

ENVIRONMENT AND POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

IDS4930/POS4931/ASH3931

SPRING 2024

Course Information:

Instructor: Onursal Erol, PhD

Email: oeerol@ufl.edu

Course Time: M/W/F 12:50PM – 1:40PM

Course Location: FLG 245

Office Location: Pugh Hall 236

Office Hours (in-person, walk-in): TH 1-2PM & F 2PM-3PM

Remote Office Hours (by appointment): M/W 3-4PM

Appointment Link: <https://calendly.com/oeerol/remote-office-hours>

Course Description

In this course, we will think about the Middle East through the analytical lens of political ecology. We will politicize the issues, conditions, conflicts, outcomes, imaginations, and projects that pertain to various environmental phenomena in the region. Our task is multifold. Together, we will question the place, representations, and socio-political functions of “nature,” its conservation, and its degradation in the Middle East. We will develop sophisticated understandings of the various relationships of power embedded in environmental disasters, conflicts, and infrastructural projects. We will rely upon our freshly gained collective wisdom regarding human-pathogen interactions to think about the political ecologies of infection and disease in the region. We will situate the Middle East in the world of carbon/post-carbon politics and debate the potentials and limitations of environmental activism in the region. Lastly, we will develop a cultural literacy of and refine our critical outlooks on the multi-species experiences that form the texture of biological life above and beyond human life in the Middle East.

Bookcreator Class Project: There are no midterm or final exams in this course. Instead, we will collectively author a public-facing media-rich digital class project on [Bookcreator](#). Think of this project as a collective exercise in putting together an e-book. Throughout the semester, each student will produce three digital essays, select samples of which will be highlighted in class.

Learning Goals

- Develop a multifaceted understanding of the main concepts/debates in environmental studies.
- Learn about the environmental issues in the Middle East in the context of the relations of power they are embedded in.
- Apply a critical political ecology lens to the study of the Middle East and think about the future possibilities/limitations of a more just and sustainable socio-natural life in the region.
- Gain experience in digital authorship, editorial collaboration, and iterative knowledge production.

Course Materials

This course is committed to affordable education and there are no required textbooks to purchase. All materials can be accessed on Canvas. Please read all materials before class.



Grade Distribution

Participation	15%
Self-Reflection Memos	15%
Bookcreator #1	15%
Bookcreator #2	25%
Bookcreator #3	30%

Grading Scale

(A) 94-100 (A-) 90-93 (B+) 86-89 (B) 82-85
(B-) 78-81 (C+) 74-77 (C) 70-73 (C-) 66-69
(D+) 62-65 (D) 58-61 (D-) 54-57 (E) 53 & below

Participation (5% \times 3 = 15%)

This grade reflects the overall level and quality of your participation in class. Please mind that, “participation” is not the same as “attendance.” Your attendance is not graded. If you are feeling unwell, have a job interview, or are pressed for time before an important exam, please feel free to miss a class or two as you see fit. But understand that you are missing out on your opportunity to establish a quality participation record. To establish a quality participation record, my expectation is that you are present for the overwhelming majority of our meetings, you come to class having read and contemplated on the required readings, voice your opinions, share your agreements/concerns freely, raise questions, and uplift and engage with your peers in intellectually meaningful ways. Participation is graded in three separate installments at the end of Weeks 5, 10 and 15, and posted on Canvas with feedback. This way students get a clean slate every five weeks and can adapt as necessary.

Self-Reflection Memos (3%x5) = 15%

These are brief, informal check-ins that ask students to reflect on their path to success in some aspect of the course in a few sentences. They are meant to be a quick and stress-free way for students to reflect on their learning and knowledge-production strategies. The memos will be available on Canvas on the specified dates in the course schedule and should be submitted within a week.

