come from (ie "NeoLiberal") so there would need some translation/curation support for a wider audience. The images in the slide show might need to come with trigger warnings for people who have reactions to violent images.

It would be interesting to watch what happens with the Ebola outbreak in the future and if more patterns of disease break out like the ones he found in his research. He has a blog we could follow and the talk is up on the IAS site so we could see how many times it gets watched and who is commenting on it. We could show it to other people and see what their reaction is and make a card for that conversation as well.