NRE 577: Political Ecology, Environmental Security and Conflict

Fall 2017
Monday 4:00 to 7:00 pm
Class Meeting Room: 1512 CC
Little Building

Faculty: Bilal Butt, PhD.
School for Environment & Sustainability
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Tel. (734)-615-6149
Office: 2502 Dana Building
Mailbox: 1535 Dana Building
Office hours: Monday 11:00 am to 12:00 pm – scheduling at this link

GSI: Sindhu Bharadwaj
Email: bsindhu@umich.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 1:00 to 2:30 pm, 4040 Dana Building (or by appointment)

Course Outline
This course uses a geographical political ecology lens to interrogate conflicts (broadly defined) between people and institutions over natural resources, in both developed and developing world contexts. The course will first review the literature on political ecology as an explanatory framework by tracing out its intellectual genealogy and outlining some of the current approaches and perspectives utilized in this subfield. Next, we will critique traditional approaches to the study of natural resources related conflicts. The remainder of the course will rely on theoretical and empirical studies, which help to unveil the complexities associated with conflict environments. Seven specific themes will be addressed in two parts. The first part concentrates on political ecological approaches to the study of environmental commodities and (violent) conflict and encompasses: (1) population, resource scarcity and green security, and (2) conflict commodities and extractive natural resources (oil, diamonds, forests, and water). The second part of the course probes deeper into the social and political aspects of environmental conflicts and specifically examines: (3) gender & the environment; (4) land, culture & identity; (5) climate change; (6) food security, and; (7) conflicts between people and protected areas.

Course Prerequisites
There are no prerequisites but it is assumed that students have a working knowledge of where places are located and have the ability to find out if they do not. This is a class that is primarily intended for Masters and PhD students who are focused on research. It is theoretically heavy and draws on multiple epistemological approaches to the study of people and the environment.

Academic Misconduct
Students are advised to thoroughly examine the student advocacy and judicial affairs website to understand what is meant by academic misconduct. The website can be accessed from here (http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic_and_professional_integrity/).

Course Readings
Additional readings (required): Will be provided as needed as pdf files on CANVAS
Textbook (Required):
   *Also available as an ebook

Textbooks (Supplementary):

Readings Responses
A critical component of graduate education is the gain the ability to thoughtfully read and critique academic works as well as to formalize these critiques in a written form. To help you achieve this goal, you will be required to write a two to four-page response to the readings each week interval. You will receive a prompt for the first of the three responses while the other two will be independently structured. You will post these responses to the CANVAS —Discussion section at preset due dates. During the end of each class period the instructor will provide a preview of the following assignment. It is important to develop and refine your own ideas as part of these responses in preparation for the final (term) paper (30% of Final Grade)

Discussion Leadership
Classes are discussion-oriented and draw heavily on readings from the literature (both the required and in some cases, the supplemental readings). To help facilitate class discussion, two students will volunteer to provide a series of questions for each class meeting. Questions must address concepts covered in the readings for that week and students must be prepared to clarify the material. Questions and any relevant discussion points should be posted to Canvas by the day before class. (10% of Final Grade).

Term Paper and Research Proposal
A major component of this class is a research paper. This will involve posing an interesting question related to political ecology, environmental security and conflict, and then setting out to answer this question through library research (in some cases you may want to examine existing datasets on conflict, such as those related to climate change or human rights). You will be graded based on the content presented in the paper as well as organization, clarity, citations, etc. A number of intermediary due dates will be established, to help you along with the paper. The research paper should not exceed 20 double-spaced pages.

