



Introduction to Political Ecology Case Studies from the Middle East

Lecturer: Miri Lavi-Neeman

3 hours once a week, 3 credits, Undergraduate.

About the course:

Political Ecology has emerged in the past two decades as a powerful interdisciplinary critique of ecological change. In short, Political Ecology is a way for mapping political, economic, and social factors onto questions of environmental degradation and transformation. It is a powerful way therefore to politicize, apolitical discussions of ecology and the environment; to undermine common sense understandings of “the environment” as separate from “the social”, and to bring humans and non-humans into discussions about conservation.

As a theoretical tool-kit and set of empirical case-studies, the field of Political Ecology is extremely broad and diverse. This course will introduce core tenets or perspectives of political ecology. It will introduce students to key debates in the field—such as the relationship between environment and violence, the critique of environmental determinisms and of Malthusian notions of scarcity and limits, the links between conservation, control and dispossession, and more. 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 in the context of regional and broader processes such as climate change.

Using a combination of case studies and theoretical works, we will explore a range of environmental issues including land, forestation, settlement, energy, agriculture, and environmental movements. We will follow case studies and research in particular within Israel and Palestine, but also from other parts of the world.

Course objectives:

At the end of the course students will be able to-

- Use some analytical tools of political ecology to analyze the complex relationships between ecological and social change that underlie contemporary environmental problems around the globe.
- Evaluate and criticize other popular understandings of the environment,



- Develop an environmental perspective on Middle East politics, and on regional and local ethnic and civic partnerships, conflicts, and violence.

Course requirements and grading:

This course is shaped as a seminar and will be primarily organized around class discussion. Occasionally, it will combine lectures, guest lectures, films, and small group work to explore specific cases. I expect your full, active participation in class. This means attending all class meetings, showing up on time, respectfully engaging with the course instructor and your peers, being responsible for all of the assigned reading and materials. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to do the reading and get class notes from one of your peers.

Seminar participation (15%): Students are expected to attend all classes, complete the reading assignments before class, and come to class prepared to participate in discussions. Absences and lateness will result in your participation grade. (5% showing up on time 10% coming prepared to discuss, and making regular contribution to discussions)

Critical reading commentaries (30%) A second component of the course grade will be reading assignments on selected texts— Each student is required to submit 5-6 assignments 500 words (~one page) long on reading materials (one –two articles from each part of the syllabus). Specific instructions will be given on a weekly basis. Please send your responses via email the day before class session by 6 PM unless instructed otherwise. In these reading responses, you may be asked to outline the key points of the readings, highlight what was interesting/confusing/significant to you, raise questions, answer a question or relate your thoughts to other readings or contemporary events. Post class submissions will not be accepted. Late submissions will be fined in the final calculation. These will be graded Pass/fail. Each student must get at least 5-6 passing responses to get the full score.

Class Presentations (20%): Each student is required to present in class – once in a group exercise and once their emerging final paper project and connect it to the course's topics. During these 10-minute presentations, you may use PowerPoint, performance, lecture, or any other creative presentation styles. The choice of topics will take place by the third part of the course.

Final Paper (35%): a short try to address course materials and topics. A max of 5 page double spaced text in length on a chosen topic. **A handout of guidelines and expectations will be distributed.**



Readings Syllabus and Books:

Readings and course activities may change to suite our student's diversity and interest and developing discussions. For this reason, readings are not available for a given week until the previous week. The readings in this syllabus should be regarded as provisional. For any given week, the readings will be available on the drive and sent via email. While readings may, from time to time change, the course policies and procedures listed in this syllabus will not. It is your responsibility to know them.

In some classes, we will spend significant time discussing particular readings. In others, we will treat them as background. In all cases, if there is something you don't understand, it is your responsibility to make sure that you gain an understanding of it by asking questions and raising issues. You are expected to arrive at class ready to discuss all the required course readings. For most classes, I have included "Suggested" readings that are also available on the drive. These are not required, but should you be interested in a topic and wish to pursue it more (for a final paper, for example) these are good places to start.

