Ecology and Violence

MPHIL Module

University of Cambridge

Department of Politics and International Studies

Lent Term 2021

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Time: 3-5pm Monday, starting on 25th January 2021.

**Description**

All politics takes place within a natural ecology. Human interaction stretches beyond the interpersonal. This is an especially important reminder in the middle of a pandemic and on the cusp of major changes in the earth’s climate. This module will explore the relationship between ecology and political violence.

The module is structure to look at different approaches to the relationship with a focus on empirical material using that approach. We will delve into rational and material approaches that test whether ecological changes correlate with the onset of violence. We will look into political ecology approaches that argue that ‘ecology’ and ‘politics’ cannot be separated. We will look at historical approaches that look at the nuance between the relationship while emphasizing how nature is used or effected by past conflicts. We will also look into approaches emphasizing the ‘new materialism’ – the idea that the non-human and inorganic are ever-shifting and have their own agency.

The final three session will look into increasing specific issues: oil and conflict, the international system, and the Syrian Civil War to begin to play these approaches off each other. The goal is for students to get a better understanding of the literature and complexity that surrounds this topic.

Module sessions are 2 hour long seminars. Students are expected to come to session having done the readings. Each session (after the first one) will be led by student discussants. These will be selected in the first session.

All readings are available through the library. Those for which the university has as an ebook are available on Moodle, as are those for which the professor was able to provide a PDF. All other books are available either through Seely Library or the Main University library as hard copies. Journal articles should be easily retrievable through the library.

If you have trouble getting a hold of readings please let me know ASAP.

**Marking**

Students will be classed on the basis of a 3000 word essay selected from a list provided by the module organizer. This will be due on **19th March 2021.**

**Week 1: Approaches to Environment, politics, and conflict**

Soysa, Indra de. “Ecoviolence: Shrinking Pie, or Honey Pot?” *Global Environmental Politics*

2, no. 4 (November 1, 2002): 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1162/152638002320980605>.

Robbins, Paul. *Political Ecology*. Ch. TBD

Coole, Diana. “Agentic Capacities and Capacious Historical Materialism: Thinking with New

Materialisms in the Political Sciences.” *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 41, no. 3 (2013): 451–69.

Mitchell, Timothy. *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*. 10th By the Author

ed. edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. Ch. 1

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. “The Climate of History: Four Theses.” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2

(2009): 197–222

**Week 2: Climate Change and Conflict**

Homer-Dixon, Thomas. “Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from

Cases.” *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 5–40.

Salehyan, Idean, and Cullen S. Hendrix. “Climate Shocks and Political Violence.” *Global*

*Environmental Change* 28 (2014): 239–50.

Koubi, Vally. “Climate Change and Conflict.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, no. 1

(2019): 343–60. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050317-070830>.

Dinar, Shlomi. *Beyond Resource Wars: Scarcity, Environmental Degradation, and*

*International Cooperation*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011. CH. TBD

**Week 3: Political Ecology Approaches**

Le Billon, Phillipe. “Resources, Wars, and Violence.” In *The International Handbook of*

*Political Ecology*, edited by Raymond L. Bryant, 176–88. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2015.

Peluso, Nancy Lee. *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java*.

Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1994. Ch. 1,4

Watts, Michael J. *Silent Violence: Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*.

Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013. Ch. TBD

**Week 4: Environmental History**

McNeill, J.R. *Mosquito Empires*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2010. Ch. 2.5

Brady, Lisa M. *War upon the Land: Military Strategy and the Transformation of Southern*

*Landscapes during the American Civil War*. University of Georgia Press, 2012. Ch. 1,4, conclusion

Tucker, Richard P., Tait Keller, J. R. McNeill, and Martin Schmid, eds. *Environmental*

*Histories of the First World War*. Cambridge University Press, 2018. Ch. TBD

Crosby, Alfred. *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of*

*1492, 30th Anniversary Edition*. Praeger, 2003. Ch. 2

**Week 5: Oil and Violence**

Ross, Michael L. *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013. Ch. 5

Mitchell, Timothy. *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*. Verso, 2011. Intro,

Ch. 8

Klare, Michael T. *The Race for What’s Left: The Global Scramble for the World’s Last*

*Resources*. First edition. Metropolitan Books, 2012. Ch. Intro, Ch. 1

Watts et al, Economies of Violence: Petroleum, Politics, and Community Conflict in the

Niger Delta, Nigeria. Working paper: <http://geog.berkeley.edu/ProjectsResources/ND%20Website/NigerDelta/WP/1-WattsOkantaVon.pdf>

**Week 6: International System**

Klare, Michael T. *Rising Powers, Shrinking Planet: The New Geopolitics of Energy*. First

edition. Metropolitan Books, 2008. Ch. TBD

Grove, Jairus Victor. *Savage Ecology: War and Geopolitics at the End of the World*. Durham,

NC: Duke University Press Books, 2019. Ch. 1,2,9

Burke, Anthony, Stefanie Fishel, Audra Mitchell, Simon Dalby, and Daniel J. Levine. “Planet

Politics: A Manifesto from the End of IR.” *Millennium* 44, no. 3 (2016): 499–523.

Chandler, David, Erika Cudworth, and Stephen Hobden. “Anthropocene, Capitalocene and

Liberal Cosmopolitan IR: A Response to Burke et al.’s ‘Planet Politics.’” *Millennium* 46, no. 2 (2018): 190–208.

**Week 7: Syrian Civil War**

Kelley, Colin P., Shahrzad Mohtadi, Mark A. Cane, Richard Seager, and Yochanan Kushnir.

“Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 112, no. 11 (2015): 3241–46.

“Forum: Climate Change and the Syrian Civil War” *Political Geography*. 2017. 28: 232-255.

Selby, Jan. “Climate Change and the Syrian Civil War, Part II: The Jazira’s Agrarian Crisis.”

*Geoforum* 101 (May 1, 2019): 260–74.