

Political Ecology

Academic year 2018-2019, second semester

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Overview

Political Ecology is a multi-disciplinary field of study that considers the relevance of power and politics for shaping the relationship between humans and their environments. Political ecology contends that environmental imbroglios can only be understood in specifically political terms. In the last decades, the field has expanded to involve not just the political causes of environmentally suspect relationships, but also the many ways in which human-environment relations have political implications (for example, how specific relationships to wildlife have implications for conservation policy, or how specific relationships to resources such as water have implications for water rights). Increasingly, the field is concerned with the uneven distribution of environmental good and with how the construction of such goods is itself involved in the reproduction of inequality. Political ecology is committed to critical analysis and methodological pluralism. It is politically committed to social and environmental justice and motivated by the desire for structural political change.

The course is aimed at students with a background in the social sciences. However, it is specifically tailored to a political science orientation, as it is the political implications of human-environment relations that we will explore. The course relies on a heavy reading load, and students are expected to tackle dense research texts in English and critically assess their arguments. A willingness to read and think through complex arguments is paramount. This goes hand in hand with a willingness to deconstruct received wisdom about human-nature relations.

The course is designed to be a non-exhaustive but rigorous introduction to political ecology. The material is divided into four different themes that capture some of the more important currents in the field: The Human Planet, Nature Conservation, Human-Nature Reciprocity, and Earth Law. Each of these themes will be explored through a series of lectures and seminars. The reading assignments for each week will be uploaded to Canvas and are clearly indicated in the syllabus.

Students should also keep up to date with the wider world of political ecology. For this, they are encouraged to follow <https://entitleblog.org> and <https://politicalecologynetwork.wordpress.com>. The Journal of Political Ecology (<https://journals.uair.arizona.edu/index.php/JPE>), Conservation and Society (<http://www.conservationandsociety.org>), and Human Ecology Review (<https://press.anu.edu.au/human-ecology-review>) are some of the open-source journals students should be familiar with and keep an eye on.

Objectives

At the end of the module students should:

- be able to identify and explain ways in which power and politics influence the human-environment relationship, and vice versa
- be able to independently analyze socio-environmental issues under the lenses of political ecology, and conduct empirical research that leads to such analysis
- have basic knowledge of the history of political ecology and the most common approaches specific to this orientation
- have familiarity with different methods in political ecology and their advantages and disadvantages
- give pertinent examples of current practice and research in political ecology
- develop skills in the preparation and presentation of critical arguments pertaining to the human-environment relationship
- develop critical skills applied to cases in political ecology and the capacity to contextualize cases, and to know what information is missing (knowing what is not known)

Format

The course will be conducted through:

- ex cathedra teaching by the course convener; the PowerPoint slides of the lectures, when applicable, will be made available on Canvas.
- seminar style discussions of assigned readings and cases.
- students are required to read the corresponding texts to prepare for each session and be ready to present the main arguments in class and engage in topical discussion. Class participation is a must, as it is a main ingredient in the approach of this course. Students will often be charged with debating particular topics and representing the results to the class.
- depending on the cultural landscape of Brussels during the course, students may be required to participate in other lectures/seminars/conferences/workshops/screenings on topics of direct relevance to political ecology. Any such events will be announced within a sufficient time-frame and will be updated on the course syllabus.

To sum up: the course blends lectures with seminar-style discussions. Particularly as we advance through the course, groups of students will have to present cases to the wider class and analyze them. Students are expected to have read at least the required reading for each class, and encouraged to have read more and draw parallels across cases. We will often blend theoretical readings with case studies.

Literature

The course makes use of primary sources in English. The necessary material will be made available with sufficient time before each course. See the reading list of each individual lecture for details.

Examination

Class participation is 20% of the final grade.

Students have a choice between a final paper and a take home exam. Both count for 80% of the final grade. The choice has to be made explicit by each student by the middle of the semester and cannot be changed.

