Overview

This course is concerned with the ways in which international development policies governing natural resource use, access and control reproduce difference and inequality, and how together these processes are imbued with conflict. Through attention to the entanglements of environment, difference and struggle, a core aim of this seminar is to interrogate what is taken as given within the governing narratives, instruments and institutions shaping natural resource policies pertaining to land and territorial demarcation, water access and distribution, oil and mineral extraction, biodiversity conservation, tourism and urban renewal, to name a few.

Course Description and Learning Outcomes

Three overlapping themes will guide this seminar. First, we will explore historical and geographical perspectives of natural resource conflicts with attention to feminist and post-colonial theorizations of environment-development as a way to become familiar with the woven relations of natural resources, difference and conflict. Second, we will examine the contemporary role of the state in the provocation and abatement of natural resource conflict and become fluent with notions of property, natural resource access and land control. In this vein, we pay particular attention to the legal geographies (both formal and informal) that underpin the myriad ways natural resource contests unfold. Third, we will investigate how multiple forms of difference and their intersections (caste, class, gender, race, sexuality, nationality etc.) are materially and symbolically imbued in natural resource policy (de jure and de facto). Together, our seminar discussions, readings, films, and news analyses will address a number of conceptual and empirical debates and policy-related discussions in geography, development planning, and development studies.

In this course students will

- become familiar with prevailing conceptual frameworks for understanding natural resource conflict and social difference;
• become familiar with geographical debates regarding the way natural resource conflicts unfold in the context of international development agendas;
• learn multiple meanings of conflict and violence and the ways in which these terms are bound up with international development thought, practice and planning;
• become familiar with the contested nature of neoliberal development models; and
• strengthen and improve written and oral communication skills through writing assignments and ongoing oral presentations.

**Required Texts**


*Required books can be found at the UT Bookstore and/or through online orders at Amazon.ca. Please plan accordingly. I will also request books be placed on Reserve at Robarts.*

**About the course and the Instructor**

This course welcomes Masters and early Ph.D students in geography and planning, and graduate students from related fields. For Ph.D students, this course offers good preparation for comprehensive exams in the arenas of environmental, critical, feminist, development and political geographies. For Masters students who are interested in environmental politics, international development planning and/or political, environmental and feminist geography, this course offers an introduction to scholarship and concepts that may be applied to contemporary environment-development planning, politics and policy. In addition to structured weekly assignments, students are welcome (with my consultation) to consider a number of different assessment styles for their final assignments.

**Who am I?**

I am cultural geographer and political ecologist whose research focuses on natural resource conflicts in Latin America. My ongoing research projects in Central America interrogate land struggles in the context of protected area conservation (Honduras) and tourism development (Panama). In addition to many years teaching geography in the United States, I have also consulted with the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program. I bring my international, scholarly and applied experiences to this course and look to foster a robust, rigorous, and reflexive learning environment.
Course Assignments

A. Contextualizing the “News” Assignment

September 18 (in class) & November 27th (last class)

This assignment requires each student to give a 5 minute oral presentation of a current event topic (no older than 6 months) and show its relevance to the readings assigned for week 2. Each student will speak for 5 minutes (max) and use the readings to contextualize the event, from the student’s point of view. After everyone has presented, we will take 5 minutes to compose our questions and then audience members must pose at least one-question to two presenters. Each presenter must have the opportunity to answer (at least) 1-2 questions. Questions must draw from the readings and not simply be clarification questions regarding the news stories. We will repeat this assignment on the last day of class. Questions must be submitted at the end of class. I will return them the following week.

CTN=20% (2x10%)

B. Student-led reading presentations (rolling due dates)

All students must lead presentations at twice throughout the term. In addition to covering the readings students must furnish (in the following week) a commentary of the readings and class discussion in a formal paper (4-6 pages). On the weeks with books, at least 2 students will share in leading the discussion. Each student must complete 2 paper/presentations. Further instructions will be provided. Students who are not presenting must actively engage in class discussion and submit to me a minimum of three discussion questions or comments (drawn from the readings) (in class). It is expected that you pose (some of) these questions/comments during class discussion.

Presentations/papers=30% (2x15%)

C. Class Participation

Participation grades are earned by active engagement in class discussions. Discussion will comprise a great deal of class time. It is expected that students will contribute by posing questions, raising issues for commentary, using the text to inform your commentary and analysis, listen closely to others, and respectively engage with their views. We will work together to become more fluent with the debates and insights embedded in the readings. It is a goal of this course to learn from one another and to follow the discussion thread. We will do our best to make time to allow all of those who wish to make a directional move in the conversation to do so. Please remember, participation starts with perfect attendance.
A good strategy for class discussion is to focus on the purpose and stated intent of the author. Did the author successfully address what they stated that they would? Are the supporting examples convincing, why and why not? Why is the argument important?

