



Changing the Intellectual Climate: A Journey into the New Vocabularies of Global Environmental change

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

About the Course:

Due to its social and ecological complexity, and its temporal and spatial grand scales, climate change, now our lifetime challenge, is a particularly daunting task, conceptually, politically and scientifically.

In this class we will examine the possible contribution of Political Ecology as a theoretical and practical framework to understand and think about climate change.

Political ecologists have long recognized that environmental degradation can't be understood as a simple objective problem—e.g., “there are just too many people,” or “we just need cleaner and more efficient production or disposal technologies.” They have identified the need to interrogate relationships, connections, and the complexity of social -ecological systems. On the one hand, Political Ecology investigates "realities" of climate change -- how societies (economy, institutions, power, discourses, practices) produces biophysical transformations in the first place and how human transformation of the planet exacerbate inequalities. It also aspires to show how concepts, words and metaphors of human- environment relationships, travel. Where they come from, what they do in terms of guiding our thinking, how they produce knowledge and become politicized, or, equally important in regards to climate change, de-politicized.

This class we will examine how social scientists have adopted and/or interrogated a number of concepts and keywords relating to the contemporary global environmental change. Together, these keywords form a climate change general vocabulary: a shared body of words and meanings that were developing, overlapping, changing and assimilating in the course of general societal discussion in the past 15 years. Among these concepts, the recent explosion of critical social science literature on “the Anthropocene” is the most prominent example of cross-disciplinary borrowing; further concepts such as resilience, adaptation,

vulnerability and attribution are more recent keywords in the lexicons of political ecology and cognate fields.

Our goal, in this class then, is to compose a set of “Keywords” for the Anthropocene. A shared vocabulary of words and meaning delineating and contextualizing concepts relevant to our own worlds and work.

The course is oriented around three questions:

- 1) How have critical social sciences and political ecology in particular deepened and complicated biophysically-based understandings of climate change terms and concepts?
- 2) Conversely, how might discussions in the social sciences and environmental humanities benefit from engaging more carefully with the biophysical specifics of these concepts?
- 3) Finally, what does acknowledging the Anthropocene from a political ecology perspective, mean for the practice of both social and physical science and social political change going forward?

Learning Objective: By the end of the course, students will be able to articulate a number of key debates around the origins, scale, and terminology of the Anthropocene, and to position themselves in relation to ongoing academic conversations about, climate justice, system thinking, and human transformation of the global environment.

Course Assessment:

- 1) **Attendance 15%**
- 2) **Active Participation and preparation including leading one part of class discussion 15%**
- 3) **Six reading responses beginning the 2nd week 30%**
- 4) **Presenting a "key word" as final written work 40%**

Course outline:

Part I: Introduction

Week 1: Political ecology as an analytical framework

Week 2: Definitions: Anthropocene, anthropogenic environments

Week 3: Beginnings – the stories we tell

Part II: Critiques of the Anthropocene (and how did we get here)

Week 4: No class. “Home assignment” Post semester trip

Week 5: Capital and History

Week 6: Emerging Markets and ecosystem services

Week 7: Governance and the post-political

Week 8: Resilience

Week 9: Vulnerability, Risk, and Adaptation

Part III: Where to now? Out of the ruin

Week 10: Multi-species assemblages and novel ecosystems Experiments

Week 11: Futures

Week 12: Presenting Students work

Week 13: Wrapping up

Detailed Course Schedule:

Supplementary/optional materials go under “recommended”. Required readings will be revised and selected as the course goes on to reflect the new contributions, interests, level, and needs of the group.

Part 1: Introduction

Week 1 - welcome to the Anthropocene

Thinking about Nature and Culture and Political Ecology as a framework for climate change

Course logistics and the concept of keywords

In class reading & exercise:

Williams, Raymond (1986) “Introduction” and “Nature” in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 2nd Ed. Oxford University Press. (11-26, 219-224)

Week 2- Definitions:

Readings:

Steffen W Crutzen P J and McNeill J R (2007) “The Anthropocene: Are humans now overwhelming the great forces of nature?” *Ambio* 36(8) 614–621.

