



Introduction to Political Ecology

Case Studies from the Middle East

Lecturer: Dr Miri Lavi-Neeman
3 academic hours once a week,
3 credits

About the course:

Political ecology, generally defined, examines the politics, in the broadest sense of the word, of the environment. Political Ecology rejects the view that environmental degradation can be understood as a simple objective problem amenable to scientific and technical fixes—e.g., “there are just too many people,” or “we just need cleaner and more efficient production or disposal technologies.” Instead, Political Ecologists emphasize that there is ecology of politics and a politics of ecology. The former refers to the central role that natural resources—their distribution, allocation, and extraction—play in shaping the nature of political and social institutions within a society. Ecological conditions influence, the development of social structures and institutions, by imposing challenges and opportunities for meeting basic needs. Moreover, ecology is political. When there is scarcity, there are decisions which have to be made over how things are going to be allocated, who will receive and who will not. Besides the distribution of resources and benefit streams, decisions are made over which groups in society bear the burden of environmental degradation. Hierarchies, privilege, and power all come into play, as social dynamics shape use patterns of natural resources, as well as fundamental definitions of what constitutes environmental problems, which causes them, and what the solutions should be.

As a theoretical tool-kit and set of empirical case-studies, the field of Political Ecology is extremely broad and varied. This course traces some origins and current formulations of political ecology as an approach to studying environmental change and the relations between society and the environment in general; it also evaluates the power of political ecology to explain and analyze historical and current conflicts and processes involving Israelis, Palestinians, and others in the Middle East. Using a combination of case studies and theoretical works, we will explore a range of environmental issues including: structures that mediate control over land and property, forestation, settlement, water, parks and protected areas, and environmental movements. We will follow case studies and research projects from the Middle East, and in particular within Israel and the Palestine, but also from other parts of the world.

The goal would be first, to be able to use the framework --analytical tools and critical thinking skills --of political ecology to analyze the complex relationships between ecological and social change that underlie contemporary environmental problems around

the globe; second, to evaluate and criticize other popular understandings of the environment, and thirdly, to gain a unique and useful but overlooked perspective on Middle East politics, and on regional and local ethnic and civic conflicts, and violence. We will sample key texts in political ecology literature dealing with environmental change; political economy of resources, social movements, and development; we will also evaluate academic and popular writings on the Middle East from a political ecology perspective.

Course Requirements and Grading

- **Seminar participation** (20%): Attendance and participation in discussion during class meetings will constitute a substantial portion of grade.
- **Critical reading commentaries** (30%): A second component of the course will be reading responses on selected texts-- short reflections, two paragraphs (approx. 200-300 words in length).
- **Class Presentations** (20%): A third component will be an individual/ group presentations.
- **Final Paper** (30%): a 600 words text in length.
- Critical thinking will be expected for all assignments and will be an important element of grading assessment.

I. Readings and Probable Books:

Reading will be based on articles, newspapers and websites; in addition we will read significant selected chapters from the following books:

Robbins, Paul (2011, 2005) Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction. 1st and 2nd Edition. Wiley-Blackwell.

Davis and Burke (2011) Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa. Ohio University Press.

Peet, R., P. Robbins, and M. Watts. (2011) . Global Political Ecology: Routledge.

Peluso, N. L., and M. Watts. 2001. Violent environments: Cornell University Press.

Orenstein, D., A. Tal, and C. Miller eds. (2013). Between ruin and Restoration an Environmental History of Israel. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Course themes and readings:

17/2 Class 1 : Introduction : Political ecology as theory

What is Theory for, What is Political Ecology ?

Politics, Ecology and Nature

Course Logistic

Readings:

In class:

Michael Burrowoy: How to Read Theory. 2000

Raymond Williams. Nature. in Keywords.

24/2 Class 2: Origins and history of the Field

The emergence of political ecology

Readings:

Robbins, 2011. Part 1,

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

Walker, Peter (2005). "Political ecology: where is the ecology?" in *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(1): 73-82.

Recommended: Davis, Diana, historical political ecology the importance of looking back and moving forward, *Geoforum*

2/3 Class 3: Historical political ecology part 1:

Colonialism, Nature, Development

Political ecology and the Middle East

Readings:

Robbins, Paul (2005). "A Tree with Deep Roots," in *Political Ecology* (Routledge), pp. 17-41.

Davis and Burke. Introduction in "Environmental Imaginaries of the MENA"

9/3 Class 4: Historical political ecology part 2:

Nature development and early Environmentalism in Palestine

Case Study: the Hula drainage project

Readings

Grove, R. 1995. Chapter 7. *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Gorney, E. 2007. (Un) Natural Selection: The Drainage Of The Hula Wetlands, An Ecofeminist Reading. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9 (4):465-474

Escobar, Arturo (1995). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton: PUP (selections).

Recommended background:

Said Orientalism. Selected pages

Rabinowitz and Kawalade. 2007.

Stuart Hall the west and the rest

16/3 No Class (Water Trip)

23/3 Class 5: Political ecology of Land conservation and Struggles

Readings:

Neumann Roderick (2004). "Nature-State-Territory: Toward a Critical Theorization of Conservation Enclosures," in Watts Michael. *Liberation Ecologies*.