A final paper will consist of maximum 6000 words, including footnotes and endnotes and excluding bibliography, and will be either a political ecological analysis of a case, or a theoretical discussion of relevant concepts in political ecology, or a combination of the two. Independent research, over and beyond the literature presented in the course, is expected. The topic of the paper shall be agreed with the lecturer ahead of time. The deadline for submitting the paper will be announced within a reasonable time-frame. Only electronic submissions are accepted, to be sent, by the deadline, to mihnea.tanasescu@vub.be. For every day that a paper is late, three points (out of twenty) will be subtracted from the final grade. A paper is considered a day late five minutes after the deadline has passed, and every twenty-four-hour period henceforth.

A take home exam is written in response to a question posed by the lecturer at a specified time and date. The students then have three hours to write a maximum 6000 words essay on the topic chosen by the lecturer. They are free to write the exam wherever they please. The following regulations are to be respected:

- The students may not consult any other person except the lecturer in answering the essay question. The essay should reflect their own thinking.
- All sources regarding concepts, ideas or words should be cited, in line with the rules regarding plagiarism.
- The lecturer will be available by email for answering questions about the take home exam during its whole duration.
- The students have to take all the necessary precautions to avoid technical problems with their computer. It is their responsibility that they have a electronic copy of their essay, that email functions properly and that the essay is sent on time. The students may make use of university computers or write the essay on their own computer at the university itself.

- The take home exams should be sent to the lecturer, by e-mail (mihnea.tanasescu@vub.be), at the agreed-upon time. No extensions are possible. Three points (out of twenty) will be deducted for every hour an assignment is late.

For both the essay and the take home exam options, standard plagiarism rules apply. Any student that is found guilty of plagiarism will have their exam/essay nullified. The exam/essay is to be written in English. No exceptions are possible. If for medical reasons an exam or essay needs to be written by hand, this can be accommodated if the lecturer is consulted ahead of time and within a reasonable time-frame.

Lecture Overview

Structure

Nota bene: the contents of the lecture overview will be updated regularly throughout the semester. This syllabus is to be treated as a live document and consulted regularly. Reading assignments will be added or subtracted for forthcoming lectures, and the order of the lectures may, as a result of unforeseen contingencies, be changed.

The lectures are divided along four main themes, covering different areas of interest in political ecology. Each class will be divided into an introductory lecture on the topic of the day, and a seminar-style discussion of the reading assignments. Depending on the number of students attending, the class will be divided into three or four groups. Each group will have its own reading assignments for each week, and there may be a common reading assignment for the whole class. Each student is responsible for knowing what group they are part of, and no excuses are acceptable. During each class, after the lecture of the day, the different groups will discuss their reading assignment and present it back to the whole class. Any student from the group can be called upon to summarize the reading assignment for the whole class.

Below is an overview of the themes and the lectures planned for this semester.

Theme I: The Human Planet?

Week 22: Introduction to Political Ecology

February 14th

Required Reading:

- Robbins, P. (2012). Political Ecology (second edition). Chapter 1: Political versus Apolitical Ecologies, p. 11-24. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Forsyth, T. (2003). Critical Political Ecology. Chapter 1: Political Ecology and the Politics of Environmental Science, p.1-20. London: Routledge.

Week 23: Natural Disasters

February 21st

Required Reading:

Group 1:

- Barrios, R. E. (2017). What does catastrophe reveal for whom? The anthropology of crises and disasters at the onset of the anthropocene. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 46, 151-166.

Group 2:

- Gould, K. A., Garcia, M. M., & Remes, J. A. (2016). Beyond "natural-disasters-are-not-natural": the work of state and nature after the 2010 earthquake in Chile. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 23(1), 93-114.

Group 3:

- Sovacool, B. K., Tan-Mullins, M., & Abrahamse, W. (2018). Bloated bodies and broken bricks: Power, ecology, and inequality in the political economy of natural disaster recovery. *World Development*, 110, 243-255.