You can also critique the literature. But keep in mind it’s not enough to say the writing is poor and I don’t understand the author’s argument. You have to explain what you did understand and what makes the author’s argument less compelling to you. A good way to evaluate the readings is to discuss the way the readings help you understand or explain a topic/event/concept that you are interested in pursuing in your own work/research/general interest etc. Critique is important and I am open to student critique of the readings, I just urge you to work hard to understand the author’s positioning first before you embrace and/or dismiss the readings. We cannot effectively critique if we don’t fully understand the argument.

In addition, to develop critical reading skills requires that most of the readings be read more than once. I suggest reading an article and taking notes at the same time. Then re-read either the entire article again, or the introduction and conclusion. Ask, what is the author’s main argument, what is the lens he/she uses to illustrate the argument, and what are the main lines of evidence? For books, try to do a close reading the first time (with note-taking) but read the introduction and conclusions twice.

**Participation=10%**

**D. Final Project (Term Paper or?)**

Students have the choice to choose the format for their final papers. Projects must however be a written assignment with no fewer than 6000 words (24 double-spaced pages@ 250word/page). Some examples may be a research paper, a literature review, a research proposal for upcoming grant application, an introductory/review chapter of a MA thesis or? Please bring me your ideas and we can discuss. I will not accept an annotated bibliography. One of the best ways to develop your ideas is through (reading) and writing. All projects must be approved and completed in consultation with me.

**Final Project=40%**
Readings Outline

September 11

Introductions

D(d)evelopment, natural resources, difference and “conflict”?

September 18

D(d)evelopment, natural resources, difference and “conflict”
Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*
p.1-68


*Conceptual frameworks: the politics of natural resource access, control and distribution*


Optional


September 25

On Difference

Akhil Gupta; James Ferguson


**October 2**

*Historicizing and SpatializingGendered Property*


**Optional**


**October 9**

*Petro-Violence and community resilience*

Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 68-128


**Optional**


**October 16**

*Forest conflicts and state-peasant power relations*

October 23  
**Violence and the legibility of property**  

Nixon, *Slow Violence*, p. 128-149


**Optional**  


October 30  
**“Unimagined Communities” and water access**


**Optional**


November 6  
**The Power of Indigeneity?**  


**Optional**


**November 13**

*Law, violence and Landed Elites*


**November 20**


Nixon, R. *Slow Violence* (Ecologies of the Aftermath)...to the end

**November 27**

*Unpacking displacement and the “Foreignization” of Space*

Empire’s Apprentice: Canada in Latin America...NACLA (TBA)

Nolin, C. and Stephens, J. 2010. We have to protect the investors: “Development” and Canadian Mining Companies in Guatemala. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*.


**Optional**


**Final Assignment Due: December 11th, 2014**
Course Norms

- We will use Blackboard for communication: email and announcements. Course readings can be accessed via the University Libraries Electronic Resources. Please see a librarian if you are having difficulty locating articles.
- Please arrive on time to class
- All course assignments must be submitted to me in class on the day that they are due. I will be on campus December 11th in room 5022 to receive your final projects/papers. Please submit no later than 3pm. If you cannot submit to me directly please leave assignment in my mailbox on the 5th floor before 3pm on December 11th, 2014. Electronic submissions will not be accepted. Thanks.
- There is an expectation is that you will keep up with your work. If you need more time for the final research paper please contact me before the last day of class. I generally will grant everyone an extension if someone asks for one. However, there are no late submissions for term assignments (besides the final). If you are late its 10% a day deduction. No exceptions without a verifiable medical reason.
- The use of cell phones is not permitted during class time. Please kindly put them away. Laptops/tablets are welcome for note taking.
- Feedback on written assignments--I will do my best to return assignments quickly. However, I will not necessarily conduct line by line editing of your assignments. I will closely edit parts of the paper to identify the strengths and weaknesses in your writing. I will make comments on your ideas and your writing. You will be graded on both. I cannot assess your ideas unless your writing is clear. I strongly suggest that if you are at all concerned about your writing that you make an appointment with the Writing Centre in the School for Graduate Studies. This should not be looked down upon. Most students learn how to write WELL in Graduate school. Take advantage of the wonderful resources to sharpen your writing skills. Book appointments in advance. The Centre is popular.
- Welcome. I am very delighted to be learning with you this term 😊

Special Accommodations

Please contact me if you require any special accommodations in order to be successful in this course. I am happy to work with you. Also please see below:

Accessibility Needs: The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility

Supplementary Materials


