

Department of Geography
University of Illinois
Prof. Tom Bassett

Geography 520
Fall 2011

Political Ecology

This course introduces students to the vibrant sub-field of political ecology with emphasis on the social and ecological theories that inform past and present research. Students will quickly discover that political ecology is not a theory but a panoply of approaches to conducting human-environmental research. This course thus examines the theoretical perspectives that inform this body of research. These include political economy (Blaikie; Watts), social constructivism and critical realism (Neumann; Robbins), non-equilibrium ecology (Zimmerer), and assorted postmodernist theories (Castree; Braun). This attention to the theoretical orientations of specific authors should sharpen our own social and ecological perspectives in doing political ecological research. Indeed, one of the goals of this class is for students to research and evaluate a particular social or ecological theory or theories that will be useful to their own research. Class discussions and writing projects will repeatedly excavate and explicate the theoretical underpinnings of political ecological research.

A second goal is to acknowledge if not to embrace the diversity of political ecological topics as well as perspectives. Although initially focused on land degradation in the global South, today political ecology includes research in urban areas of the global North and South, environmental politics, environmental history, feminist development studies, science studies, and environmental knowledge and policy. Among its many conceptual and methodological strengths, political ecology is often praised for its potential to integrate multiple social and biophysical processes in explaining environmental change.

A third goal is to assess the epistemological and methodological challenges involved in integrating the natural and social sciences in political ecological research. A fourth and final objective will be to reflect on the political significance of doing political ecology. Paul Robbins has written in his masterful book *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, that there is no such thing as an “apolitical ecology.” That is, politics and power relations are implicit in all human-environmental research and writing. It is not that political ecology is more political than other types of environmental research, it is simply more explicit about how power relations shape environmental change and management. Through course readings, discussions, and writing assignments, students will explore these theoretical, methodological, and political dimensions of political ecology.

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Office Hours: Tuesday: 3-5:00

Text: P. Robbins 2004. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell).

Course Requirements

Grades will be based on weekly 2-page written commentaries on assigned readings (60%) and a 15-20 page research paper (40%).

a) Commentaries should focus on conceptual, theoretical, or methodological aspects of the readings scheduled for that week. They are due on Tuesday (no later than 5:00) on the Compass website in that week's Discussion folder. These commentaries will serve as a basis of discussion of our meetings.

b) Term papers can take a variety of forms: a chapter in a M.A. thesis, a journal article, or a research paper. Whatever the project, its core should reflect an engagement with the theoretical dimensions of political ecology. Be sure to discuss your project with me early in the semester. Term papers are due in class on December 7.

Class Themes and Readings

Week 1 (Aug 24): Course introduction

Overview of course syllabus, student introductions, short lecture on political ecology approaches.

Week 2 (Aug 31): The roots of political ecology

Robbins, P. 2004. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, Chaps. 1-2, pp. 1-40.

Neumann, R. 2005. *Making Political Ecology* (New York: Hodder Arnold), Chap 2, "Roots and Branches", pp. 17-43.

Zimmerer, K. 2010. Retrospective on Nature-Society Geography: Tracing Trajectories (1911-2010) and Reflecting on Translations. *Annals of the AAG* 100(5): 1076-94.

Week 3 (Sept 7): Hazards, Adaptation, and Cultural Ecology

Brookfield, H. 1973. Introduction: explaining or understanding? The study of adaptation and change. In H. Brookfield (ed.) *The Pacific in Transition. Geographical perspectives on adaptation and change*. Canberra: ANU Press, pp. 3-24.

Burton, I. R. Kates, and G. White. (1978) *Environment as Hazard* (New York: Oxford U. Press), Chap. 1. Is the environment becoming more hazardous? Chap. 2. Hazard, Response, and Choice; pp. 1-52.

Butzer, K.W. 1990. "The Realm of Cultural Ecology: Adaptation and Change in Historical Perspective." In *The Earth as Transformed by Human Action*, edited by B. L. Turner II et al., 685-702. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Denevan, W.M. "Adaptation, Variation, and Cultural Geography." *The Professional Geographer* 35, no. 4 (1983): 399-406.

Also, read one of the following case studies:

Netting, R. McC (1977) *Cultural Ecology* (Menlo Park: Cummings), Chap. 4. East African Pastoralists; or Chap 5. Cultivators, pp. 40-82.

Rappaport, R.A. 1969. "Ritual Regulation of Environmental Relations Among a New Guinea People." In: Vayda, A. (ed). *Environment and Cultural Behavior*. Garden City, New York: The Natural History Press, pp. 181-201.

Nietschmann, B. 1972. "Hunting and fishing focus among the Miskito Indians, Eastern Nicaragua." *Human Ecology*. 1: 41-67.

