SYLLABUS
CRD 244: POLITICAL ECOPOLGY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
UC DAVIS
WINTER 2010

What is called human power over nature is actually the power exercised by some humans over others with nature as its instrument.
   — C.S. Lewis, cited by Hindmarsh and Lawrence (2004: 28)

Political ecology has three essential foci. The first is interactive, contradictory and dialectical: society and land-based resources are mutually causal in such a way that poverty, via poor management, can induce environmental degradation which itself deepens poverty. Less a problem of poor management, inevitable decay or demographic growth, land degradation is seen as social in origin and definition. . . Second, political ecology argues for regional or spatial accounts of degradation which link, through chains of explanation, local decision-makers to spatial variations in environmental structure. . . Third, land management is framed by ‘external structures’ which for Blaikie meant the role of the state and the core-periphery model.
   — Michael Watts (2000: 591)

LOGISTICS
Instructor: Ryan E. Galt, Assistant Professor of Agricultural Sustainability & Society
office: 2429 Hart; office hours: T & R 12:30 to 2:00 p.m., or by appointment
phone: (530) 754-8776; email: regalt@ucdavis.edu
Class time and place: Wednesdays 2:10 to 6:00 p.m. in 166 Hunt, or at field trip locations
Websites: SmartSite + CRD 244 2010 Google map + CRD 244 2010 MobileMe photo gallery

COURSE OVERVIEW
This graduate seminar explores the interactions between societies and the environment from the perspective of geographical political ecology. Political ecology, a subfield with contributions from geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, ecologists, and biologists, integrates social theory and social science — especially political economic analysis and, increasingly, post-structural theory — with environmental sciences/studies across multiple scales to analyze the dynamic relationships between society and land-based resources, environmental outcomes resulting from social structures, and the environmentally-mediated interactions between and within social groups. Geographical political ecology includes a large number of theoretically-informed, empirical studies in spatially-delimited locales shaped by the interplay between local and extra-local processes. Michael Watts and Richard Peet (2004) argue that political ecology as a subfield is nearly at the point of being a “normal science” in the Kuhnian sense (Kuhn 1970), having foundational works (Blaikie 1985; Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Watts 1983; Wolf 1983), its own journals (Journal of Political Ecology; Capitalism, Nature, Socialism; Land Degradation & Development), a conceptual toolkit, a rich history of theorizing nature-society relationships in multiple contexts and across scale, and graduate textbooks (e.g., Robbins 2004).

A great deal of political ecological work has focused on the politicization of nature through the processes of environmental conservation, economic development and commodification, and conflicts over livelihoods and the landscapes on which they depend. A political ecological approach to local communities and social movements — i.e., communities of interest — stresses understanding them in the context of their relationship to the state, markets, other elements of civil society, discourses of identity, culture, and nature, and the various components of the biophysical environment. We use political ecology to understand cases of the commodification
of resources; community in environmental degradation and conservation efforts; the use of nature in primary production activities such as agriculture, forestry, and fishing; environmental social movements; and the linkages between nature and society in rural, urban, and suburban areas in both third world and first world contexts. We will also examine the place of social theory, ecological theory, scale, capitalist development, knowledge, power, environmental justice, and first world/third world distinctions in political ecology.

While much work in geographical political ecology focuses on detailed understandings of cases, the field can also dialogue with a number of larger questions: How do we conceptualize society-environment interactions at a variety of scales? How can one bring together biophysical and social sciences in analysis and practice? What does a political ecological perspective mean for our understandings of sustainability as a concept and as a movement? What role does social justice play in sustainability? Is capitalism sustainable? How should society be reconfigured to increase ecological sustainability, and how should we as individuals and as members of communities attempt to reconfigure society? What alternatives to the widespread commodification of nature exist, and how do we bring them into being, and scale them up?

