

Critical Environmental Studies of the Contemporary Middle East and North Africa (graduate, Karen Rignall, Georgetown, 2013)

This seminar introduces students to how political ecology, an interdisciplinary field that critically explores the political dimensions of nature/society relations, can shed light on the key environmental challenges facing the contemporary Middle East and North Africa (MENA). For decades, scholars have examined the management of strategic resources such as oil and water primarily from international relations or political economy perspectives. In this course, we bring other academic approaches to bear on these discussions and explore how people grapple with environmental challenges in their everyday lives. The course expands the range of environmental questions usually addressed in the scholarship to include: desertification and land degradation in arid lands, the contemporary practice of pastoralism, agricultural production, urban environments, and environmental history.

Under the banner of political ecology, geographers, anthropologists, and environmental scientists have developed a diverse array of methods and theories to ask critical questions about human-environment interactions. By conducting community-level field studies and foregrounding local perspectives on environmental change, political ecologists have given us the critical tools to ask new questions about the environment in the Middle East and North Africa. How do environmental narratives -- the stories that explain the reasons for environmental degradation -- get formed? What political interests do they reflect? What does the evidence tell us about the reasons for and extent of environmental problems in the MENA region? What are the different ways to interpret the evidence -- and the political interests at stake in various interpretations? How do power and inequality shape the ways different groups of people experience environmental stress?

In this discussion-based seminar, we will use case studies, ethnography, and other sources to develop our own critical language for analyzing the environmental challenges facing the contemporary Middle East and North Africa. Most weeks, I have paired region specific readings with foundational texts from political ecology. At the end of the course, students will develop an understanding of the major environmental questions in the region from the perspective of many different relevant actors: from governments, to farmers, marginalized urban dwellers, pastoralists, and others.

There are no required texts for the course, but if you have a special interest in North Africa, I recommend purchasing *Davis, Diana. 2007. Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa. Athens: Ohio University Press.* I also recommend purchasing *Diana, Davis and Edmund Burke, eds. 2011. Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa.* For a highly regarded overview of the theoretical foundations and methodological underpinnings of political ecology, I recommend purchasing *Robbins, Paul 2004 Political Ecology. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing,* though this is not assigned reading.

Assignments

Class presentation (20%; 200 points): Students will make two in-class presentations (with partners) during the semester that provides a critical perspective (not a summary) on the week's readings. They will primary responsibility for leading class discussion after the presentation; I expect a handout with some key points as well as some starter discussion questions (no required length but concise is better).

Class participation and attendance (20%; 200 points): I will give real grades for class participation. Be advised that I look for thoughtful contributions to the class rather than frequent but insubstantial comments. I also place importance on discussion that refers back to the texts; the point is not to have mastery of the empirical data in the texts but to have read closely enough that you can refer back to particularly provocative or important passages to support a point or serve as the basis of a question. An addition element of the class participation grade will be in class presentations of your final research project. The length of time for each presentation will depend on enrollment and we will discuss the parameters for the presentations in class.

Paper proposal (10%; 100 points): 2-3 page paper proposals and an additional annotated bibliography (minimum of 5 sources) will be due a third of the way through the semester. I will grade and offer detailed feedback. These proposals should serve as the basis for the final paper; if there is substantial change in the paper topic, students are required to see me in office hours. I recommend you see me in office hours anyway; it is a good opportunity to work through ideas for your papers.

Final paper of 15-20 pages (50%; 500 points): The final paper should be a well-argued research paper that addresses a key environmental issue in the Middle East or North Africa using either political ecology approaches directly or another clear theoretical framework to guide the argument. While it may not be possible to use primary sources extensively, I expect this research to use diverse sources creatively.

Policies

Absences: Students may miss two classes for any reason (medical, personal) without penalty. However, you do need to contact me, preferably by email and before your absence, if it is planned and as soon as possible if it is unplanned. For subsequent (unexcused) absences, I will reduce the course participation grade.

Grading scale: There are 1000 total points for this class. Final letter grades for the course will be determined using a declining 10% scale: 900 pts. or more=A; 800-899=B; 700-799=C; 600-699=D; fewer than 600=F. Participation carries much weight in this class (200 pts. or 20%).

Ethics and university policies: Please see <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/> for more information regarding Georgetown University ethics.

I do not accept late assignments.