Week 4 (Sept 14): Critical Cultural Ecology

Robbins, P. *Political Ecology*, Chap 3. pp. 41-70

Watts, M. 1983. On the poverty of theory: natural hazards research in context. In K. Hewitt (ed.) *Interpretation of Calamity* (Boston: Allen and Unwin), 23-62.

Blaikie, P. 1985. *The Political Economy of Soil Erosion* (London: Longman), Chap 5, pp. 79-106.

Scott, J. 1976. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale). Chap 1, pp. 13-35.

Further readings:

Bernstein, H. 1977. Notes on capital and peasantry. *Review of African Political Economy* Vol.4 No.10 (Winter 1977), pp. 60-73.

P. Blaikie. 1994. Political ecology in the 1990s: An evolving view of nature and society. CASID Distinguished Speaker Series, NO. 13. Michigan State University.

Week 5 (Sept 21): First Wave Political Ecology

Robbins, P. *Political Ecology*, Chap 4. pp. 71-84

Blaikie, P. and H. Brookfield. 1987. *Land Degradation and Society* (London: Methuen), Chaps 1 & 2.

Bassett, T. 1988. The political ecology of peasant-herder conflicts in northern Ivory Coast. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 78 (3): pp. 453-472.

M. Watts. 1987. Drought, environment and food security: some reflections on peasants, pastoralists, and commoditization in dryland West Africa. In M. Glantz (ed.) *Drought and Hunger in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press), pp.171-212.

Further readings:

Blaikie P. 1994. Political ecology in the 1990s: An evolving view of nature and society. CASID Distinguished Speaker Series, NO. 13. Michigan State University.

N. Peluso. 1995. Whose woods are these? Counter-mapping forest territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia, *Antipode*. 27(4): 383-406.

Watts, M. 1994. The privatization of everything. *Progress in Human Geography* 18(3): 371-84.

Week 6 (Sept 28): Ecological Theory, Environmental Science, and Land Use/Land Cover Change

Robbins, P. *Political Ecology*, Chap 5, pp. 87-106

Hobbs, R.J., L. M. Hallett, P. R. Ehrlich and H.A. Mooney. Intervention ecology: Applying Ecological Science in the twenty-first century. *BioScience*, 61(6):442-450.

Scoones, I. 1999. New Ecology and the Social Sciences: What Prospects for a Fruitful Engagement *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 28, pp. 479-507

Turner, M.D. 2009. Ecology: Natural and Political. In N. Castree, et al. (eds.) *Environmental Geography* (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell), pp. 181-197.

Further reading:

Botkin, D. 1990. *Discordant Harmonies: A new ecology for the twenty-first century*. New York: Oxford U. Press.

Crosby, W. 1986. *Ecological imperialism: The biological expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rocheleau, D. and L. Ross. 1995. Trees as tools, trees as text: Struggles over resources in Zambrana-Chacuey, Dominican Republic, *Antipode* 27(4): 407-28.

Turner, M. 1993. Overstocking the range: A critical analysis of the environmental science of sahelian pastoralism. *Economic Geography* 69(4): 402-21.

Zimmerer, K. 1994. Human geography and the “new ecology”: The prospect and promise of integration. *Annals of the AAG* 84: 108-25.

Week 7 (Oct 5): Post-structural critiques and extensions of early political ecology

Robbins, P. *Political Ecology*, Chap. 6, pp. 107-26.

Peet, R. and M. Watts 1996. Liberation Ecology: Development, sustainability, and environment in an age of market triumphalism, *Liberation Ecologies*. New York: Routedledge, pp. 1-45.

Demeritt, D. 1996. Social theory and the reconstruction of science in Geography. *Transactions of the IGB* 21: 484-503.

Leach, M. and R. Mearns 1996. Challenging received wisdom in Africa. In M. Leach and R. Mearns (ed.) *The Lie of the Land*. Oxford and Portsmouth, NH. James Currey and Heinemann, pp. 1-33.

Week 8 (Oct 12). The political ecology of scale

Neumann, R. 2009. Political ecology: theorizing scale. *Progress in Human Geography* 33(3): 398-406.

Sayre N. 2009. Scale. In N. Castree, et al. (eds.) *A Companion to Environmental Geography*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 95-108.

R. Galt. 2010. Scaling up political ecology: the case of illegal pesticides on fresh vegetables imported into the United States. *Annals of the AAG* 100 (2): 365-75.

M. Goldman. 2011. The politics of connectivity across human-occupied landscapes Corridors near Nairobi National Park, Kenya. In M. Goldman, P. Nadasdy, and M. Turner (eds) *Knowing Nature: Conversations at the intersection of political ecology and science studies*. (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press), pp. 186-202.