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**PART I: FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL ECOLOGY**
Jan. 6    Introducing political ecology
Jan. 13   Theory, concepts, and methods in political ecology

**PART II: COMMODIFICATION, MARGINALIZATION, & DEGRADATION**
Jan. 20   Commodification of the commons, nature, and food production
Jan. 27   Environmental degradation in developing countries
Feb. 3    Agrarian questions, revisited

**PART III: COMMUNITY & THE POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE & PRACTICE**
Feb. 10   State and community in environmental protection
Feb. 17   First world political ecology: successfully bringing it home?
Feb. 24   Rural and environmental social movements in the North and South
Mar. 3    Feminist and post-structural political ecology: difference & discourse

**PART IV: RETHINKING POLITICAL ECOLOGY**
Mar. 10   Systems, dialectics, ecological and geographical scale, and cross-scale analysis

**A BRIEF STATEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY**
I do not follow the banking model of education, in which students passively receive knowledge “deposited” by experts (see hooks 1994: 40), and in which memory is the storage tank and intelligence is the ability to access memory. Rather, I believe education should include critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, curiosity, and the development of critical consciousness. Education should include wrestling with ethical issues, and examining one’s and society’s values and interests. I believe that students bring important knowledge, experiences, and voice into the classroom, and the classroom learning community can benefit greatly from this diversity. In a graduate seminar we all should be, and are, teachers and learners — simultaneously.

I also do not believe that intelligence is fixed or predetermined, even if some biological elements of it appear to be so. Rather, I think intelligence develops and expands when people try hard to learn new things that they do not understand and when they make new connections. Trying
things out and making mistakes (i.e., fearless experimentation) are essential parts of the learning process and the development of our intelligence, and it is my job to create a learning environment in which this can occur, for students and for myself. Fundamentally, all people can change and develop — by examining and better organizing their knowledge, thought processes, ethical commitments, and behaviors, and by finding gaps and inconsistencies in their own views and in common sense understandings. For me, it is these changes, and not just accumulation of facts, that represent true learning.

I strongly believe that education has a social purpose to develop students’ critical consciousness (Freire 1973). In this way, education is fundamentally linked to participatory democracy, in which informed citizens make decisions about the future of society. I believe I have an obligation to help make each class session worth attending and to facilitate your learning process. I ask that you let me know if I am not doing this. The buck stops with you, however, but as students and as co-teachers. As adults here by choice, you bring yourself and your desire to learn and participate here, and what you do in the course ultimately depends on your commitment to yourself, your learning process, and our learning community.

**LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND GRADES**

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<th>Activity</th>
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<td>Leadership of discussion and localization/field trip</td>
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<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Term paper</td>
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<td>Peer review of term paper</td>
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**Leadership of discussion and localization/field trip (15%)**

Each student must facilitate class learning activities and discussion for two class sessions (see sign-up sheet passed around on day 1 of class). This means you will work together with two other students, and class leaders must coordinate efforts before class. Reviews of the readings are prohibited, as we assume that everyone will have read. Facilitation involves posing provocative questions, connecting people’s comments and other readings, presenting background to the subfield or place under discussion, and/or creating and leading relevant activities. If class leaders want further ideas for facilitating group learning activities, I suggest they contact me beforehand, as I have useful resources (e.g., Bean 1996; Pretty et al. 2002). Importantly, your leadership role also involves an effort to bring in local cases that illustrate the themes, concepts, or theories from that class session. Field trips accessible by bike (or, if farther away, coordinated with classmates with cars) are highly encouraged as part of your leadership activities, and we will devote some time in class to brainstorm possible locations. Field trips if closeby should occur during class time. We can consider field trips on other days if they involve locations farther away.

**Participation (15%)**

Participation grades reflect attendance and your critical engagement during class sessions. My expectations are that students will read critically; come to class to pose questions and discuss points of agreement and disagreement; and make connections with other readings and material.

**Reflection papers (15%)**

A 250-500 word response paper or blog entry is required on the readings of at least four class sessions. The response papers should be your reflections on one to three of the readings and are meant to help you gather your thoughts for discussion. These are due on SmartSite two hours
before class starts and are graded as done/not done. Class leaders are exempt from writing discussion papers for the sessions they lead.