Course Overview:

Part I: Introduction

Class 1: What is Political Ecology

What is Political Ecology? A short introduction
Curse of the black gold,
Course Logistics

Class 2: How Natural is Nature (and why is it important)

The cultural politics of Nature
The Nature/ Culture Divide and Origins of the Field
Current implications: Political Ecology and the Anthropocene as "the end of nature"

Assignment 1. Submission

Part II: Case Studies

Class 3:

Part A: (Last Part of Introduction) Historical political Ecology, Colonialism, Development and Environmental imaginaries

Colonialism, Nature, Development and the Middle East



Part B: Environmentalism and development: The Huleh Drainage Project

The Nature/ Culture divide
Nature, development and Early Environmentalism in Israel /Palestine
Case Study: the Hula Drainage Project

Assignment 2. Submission

Class 4: From swamps to Deserts

Part A: Deserts

Deserts, desertification, and climate frontiers, desert dwellers and justice in Western imaginations

Part B: Settlement and agriculture in the Negev highland: the Production of socio-ecological Boundaries

Conservation and Control,
Uneven evictions and closures : Unrecognized villages and Solitary Farms
Development and the return of agriculture in Israel Negev highland. Preparation for the Negev trip.

Assignment 3 Submission:

Class 5: Negev trip Lecture: The Bedouin Communities of the Negev

Yiftachel, Oren. (1998). Nation-Building and the Division of Space: Frontiers and Domination in the
Assignment 4 Submission: TBA

Class 6 Political Ecology of Non –Humans- Trees forest and greening the Desert With Guest lecturer Prof. Yagil Osem

Assignment 5 Submission

Class 7: Underground Political ecology : Energy Precarity, and renewables Guest Lecture with Prof. Itai Fishhendler, Hebrew University

Gas and oil from political ecology perspective
Politics of renewables in Gaza , Area C, and unrecognized Bedouin villages.

Assignment 6 Submission

Class 8: Resistance part 1: Movie- Occupy the farm and urban political ecology Preparations for Final projects



Class 9: The political ecology of Zionism and the agricultural settlement of the Central Arabah

Guest Lecture Dr. Matan Kaminer

Migrant workers in Israeli agriculture: A neoliberal solution?

Assignment 7 Submission

Part III: Wrapping up

Class 10: Old and New Environmental Determinisms. Guns Germs and Steel

Class Exercise #2

Part 1: Movie: Guns Germs and Steel.

Part 2: Class Exercise: Political Ecology response

Assignment 8. Submission

Class 11: Political Ecology –Where to Now?

Political ecology's New frontiers

Student Presentations

For and Against Political Ecology

New directions in Political ecology

Political Ecology and climate change

Assignment 9. Submission

Class 12: student presentations

Class 13: student presentations and farewell

Course weekly Readings and assignments:



Part I: Introduction

Class 1: What is Political Ecology

What is Political Ecology? A short introduction
Curse of the black gold,
Course Logistics

Readings:

Robbins (2011). Part 1, chapter 1. Political versus Apolitical pp. 11-24 chapter 2: A tree with deep roots: emphasis on the Determinist context. pp 25-28.

Roberts, J. (2020). Political Ecology. In The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology (eds) F. Stein, S. Lazar, M. Candea, H. Diemberger, J. Robbins, A. Sanchez & R. Stasch. <http://doi.org/10.29164/20polieco> Political Ecology.

Recommended readings:

Michael Borrawoy. 2000. How to Read Theory. Unpublished manuscript.

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 2: How Natural is Nature (and why is it important)

The cultural politics of Nature

The Nature/ Culture Divide and Origins of the Field

Current implications: Political Ecology and the Anthropocene as "the end of nature"

Assignment 1. Submission: 19/9 6pm

Readings:

Raffles, Hugh. 2000. "The Amazon: A Natural Landscape?" Seminar, February. <http://www.india-seminar.com/2000/486/486%20raffles.htm>

Kevin Archer, 2010. "Social construction of Nature" in Warf, B. (Ed.) Encyclopedia of geography. Sage Publications. P. 1-2 (How do we know nature) and 4-5 (From the Construction to the production of nature)



Part II: Case Studies

Class 3:

Part A: (Last Part of Introduction) Historical political Ecology, Colonialism, Development and Environmental imaginaries

Colonialism, Nature, Development and the Middle East

Part B: Environmentalism and development: The Huleh Drainage Project

The Nature/ Culture divide

Nature, development and Early Environmentalism in Israel /Palestine

Case Study: the Hula Drainage Project

Readings Part A (One of two)

Davis, Diana. (2011). "Imperialism, Orientalism, and the Environment in the Middle East: History, Policy, Power, and Practice." In *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Diana Davis and Edmund Burke, 1–22. Athens: Ohio University Press.