All Groups:

- Adaman, F. (2012). Power Inequalities in Explaining the Link between Natural Hazards and Unnatural Disasters. *Development and Change* 43(1): 395–407. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7660.2012.01760.x

Recommended Reading:

- Nancy, Jean-Luc (2015). *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Lloréns, H., Santiago, R., Garcia-Quijano, C.G. and de Onís, C.M. (2018) Hurricane Maria: Puerto Rico's Unnatural Disaster, *Social Justice: a journal of crime, conflict and world order*, January 22 2018, retrieved from <http://www.socialjusticejournal.org/hurricane-maria-puerto-ricos-unnatural-disaster/>
- Park, Y., & Miller, J. (2006). The social ecology of Hurricane Katrina: Re-writing the discourse of "natural" disasters. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 76(3), 9-24.
- Murray, M. J. (2009). Fire and Ice: Unnatural Disasters and the Disposable Urban Poor in Post-Apartheid Johannesburg. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33(1): 165-92. DOI:10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00835.x

Week 24: Agriculture and Migration

February 28th room E.0.05

Required Reading:

Group 1:

- Gamso, J., & Yuldashev, F. (2018). Does rural development aid reduce international migration?. *World Development*, 110, 268-282.

Group 2:

- Radel, C., Schmook, B., Carte, L., & Mardero, S. (2018). Toward a Political Ecology of Migration: Land, Labor Migration, and Climate Change in Northwestern Nicaragua. *World Development*, 108, 263-273.

Group 3:

- Carney, M. A. (2014). The biopolitics of 'food insecurity': towards a critical political ecology of the body in studies of women's transnational migration. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 21(1), 1-18.

All groups:

- Kerr, R. B. (2014). Lost and found crops: agrobiodiversity, indigenous knowledge, and a feminist political ecology of sorghum and finger millet in northern Malawi. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 104(3), 577-593.
- Vicol, M., Neilson, J., Hartatri, D. F. S., & Cooper, P. (2018). Upgrading for whom? Relationship coffee, value chain interventions and rural development in Indonesia. *World Development*, 110, 26-37.

Recommended Reading:

- Bennett, A., Ravikumar, A., & Paltán, H. (2018). The Political Ecology of Oil Palm Company-Community partnerships in the Peruvian Amazon: Deforestation consequences of the privatization of rural development. *World Development*, 109, 29-41.
- Unruh, J. D., Krol, M., & Kliot, N. (Eds.). (2005). *Environmental change and its implications for population migration* (Vol. 20). Springer Science & Business Media.

Week 25: cancelled; rescheduled for next week

March 7th

Week 26a: The Anthropocene (guest lecture by Professor Marcel Wissenburg, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen)

March 14th morning room E.0.05

Required Reading:

Group 1:

- Wissenburg, M. (2016) 'The Anthropocene, Megalomania, and the Body Ecologic', in P.H. Pattberg & F. Zeli (eds.), *Environmental Governance in the Anthropocene: Institutions and Legitimacy in a Complex World*, London: Routledge, 15-30.

Group 2:

- Trachtenberg, Z. (2015) 'The Anthropocene, Ethics, and the Nature of Nature'. *Telos* 172: 38-58.

Group 3:

- Luke, Timothy W. (2015b) 'On the Politics of the Anthropocene'. *Telos* 172: 139-62.

All groups:

- Steffen, W., Grinevald, J., Crutzen, P., McNeill, J. (2011). The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, Phil. Trans. R. Soc. A* (2011) 369, 842–867, <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/pdf/10.1098/rsta.2010.0327>

Recommended Reading:

- Baskin, Jeremy (2015) 'Paradigm Dressed as Epoch: The Ideology of the Anthropocene'. *Environmental Values* 24: 9-29.
- Cox, Christopher R. (2015) 'Faulty Presuppositions and False Dichotomies: The Problematic Nature of "the Anthropocene"'. *Telos* 172: 59-82.
- Di Chiro, Giovanna (2016) 'Environmental Justice and the Anthropocene Meme' in Teena Gabrielson, Cherry Hall, John M. Meyer and David Schlosberg (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 362-81.
- Lepori, Matthew (2015) 'There Is No Anthropocene: Climate Change, Species-Talk, and Political Economy'. *Telos* 172: 103-24.