Crutzen, P.J. (2002), “Geology of mankind,” *Nature*, **415** (6867), 23.

Robbins, P. (2012). *Lawn people: How grasses, weeds, and chemicals make us who we are*. Temple University Press.

Recommended:

Showstack, R. (2016), Scientific study group favors recognizing human-influenced epoch, *Eos*, 97, 01September. <https://eos.org/articles/scientific-study-group-favors-recognizing-human-influenced-epoch#>

Week 3- Beginnings

Veland, S., & Lynch, A. H. (2016). Scaling the Anthropocene: How the stories we tell matter. *Geoforum*, 72, 1-5.

Ruddiman, W. F., Ellis, E. C., Kaplan, J. O., & Fuller, D. Q. (2015). Defining the epoch we live in. *Science*, 348(6230), 38-39. **(Recommended with comments:** Certini, G., & Scalenghe, R. (2015). Holocene as Anthropocene. And Ruddiman, W. F. (2015). Geological evidence for the Anthropocene—response. *Science*, 349(6245), 247-247.

Bonneuil, C. (2015). The geological turn: narratives of the Anthropocene. In *The Anthropocene and the global environmental crisis* (pp. 17-31). Routledge.

Recommended: Lewis, Simon & Maslin, Mark (2015) 'Defining the Anthropocene.' *Nature*, 12th March. 171–180

Waters, C. N., Zalasiewicz, J., Summerhayes, C., Barnosky, A. D., Poirier, C., Gałuszka, A., ... & Wolfe, A. P. (2016). The Anthropocene is functionally and stratigraphically distinct from the Holocene. *Science*, 351(6269).

Part II: Critiques of the Anthropocene (and How Did We Get Here)

Week 4: No Class Home Assignment

Week 5: Capitalism and History: Capitalocene?

Chakrabarty, D. 2014. Climate and Capital: On Conjoined Histories. *Critical Inquiry* 41: 1-23 OR- Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2015) "The Anthropocene and the Convergence of Histories" in Hamilton et al. *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis*

Malm, Andreas and Hornborg, Alf (2014) The geology of mankind? A critique of the Anthropocene narrative *The Anthropocene Review* 1(1) 62–9

Capitalism and the Web of Life, and Interview with Jason Moore View Poing Magazine September 2015

<https://viewpointmag.com/2015/09/28/capitalism-in-the-web-of-life-an-interview-with-jason-moore/>

Recommended: Moore, Jason (2015) Ch 7 “Anthropocene or Capitalocene? On the nature and origins of our ecological crisis” and “Conclusion: The End of Cheap Nature? The world-ecological limit of capital is capital itself”, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, Verso.

Gonzalez, C. G. (2021). Racial capitalism, climate justice, and climate displacement. *Oñati Socio-Legal Series*, 11(1), 108-147.

Week 6: critic II: Emerging Market and Ecosystem Services:

Dempsey, Jessica (2016) *Enterprising Nature: Economics, markets and finance in global biodiversity politics*. Wiley-Blackwell

Recommended:

Braun, B. (2014). New Materialisms and Neoliberal Natures. *Antipode* 47(1):1-14
Block Fred, Introduction, in Polanyi Karl *The great Transformation*
Beymer-Farris, Betsy and Bassett, Tom, (2012). The REDD menace: Resurgent protectionism in Tanzania's mangrove forests. *Global Environmental Change*, 22(2), pp.332-341.

Week 7: Critic III Governance and the Post-Political

Biermann, Frank (2014) ‘The Anthropocene: A Governance Perspective.’ *The Anthropocene Review*, Vol.1:1. 57–61

Swyngedouw, Erik (2010) ‘Apocalypse Forever? Post-Political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change.’ *Theory, Culture, Society*, 27:2-3. 213- 232

Recommended:

Dalby, Simon, 2013. The geopolitics of climate change. *Political Geography*, 37, pp.38-47.