Davis Diana. (2020). "Of deserts and decolonization: dispelling myths about Drylands" *The MIT Press Reader* August. <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/dispelling-myths-about-drylands/>

Readings Part B

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

Kelly John. (2010) "uneven development". in Warf, B. (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of geography*. Sage Publications.

Recommended /background readings:

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

Hall, S.(1992). *The West and the Rest: Discourse and power. The Indigenous Experience: Global Perspectives*, pp.165-173.

Davis,Diana, *Historical Political Ecology the Importance of Looking Back and Moving Forward*, Geoforum.



Robbins, Paul (2011). Ch. 3: "The critical tools: the producer as an agent of history: peasant studies" pp.59-61; pp 62-63 (hegemony); and pp 65-71("critical Environmental history", "whose history? Postcolonial studies and power/knowledge").

Burke, Edmund. (2005). "The Coming Environmental Crisis in the Middle East: A Historical Perspective, 1750-2000 CE." UC World History Workshop. Paper 2. 1-19.

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

Tal, Alon. 2002. Pollution in a promised land: An environmental history of Israel. University of California Press. Chapter 1 - The Pathology of a Polluted River: An Introduction to Israel's Environmental Crisis.

Rabinowitz, D. and Khawalde, S.,(2000). Demilitarized, then dispossessed: The Kirad Bedouins of the Hula Valley in the context of Syrian-Israeli relations. International Journal of Middle East Studies, 32(4), pp.511-530.

Class 4: From swamps to Deserts, Evictions and recognition

Part A: Deserts

Deserts, desertification, and climate frontiers, desert dwellers and justice in Western imaginations

Part B: Settlement and agriculture in the Negev highland: the Production of socio-ecological Boundaries

Conservation and Control,

Uneven evictions and closures : Unrecognized villages and Solitary Farms

Development and the return of agriculture in Israel Negev highland. Preparation for the Negev trip.

Readings:

McKee, Emily.(2016). Dwelling in Conflict: Negev Landscapes and the Boundaries of Belonging. Stanford University Press. Introduction.

Beverly Mullings (2010). "Neoliberalism". in Warf, B. (Ed.) Encyclopedia of geography. Sage Publications.

Davis Diana. (2020). "Of deserts and decolonization: dispelling myths about Drylands" The MIT Press Reader August. <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/dispelling-myths-about-drylands/>

Recommended /background readings:

McKee, Emily.(2016). Dwelling in Conflict: Negev Landscapes and the Boundaries of Belonging. Stanford University Press. Chapter 2.



David Harvey.(2005). "Accumulation by Dispossession." In *The New Imperialism*. Oxford.

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

Robbins, Paul (2011). Chapter 9: "Conservation and Control," in *Political Ecology*, pp. 176-181.

Wendy Wolford. 2007. "Land Reform in the Time of Neoliberalism: A Many-Splendored Thing." *Antipode*. 39(3).

: **Negev trip Lecture: The Bedouin Communities of the Negev**

Readings:

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>

Yahel, H. (2019). *The Conflict Over Land Ownership and Unauthorized Construction in the Negev*. *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 6(3-4), 352-369.

Flip through the website of the Negev Coexistence forum for Civil Rights
<https://www.dukium.org/>

Recommended /background readings:

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

Frantzman, S. J., Yahel, H., & Kark, R. (2012). *Contested indigeneity: The development of an indigenous discourse on the Bedouin of the Negev*, *Israel Studies*, 17(1), 78-104.

Abu-Rabia, S. (2016). *Memory, belonging and resistance: the struggle over place among the Bedouin-Arabs of the Naqab/Negev*. *Remembering, Forgetting and City Builders*, 65-83.

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

Class 6: Political Ecology of Non –Humans

Political life of trees, Camels, wild asses, and Bees

Assignment 4 Submission: 7/11 6pm



Readings : (choose 1)

Braverman, Irus. (2021). Wild legalities: Animals and settler colonialism in Palestine/Israel. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 44(1), 7-27.

Braverman, Irus. (2009) "Planting the Promised Landscape: Zionism, Nature, and Resistance in Israel/Palestine." *Natural Resources Journal* 49.2: 2010-012.

Novick, T. (2013). Bible, Bees and Boxes: The Creation of "The Land Flowing with Milk and Honey" in Palestine, 1880–1931. *Food, Culture & Society*, 16(2), 281-299.

