

ANT 324L: Political Ecology

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Tuesdays & Thursdays: 9:30-11:00 AM CLA 0.124

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:30-4:30



Course Description:

Over the past three decades, Political Ecology has emerged as a powerful interdisciplinary critique of ecological change. Simply put, Political Ecology is a strategy for mapping political, economic, and social factors onto questions of environmental degradation and transformation. Political Ecology has been a powerful strategy for reinserting politics into apolitical discussions of ecology and the environment; writing disposed groups—human and non-human—back into discussions about conservation; and unsettling common sense understandings of “the environment” as separate from “the social.” This course will provide an introduction to core tenets of political ecology. Particularly focusing on ethnographic approaches, this course will introduce students to key debates in the field—such as the relationship between environment and violence, the critique of Malthusian and neo-Malthusian notions of scarcity and limits, the links between conservation and dispossession, and more. It will further explore the uses of political ecology in key contemporary debates over social and environmental change—from food production to water management.

Course Format, Policies and Procedures

Course Format:

This course is an upper-level seminar and will be primarily organized around class discussion. Occasionally, it will combine lectures, in-class presentations, and small group work to explore specific cases. We will cover a range of different materials, including academic writings, case studies, and films. I expect your *full, active, and professional participation in class*. This means:

- . Attending all class meetings
- . Showing up on time (note—persistently showing up late will negatively effect your participation grade)
- . Respectfully engaging with the course instructor and your peers
- . Being responsible for all of the assigned reading and materials: *this means that if you miss a class, it is your responsibility to do the reading and get class notes from one of your peers*

Course readings and Syllabus:

I believe that a course and its instructor should be adaptable. This means that readings and course activities *may* change to suite course developments, forward fruitful discussions, or to address a student interests. For this reason, the readings in this syllabus should be regarded as provisional. *For any given week, the readings will be available and listed in the “Modules” section of Canvas. For this reason, readings are not available for a given week until the previous week.*

While readings may, from time to time change, *the course policies and procedures listed in this syllabus will not*. It is your responsibility to know them.

Reading Policy:

All of the course readings for this class can be found on Canvas with the exception of four books which are required. Those are:

- Paul Robbins. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction, 2nd Edition*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Jessica Barnes. *Cultivating the Nile: The Everyday Politics of Water in Egypt*. Duke.
- Laura Ogden. *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*. Minnesota.
- Sarah Besky. *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*. California.

In some classes, we will spend significant time discussing particular readings. In others, we will treat them as background. In all cases, if there is something you don't understand in the material, *it is your responsibility to make sure that you gain an understanding of it by asking questions and raising issues*. You are expected to arrive at class ready to discuss any and all of the required course readings. For most classes, I have included “Suggested” readings that are also available on Canvas. These are not required, but, should you be interested in a topic and wish to pursue it more (for a final paper, for example) these are good places to start.

Policy on Plagiarism:

I strongly believe that learning is a collaborative venture. I encourage you to study with your peers, meet to discuss readings with them, and, on particular assignments, to work together with them. That said, the work that you produce for this course must be your own. Where you quote from other sources, those sources must be acknowledged with quotations and/or text references. There are *no exceptions to this rule and no legitimate excuses for violating it*.

In event that you fail to acknowledge others' work or that you are caught overtly plagiarizing from online

or written sources, you will receive a zero on the assignment and may be subject to disciplinary procedures.

Academic Integrity:

You should familiarize yourself with the University Texas Policies

- Academic Integrity: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php
- University Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu>
- Student Honor Code: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/spot_honorcode.php
- Academic Integrity: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/cwgs/files/pdf-4/ai2012.pdf>

Email and Office Hours policy:

Please, feel free to contact me via email (jasoncons@utexas.edu). I prefer that you contact me directly rather than through Canvas. Please also keep in mind that I am as busy as you. Make sure you consult the course syllabus, other handouts, your peers and the course Canvas site *before* sending an e-mail. Note that e-mail should *not* be seen as an alternative to meeting with me during office hours. Nor should e-mail be used as a mechanism to receive private tutorials or to explain material that was covered in classes you missed (those are your responsibility to obtain from your peers). To ensure that your e-mail reaches my inbox, include the course code (ANT 324) and the nature of your question/comment in the subject of your e-mail. I will endeavor to respond within 24 hours, though I make no promises to do this on the weekend, so plan ahead. Contacting me the night before an assignment is due is, by definition, too late.