M. Turner. 2011. The new pastoral development paradigm: Engaging the realities of property institutions and livestock mobility in dryland Africa. *Society & Natural Resources*. Vol. 24 (5), pp. 469-484

Further Reading:

K. Zimmerer and T. Bassett. 2003. *Political Ecology: An integrative approach to geography and environment-development studies*. New York: Guilford, Chap 1, Approaching political ecology.

A. Herrod, 2011. *Scale*. New York: Routledge. Chap 1, "What is scale and how do we think about it?", pp. 1-58.

Week 9 (Oct 19): Environmental discourses and narratives

Political Ecology, Chaps. 7-8, pp. 129-46.

Fairhead, J. and M. Leach 1996. Rethinking the forest-savanna mosaic: Colonial science and its relics in West Africa. In M. Leach and R. Mearns (ed.) *The Lie of the Land*. Oxford and Portsmouth, NH. James Currey and Heinemann, pp. 105-121.

Bassett, T. and Koli Bi Zueli 2000. Environmental discourses and the Ivorian savanna. *Annals of the AAG*. 90(1): 67-95

Adger, N., et al. 2001. Advancing a political ecology of global environmental discourses. *Development and Change* 32(4): 681-715.

Further reading:

Dressler, Wolfram, et al. 2010. From hope to crisis and back again? A critical history of the global CBNRM narrative. *Environmental Conservation* 37(1): 5-15.

Forsyth, T. and A. Walker. 2008. *Forest guardians, forest destroyers: The politics of environmental knowledge in Northern Thailand*. Seattle: U. of Washington Press, Chaps 1-2.

L. Gray. 1999. Is land being degraded? A multi-scale examination of physical measurement and social explanations from western Burkina Faso. *Land Degradation & Development* 10(4): 329–343.

Leach, M. and R. Mearns 1996. *The Lie of the Land: Challenging received wisdom on the African environment* (Oxford and Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann and James Currey).

Week 10 (Oct 26) Neoliberal nature and environmental governance

Robertson, M. 2004. The neoliberalization of ecosystem services: wetland mitigation banking and problems in environmental governance. *Geoforum* 35(3): 361-373.

McCarthy, J. and Scott Prudham. 2004. Neoliberal nature and the nature of neoliberalism. *Geoforum* 35 (3): 275-283.

Liverman, D. 2004. “Who governs, at what scale, and at what price?” Geography, environmental governance, and the commodification of nature. *Annals of the AAG*. 94(4): 734-738.

Prudham, S. 2009. Commodification. In N. Castree, et al. (eds.) *A Companion to Environmental Geography*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 123-142.

Braun, B. 2009. Nature. In N. Castree, et al. (eds.) *A Companion to Environmental Geography*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 19-36.

Further Reading:

Bakker, K. 2010. The limits of ‘neoliberal natures’: Debating green neoliberalism. *Progress in Human Geography* 34(6): 715-735.

Castree, N. 2005. *Nature*. New York: Routledge.

Peet, R., P. Robbins, and M. Watts. 2011. Global Nature. In R. Peet, P. Robbins, and M. Watts (eds.) *Global Political Ecology*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-47.

Eden, S. 2011. The politics of certification: consumer knowledge, power, and global governance in ecolabeling. In R. Peet, P. Robbins, and M. Watts (eds.) *Global Political Ecology*. New York: Routledge, pp. 169-84.

Week 11. (Nov 2) Political ecology of natural resource management

Robbins, P. *Political Ecology*, Chaps 9-10, pp. 172--201

Peluso, N. 1993. Coercing Conservation? The politics of state resource control. *Global Environmental Change* 3(2) 199-217.

Zimmerer, K. The reworking of conservation geographies: Nonequilibrium landscapes and nature-society hybrids. *Annals of the AAG*. 90(2) 356-69.

Daniels, R. and T. Bassett 2002. The spaces of conservation and development around Lake Nakuru National Park, Kenya. *Professional Geographer* 54(4): 481-90.

Gray, L. 2002. Environmental policy, land rights, and conflict: rethinking community natural resource management programs in Burkina Faso. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20(2) 167 – 182.

Further reading:

Goldman, M. 2003. "Partitioned Nature, Privileged Knowledge: Community-based Conservation in Tanzania." *Development and Change*. 34(5): 833 - 862

Neumann, R. 2004. Nature-state-territory: Toward a critical theorization of conservation enclosures. In R. Peet and M. Watts (eds.) *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, development, social movements*, (2nd edition). New York: Routledge, pp. 195-217.

Turner, M. 1999. Conflict, environmental change, and social institutions in dryland Africa: Limitations of the community resource management approach. *Society and Natural Resources* 12: 643-57.