Schroeder, Heike (2014) “Governing Access and Allocation in the Anthropocene” *Global Environmental Change* 26: A1—A3.

Week 8: Resilience (New forms of Governance and Subjectivities)

Folke, C., S. R. Carpenter, B. Walker, M. Scheffer, T. Chapin, and J. Rockström (2010) Resilience thinking: integrating resilience, adaptability and transformability. *Ecology and Society* 15 (4): 20.

Walker, Jeremy and Cooper, Melinda (2011) Genealogies of resilience: from ecology to political economy of crisis adaptation. *Security Dialogue* 42(2): 143–160

Recommended:

Simon, Stephanie, and Samuel Randalls (2016) Geography, ontological politics and the resilient future. *Dialogues in Human Geography* 6.1: 3-18

MacKinnon, Danny and Derickson, Kate Driscoll (2012) From resilience to resourcefulness: a critique of resilience policy and activism. *Progress in Human Geography* 37(2): 253-270.

Week 9: Adaptation, Vulnerability, Risk (New forms of Governance and Subjectivities)

Ribot, Jessie (2014) Cause and response: Vulnerability and climate in the Anthropocene. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(5), 667- 705. doi:10.1080/03066150.2014.694911

Gemmene, François (2015) The Anthropocene and its victims, in Hamilton et al. *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis*, p 168-173

Recommended:

Derickson, Kate Driscoll and MacKinnon, Danny (2015) Toward an interim politics of resourcefulness for the Anthropocene. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 105(2): 304-312

O'Brien, Karen (2012) Global environmental change II: From adaptation to deliberate transformation. *Progress in Human Geography*, 36(5), 667-676.

Wrathall, David et al (2014). Migration amidst climate rigidity traps: resource politics and social-ecological possibilism in Honduras and Peru. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 104(2), 292-304.

Part III: where to now?

Week 10: Multi-species assemblages, Rewilding, and novel ecosystems

Tsing, A. L. (2015). *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton University Press. Selection,

Lorimer Jamie and Clemens Driessen C (2013) Wild experiments at the Oostvaardersplassen: Rethinking environmentalism in the Anthropocene. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. doi: 10.1111/tran.12030.

Robbins, Paul and Moore, Sarah (2012) Ecological anxiety disorder: Diagnosing the politics of the Anthropocene. *Cultural Geographies* 20: 3-19

Recommended: Morelli TL, Daly C, Dobrowski SZ, Dulen DM, Ebersole JL, Jackson ST, et al. (2016) Managing Climate Change Refugia for Climate Adaptation. PLoS ONE 11(8): e0159909. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0159909

Week 11: Futures (Class exercise each group reads one)

Johnson, N. (2014). Is the Anthropocene a world of hope or a world of hurt. *Grist.org*.

Monbiot, G. (2014). Saving the world should be based on promise, not fear. *The Guardian*.

Collard, R. C., Dempsey, J., & Sundberg, J. (2015). A manifesto for abundant futures. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 105(2), 322-330.

Kirksey, E., Shapiro, N., & Brodine, M. (2014). Hope in blasted landscapes. In *The multispecies salon* (pp. 25-63). Duke University Press.

Scranton, Roy (2015) Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization Introduction, pp 13-27

Recommended:

Haraway, Donna (2015) Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin. *Environmental Humanities* 6(1):159-165;

Osborne, T. (2017). Public political ecology: A community of praxis for earth stewardship. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 24(1), 843-860.

Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2011). A feminist project of belonging for the Anthropocene. *Gender, place and culture*, 18(01), 1-21.

Braun, Bruce (2015) "From critique to experiment? Rethinking political ecology for the Anthropocene" *Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*, T. Perrault, G. Bridge and J. McCarthy, eds. London: Routledge

Week 12: Presenting students work

Week 13: Wrapping up