Wednesday, January 9 (Week 1): Course introduction

Monday, January 14 (Week 2): Foundations of political ecology

Blaikie, Piers, and Harold Brookfield. 1987. *Land Degradation and Society*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. *Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2*

Fairhead, James, and Melissa Leach. 1996. *Misreading the African Landscape*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Intro, Chapter 1, 2, and 3*.

Paulson, Susan, Lisa Gezon, and Michael Watts. 2003. "Locating the Political in Political Ecology: An Introduction." *Human Organization* 62(3):205-217.

Peet, Richard, and Michael Watts, eds. 1996. *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. New York: Routledge. First, not second, edition. *Introduction*

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

Optional (no requirement to discuss in class):

Peluso, Nancy, and Michael Watts, eds. 2001, *Violent Environments*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. *Introduction*

January 21 - No class

January 28 (Week 3): Historical perspectives on Middle Eastern environments

Burke, Edmund. 2009. "The Transformation of the Middle Eastern Environment: 1500 B.C.E.-2000 C.E.," In *The Environment and World History*. Edmund Burke and Kenneth Pomeranz, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Davis, Diana. 2007. *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press. *Intro, Chapters 1 and 5*

Diana, Davis, and Edmund Burke, eds. 2011. *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press. *Introduction, "Imperialism, Orientalism, and the Environment in the Middle East: History, Policy, Power, and Practice." AND Chapter 1 "A Rebellion of Technology: "Development, Policing, and the British Arabian Imaginary*

Mikhail, Alan. 2011. *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Intro, Chapters 1 and 4*

White, Sam. 2011. "Middle East Environmental History: Ideas from an Emerging Field." *World History Connected* 8:2. http://worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu/8.2/forum_white.html

February 4 (Week 4): Contemporary political economy from a political ecology perspective

Breisinger et al. 2012. Food Security and Economic Development in the Middle East and North Africa: International Food Policy Research Institute.

Mitchell, Timothy. 2002. *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press. *Chapter 7*

Pfeiffer, Karen 2012. Economic Reform and Privatization in Egypt. In *The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest, and Social Change in Egypt*. ed. Jeannie Sowers and Chris Toensing. London: Verso.

Purcell, Mark, and J. Christopher Brown. 2005 "There's Nothing Inherent about Scale: Political Ecology, the Local Trap, and the Politics of Development in the Brazilian Amazon." *Geoforum* 36(5):607-624.

Smith, Neil. 2008 (3rd edition) *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. Athens: University of Georgia Press. *Intro, Chapter 4*

Optional:

Breisinger, Clemens, Olivier Ecker, Perrihan Al-Riffal, and Binxin Yu. 2012. *Beyond the Arab Awakening: Policies and Investments for Poverty Reduction and Food Security*. Washington: International Food Policy Research Institute.

Harrigan, J., and El-Said, H. 2009. Aid and Power in the Arab World: World Bank and IMF Policy-based Lending in the Middle East and North Africa. New York: Palgrave. *Chapters 1,3, 6*

Labban, Mazen. 2011, The Geopolitics of Energy Security and the War on Terror: The Case for Market Expansion and the Militarization of Global Space. In *Global Political Ecology*, ed. Richard Peet, Paul Robbins, and Michael Watts. London: Routledge.

Yapa, Lakshman. 1996. Improved Seeds and Constructed Scarcity. In *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*, ed. Richard Peet and Michael Watts. New York: Routledge.

February 11 (Week 5): Strategic resources--oil

Huber, Matthew T. 2011. Enforcing Scarcity: Oil, Violence and the Making of the Market. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101 (4): 816-826.

Limbirt, Mandana E. 2008. Depleted Futures: Anticipating the End of Oil in Oman. In *Timely Assets: The Politics of Resources and their Temporalities*, ed. Mandana E. Limbert and Elizabeth Ferry. Santa Fe: School of American Research, Advanced Seminar Series.

Mitchell, Timothy. 2009. "Carbon democracy." *Economy and Society* 38 (3): 399–432. (Blackboard has a pdf version of the article as presented at Harvard)

Vitalis, Robert. 2006. *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. *Foreward, Chapter 1 and 8*

Watts, Michael. 2001. Petro-Violence: Community, Extraction, and Political Ecology of a Mythic Commodity. In *Violent Environments*, ed. Nancy Peluso and Michael Watts. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

February 18 - no class

February 25 (Week 6): Strategic resources--water

Assignment: Paper proposals due

Alatout, Samer. 2011. Hydro-Imaginations and the Construction of the Political Geography of the Jordan River. The Johnston Mission, 1953-56. In *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Diana Davis and Edmund Burke. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Barnes, Jessica. 2009. "Managing the Waters of Ba'th Country: The Politics of Water Scarcity in Syria" *Geopolitics* 14:510-530.