My office hours are *your* time and you are welcome to drop by at any time during them. Because, at particular times in the semester, many of you will want to see me, I do recommend setting up an appointment ahead of time. Also, if you have a regular class conflict during my office hours, I am more than happy to set up an appointment with you at another time, however, I ask that you do not just drop by my office outside of office hours without checking with me first. I may be there, but I will be working on other things with pressing deadlines.

Late Policy:

I adhere to the following late policy on assignments:

- . All reading response papers must be turned in by *8PM the night before class*. Late reading responses will receive a zero. The responses must deal with the readings for that day. Post-facto responses are not acceptable.
- . Other assignments turned in up to 12 hours late will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade.
- . Assignments turned in between 12 and 24 hours late will be penalized a full letter grade.
- . Assignments turned in between 24 and 48 hours late will be penalized two full letter grades.
- . Assignments more than 48 hours late will not be accepted.

Writing Policy:

I have extensively detailed my policy on citation and bibliography on my website:

<http://www.jasoncons.net/formatting-and-referencing-papers.html>

I have also provided advice for student writers that is applicable not just in my courses, but in any course you are likely to take as an undergraduate:

<http://www.jasoncons.net/advice-on-writing.html>

Attendance Policy:

Attendance at all course meetings is required. For the first few course sessions (until I know all of your names) I will take a roll call. After that, I will simply record your presence or absence in my notes.

You are permitted two unexplained course absences per semester. After that, each absence will reduce your overall participation grade by 3.33% (i.e., by 1/3 of a letter grade). If you have a legitimate reason to miss class, it is your responsibility to let me know by email *before* class.

Assignments and Grades:

The following is a breakdown of how I will evaluate your performance in the class. More in-depth descriptions, rubrics, and prompts will be provided with each assignment.

- . *Class Participation: 20%*—Active, informed, and respectful participation in class discussions and small group work. Course leadership on days you are a course leader is a significant factor in this grade.
- . *Reading Responses: 20%*—You will write 4 brief (2 page) reading response papers over the course of the semester.
- . *Mid-Term Take Home Exam: 25%*—There will be a mid-term take home exam designed to evaluate your familiarity with concept from the first half of the course.
- . *Final Paper: 35%*—You will write a final research paper for the class based on your own original research.

A note on class participation:

The class participation is worth 20% of your overall grade. This is a famously fuzzy measure. Here is how I plan to assess it:

- 5% of total grade: Showing up on time
- 5% of total grade: Coming prepared to discuss the readings
- 5% of total grade: Making regular and productive contributions to class discussions
- 5% of total grade: Being an effective discussion leader during your designated course sessions

Learning Objectives/ Goals:

Upon completion, students will be able to:

- . Understand and explain the origins of and key debates in political ecology
- . Understand the contributions of anthropology and ethnography to discussions of contemporary and historical environmental change
- . Apply perspectives in political ecology to tease apart key assumptions in standard environmental debates (Neo-Malthusianism, scarcity, nature/culture, etc.)
- . Use a political ecology lens to explain and evaluate real world problems in historical, geographical, and cultural context.
- . Identify and analyze key challenges and complexities related to addressing specific problems in political ecology
- . Analyze and understand different approaches to the study of ecological transformation
- . Write, speak, and communicate more clearly about the politics of environmental change.

Course Introduction

Week 1: What is Political Ecology

January 19: Course Introduction

SUGGESTED:

- Aldo Leopold. 1949. "The Land Ethic" in *A Sand County Almanac*, New York: Oxford University Press.

January 21: *The Origins and Futures of Political Ecology*

- Mike Davis. 2001. "The Origins of the Third World." In *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*. Verso.
- Paul Robbins. "Introduction." In *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell

SUGGESTED:

- Richard Peet and Michael Watts. 1996. "Liberating Political Ecology." In *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. Routledge.

Week 2: What is Political Ecology? 2

January 26: *Political or Apolitical Ecology?*

- Paul Robbins. "Political versus Apolitical Ecologies" and "A Tree with Deep Roots." In *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell

January 28: *The Political Ecology Toolkit*

- Paul Robbins. "The Critical Tools" and "Political Ecology Emerges." In *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Themes, Strategies, Practices

Week 3: Unsettling the Nature/Culture Divide

February 2: *Troubling Nature and Wilderness*

- William Cronon. 1995. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human place in Nature*. WW Norton.
- Raymond Williams. 1983 (1976). "Nature." In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford.

