

THE POLITICS OF NATURE:
CRITICAL POLITICAL ECOLOGY & THE GLOBAL SOUTH
(ANG 6286)

Instructor: M. Heckenberger, Anthropology
Spring 2015; Turlington 2341; M (6): 12:50-1:40; W (6-7): 12:50-2:45
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This course is an advanced survey of critical political ecology. Classic monographs and perspectives set the agenda, in the early 21st century, particularly the critical theory that emerged from the Frankfurt School and Chicago School of urban ecology. It focuses on what in anthropology are often referred to as the “new ecologies,” addressing symbolic, historical and political aspects of ecology. It also focuses on actual case materials from the Global South and Latin America, particularly, Brazil, which highlight the central importance of politics in the construction of nature and practical engagements with it.

Traditional approaches that seek to examine relations between nature and culture generally focus on how culture orders nature or how nature orders culture. Today, this basic contention, often posed as the difference between scientific and interpretative positions, has multiplied in knowledge hybrids that include science, social science and the humanities and articulate with broader issues of sustainability, governance and social justice in understanding coupled human-natural systems. For the anthropologist this means that the scope of inquiry and practice expands from “going native,” understanding “them,” whether that be present or past groups but how “natives” are becoming (or always have been) “us,” through global connections and Western discourse, including scientific research. Both scientific and interpretive approaches represent abstractions that often only divide as such in academic debates, when real world contexts of research are seen as very dynamic, multi-sited and poly-vocal. These contexts require equally diverse research teams and other collaborations outside of the academy.

The concept of sustainability, in particular, captures the diverse and often contentious polemics, in conceptual and practical terms, in global climate, ecological integrity, biodiversity conservation, economic development, geo-politics and social justice: the three poles of ecology, economy and society. The term is particularly useful in considering these overlapping domains, especially the explicit goal of achieving balance between overlapping domains of ecology, economy and social equity, the “sweet spot” where the optimal conditions for each overlap. The class focuses particularly on Latin America and, specifically, debates surrounding urban and rural sustainability, such as major initiatives, agro-pastoral, energy and urban development.

The class will acquaint students with the major themes of critical political ecology, particularly through integration with actual research and academic interests of class participants: The course promotes the view of anthropology as “meeting place,” uniquely poised to consider the diverse academic, socio-economic, geo-political and

cultural interests involved in contemporary scientific and humanistic research, including the views and rights of local populations and broader society. The ultimate aim is to create a work group or think tank – set a table - based on clear positions of participants and around which a dialogue will be developed to both address common themes: sustainability, but also enrich each individual component.

There are four major works that will be covered in class (Biro, Latour, Agrawal and Tsing) and one book that provide a general background to critical political ecology (Robbins). Primary readings will be complemented with current (2000-2013) readings to be selected based on the specific composition of the course. Readings suggested by participants are encouraged, particularly relating to individual presentations.

Evaluation is based on attendance and participation (10%), a class power-point overview presentation (30%) and a final product (60%). This requires that the preparation of materials, including abstracts, mid-semester draft, and final products are developed throughout the semester. Draft products (papers, proposals) are due at mid-semester for distribution and discussion in class, with presentation of this in class (25-40 minutes). A final synopsis of paper development and articulation with themes explored in course will be given, with each being open in terms of content and length (could be open discussion around a targeted reading or actual presented case material related individual projects, a reading paper or narrative outline, or a powerpoint presentation; 15-40 minutes).

Recommended Books:

1. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* (2004); Paul Robbins; Blackwell.
2. *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crisis* (2011); Andrew Biro; University of Toronto.
3. *The Politics of Nature* (2004); Bruno Latour; Harvard.
4. *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects* (2005); Arun Agrawal; Duke.
5. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (2004); Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing; Princeton.

Weekly Course Outline:

1. Course themes and objectives (WSF3; proposal or other submitted);
2. Introduction: What is Ecology and Politics (Fruhmann et al. 2006; Gibbons 2003; Heckenberger 2013):

PART I: THE NEW ECOLOGIES

3. The New Ecologies and Politics of Nature (Stott and Sullivan 2005; Sullivan 2005; Robbins 2004, intro, “hatchet and seed” and conclusion)
4. Historical and Symbolic Ecology

5. Political Ecology
6. The New Ecologies in Action, Stories from the Field (Amazon archaeology 3 (09/06-13/2013); Encontro Xingu (09/28-29, Altamira)

PART II: CRITICAL POLITICAL ECOLOGY

7. Biro (each read carefully one to two chapters for presentation)
8. Latour 1: Sao Paulo case (“Coração da Cidade” powerpoint; Heck 2012; Goldstein 2009; Herzfeld 2010)
9. Latour 2: Amazonia (Latour 1998, 2009; Heckenberger 2009, 2012; Viveiros 1998) Heck FASA lecture “The Science of the Concrete: Context, Dialogue and Collaboration in 21st century Anthropology” recommended Friday 10/18 @ 4 pm
10. *Environmentality* & Governmentality (Agrawal): **Presentation 1**
11. *Environmentality* & Governmentality (Agrawal): **Presentation 2**
12. *Friction* & Globalization (Tsing): **Presentation 3**
13. *Friction* & Globalization (Tsing): **Presentation 4**

PART III: KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

14. Grass-roots Participation (selected readings from Pound et al. 2003, *Managing Natural Resources for Sustainable Livelihoods: Uniting Science and Participation*, Earthscan; Urban Brazil): **Presentation 5**
15. The New Dynamics of Knowledge Production & Emergent Brazil & Latin America (Chapin 2005; Gibbons 2001; Gibbons et al. 1994; Nowotny et al. 2001; Heck 2004, 2007): **Presentation 6**

Final Recap (final syllabus, including final paper titles and abstracts)