Bookcreator#1 (15%) (500-1500 words)

Bookcreator #2 (25%) (500-1500 words)

Bookcreator #3 (30%) (500-1500 words)

- Sign up [here](#) to reserve three spots for your Bookcreator entries. The “submission” deadlines are on the sign-up sheet. You do not need to actually “submit” your digital essay. I will share access to them on Bookcreator and will consider them submitted by the designated deadline.
- Select a topic for your essay. Opt for a specific empirical case that effectively illustrates the broader theme. This way you can ensure that your essay topic remains focused enough for comprehensive coverage within such a limited space, while allowing for intellectual depth as you can analyze it as an instance of a larger phenomenon.
- Produce a digital essay on your topic in Bookcreator that features a text to explain and discuss the issue and include relevant external media that can be embedded to enrich the entry. Pretend you are writing an Op-Ed that will be published in an online magazine for the general public. Your goals are to concisely introduce the particulars of your topic, explicitly identify a socio-political aspect of the topic that can be unpacked through the analytical lens of political ecology, communicate in an engaging way with regard to both your prose and the external materials you include in the piece, make your personal stance clear, and convince your readers as to why they should agree with you. A detailed grading rubric is available below.

Bookcreator Digital Essay Grading Rubric

	Excellent <i>Bookcreator#1 (3 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#2 (5-4 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#3 (6-5 points)</i>	Good <i>Bookcreator#1 (2 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#2 (3-2 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#3 (4-3 points)</i>	Fair <i>Bookcreator#1 (1 point)</i> <i>Bookcreator#2 (1 point)</i> <i>Bookcreator#3 (2-1 points)</i>	Needs Improvement <i>Bookcreator#1 (0 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#2 (0 points)</i> <i>Bookcreator#3 (0 points)</i>
Topic Selection	Highly relevant and engaging topic. Demonstrates original thinking and strong connection to the designated theme.	Relevant and engaging topic. Shows some originality or connection to the designated theme.	Topic is somewhat generic or lacks clear focus. Connection to designated theme is weak.	Topic is irrelevant. Shows no connection to the designated theme.
Format Compliance	Assignment complies with the word-limit and submission requirements.	Assignment largely complies with the word-limit and submission requirements with minor errors or inconsistencies.	Assignment falls short of complying with the word-limit and submission requirements.	Assignment largely fails to comply with the word-limit and submission requirements.
Media Enrichment	Includes impactful media (images, infographics, video, audio, etc.) that significantly enhance understanding and engagement, demonstrating critical judgment in selection.	Media is either impactful or effective in enhancing the essay.	Media is neither impactful nor effective in enhancing the essay.	Media choice actively disrupts or hinders understanding, or media is absent.
Writing/Engagement	Engaging and sophisticated prose that targets the general public.	Mostly clear and understandable public writing with some weaknesses. Engagement may be slightly inconsistent.	Writing is unclear, convoluted, or lacks engaging voice or variety.	Writing contains frequent errors that distract from the message, is difficult to understand, or lacks any sense of engagement.
Argumentation	Presents a clear and persuasive main argument with strong supporting evidence, addressing opposing viewpoints in a nuanced way.	Main argument is somewhat clear with limited evidence or counterarguments are weakly addressed.	Main argument is unclear or unconvincing. Evidence is lacking or irrelevant. Counterarguments are ignored or dismissed without explanation.	Main argument is absent or illogical.

Course Schedule

Week 1 - POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Jan. 8

Course Introduction (No readings assigned)

Jan. 10

Jamieson, Dale. "The Environment as an Ethical Question." In *Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction*. Environmental Issues Online (Text). Cambridge: University Press, 2008.

Jan. 12

Robbins, Paul. "Political versus Apolitical Ecologies." in *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed., 11–20. Chichester, U.K.; J Wiley & Sons, 2012.

Week 2 – MIDDLE EASTERN ENVIRONMENT

Jan. 15 (No Class)

MLK Day

Jan. 17

Cline, Eric. "What Happened After Civilization Collapsed : Throughline." 57min.
<https://www.npr.org/2021/01/11/955735429/what-happened-after-civilization-collapsed>.

Jan. 19

Burke, Edmund, III. "The Transformation of the Middle Eastern Environment, 1500 B.C.E., 2000 B.C.E." In *The Environment and World History: Environment and World History*, edited by Edmund Burke III and Kenneth Pomeranz. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009: 81-91.