SUGGESTED:

- Smith, N. 1984. Uneven Development, Preface, Introduction and Chapter 2, "The Production of Nature" Oxford: Blackwell, pp. vii-xv, 32-65.
- Castree, N. 2001. Marxism, Capitalism and the Production of Nature, in N. Castree and B. Braun (eds) *Social Nature: Theory, Practice and Politics*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 189-207.

February 4: *Untangling Histories of Nature and Culture*

- Donna Haraway. 1984. "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936." *Social Text*. 11.

SUGGESTED:

- Roderick Neumann. 1995. "Ways of Seeing Africa: Colonial Recasting of African Society and Landscape in Serengeti National Park." *Ecumene*. 2(2).

Week 4: The Production of Boundaries

February 9: Enclosures and Boundary Making

- Karl Marx. 1977. "Part Eight: So-Called Primitive Accumulation (Chapters 26-28)." *Capital, Volume 1*. Vintage.

SUGGESTED:

- David Harvey. 2005. "Accumulation by Dispossession." In *The New Imperialism*. Oxford.

February 11: Displacements and Development

- Rob Nixon. 2010. "Unimagined Communities: Developmental Refugees, Megadams, and Monumental Modernity." *New Formations*. 69.

SUGGESTED:

- Hariprya Rangan. 1996. "From Chipko to Uttaranchal: The Environment of Protest and Development in the Indian Himalaya." In *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. Routledge.

Week 5: The Critique of Violence

February 16: Scarcity/Security

- Kaplan, R. 1994. "The Coming Anarchy." *The Atlantic*. February.
- Nancy Peluso and Michael Watts. 2001. "Violent Environments." In *Violent Environments*. Cornell University Press.

SUGGESTED:

- Malthus, T. 1798. Chapters 1. In *An Essay on the Principle of Population*.
- Michael Watts. 2004. "Resource Curse? Governmentality, Oil and Power in the Niger Delta, Nigeria." *Geopolitics*. 9 (1).

February 18: Violence, Nature, Poverty

- Rob Nixon. 2006. "Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism of the Poor." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*. 13 (2).

SUGGESTED:

- "Rob Nixon Interviewed by Robert Marzec and Allison Carruth." 2014. *Public Culture*. 26:2.
- Michael Taussig. 1984. "Culture of Terror—Space of Death: Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 26 (3).

Week 6: Resource Management and Environmental Governance

February 23: Disciplining the Environment

- Michael Goldman. 2001. "The Birth of a Discipline: Producing Authoritative Green Knowledge, World Bank Style." *Ethnography*. 2(2).
- Paul Robbins. Chapter 9. In *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell

SUGGESTED:

- Derek Hall, Philip Hirsch, and Tania Murray Li. 2011. "Ambient Exclusions: Environmentalism and Conservation." In *Powers of Exclusion: Land Dilemmas in Southeast Asia*. University of Hawaii.

February 25: Contesting Environmental Management

- Donald Moore. 1993. "Contesting Terrain in Eastern Zimbabwe's Highlands: Political Ecology, Ethnography, and Peasant Resource Struggles." *Economic Geography*. 69(4).
- Arun Agrawal. 2005. "Environmentality: Community, Intimate Government, and the Making of Environmental Subjects in Kumaon India." *Current Anthropology*. 46 (2).

SUGGESTED:

- West, Paige. 2006. Environmental Conservation and Mining: Between Experience and Expectation in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. *The Contemporary Pacific* 18 (2):295-313.

Week 7: Fictitious Commodities 1

March 1: Understanding Fictitious Commodities

- Karl Polanyi. 2001 (1944). "The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities: Labor, Land, and Money." In *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Beacon Books.
- Tania Murray Li. 2014. "What is Land? Assembling a Resource for Global Investment." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 39(4).

SUGGESTED:

- Wendy Wolford. 2007. "Land Reform in the Time of Neoliberalism: A Many-Splendored Thing." *Antipode*. 39(3).

March 3: The Global Land Grab

- Jennifer Franco, et al. 2013. *The Global Land Grab: A Primer*. The Transnational Institute.