Robbins, Paul (2004). "Conservation and Control," in *Political Ecology*, pp. 147-172.

Yiftachel, Oren. 1998. Nation-Building and the Division of Space: Frontiers and Domination in the Israeli 'Ethnocracy'. <http://www.geog.bgu.ac.il/members/yiftachel/paper2.html>.

Yiftachel, O. 2009. Studying al-Naqba/Negev Bedouins: Toward a Colonial Paradigm? *Hagar: Studies in Culture, Polity and Identities* 8 (2):173-192

Yiftachel Oren 2013. The Unrecognized Bedouins space: The development of a strategic issue, in Pedazur, R. (ed). *The Bedouins in the Negev - strategic Challenge to Israel (Hebrew)*. In *The Bedouins*

in the Negev - strategic Challenge to Israel, ed. R. pedazur, 8-18. Netanyah: Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue

Orenstein, D. E., and S. P. Hamburg. 2009. To populate or preserve? Evolving political-demographic and environmental paradigms in Israeli land-use policy. *Land Use Policy* 26 (4):984-1000.

30/3 Class 6: Reading and writing workshop Preparations for final papers.

6/4 Class 7: Political Ecology of trees and forest

Forest and trees as a political realm

Forestation in Israel and Palestine

Readings:

Gordillo, G. 2002. Locations of Hegemony: The Making of Places in the Toba's Struggle for La Comuna, 1989-99. *American Anthropologist* 104 (1):262-277

Zerubavel, Y. 1996. The Forest as a National Icon: Literature, Politics, and the Archaeology of Memory. *Israel Studies* 99-60:(1) 1

Tal Alon. 2013. All the Trees of the Forest: Israel's Woodlands from the Antiquity to the Present. New Haven: Yale University Press Selected pages.

Shaul Cohen in Davis and Burke. Davis, D. K., and E. Burke, III eds. 2011. *Ecology and History : Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*. Athens, OH, USA: Ohio University Pres

Irus Braverman. 2014. "Trees and War" in *Planted Flags: Trees, Land, and Law in Israel/Palestine* Cambridge Studies in Law and Society pp. 1-29

13/4 – 27/5 No Classes

4/5 Class 8: Political Ecology of war, Militarism and Security

Readings:

Robbins and Watts. 2011. *Global environmental politics*. Introduction to Part 4 . pp. 225-227.

Urdal, H. 2005. People vs. Malthus: Population pressure, environmental degradation, and armed conflict revisited. *Journal of Peace Research* 42 (4):417-434

Uri Gordon. 2013. "Olive Green: Environment Militarism and the Israel Defense Force". In Orenstein, D., A. Tal, and C. Miller eds. *Between ruin and Restoration an Environmental History of Israel*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press. Pp.242-262

Recommended:

Deudeny, D. 1990. Environment and security: muddled thinking. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 47(3): 21-28.

Homer-Dixon, T. 1994. "Environmental scarcities and violent conflict: evidence from the cases." *International Security* 19(1): 5-40.

11/5 No class

18/5 Class 9: Political ecologies of resistance

Modes of negotiation and resistance

Readings:

Watts and Peets 1996. Introduction

Robbins, Paul (2005). "Environmental Identity and Social Movement," in *Political Ecology*, pp. 187-203.

McKee, E. 2013. *Performing Rootedness in the Negev/Naqab: Possibilities and Perils of Competitive Planting*. Antipode:1

23/5 (Monday) **Class 10:**

Part 1: Challenges to Political Ecology: New Environmental Determinisms.

Diamond, J. (1997), *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. (read his lecture on the web – 10,000 years of human history in 45 minutes...). Also see the discussion on *Guns, Germs, and Steel* in *Antipode* (35/4, 2003).

Gallup, J.L., J.D. Sachs, and A.D. Mellinger (1999), "Geography and Economic Development," in *International Regional Science Review* 22(2): 179-232.

Hausmann, R., (2001), "Prisoners of Bad Geography," in *Foreign Policy*, 122: 44-54.

25/5 **Class 11 :**

Part 2: Where to now?

Israel, the environment and for and against political ecology

Readings:

Orenstein and Silverman. "The future of Israeli environmental movement: is a Major Paradigm Shift Underway?" in Tal, and C. Miller eds. *Between ruin and Restoration an Environmental History of Israel*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press. Pp.357-380

Robbins, Paul (2005). "Where to Now?" Ppart IV in *Political Ecology*, pp. 203-218.

Watts, Michael and Richard Peet (2004). "Liberating Political Ecology," in *Liberation Ecologies*, Chapter One. Routledge, pp. 3-47.

Recommended Reread:

Brookfield, Harold (1999). "A review of political ecology: issues, epistemology, and analytical narratives," in *Zeitschrift fur Wirtschaftsgeographie*. 131-147.

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

Walker, Peter (2005). "Political ecology: where is the ecology?" in *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(1): 73-82.

Class 12 : Students presentations (Date TBA)