

# **Environmental Change and Governance**

MA Environmental Humanities 2011-12

Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

## **Class 2**

# **The politics of environmental change I: structuralism**

**Christos Zografos, PhD**

Institute of Environmental Science & Technology (ICTA)

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

[christos.zografos@uab.cat](mailto:christos.zografos@uab.cat)

# Evaluations: timetable

*Submit (send me by email)  
your collective essay*

**Friday 3 February**



1. Plan your collaboration (research and writing): Meeting 1
2. Do the research
3. Do the writing

*Present your plans for the essay*

**Class 9 (Fri 18 Nov)**



- Get together to discuss, produce and rehearse your presentation

*Email me (1 person per group!) the  
topic of your essay*

***before Class 6***

**(i.e. by Sun 13 Nov)**



- Get together to discuss ideas and decide which precise topic

*1. Which topic? (1 or 2)*

*2. Which specific conflict, change,  
decision-making process?*

*Email me (1 person/ group) names of  
persons in your group*

**Class 3 (Wed 9 Nov)**



- Find colleagues to form group

**Today**

# Class 9 presentation

- Themes to cover in the presentation
  - Which topic? Background info about topic
  - What is the main question you will be trying to answer with your essay?
  - Why topic is important/ interesting to look at?
  - What specific sources of information you will consult (e.g. newspapers: which, from when to when; etc.) to find data?
  - What is the timeline and internal deadlines of your essay (when you'll meet for first time, when you'll finish data gathering, etc.)
  - How do you plan to collaborate (who does what and how collaborate)?
  - Present the outline of your essay (first section: Intro; second section: Literature, etc.) – will also discuss in Class 8

“...the uncontrolled growth of weeds and their emerging dominance in the landscape do appear to symbolize disorder, decay, and the absence of control that accompany years of political and fiscal neglect. Socially speaking, the significance of weeds is not what they do but, rather, what they represent; the same can be said for the abandoned autos, heaps of garbage, discarded needles, condoms, and drug paraphernalia, and broken glass that are pervasive throughout the park” (Brownlow, 2006, p.242)

Why, according to Brownlow, have disorder and decay fallen upon Cobbs Creek?  
Do you know of any other examples where the same thing has happened?

# **CLASS ASSIGNMENT 1**

# Intro

- Purpose: explain structuralist approach to the study of how power produces environmental change
- Reason why you should know this:
  - Because it is one main approach of explaining the role of politics in producing environmental change, which you can use for your research
- Class outline:
  - Discuss answers to student assignment
  - Delve deeper in premises of structuralist explanation
  - Explain some key points re: classes 2 and 3

# Disorder and decay in Cobbs Creek

Why?

- **Loss of social (community) control** mechanisms that ensured park security for everyone
- What reasons produced this phenomenon?
  1. Actions of a man in power (Rizzo)
  2. Public Administration's neglect
  3. Change in gang culture

# Personal agenda of one person in a seat of power

- Police Commissioner & then Mayor Rizzo:
  - his actions led to a loss of surveillance (local community social control) mechanisms
- Actions: Rizzo policies
  - 1974: Mayor Rizzo cuts park budget by 50% (compared to previous admin)
  - reduce importance of mounted Park Guard (personal vendetta) through its reduction: from 500 guards to 24 and its integration with the Philadelphia Police Department,
  - removal of park benches upon which members of the community would sit and observe “the world passing by”. This also led to elimination of an important element of community self-surveillance (benches)

# Result of neglect (of racist-origins)

- Budget cuts started with Mayor Rizzo but continued: since early 80s (i.e. 3 decades=no increase)
- steady decline in budgetary spending on the park further compounded the problem
- budget cuts followed almost exact pattern as exodus of whites from the area (racism within the Philadelphia power bodies)



# End of gangs' informal agreement over park's neutrality (in 50s)

- John: “The park was sort of that neutral ground because everybody came to the park, and you had picnics out there and all kinds of things in that community – cook outs”
- Tom: “It was an unwritten agreement that the park would be neutral”