Beaumont, Peter. 2000. Conflict, Coexistence, and Cooperation: A Study of Water Use in the Jordan Basin. In *Water in the Middle East: A Geography of Peace*, ed. Hussein A. Amery and Aaron T. Wolf. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Wittfogel, Karl A. 1957. *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press. *Introduction*

Hammoudi, Abdellah. 1985. Substance and Relation: Water Rights and Water Distribution in the Dra Valley. In *Property, Social Structure, and Law in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Ann Elizabeth Mayer. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Harris, Leila M. 2008. "Water Rich, Resource Poor: Intersections of Gender, Poverty, and Vulnerability in Newly Irrigated Areas of Southeastern Turkey," *World Development* 36 (12): 2643-2662.

March 4 Spring break

March 11 (Week 7): Strategic resources--land and agriculture

Bernal, Victoria. 1997. "Colonial Moral Economy and the Discipline of Development: The Gezira Scheme and 'Modern' Sudan." *Cultural Anthropology* 12(4):1-33.

Bush, Ray. 2002. Land Reform and Counter Revolution. In *Counter-revolution in Egypt's Countryside: Land and Farmers in the Era of Economic Reform*, ed. Bush, Ray. London: Zed Books. *Chapter 1*

Davis, Diana. 2006. "Neoliberalism, Environmentalism and Agricultural Restructuring in Morocco." *Geographical Journal* 172(2):88-105.

Swearingen, Will D. 1992. "Drought Hazard in Morocco." *Geographical Review* 82(4):401-412.

Tiffen, Mary, Michael Mortimore, and Francis Gichuki. 1994. *More People, Less Erosion: Environmental Recovery in Kenya*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons for the Overseas Development Institute. *Chapters 1, 6, 7, 11, 16*

March 18 (Week 8): Contemporary narratives of land degradation

Chatty, Dawn. 2003. Environmentalism in the Syrian Badia: The Assumptions of Degradation, Protection and Bedouin Misuse. In *Ethnographies of Conservation: Environmentalism and the Distribution of Privilege*, ed. Anderson and Berglund. New York: Berghahn Books.

Davis, Diana K.. 2005. "Indigenous Knowledge and the Desertification Debate: Problematising Expert Knowledge in North Africa." *Geoforum* 36(4):509-524.

Fairhead, James, and Ian Scoones. 2005. "Local Knowledge and the Social Shaping of Soil Investments: Critical Perspectives on the Assessment of Soil Degradation in Africa." *Land Use Policy* 22(1):33-41.

Harris, Leila M. 2011. "Salts, Soils, and (Un)Sustainabilities? Analyzing Narratives of Environmental Change in Southeastern Turkey." In *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Diana Davis and Edmund Burke. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Lambin, Eric F., et al. 2001. "The Causes of Land-use and Land-cover Change: Moving beyond the Myths." *Global Environmental Change* 11: 261–269.

Mortimore, Michael J. and William M. Adams. 2001. "Farmer Adaptation, Change and 'Crisis' in the Sahel." *Global Environmental Change* 11:49-57.

Optional:

Zimmerer, Karl S. 1996. Discourses on Soil Loss in Bolivia: Sustainability and the Search for Socioenvironmental "Middle Ground". In *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, and Social Movements*, ed. Richard Peet and Michael Watts. London, Routledge.

March 25 (Week 9): Transformations in rural livelihoods (pastoralism)

Asad, Talal. 1979. Equality in Nomadic Social Systems? Notes towards the Dissolution of an Anthropological Category. In *Pastoral Production and Society*, ed. Equipe Ecologie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Behnke, Roy H., Jr., Ian Scoones, and Carol Kerven, eds. 1993. Range Ecology at Disequilibrium: New Models of Natural Variability and Pastoral Adaptation in African Savannas. London: ODI. *Chapters 1 and 2*.

Gardner, Andrew. 2005. The New Calculus of Bedouin Pastoralism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In *Political Ecology Across Spaces, Scales, and Social Groups*, ed. Susan Paulson and Lisa L. Gezon. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Marx, Emanuel. 1977. "The Tribe as a Unit of Subsistence: Nomadic Pastoralism in the Middle East." *American Anthropologist* 79:343-363.

Steinmann, Susanne H. 1998. "Gender, Pastoralism, and Intensification: Changing Environmental Resource Use in Morocco" *Yale F&ES Bulletin* 103.