1. Research Proposal and Bibliography (2 to 5 pages) - Due (to the GSI by Friday October 13 at 5:00pm(10% of Final Grade)
   - This will entail posing an interesting problem or question related to ‘conflict’ and the ‘environment’ both of which are broadly defined.
   - Topics should be related to your on-going career and research interests
   - A tentative outline should provide you with the starting point for your investigations. This outline should be similar to the structure you have followed in previous papers (Introduction -> research question -> Literature Review -> Methods -> Study area/Region -> Results/discussions -> Conclusions
   - You will then provide a list of references from which you will draw on to either support a line of argument or to refute a particular dominant narratives
   - Should be built on themes which we have been addressing as part of the class
• Be sure to sketch out preliminary diagrams and/or figures that illustrate conceptual models or networks of actor interactions

3. Peer Review of Paper Draft - Due (to reviewers) Sunday November 26 at 5:00pm (10% of Final Grade)

**Peer Review Exercise:**
A peer review exercise will be conducted to help you strengthen the structure and execution of your term paper. You will receive comments from at least three other class members (and you, in turn will provide three students with feedback). The modalities of this exercise will be discussed on the first day of class and a guideline sheet will be prepared to help you organize your critiques as part of the peer review process. More information will be provided as the semester progresses.

• The research question should be clearly spelt out (i.e. the purpose of this paper is to...)
• You will then set about out to answer this question through library research, and in some instances, the analysis of relevant data sets.
• The scope and intent of the investigation in the paper must also be clearly delineated as well as any supporting analytical and theoretical frameworks
• More fully fleshed out narrative emanating from the proposal
• Should be properly structured
• Should rely on evidence from secondary sources (either journal articles) or existing datasets
• Methods should be clearly delineated
• Papers should be organized, written clearly and free of errors.
• All sources used in preparing your paper as well as references for supporting maps, figures and tables, must be cited, including data sources.
• Use standard citation and presentation forms (e.g., Kate Turabian’s Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations)
• Paper should ideally be innovative and build on lines of investigation, which are new and novel. They should provide a good counter-narrative to dominant discourses of conflicts over natural resources.
• Paper should also try and stay away from using ‘straw-person’ arguments (for example, commonly citing neo-Malthusian and apolitical explanations). Rather the paper should expand on existing literatures, which have already demonstrated that these explanations are less accurate and imprecise. Your work should seek to move these conversations forward without necessarily grounding it in, for example, Neo-Malthusian narratives.
• Should be as detailed as possible
• Peer review sessions will occur outside of class hours
• The guiding principles for a useful peer review are as follows: 1) engage at the level of ideas; 2) back up your comments with specific examples from the draft; and 3) be precise when giving advice.
• Comments should revolve around: (1) structure, and; (2) execution.
• You will prepare two sets of written evaluation: (1) confidential comments to the ‘editor’ (me); (2) blind comments to the author. These should be e-mailed to the GSI (bsindhu@umich.edu) by the due date.
• The peer review exercise will be double blind. I.e. you do not know who is writing the paper and the author of the paper will not know who the reviewer is.
• You will provide a rating out of 5 (5 being a high rating and 1 a low rating)

4. Final Paper (no more than 20 double spaced pages excluding references) - Due (to me) Friday December 8 @ 5:00 pm (30% of Final Grade)

• The paper should be a polished, clear and concise product. Don’t BS your way through the paper – I will know!
• Should also significantly incorporate changes from the project draft and peer review
• Final format should be similar to a journal which you would ideally like your work published in
Finally, I will not tolerate late submissions, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

**Grading**

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Leadership</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Readings Responses (3 in total)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Proposal and Bibliography</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Review of Paper Draft</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Final Paper</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Final grades are based on a total percentage for the term. Grade cutoff points (in terms of percentages) are as follows: A+ (100%), A (95.00 to 99.99%), A- (90.00 to 94.99%), B+ (87.00 to 89.99%), B (83.00 to 86.99%), B- (80.00 to 82.99%), C+ (77.00 to 79.99%), C (73.00 to 86.99%), C- (70.00 to 72.99%), D+ (67.00 to 69.99%), D (63.00 to 66.99%), D- (60.00 to 62.99%), E (50.00 to 59.99%), F (40.00 to 49.99%).

*Tentative Schedule*

*Note that during the course it is possible that some of the topics and readings will have their dates changed, or contents altered. I will try to provide as much advance warning of changes as possible.*

**PART I: POLITICAL ECOLOGY AS A CONCEPTUAL & ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

**Week 1:**  
**Course Overview and What is Political Ecology I?**

**Monday Sep 11**

*Course Overview and Introduction to Political Ecology*

**Required Readings**


**Supplementary**


**Week 2:**  
**What is Policy Ecology II?**

**Monday Sep 18**

*The Critical Tools of Political Ecology*
Required Readings


Supplementary

(Note: Please also read the commentary [by Michael Watts and Nick Middleton] and author response [by Piers Blaikie] in the ‘Classics in Human Geography Revisited’)

Week 3: What is Political Ecology III?