# End of gangs' informal agreement over park's neutrality (in 50s)

- Late 60s + early 70s: growing pressure of black power movement to cease black-on-black violence and focus energy and anger on greater social and political wrongs
  - Cobbs Creek's early gangs quietly disappear: informal park security they ensured also disappears
- late 1970s: decline of black identity movement and outmigration of middle-class blacks leaves power vacuum
- 1980s: re-emergence of gangs (1980s)
  - structure and membership not like “organic, homegrown gangs of the 1950s and 1960s”
  - more violent forms and structures mimicked gang activity in cities like L.A., Chicago, and New York, where there were no agreements, unwritten or otherwise

# The bigger picture

- Loss of social control mechanisms must be analysed from a **wider perspective** of power relations' evolution within Philadelphia's recent history
  - civil rights movement, racial struggles, economic decay, etc.
- Rizzo's decisions to dismantle local social control mechanisms in Cobbs Creek can be seen as a form of **social control**
  - as a means of controlling social organization and activity among politically active black community during a period of racial upheaval
  - by removing their primary public arena of social intercourse and political exchange

# STUDYING POWER THE STRUCTURALIST WAY

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY 1

Power: ability to control one's environment including others' behaviour

How does Brownlow study this "ability to control"?

1. What things (aspects of 'reality') does he analyse?
2. Where is power **located**?  
Who holds it?
3. How does power **operate** upon people?

Get into groups

1. Study ways (practices and processes) in which power ***circulates*** among different social groups, resources, and spaces (Paulson et al., 2005)
2. *Where* is power **located**?
  - Outside of 'the subject'
3. How does power **operate**?
  - Power presses subject from the outside
  - e.g. power of women vs. men

Block 2

# **DEEPER INTO STRUCTURALIST EXPLANATION OF POWER AND POLITICS**

# Brownlow, 2006

- Power relations have **transformed** Cobbs Creek into a 'Third World within' space: wasteland
  - Idea of 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> World: accepts and builds upon it
- Shows how elimination of **social control mechanisms** has facilitated this transformation
- Through analysis of how racially-motivated decisions (e.g. Mayor Rizzo's policies) have:
  - eliminated social control mechanisms
  - transferred power away from local Black community
  - transformed Cobbs Creek into a 'Third World within'

# Brownlow, 2006

- “Today, the Cobbs Creek “condition” is dominated by social indicators of inequality and neglect: ...male unemployment near 50%, ...” (p.231)
- He draws a picture of peri-urban Philadelphia as a First World **backwaters/ wasteland**
  - A story of uneven development created by
    - political actions (based on racism)
    - indifference of economic actors (capital) to invest (fiscal neglect)
- This creates Third World conditions/ spaces inside ‘First World’: **Third World within** (e.g. Cobbs Creek)
  - First World spaces *transformed* to Third World ones

# Deeper conceptual premises

- The First – Third World binary
- **Structuralism**: to explain/ understand social reality, builds models based on binaries
- Structuralism makes a distinction between what may be called **surface structure** (superstructure) and **deep structure** (infrastructure/ base structure) (Glazer)
  - to understand the surface structure one has to understand the **deep structure**, and how it influences the surface structure
  - \*Note: origins in Freud's psychoanalysis (surface structure = conscious; deep structure = unconscious)



# Deeper conceptual premises

- In political ecology, Historical Materialism is an influential structuralist approach
  - Ideology, politics: surface structure (superstructure)
  - Economics: deep structure (base)

# Deeper conceptual premises

- Society's relations of production = economic base
  - e.g. capitalist relations: means of production (non-human inputs, e.g. tools + infrastructure + natural K, e.g. land) are held privately
- Society's superstructure (e.g. legal system, ideology, etc.) merely expresses those social conditions (private ownership of MoP) and dominant class interests
  - E.g. upper and upper-middle class (bourgeois) dominate working class

### CLASS QUESTION 3

Structural explanations are used to explain not only 'a society' but also social phenomena (e.g. causes of war)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrdFFCnYtbk>

According to this explanation, why did the US attack Iraq?

- A structuralist (Historical Materialist) explanation:
  - The US took the political decision to attack Iraq because they wanted to control Iraq's oil reserves, profit these provide and the possibility to control oil (natural resource) profit globally = base (deeper)
  - To do this, they mobilised a liberal ideology (liberate population from dictator) to justify their military intervention (liberation from political tyranny, etc. = surface structure)

# Binaries

Apart from the conceptual binary base –  
superstructure, binaries exist in terms of:

- