

Master in Political Ecology
Academic year: 2019-2020

POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Instructors

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Objectives

The course offers a critical introduction to the interdisciplinary field of Political Ecology (PE), the study of the ways in which power affects socio-environmental relations and processes. The course will offer a global view of the current ecological crisis and its political, economic, cultural and epistemological dimensions and interconnections. Drawing from a range of critical approaches, the course will examine key concepts and theoretical frameworks that underlie the contemporary political ecological critique of capitalism and development. Students will learn to think politically about environmental problems, and to critically engage with “apolitical” approaches that explain environmental issues in terms of population, bio-physical, or human-behavioural drivers.

Structure

The course is broken into two main parts. In the first part, we will focus on key themes that have been critically studied from a PE perspective, starting to discern central premises and main strands of PE through central debates. Case-study articles will be used to illustrate how this analysis is ‘put to work’ in a real case. The second part will introduce key concepts and ideas that are mobilised in PE research. It will do so by analysing how some key actors in global environmental governance - namely, capital, the state, development agencies, and social movements - “see” nature and seek to shape environment-society relations.

Each class’s **readings** consist of one required text (journal articles or academic book chapters). There are also additional (suggested) readings for most topics. While we do not expect you to read all additional readings, we will address some key ideas raised in them. All readings will be made available in digital format beforehand.

Classes will follow a seminar format with a combination of lecture and discussion of the assigned readings. This might also include discussion in small groups, debates, games, use of audiovisual material, and other activities.

Assignments and evaluation

This class does not require a final exam. Students will be evaluated on an two assignments based on the readings and lectures, and of a final group-written review and oral presentation.

1. Assignments

Two assignments will be asked after the two main lecture blocks (after the 5th and 9th class). For each assignment you will respond to three questions, 250 words each, covering the material of lectures. The assignments will be sent to you by email at the end of each block and you will have one week to complete the assignment and email it back to us. The assignments will be assessed and count towards the final grade (60% of the overall grade). All assignments will be returned corrected at the end of the course.

2. Group presentations and book reviews

The course will require reading and critically reviewing a book. The class will be divided into four groups; students in each group will choose a book from the list below (first come, first served), read it and discuss it among themselves. Each group will *a*) write collectively a book review; and *b*) give a 20 minute presentation of the book to the class (last session). Both the review and the presentation will be evaluated and count towards the final grade (20% and 20% respectively). Instructions for writing the review and preparing the presentation will be provided in advance.

Programme outline

1. Introduction to Political Ecology (Marta & Diego)

Required readings:

Robbins, 2012 "Political versus apolitical Ecologies" (Ch. 1). In: *Political Ecology. A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell

Robbins, 2012 "The Critical Tools" (Ch. 3). In: *Political Ecology. A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell

Further readings:

Robbins, 2012 "A Tree with Deep Roots." In: *Political Ecology. A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell

Bridge, McCarthy, and Perreault, 2015, "Editors' Introduction" (Ch. 1). In: *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*, edited by Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, and James McCarthy. New York, Routledge.

Part one: Key themes in PE (Marta Conde)

2. Capitalism and the commodity frontiers

Required readings:

Patel, R., & Moore, J. W. (2017). Introduction. *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*. Univ of California Press.

Additional readings:

Conde, M. and Walter, M. (2015) Commodity Frontiers (Ch 13) *Degrowth. A Vocabulary for a New Era*.

Alimonda H., (2015) Mining in Latin America: Coloniality and Degradation, 149-162 *In International handbook PE* (Bryant (Ed.)).

3. Feminism and feminist political ecologies

Required readings:

Carney, J. (1993). Converting the wetlands, engendering the environment: The intersection of gender with agrarian change in the Gambia. *Economic Geography*, 69(4), 329-348.

Additional readings:

Veuthey, S., & Gerber, J. F. (2010). Logging conflicts in Southern Cameroon: a feminist ecological economics perspective. *Ecological economics*, 70(2), 170-177.

Elmhirst, R., (2016). Feminist Political Ecology. In Perreault, T., Bridge, G. and J. McCarthy (Eds). *Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology, Chapter 40*

4. Constructivism in PE

Required readings:

Sletto B, 2008, The Knowledge that Counts: Institutional Identities, Policy Science, and the Conflict Over Fire Management in the Gran Sabana, Venezuela *World Development* 36(10) 1938-1955

Additional readings:

Robbins, P. (2012) Challenges in Social Construction. (Ch 6). In: *Political Ecology. A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell

Escobar, A. (1998). Whose knowledge, whose nature? Biodiversity, conservation, and the political ecology of social movements. *Journal of political ecology*, vol. 5, no 1, p. 53-82.

5. Politics of science and knowledge

Required readings:

Conde, M. (2014). Activism mobilising science. *Ecological economics*, 105, 67-77.

Additional readings:

S. Funtowicz and J. Ravetz, (2003) *Post normal science*.

Forsyth, T. (2015). Integrating science and politics in political ecology. In *International handbook PE*, Bryant (Ed.),.

Wisner, B. (2015). Speaking truth to power. A personal account of activist political ecology. In Perreault, T., Bridge, G. and J. McCarthy (Eds). *Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. (Chapter 3)

Part two: Ways of seeing and making nature (Diego Andreucci)

6. Capital: Nature and dispossession

Required readings:

Perreault, T. (2013). Dispossession by Accumulation? Mining, Water and the Nature of Enclosure on the Bolivian Altiplano. *Antipode* 45, 5: 1050-69.

Additional readings:

Prudham, S. "Property and Commodification". In: *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*, ed. by Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, & James McCarthy. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Harvey, D. (2003) "Accumulation by dispossession" (Ch. 4). In: *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

7. The State: Regulation and environment-making

Required readings:

Pichler, Melanie (2015). Legal dispossession: State strategies and selectivities in the expansion of Indonesian palm oil and agrofuel production. *Development and Change*, 46(3), 508-533.

Additional readings:

Robertson, M. "Environmental governance: Political ecology and the state". In: *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*, ed. by Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, & James McCarthy. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Parenti, C. (2015). The Environment Making State: Territory, Nature, and Value. *Antipode* 47, 4: 829-48.

8. Development institutions: Governmentality and nature's legibility

Required readings:

Andreucci, D., and Kallis, G., 2017, Governmentality, Development and the Violence of Natural Resource Extraction in Peru. *Ecological Economics*, 134, pp. 95-103.

Additional readings:

Goldman, M., 2004, "Eco-governmentality and other transnational practices of a 'green' World Bank". In, Peet, R. and Watts, M. *Liberation Ecologies* (chapter 6, pp. 153-178).

Valdivia, G. (2015) "Eco-governmentality". In: *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*, Ed. by Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, y James McCarthy, pp. 467-80. New York: Routledge.

9. Social movements: From 'environmental conflicts' to counter-hegemony

Required readings:

Karriem, A. (2009) The rise and transformation of the Brazilian landless movement into a counter-hegemonic political actor: A Gramscian analysis, *Geoforum* 40, 3: 316-25.

Additional readings:

Simon, R. (1991) *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, Selected chapters.

Wolford, Wendy and Sara Keene, "Social Movements". In: *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*, Ed. by Tom Perreault, Gavin Bridge, y James McCarthy. New York: Routledge.

10. Group presentations

Books suggested:

1. Arturo Escobar, *Territories of Difference* (2008).
2. Tania M. Li, *The Will to Improve* (2007).
3. Susanna B. Hecht, Alexander Cockburn, *The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers, and Defenders of the Amazon*, Updated Edition (2004).
4. Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (2004).
5. Silvia Federicci, *Caliban and the Witch* (2004)