Hoffmann, Clemens. "Environmental Determinism as Orientalism: The Geo-political Ecology of Crisis in the Middle East." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 31, no. 1 (March 2018): 94–104.

Week 3 – NATURE IN CONSERVATION: WILDERNESS & ENCLOSURE

Jan. 22

Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 7–28.

*Self-Reflection Memo#1 available on Canvas

Jan. 24

Davis, Diana K. "Enclosing Nature in North Africa: National Parks and the Politics of Environmental History." in *Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Alan Mikhail. Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2012.

Jan. 26 (Bookcreator Workshop & Editorial decisions)

Noll, Steven. "Introduction." In *Writing for the Public Good: Essays from David R. Colburn and Senator Bob Graham.*, by David R. Colburn and Bob Graham, 1–11. edited by Steven Noll. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2022.

Week 4 – NATURE AS CRISIS: DISASTERS AND HAZARDS

Jan. 29

Angell, Elizabeth. "Assembling Disaster: Earthquakes and Urban Politics in Istanbul." *City* 18, no. 6 (November 2, 2014): 667–78.

Jan. 31

Popperl, Simone. "Geologies of Erasure: Sinkholes, Science, and Settler Colonialism at the Dead Sea." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 3 (August 2018): 427–48.

Feb. 2

Bookcreator#1 (Group A)

Week 5 – NATURE OF DISEASE

Feb. 5

Gratien, Chris. "The Ottoman Quagmire: Malaria, Swamps, and Settlement in the Late Ottoman Mediterranean." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 4 (2017): 583–604.

Feb. 7

Clifton, Eli, and Marmar Kabir. "A Deadly Combination in Iran: Coronavirus and Sanctions." *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 39, no. 3 (May 1, 2020): 14–18.

Stone, Richard. "Iran Confronts Coronavirus amid a 'Battle between Science and Conspiracy Theories.'" *Science* | AAAS, March 29, 2020.

Feb. 9

Bookcreator#1 (Group B)

Week 6 – ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINARIES OF THE NATION

Feb. 12

Harris, Leila M. “Salts, Soils, and (Un)Sustainabilities? Analyzing Narratives of Environmental Change in Southeastern Turkey.” In *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Diana K. Davis and Edmund Burke, 192–217. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011.

*Self-Reflection Memo#2 available on Canvas

Feb. 14

Barromi-Perlman, Edna. “Visions of Landscape Photography in Palestine and Israel.” *Landscape Research* 45, no. 5 (July 3, 2020): 564–82.

Feb. 16

Bookcreator#1 (Group C)

Week 7 – NATURE IN TRANSFORMATION: DESERTS OF MODERNITY

Feb. 19

Günel, Gökçe. “Air Conditioning the Arabian Peninsula.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 3 (August 2018): 573–79.

Feb. 21

Sowers, Jeannie. “Remapping the Nation, Critiquing the State: Environmental Narratives and Desert Land Reclamation in Egypt.” In *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Diana K. Davis and Edmund Burke, 158–91. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011.

Suggested Reading:

Barnes, Jessie. “Expanding the Nile’s Watershed: The Science and Politics of Land Reclamation in Egypt.” In *Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Alan Mikhail. Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2012.

Feb. 23

Bookcreator#1 (Group D)

*Self-Reflection Memo#3 available on Canvas

Week 8 – ENERGY & THE ENVIRONMENT

Feb. 26

Mitchell, Timothy. “Carbon Democracy.” *Economy and Society* 38, no. 3 (August 1, 2009): 399–432.

Feb. 28

Cantoni, Roberto, and Karen Rignall. “Kingdom of the Sun: A Critical, Multiscalar Analysis of Morocco’s Solar Energy Strategy.” *Energy Research & Social Science* 51 (May 1, 2019): 20–31.

Mar. 1

Bookcreator#2 (Group A)

Week 9 – CLIMATE CHANGE

Mar. 4

Klein, Naomi. “Introduction.” in *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, Simon&Schuster hardcover edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014.

Mar. 6

Stamatopoulou-Robbins, Sophia. “An Uncertain Climate in Risky Times: How Occupation Became Like the Rain in Post-Oslo Palestine.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 3 (August 2018): 383–404.