Wilshusen P, Brechin S, Fortwangler C, West P. 2002). Reinventing a square wheel: Critique of a resurgent "protection paradigm" in international biodiversity conservation. *Society and Natural Resources* 15:17–40.

Week 12 (Nov 9) Political ecological methods

Batterbury, S., T. Forsyth, and K. Thomson 1997. Environmental transformations in developing countries: hybrid research and democratic policy. *The Geographical Journal* 163(2): 126-132.

Bebbington, A. and S. Batterbury 2001. Transnational livelihoods and landscapes: Political ecologies of globalization. *Ecumene* 8(4): 369-80.

O'Reilly, K. 2006. Women fieldworkers and the politics of participation. *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture and Society* 31(4): 1075-98.

Robbins, P. 2010. Human-environment field study. In B. Gomez and J.P. Jones III (eds.) *Research Methods in Geography*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 241-256.

St. Martin, K. and M. Pavlovskaya. 2009. Ethnography. In N. Castree, et al. (eds.) *A Companion to Environmental Geography*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 370-384.

Further reading:

DeLyser, D. 2010. Writing it up. In B. Gomez and J.P. Jones III (eds.) *Research Methods in Geography*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 424-436.

Hawkins, R. and D. Ojeda. 2011. Gender and environment: Critical tradition and new challenges. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29: 237-53.

Mels, T. 2009. Analysing environmental discourses and representations. In N. Castree, et al. (eds.) *A Companion to Environmental Geography*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 385-399.

Secor, A. 2010. Social surveys, interviews, and focus groups. In B. Gomez and J.P. Jones III (eds.) *Research Methods in Geography*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 194-205.

Smith, D. 2010. The politics and ethics of research. In B. Gomez and J.P. Jones III (eds.) *Research Methods in Geography*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 411-423.

Week 13 (Nov 16) Revisiting Adaptation in the Environmental Change Literature

Head, L. 2010. Cultural ecology: adaptation—retrofitting a concept? *Progress in Human Geography* 34(2): 234-242.

Wilbanks, T. and R. Kates. 2010. Beyond adapting to climate change: Embedding adaptation in responses to multiple threats and stresses. *Annals of the AAG* 100(4): 719-728.

Folke, C., Carpenter, S.R., Walker, B., Scheffer, M., Chapin, T., and J. Rockström. “Resilience Thinking: Integrating Resilience, Adaptability and Transformability.” *Ecology and Society* 15, no. 4 (2010): 1-20.

Adger, N., et al. 2003. Adaptation to climate change in the developing world. *Progress in Developing Studies* 3(3): 179-195.

Mearns, R. and A. Norton. 2010. Equity and vulnerability in a warming world: Introduction and overview. In R. Mearns and A. Norton (eds.) *Social Dimensions of Climate Change: Equity and vulnerability in a warming world* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank), pp. 1-44.

Further reading:

Adger, N. et al. 2007. Assessment of adaptation practices, options, constraints and capacity. *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 717-43.

Chapin III, F. S., Carpenter, S., Kofinas, G., Folke, C., et al. 2010. Ecosystem Stewardship: Sustainability Strategies for a Rapidly Changing Planet. *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 25 (4): 241-249.

Folke, C., Hahn, T., Olsson, P., and J. Norberg. “Adaptive Governance of Social–Ecological Systems.” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 30 (2005): 441-473.

Füssel, M. and Klein, R. 2006. Climate change vulnerability assessments: an evolution of conceptual thinking. *Climate Change* 75: 301-29.

Head, L. J. Atchinson, A. Gates and P. Muir. 2011. A fine-grained study of the experience of drought, risk and climate change among Australian wheat farming households. *Annals of the AAG* 101(5): 1089-1108.

Leichenko, R., K. O’ Brien, and W. Solecki 2010. Climate change and the global financial crisis: A case of double exposure. *Annals of the AAG* 100 (4): 963-972.

Week 14 (Nov 23) Thanksgiving Break

Week 15 (Nov 30) Food Studies

Friedberg, S. 2009. "Eggs: the Shell Game," Chap 3 in S. Friedberg, *Fresh* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press), pp. 86-121.

Guthman, J and E M DuPuis. 2006. "Embodying Neoliberalism: Economy, Culture, and the Politics of Fat." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24 (3): 427-448.

Dunn, E. 2007. "Escherichia Coli, Corporate Discipline and the Failure of the Sewer State." *Space and Polity* 11 (1): 35-53.

DuPuis, E Melanie and Daniel Block. 2008. "Sustainability and Scale: US Milk-Market Orders as Relocalization Policy." *Environment and Planning A* 40 (8): 1987-2005.

Week 16 (Dec 7) Student Paper Presentations