Monday Sep 25

Challenges in Ecology, Social Construction & Explanation

Required Readings


Supplementary


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**Week 4:**

**What is Political Ecology IV?**

**Monday Oct 02**

*Degradation & Marginalization, Conservation & Control, Environmental Conflict, etc.*

**Required Readings:**


**Supplementary**


Monday Oct 02  
**Reading Response 1 Due (Post on CANVAS AND as a hardcopy to Bilal)**

**PART II: POLITICAL ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMMODITIES AND (VIOLENT) CONFLICT**

**Week 5: Population, Resource Scarcity & Green Security**

**Monday Oct 09**  
*Neo-Malthusian and apolitical explanations of population & scarcity*

**Required Readings (First Half):**


**Supplementary**


**Political-Ecological Explanations**

**Required Readings (Second Half):**


**Supplementary:**


RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHY (2 TO 5 PAGES) - DUE (TO GSI) FRIDAY OCTOBER 13 AT 5:00PM

Week 6: NO CLASS (FALL BREAK)

Monday Oct 16 No Class (Fall Break)

Week 7: Conflict Commodities (Oil)

Monday Oct 23

The Political Ecology/Economy of War

Required Readings (First Half):


Supplementary


Petro violence

Required Readings (Second Half):


Supplementary


Monday Oct 23

**Reading Response 2 Due (Post on CANVAS)**

**Week 8: Conflict Commodities (Diamonds & Other Gems)**

Monday Oct 30

**Gems: A Resource Curse?**

**Required Readings (First Half): Conceptual Approaches**


**Supplementary**


**Required Readings (Second Half): Certification & Commodity Chains**


**Supplementary**

Week 9: Conflict Commodities (Forests)

Monday Nov 06

Required Readings (First Half):  

Forest exploitation in the developing world


Supplementary


Required Readings (Second Half)  

The Politics (and life) of Forests in the developed world


Supplementary


**Week 10:** Conflict Commodities (Water)

Monday Nov 13

Required Readings (First Half):  **Conceptual Overviews**


Supplementary


Required Readings (Second Half):  **Case studies**


**Supplementary**


**PART III: PROBING DEEPER INTO THE SOCIAL & POLITICAL ASPECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS**

**Week 11: Gender & Environmental Conflict**

Monday Nov 20

**Required Readings (First Half):  **Slow Violence and Feminist political Ecology**


**Supplementary**


Required Readings (Second Half): Gender Politics and Conflicts


Supplementary


Monday Nov 20 Reading Response 3 Due at 4:20pm (Post on CANVAS)

PEER REVIEW OF PAPER DRAFT - DUE (TO REVIEWERS) SUNDAY NOVEMBER 27 AT 5:00PM (10% OF FINAL GRADE)

Week 12: Climate Change & Environmental Conflict

Monday Nov 27

Required Readings (First Third): Climate Change & Conflict in Darfur: Fact or Fiction


**Required Readings (Second Third):**

*Does Climate Change Drive Violence?*


**Required Readings (Second Third):**

*Climate Science and Slow Violence*


**Supplementary**


**Week 13  Food, Security & Environmental Conflict**

**Monday Dec 4**

**Required Readings (first Half) Neoliberalism and Food Security/Politics**


**Supplementary**


**Required Readings (Second Half): Food Sovereignty**


**Supplementary**


**Week 14: Conservation Conflicts**

**Monday Dec 11**

**Required Readings (First Half): War, by Conservation**


**Final Reading (Required)**


**Epilogue (supplementary)**


**Supplementary**


**HARDCOPY FINAL PAPER (NO MORE THAN 20 DOUBLE SPACED PAGES EXCLUDING REFERENCES) - DUE (TO ME) FRIDAY DECEMBER 08 @ 5:00 PM (30% OF FINAL GRADE)**