Theme II: Nature Conservation

Week 26b: Neoliberal Conservation

March 14th afternoon (15:00 – 18:00) room D.0.08

Required Reading:

Group 1:

- Münster, D., & Münster, U. (2012). Consuming the forest in an environment of crisis: nature tourism, forest conservation and neoliberal agriculture in South India. *Development and Change*, 43(1), 205-227.

Group 2:

- Arsel, M., & Büscher, B. (2012). Nature™ Inc.: Changes and continuities in neoliberal conservation and market-based environmental policy. *Development and Change*, 43(1), 53-78.

Group 3:

- Ojeda, D. (2012). Green pretexts: Ecotourism, neoliberal conservation and land grabbing in Tayrona National Natural Park, Colombia. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39(2), 357-375.

All groups:

- Allen, K. (2018). Why Exchange Values are Not Environmental Values: Explaining the Problem with Neoliberal Conservation. *Conservation and Society*, 16(3), 243-256.
- Igoe, J., & Brockington, D. (2007). Neoliberal conservation: a brief introduction. *Conservation and society*, 5(4), 432-449.

Recommended Reading:

- Büscher, B. (2012). Payments for Ecosystem Services as Neoliberal Conservation: (Reinterpreting) Evidence from the Maloti-Drakensberg, South Africa. *Conservation and Society*, 10(1), 29-41.
- Jones, C. (2012). Ecophilanthropy, neoliberal conservation, and the transformation of Chilean Patagonia's Chacabuco Valley. *Oceania*, 82(3), 250-263.

Week 27: Conflict and Conservation

March 21st room E.0.04

Required Reading:

Group 1:

- Büscher, B. (2018). From biopower to ontopower? Violent responses to wildlife crime and the new geographies of conservation. *Conservation and Society*, 16(2), 157-169.

Group 2:

- Fletcher, R. (2018). License to Kill: Contesting the Legitimacy of Green Violence. *Conservation and Society*, 16(2), 147-156.

Group 3:

- Pellis, A., Pas, A., & Duineveld, M. (2018). The Persistence of Tightly Coupled Conflicts. The Case of Loisaba, Kenya. *Conservation and Society*, 16(4), 387-396.

All groups:

- Büscher, B., & Fletcher, R. (2018). Under Pressure: Conceptualising Political Ecologies of Green Wars. *Conservation and Society*, 16(2), 105-113.

Recommended Reading:

- Margulies, J. D. (2018). The Conservation Ideological State Apparatus. *Conservation and Society*, 16(2), 181-192.

Week 28: New Directions: Restoration and Rewilding

March 28th room E.0.05

Required Reading:

Group 1:

- Lorimer, J., & Driessen, C. (2013). Bovine biopolitics and the promise of monsters in the rewilding of Heck cattle. *Geoforum*, 48, 249-259.

Group 2:

- Jordan, W. R. (2006). Ecological restoration: Carving a niche for humans in the classic landscape. *Nature and culture*, 1(1), 22-35.

Group 3:

- Tanasescu, M. (2017). Field Notes on the Meaning of Rewilding. *Ethics, Policy & Environment*, 20(3), 333-349.

All groups:

- Jepson, P., Schepers, F., & Helmer, W. (2018). Governing with nature: a European perspective on putting rewilding principles into practice. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 373(1761), 20170434.

Recommended Reading:

- Tanasescu, M. (2017). Responsibility and the Ethics of Ecological Restoration. *Environmental Philosophy*.
- Drenthen, M. (2018). Rewilding in layered landscapes as a challenge to place identity. *Environmental Values*, 27(4), 405-425.
- Lorimer, J., & Driessen, C. (2016). From “Nazi cows” to cosmopolitan “ecological engineers”: Specifying rewilding through a history of Heck cattle. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 106(3), 631-652.
- Jepson, P. (2016). A rewilding agenda for Europe: creating a network of experimental reserves. *Ecography*, 39(2).