**Term paper (45%)**
A term paper related to course themes and your research interest(s) is required. I ask that you limit your paper to 20 pages (double-spaced, 12 point serif font, 1-inch margins). The paper requires three products from you in the following order: (1) on Jan. 20 a prospectus and rough outline, due 30 minutes before class on SmartSite; (2) on Feb. 24 a rough draft of your paper for peer review, due 30 minutes before class on SmartSite and by class in whatever format you and your peer reviewed agree upon; and (3) on Mar. 12 the final paper, due at 12 p.m. on SmartSite.

**Peer review of other term paper (10%)**
Term paper drafts will be exchanged on Feb. 24 (whether it be electronic or paper format is up to the agreement between writer and reviewer). Each of you will be responsible for reviewing another student’s paper. These reviews are due to the writer and myself before or in class on Mar. 3. Review using either electronic methods (e.g., track changes in Pages or Word) or paper (written comments) is acceptable, but either way I need to see evidence that it has occurred. More details are provided in the Peer Review assignment on SmartSite.

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**REQUIRED READINGS**
Reading is fundamental to the course. Each day of class has corresponding readings that must be completed before class session. Required texts are available in the campus bookstore. PDFs of the readings that are not in the required texts are available by week in SmartSite’s Resources section (folder “01_06” corresponds to class on January 6, and so forth).

**Required texts**

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**WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF COURSE TOPICS & READINGS**

**PART I: FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL ECOLOGY**

**Jan. 6** Introducing political ecology


Jan. 13  Theory, concepts, and methods in political ecology


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Feb. 10  State and community in environmental protection


Feb. 17  First world political ecology: successfully bringing it home?

Feb. 24    Rural and environmental social movements in the North and South
York: Routledge.
(P&W) Rangan, Haripriya. 2004. From Chipko to Uttarakhand: the environment of protest and
development in the Indian Himalaya. In Liberation ecologies: environment, development, social
(*) Miller, Vernice, Moya Hallstein, and Susan Quass. 1996. Feminist politics and environmental justice:
women's community activism in West Harlem, New York. In Feminist political ecology: global
issues and local experiences, pp. 62-85, edited by D.E. Rocheleau, B.P. Thomas-Slayter and E.
(*) Wolford, Wendy. 2005. Agrarian moral economies and neoliberalism in Brazil: Competing worldviews

Mar. 3    Feminist and post-structural political ecology: difference & discourse
(Z&B) Carney, Judith. 2003. Agroenvironments and slave strategies in the diffusion of rice culture to the
Americas. In Political ecology: an integrative approach to geography and environment-
development studies, pp. 256-73, edited by K.S. Zimmerer and T.J. Bassett. New York: Guilford
Press.
Liberation ecologies: environment, development, social movements, pp. 316-335. New York:
Routledge.
exchanges. In Political ecology across spaces, scales, and social groups, edited by S. Paulson and
(*) Rocheleau, Dianne E. 2008. Political ecology in the key of policy: from chains of explanation to webs

PART IV: RETHINKING POLITICAL ECOLOGY
Mar. 10    Systems, dialectics, ecological and geographical scale, and cross-scale analysis
Biology under the influence: dialectical essays on ecology, agriculture, and health. New York:
(*) Galt, Ryan E. in press. Scaling up political ecology: the case of illegal pesticides on fresh vegetables
100 (2).
(P&G) Gezon, Lisa L. 2005. Finding the global in the local: environmental struggles in northern
Madagascar, in S. Paulson and L. L. Gezon (eds.), Political ecology across spaces, scales, and
social groups. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
(*) Brown, J. Christopher, and Mark Purcell. 2005. There's nothing inherent about scale: Political
ecology, the local trap, and the politics of development in the Brazilian Amazon. Geoforum 36 (3):
607-24.
Progress in Human Geography 29 (3):276-90
(*) Allen, Tim F.H. 1998. The landscape "level" is dead: persuading the family to take it off the
respirator. In Ecological scale: theory and applications, pp. 35-54, edited by D.L. Peterson and
REFERENCES