SUGGESTED:

- Madeliene Fairbairn. 2015. "Foreignization, Financialization, and Land Grab Regulation." *Journal of Agrarian Change*.

Mid-Term Exam Distributed

Week 8: Fictitious Commodities 2

March 8: Political Forests, part 1

- Nancy Peluso and Peter Vandergeest. 2001. "Genealogies of the Political Forest and Customary Rights in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand." *Journal of Asian Studies*. 60 (3).
- David Biggs. 2005. "Managing a Rebel Landscape: Conservation, Pioneers, and the Revolutionary Past in the U Minh Forest, Vietnam." *Environmental History*. 10(3).

SUGGESTED:

- Nancy Peluso. 1995. "Whose Woods Are These? Counter-Mapping Forest Territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia." *Antipode*. 27(4).

March 10: Political Forests, part 2

- Jake Kosek. 2006. "'Smokey Bear is a White Racist Pig.'" In *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico*. Duke University Press.

SUGGESTED:

- Susanna Hecht. 1996. "Invisible Forests: The Political Ecology of Forest Resurgence in El Salvador." In *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. Routledge.

Mid-Term Exam Due: Thursday by Midnight on Canvas

Topics in Political Ecology

Week 9: The Political Ecology of Food/Consumption

March 22: Production

- Timothy Pachirat. 2011. "Introduction: Hidden in Plain Sight" and "Kill Floor." *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight*. Yale University Press.

March 24: Obesities

- Julie Guthman. 2011. "Excess Consumption or Over-Production? US Farm Policy, Global Warming, and the Bizarre Attribution of Obesity." In *Global Political Ecology*. Routledge.

Instructions for final paper distributed

Week 10: The Political Ecology of Water

March 29: Cultivating the Nile, Part 1

- Jessica Barnes. 2014. Chapters 1, 2, and 3. *Cultivating the Nile: The Everyday Politics of Water in Egypt*. Duke University Press

March 31: Cultivating the Nile, Part 2

- Jessica Barnes. 2014. Chapters 4, 5, and 6. *Cultivating the Nile: The Everyday Politics of Water in Egypt*. Duke University Press.

Week 11: The Political Ecology of Extraction

April 5: Extraction and Corporate Social Responsibility

- Marina Welker. 2009. "'Corporate Security Begins in the Community': Mining, the Corporate Social Responsibility Industry, and Environmental Advocacy in Indonesia." *Cultural Anthropology*. 24 (1).

SUGGESTED:

- Douglas Rogers. 2012. "The Materiality of the Corporation: Oil, Gas, and Corporate Social Technologies in the Remaking of a Russian Region." *American Ethnologist*. 39(2).

April 7: Extraction and Environmental Impact

- Anthony Bebbington. 2012. "Underground Political Ecologies." *Geoforum*. 43.

SUGGESTED:

- Anna Tsing. 2000. "Inside the Economy of Appearances." *Public Culture*. 12(1).

Week 12: The Political Ecology of the Swamp

April 12: Swamplife, Part 1

- Laura Ogden. 2011. Chapters 1, 2, and 3. *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*. University of Minnesota Press.

April 14: Swamplife, Part 2

- Laura Ogden. 2011. Chapters 4, 5, and 6. *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*. University of Minnesota Press.

Week 13: Plantations and Trade

April 19: The Darjeeling Distinction, Part 1

- Sarah Besky. 2014. Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2. *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*. University of California Press.

April 21: The Darjeeling Distinction, Part 2

- Sarah Besky. 2014. Chapter 3, Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Conclusion. *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-Trade Tea Plantations in India*. University of California Press.

Week 14: Final Paper Prep

April 26: Library Working Session

April 28: Abstract Working Session

Paper abstract and bibliography due by midnight on Canvas

Week 15: More than Human Natures

May 3: Parasites of Capitalism

- Timothy Mitchell. 2002. "Can the Mosquito Speak?" *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, and Modernity*. University of California Press.

May 5: Interspecies Entanglements

- Anna Tsing. 2012. "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species." *Environmental Humanities*. 1

SUGGESTED:

- Eben Kirsky and Stefan Helmreich. 2010. "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography." *Cultural Anthropology*. 25 (4).
- Van Dooren, Thom. 2012. "Life at the Edge of Extinction: Spectral Crows, Haunted Landscapes and the Environmental Humanities." *Humanities Australia*.