

Seminar in Political Ecology

Anthropology 277
University of California, Riverside
Spring 2009
Watkins 1347
5:10 PM-8:00 PM
<http://faculty.ucr.edu/~derickf/09sprgpe/>

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Course Overview

The field of political ecology has emerged in geography and anthropology since the 1980s from the intersection of political economy and cultural ecology, but defies characterization in terms of a single discipline or theoretical paradigm (cf. Robbins 2004: 6-7 for a survey of attempts to define political ecology). This course does not attempt a survey or a history of the field. Rather, it focuses on works that exemplify a range of contemporary approaches to, and questions in, political ecology (including works by authors who might not identify themselves as doing political ecology).

While generally remaining grounded in the intersection of political economy and cultural ecology, recent scholarship in political ecology has drawn upon a range of fields—many of them interdisciplinary themselves: environmental history, phenomenology, postcolonial and poststructuralist theory, governmentality studies, science and technology studies, and neo-institutional economics, among others. The range of comparative, theoretical and methodological issues addressed includes questions about the relations between capital, nature and culture; states, non-governmental organizations and communities; gender, race and nature; space, place and landscape; scale, units of analysis, and objects of explanation; conservation, environmentalism and subject formation; population, commoditization and the use of land and natural resources; and knowledge, narrative and their relation to policy.

By considering political ecology in relation to contemporary anthropology, the course also examines issues related to the complex self-examination the discipline has undertaken in recent decades: the relationship between author, audience and subjects in ethnographic writing; the possibilities and shortcomings of multi-sited ethnography; the roles of anthropologists in environmental policy and advocacy; and the meaning of the term “political” in “political ecology” and its relation to recent calls for a “public anthropology.”

Requirements

This class will be run as a graduate-level reading-intensive research seminar. Preparation for class discussion by careful reading of the week’s readings is required. This seminar relies upon the participants’ capacity to participate in a fruitful discussion in the seminar meeting. This means that each student should be familiar with the central arguments of the required readings, and be able to develop thoughts on the connections/disconnections in the larger body of readings for the week and across the term.

Requirements (continued)

Additionally, each student will be expected to:

- i) Prepare a one page critical commentary on the week's readings to be circulated electronically by the Monday before Wednesday's class.
- ii) Lead/chair at least one class discussion. This involves two things: 1) a short (10-minute) presentation of the key arguments made in the readings pertaining to that week; 2) using other materials to locate them in one or more debates or to show something of their intellectual genealogy. Again, the presentation should be no more than ten minutes.
- iii) Submit a paper or research proposal no later than Friday June 5th. Papers or proposals should use some of the readings from the class (probably in theoretical or context sections) and should not be the same as papers or proposals submitted for other classes or program requirements.

Auditors: Auditors are welcome in this class on two conditions: they need to come to most (preferably all) of the classes and they should be prepared to do all the readings and fulfill qualification (i) above, i.e. prepare a weekly commentary. Auditors can add a great deal to the discussion in the class but only if they prepare in the same way as students taking the class for credit.

Grading:

Participation (including commentaries and discussion leading): 50%

Paper / proposal: 50%

Required Texts

Cronon, W.

1992 *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Milton, K.

2002 *Loving nature: towards an ecology of emotion*. London: Routledge.

Braun, B.

2002 *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture, and Power on Canada's West Coast*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Craib, R. B.

2004 *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Keeley, J. and Scoones, I.

2003 *Understanding Environmental Policy Processes: Cases from Africa*. London: Earthscan.

Li, T. M.

2007 *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Acheson, J. M.

2004 *Capturing the Commons: Devising Institutions to Manage the Maine Lobster Industry*. Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England.

(continues)

Robbins, P.

2007 *Lawn People: How Grasses, Weeds, and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Vitebsky, P.

2005 *The Reindeer People: Living with Animals and Spirits in Siberia*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Besides these books, there will be several articles and/or book chapters assigned most weeks. In addition, students should subscribe to EANTH-L, the listserv of the Anthropology and Environment Section of the American Anthropological Association.

Optional Text

Robbins, P.

2004 *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. London: Blackwell Publishers.

Robbins or other background reading will be helpful for students without a background in environmental anthropology, geography and/or social theory.