1. Overview

This course focuses on the ways power dynamics shape environment-based, social conflict and undermine efforts to conserve wilderness and species for their utilitarian, aesthetic, intrinsic, and ecological values. It covers historical and ethnographic case studies from around the world concerning resource extraction and ecological conservation efforts that have caused, and have often been undermined by, violence or resistance. Cases include, for example, the creation of national parks in Native American territories of the United States, the enclosure of African savannas for hunting preserves by British colonial settlers, the protection of rain forest by NGOs and state agencies for ecotourism development in Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, and Amazonia, and the enactment of international bans against killing or removing endangered species in regions where human poverty is acute. The course focuses on violent and nonviolent conflict oriented around environmental issues, including natural resource scarcity, unequal distribution to natural resources, unequal distribution of benefits accrued by extractive activity, land and forest degradation, and state management of environmental crises and natural disasters.

We will emphasize the social dimensions of environmental hazards and natural disasters, including how different actors frame and act upon environmental problems, with special attention to the ways in which framing, which is informed by both scientific data and ideology, might trigger or intensify social conflict on the ground. Conflict might take the form of social resistance to state, industry, or NGO-driven interventions into environmental problems, thus hobbling efforts to remediate problems; or it might manifest as violent confrontations between socially different groups. Depending on the context, the key identifiers of difference may pertain to gender, ethnicity, age, class, or nationality. The course is designed to both inform students of global environmental problems recognized to be causes of social conflict, and to train students in evaluating “explanatory frameworks” of environmental conflict. The course will encourage graduate students to probe the assumptions of particular explanations of environmental crisis and conflict, to discern whether and how explanations may be partial and situated, shaped by the perspectives of the upbringing, ideology, and place-based knowledge of the explainers, and to recognize how theoretical perspectives inform the collection of social and historical data.

2. Course objectives

1) Students will examine ethnographic and historical case studies of the major environmental problems confronted by societies around the world, including tropical deforestation, climate change, natural resource extraction, water scarcity, and pollution.

2) Students will learn key concepts and theoretical approaches in social science concerning the environment-based conflict.

3) Students will critically analyze the structural, political, and cultural causes of these problems as they are explained by social scientists over time, attending to the conceptual emphases of these explanations.

4) Students will gain an understanding of scholarly debates surrounding prominent theories of environmental degradation, including “tragedy of the commons,” over-population, resource scarcity, and political economic inequalities, as well as how critique has transformed theories of environmental decline and conflict.

5) Students will demonstrate a grasp of the relationship of theory to the presentation of evidence by writing a final research paper on environmental conflict in one region of the world.
Requirements and Grading

1) Active participation in class discussions (15%). Seminars depend on active student involvement in discussion of texts. Students must not only participate verbally in the seminar but also show familiarity with the weekly reading.

2) 250 word response each week (15%) posted in Blackboard’s “Discussion Forum” before the weekly class meeting.

3) An oral presentation (10%) of research paper in which each student explains the theoretical literature that informs the analysis, and describes the social and historical context of the conflict case study.

4) Final essay (60%). Students are required to write a 20 page essay based on one case study of environmental conflict (preferably on a region/topic they wish to pursue further in the Peace and Conflict Studies program) drawing on a particular theoretical perspective. Integral to the paper will be a literature review of the scholarly debate concerning the selected theory of environmental conflict.

ASSIGNMENTS

Part 1: Carrying Capacity

Week 1: Course Intro

Week 2: Resource Scarcity and the “Resource Curse”


the “Resource Curse”
Readings TBA

Week 3: Overpopulation or Resource Distribution?


Part 2: The Commons

Week 4: Tragedy of the Commons


Week 5: The Climate as Commons
Part 3: Political Ecology

Week 6: Defining the Perspective


Week 7: Conservation and Subaltern People


Week 8: Gender and Environment


Part 4: Environmental Justice

Week 9: Spring Break
Work on final papers

Week 10: Environmental Justice Defined


**Week 11: Nuclear Testing**


**Week 12: Fracking**

1) Benjamin E. Griffith. "Beyond the Fracking Wars: The International Community’s Response."


Film: Gasland

**Week 13: Corporate Mining**


**Week 14: Student Presentations & Discussion**

**Week 15: Student Presentations & Discussion**