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

Recommended /background readings:

Galai, Y. (2017). "Narratives of Redemption: The International Meaning of Afforestation in the Israeli Negev." *International Political Sociology*, 11(3), 273-291.

Liron Shani (2017): *Of Trees and People: The Changing Entanglement in the Israeli Desert*, *Ethnos*, DOI: 10.1080/00141844.2017.1304972

Class 7: Uderground Political ecology : Energy Precarity, and renewables +Guest Lecture with Prof. Itai Fishhendler, Hebrew University

Gas and oil from political ecology perspective
Politics of renewables in Gaza , Area C, and unrecongized Bedouin villages.

Readings:

Hartman, Shuli. (2012) "Like water for the thirsty..." *Renewable Energy Systems in Palestinian Communities in the South Hebron Hills*

Cohen Tamar, Lavi-Neeman Miri " Energy in a climate of occupation"

Boyer, D., & Szeman, I. (2014). "Breaking the Impasse: The Rise of Energy Humanities." *University Affairs*, 40, 12.

Recommended readings:

Huber, M.,(2019)."Resource geography II: What makes resources political?" *Progress in Human Geography*, 43(3), pp.553-564.

Huber, M. T. (2015). "Energy and social power: from political ecology to the ecology of politics." in *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology* (pp. 481-492). Taylor and Francis Inc.



Miller, C. A., Iles, A., & Jones, C. F. (2013). The social dimensions of energy transitions. *Science as Culture*, 22(2), 135-148.

Ottinger, G. (2013). The winds of change: environmental justice in energy transitions. *Science as Culture*, 22(2), 222-229.

Mitchell, T. (2009). Carbon democracy. *Economy and Society*, 38(3), 399-432.

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

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

Watts and Peets (1996). Introduction: resistance

Robbins and Watts.(2011). *Global Political Ecology*. Introduction to Part 4 . pp. 225-227.

Class 8: Resistance part 1: movie- Occupy the farm and urban political ecology NO READINGS

Class 9: The political ecology of Zionism and the agricultural settlement of the Central Arabah

Guest Lecture Dr. Matan Kaminer

Migrant workers in Israeli agriculture: A neoliberal solution ?

Assignment 6. Submission: 21/11 by 6pm

Readings: (one of three)

Kaminer, M. (2022). The Agricultural Settlement of the Arabah and the Political Ecology of Zionism. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 54(1), 40-56.

Kaminer, M. (2016). A lonely Songkran in the Arabah. *Middle East Report*, 279(46), 34-37.

Kaminer, M. (2019). Thai migrant workers in Israeli agriculture: A neoliberal solution to a colonial problem. *Israeli Affairs* 74, pp. 65-74 [Arabic].

كيمير، متان. التابليديون المهاجرون للعمل في الزراعة الإسرائيلية : حل نيوليبرالي لمشكلة كولونيلية. قضايا إسرائيلية ع. 74 (2019)، ص ص. 65-74.

Class 10: Old and New Environmental Determinisms. Guns Germs and Steel **Class Exercise #2**



Part 1: Movie: Guns Germs and Steel.

Part 2: Class Exercise: Political Ecology response

Readings

Diamond, J. (1997), *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company (We will read his lecture on the web – 10,000 years of human history in 45 minutes). And at least one critic from the symposium on *Guns, Germs, and Steel* in *Antipode* (35/4, 2003).

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

Recommended /background readings:

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

Readings

Diamond, J. (1997), *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company (We will read his lecture on the web – 10,000 years of human history in 45 minutes). And at least one critic from the symposium on *Guns, Germs, and Steel* in *Antipode* (35/4, 2003).

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

Recommended /background readings:

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

Class 11: Political Ecology -Where to Now?

Political ecology's New frontiers

For and Against Political Ecology
New directions in Political ecology
Political Ecology and climate change

Readings:

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

Robbins, Paul (2011). "Where to Now?" chapter 13: beyond political ecology , pp. 247-253. And "urban political ecology " chapter 2 pp72-74.



Goldman, M. J., Turner, M. D., & Daly, M. (2018). A critical political ecology of human dimensions of climate change: Epistemology, ontology, and ethics. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 9(4), e526.

Tschakert, P. (2012). From impacts to embodied experiences: tracing political ecology in climate change research. *Geografisk Tidsskrift-Danish Journal of Geography*, 112(2), 144-158.

Recommended readings:

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

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

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