Mar. 8

Bookcreator#2 (Group B)

..... SPRING RECESS

Week 10 - POLLUTION

Mar. 18

Movahedi-Lankarani, Ciruce. “A Ghoul at the Gates: Natural Gas Energy and the Environment in Pahlavi Iran, 1960–1979.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 54, no. 1 (2022): 80–99.

Mar. 20

Costa Brava, Lebanon. Drama. About Productions, Barentsfilmm, Boo Pictures, 2021.

Mar. 22

Bookcreator#2 (Group C)

Week 11 – POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

Mar. 25

Özkaynak, Begüm, Cem İskender Aydın, Pınar Ertör-Akyazı, and Irmak Ertör. “The Gezi Park Resistance from an Environmental Justice and Social Metabolism Perspective.” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 99–114.

Mar. 27

Cohen, Shaul. “Environmentalism Deferred Nationalisms and Israeli/Palestinian Imaginaries.” In *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Diana K. Davis and Edmund Burke, 246–64. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011.

Suggested Reading:

Caroline Nagel, and Lynn Staeheli. “Nature, Environmentalism, and the Politics of Citizenship in Post-Civil War Lebanon.” *Cultural Geographies* 23, no. 2 (2016): 247–263.

Mar. 29

Bookcreator#2 (Group D)

*Self-Reflection Memo#4 available on Canvas

Week 12 – THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT & THE ECO-CITY

Apr. 1

Ceylan Baba, Ece. “The Risks of Mega Urban Projects Creating a Dystopia: Canal Istanbul.” *City and Environment Interactions* 6 (April 1, 2020): 1–10.

Apr. 3

Cugurullo, Federico. “Urban Eco-Modernisation and the Policy Context of New Eco-City Projects: Where Masdar City Fails and Why.” *Urban Studies* 53, no. 11 (August 2016): 2417–33.

Apr. 5

Bookcreator#3 (Group A)

Week 13 – MULTISPECIES STUDIES - (BIOPOLITICS)

Apr. 8

Kedi. Documentary. Termit Films, 2016.

Suggested Reading:

Mitchell, Timothy. “Can the Mosquito Speak?” In *Rule of Experts*, 1st ed., 19–53. Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity. University of California Press, 2002.

Apr. 10

Gutkowski, Natalia. "Bodies That Count: Administering Multispecies in Palestine/Israel's Borderlands." *Environment and Planning. E, Nature and Space (Print)*, 2021, 1–23.

Apr. 12

Bookcreator#3 (Group B)

Week 14 – MULTISPECIES STUDIES - (NECROPOLITICS)

Apr. 15

Franck, Alice, Jean Gardin, and Olivier Givre. "Blood and the City: Animal Representations and Urban (Dis)Orders during the 'Feast of the Sacrifice' in Istanbul and Khartoum." *Anthropology of the Middle East; Oxford* 11, no. 1 (March 2016): 85–111.

Apr. 17

Long, Kayleigh E. "Cheetah Researchers Accused of Spying Sentenced in Iran." National Geographic, November 20, 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/jailed-cheetah-researchers-sentenced-iran>.

Apr. 19

Bookcreator#3 (Group C)

Week 15 – CONCLUSION

Apr. 22

Bookcreator#3 (Group D)

Apr. 24

OnurGames

*Self-Reflection Memo#5 available on Canvas

Course Policies

Extra Credit: Three opportunities for extra credit (each worth 1 point towards the course grade) will be offered to the entire class throughout the semester. No individual extra credit opportunities can be provided privately.

Grading Policies: All [UF grading policies](#) are observed.

Academic Honor Policy: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Conduct Code.](#)

Email Policy: When you reach out to me by email, please include the course information in the subject line so I can better assist you. If your email includes a question, please allow up to 48 hours for a response. I can only contact you through your official UF email address and Canvas, so please make sure you are able to receive messages through these platforms.

Accommodations: Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester as accommodations cannot be applied retroactively.

Publication of Class Lecture: Publication of a class lecture without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Evaluations: Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.