Week 29: Parks and People (guest lecture by Dr. Esther Marijnen, Ghent University)

April 4th room E.0.05

Required Reading for All Groups:

- Neumann, R. P. (2003). The Production of Nature: Colonial Recasting of the African Landscape in Serengeti National Park.
- Verweijen, J., Marijnen, E. (2016). The counterinsurgency/conservation nexus: guerilla livelihoods and the dynamics of conflict and violence in the Virunga National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*.

Weeks 30 & 31: Spring Break

Theme III: Human – Nature Reciprocity

Week 32: Nature, Invasiveness, Novelty

April 25th room E.0.05

Required Reading:

Group 1:

- Hobbs, R. J., Higgs, E., & Harris, J. A. (2009). Novel ecosystems: implications for conservation and restoration. *Trends in ecology & evolution*, 24(11), 599-605.
- Murcia, C., Aronson, J., Kattan, G. H., Moreno-Mateos, D., Dixon, K., & Simberloff, D. (2014). A critique of the 'novel ecosystem' concept. *Trends in ecology & evolution*, 29(10), 548-553.
- Hobbs, R. J., Higgs, E. S., & Harris, J. A. (2014). Novel ecosystems: concept or inconvenient reality? A response to Murcia et al. *Trends in ecology & evolution*, 29(12), 645-646.
- Aronson, J., Murcia, C., Kattan, G. H., Moreno-Mateos, D., Dixon, K., & Simberloff, D. (2014). The road to confusion is paved with novel ecosystem labels: a reply to Hobbs et al. *Trends in ecology & evolution*, 29(12), 646-647.

Group 2:

- Comaroff, J. (2017). Invasive Aliens: The Late-Modern Politics of Species Being. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 84(1), 29-52.

Group 3:

- Raffles, H. (2017). Against Purity. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 84(1), 171-182.

All groups:

- Descola, P. (2014). Modes of being and forms of predication.
- Warren, C.R (2007). Perspectives on the 'alien' versus 'native' species debate: a critique of concepts, language and practice

Recommended Reading:

- Kim, E. (2017). Invasive Others and Significant Others: Strange Kinship and Interspecies Ethics near the Korean Demilitarized Zone. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 84(1), 203-220.
- Toadvine, T. (2017). Naturalism, Estrangement, and Resistance: On the Lived Senses of Nature. In *Ontologies of Nature* (pp. 181-198). Springer, Cham.
- Stephens, P. H. (2015). On the Nature of "Nature": The Real Meanings and Significance of John Stuart Mill's Misunderstood Essay. *Environmental Ethics*, 37(3), 359-376.
- Hobbs, R. J., Higgs, E. S., & Hall, C. (2013). Novel ecosystems: intervening in the new ecological world order. John Wiley & Sons.
- Marris, E., Mascaro, J., & Ellis, E. C. (2013). Perspective: Is everything a novel ecosystem? If so, do we need the concept. *Novel Ecosystems: Intervening in the New Ecological World Order*, 345-349.
- Pearce, F. (2016). *The new wild: Why invasive species will be nature's salvation*. Beacon Press.

Week 33: Urban Political Ecology

May 2nd room E.0.05

Required Reading:

Group 1:

- Swyngedouw, E., Kaïka, M., and Castro, E. (2002). Urban Water: A political-ecology perspective. *Built Environment* 28:2.

Group 2:

- Heynen, N., Perkins, H.A., Roy, P. (2006). The Political Ecology of Uneven Urban Green Space. *Urban Affairs Review* 42:1.

Group 3:

- Njeru, J. (2006). The urban political ecology of plastic bag waste problem in Nairobi, Kenya. *Geoforum* 37.

All groups:

- Keil, R. (2004). Progress Report – Urban Political Ecology. *Urban Geography* 26:7.
- Gabriel, N. (2014). Urban Political Ecology: Environmental Imaginary, Governance, and the Non-Human. *Geography Compass* 8:1.

Recommended Reading:

- Keil, R. (2003). Urban Political Ecology. *Urban Geography* 24:8.
- Heynen, N. (2014). Urban Political Ecology I: The Urban Century. *Progress in Human Geography* 38:4.