Turner, Matthew D. 2011. "The New Pastoral Development Paradigm: Engaging the Realities of Property Institutions and Livestock Mobility in Dryland Africa." *Society and Natural Resources* 24(5):469-484.

April 1 Easter break

April 8 (Week 10): States, governance, and environment

Agrawal, Arun. 2005. *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*. Durham: Duke University Press. *Chapters 1, 6, and 7*

Braverman, I. 2009 *Planted Flags: Trees, Land, and Law in Israel/Palestine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Intro, Chapter 4*

Guarasci, Bridget Lauren. 2011. Reconstructing Life: Environment, Expertise, and Political Power in Iraq's Marshes 2003-2007. <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/84598>. *Selections tbd*

Robbins, Paul. 2000. "The Practical Politics of Knowing: State Environmental Knowledge and Local Political Economy." *Economic Geography* 76(2):126-44.

Sowers, Jeannie. 2007. "Nature Reserves and Authoritarian Rule in Egypt: Embedded Autonomy Revisited." *Journal of Environment and Development* 16:375-399.

Optional:

Dove, Michael. 2005. "Throwing Light on Politics and Ecology in Cont Pakistan Political Ecology across Spaces Scales and Social Groups," in *Political Ecology Across Spaces, Scales, and Social Groups*, ed. Susan Paulson and Lisa L. Gezon. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

April 15 (Week 11): Conservation and tourism

Chatty, Dawn. 2001. "Pastoral Tribes in the Middle East and Wildlife Conservation Schemes: The Endangered Species?" *Nomadic Peoples* 5(2):104-124.

Mitchell, Timothy. 2002. *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Experts, Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press. *Chapter 6*

Neumann, Roderick. 2004. Nature-State-Territory: Toward a Critical Theorization of Conservation Enclosures. In *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*, 2nd ed., ed. Richard Peet and Michael Watts. New York: Routledge. *Scan to be uploaded*

Peutz, Nathalie. 2011. "Bedouin 'Abjection': World Heritage, Worldliness, and Worthiness at the Margins of Arabia." *American Ethnologist* 38(2):338-360.

Sowers, Jeannie. 2007. "Nature Reserves and Authoritarian Rule in Egypt: Embedded Autonomy Revisited." *The Journal of Environment and Development* 16 (4):375-397.

Optional:

Moore, Donald S., 1996. Marxism, Culture and Political Ecology: Environmental Struggles in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands. In *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. New York: Routledge. 1st edition, ed. Richard Peet and Michael Watts. New York: Routledge.

Neumann, Roderick. 2001. Disciplining Peasants in Tanzania: from State Violence to Self-Surveillance in Wildlife Conservation. In *Violent Environments*, ed. Nancy Peluso and Michael Watts. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

April 22 (Week 12): Urban environments

Al-Mohammad, H. 2007. "Ordure and Disorder: The Case of Basra and the Anthropology of Excrement." *Anthropol. Middle East* 2(2):123.

Gardner, Andrew. 2010. *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. *Selections tbd*

Kuppinger, Petra. 2004. "Exclusive Greenery: New Gated Communities in Cairo." *City & Society* 16(2):35-61.

Swyngedouw, Erik, and Nikolas C. Heynen. 2003. "Urban Political Ecology, Justice and the Politics of Scale," *Antipode* 35(5):898-918.

Zawahri, Neda Jeannie Sowers, and Erika Weinthal. 2011. "The Politics of Assessment: Water and Sanitation MDG's in the Middle East." *Development and Change* 42(5): 1153-1178.

Optional:

Moore, Sarah. 2011. Global Garbage: Waste, Trash, Trading, and Local Garbage Politics. In *Global Political Ecology*, ed. Richard Peet, Paul Robbins, and Michael Watts. London: Routledge.

Totah, FM. 2009. "Return to the Origin: Negotiating the Modern and Unmodern in the Old City of Damascus." *City & Society* 21(1):58-81.

Kanna, Ahmed. 2010. "Flexible Citizenship in Dubai: Neoliberal Subjectivity in the Emerging 'City Corporation,'" *Cultural Anthropology* 25(1):100-129.

April 29 (Week 13): Paper presentations

Assignment: Final paper due

This week, students will make short presentations of their final paper.

ADDED READING:

Waterbury, John

2013 The Political Economy of Climate Change in the Arab Region. Arab Human Development Report Research Paper Series.