Week 34: The Ethics of Knowing Beyond the Human

May 9th room E.0.05

Required Reading:

Group 1:

- Harbers, H. (2010). Animal farm love stories. Care in Practice. On Tinkering in Clinics, Homes and Farms, edited by A. Mol, Ingunn Moser and Jeanette Pols, 141-70.

Group 2:

- Driessen, C., & Heutinck, L. F. (2015). Cows desiring to be milked? Milking robots and the co-evolution of ethics and technology on Dutch dairy farms. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 32(1), 3-20.

Group 3:

- Driessen, C. (2012). Farmers engaged in deliberative practices; an ethnographic exploration of the mosaic of concerns in livestock agriculture. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 25(2), 163-179.

All groups:

- Despret, V. (2013). Responding bodies and partial affinities in human–animal worlds. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 30(7-8), 51-76.

Recommended Reading:

- Despret, V., & Porcher, J. (2015). The Pragmatics of Expertise. *Angelaki*, 20(2), 91-99.
- Despret, V. (2015). Who Made Clever Hans Stupid?. *Angelaki*, 20(2), 77-85.
- Tanasescu, M. and Constantinescu, S. (2019). How Knowledge of the Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*) is Formed: Report from the Danube Delta. *Environmental Values*.
- Sandbrook, C., Luque-Lora, R., & Adams, W. M. (2018). Human Bycatch: Conservation Surveillance and the Social Implications of Camera Traps. *Conservation and Society*, 16(4), 493-504.

Theme IV: Earth Law

Week 35: Planet-centered Jurisprudence and Wild Law

May 16th room D.0.08

Required Reading:

Group 1:

- Tanasescu, M. (2014). The Rights of Nature: Theory and Practice. In Wissenburg, M., & Schlosberg, D., *Political Animals and Animal Politics*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Group 2:

- Burdon, P. (2011). The Great Jurisprudence. In Burdon, P. (Ed.), *Exploring wild law: The philosophy of earth jurisprudence*. Wakefield Press.

Group 3:

- Fitz-Henry, E. (2018). Challenging Corporate “Personhood”: Energy Companies and the “Rights” of Non-Humans. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 41(S1), 85-102.

All groups:

- Youatt, R. (2017). Personhood and the Rights of Nature: The New Subjects of Contemporary Earth Politics. *International Political Sociology*, 11(1), 39-54.
- Stone, C. D. (1972). Should Trees Have Standing--Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects. *S. Cal. J. rev.*, 45, 450.

Recommended Reading:

- Burdon, P. (Ed.). (2011). *Exploring wild law: The philosophy of earth jurisprudence*. Wakefield Press.
- Tanasescu, M. (2016). *Environment, Political Representation and the Challenge of Rights: Speaking for Nature*. Springer.

Week 36: The Rights of Nature in Ecuador, Bolivia, India and Legal Personality for Nature in Aotearoa New Zealand

May 23rd room E.0.05

Required Reading:

Group 1:

- Knauß, S. (2018). Conceptualizing human stewardship in the anthropocene: The rights of nature in Ecuador, New Zealand and India. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 1-20.

Group 2:

- Tanasescu, M. (2013). The rights of nature in Ecuador: the making of an idea. *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 70(6), 846-861.

Group 3:

- Sanders, K. (2017). 'Beyond Human Ownership'? Property, Power and Legal Personality for Nature in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Journal of Environmental Law*.

All groups:

- Rawson, A., & Mansfield, B. (2018). Producing juridical knowledge: "Rights of Nature" or the naturalization of rights?. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 2514848618763807.
- Tanasescu, M. (2015). Nature advocacy and the indigenous symbol. *Environmental Values*, 24(1), 105-122.

Recommended Reading:

- Burdon, P. (Ed.). (2011). *Exploring wild law: The philosophy of earth jurisprudence*. Wakefield Press.
- Tanasescu, M. (2016). *Environment, Political Representation and the Challenge of Rights: Speaking for Nature*. Springer.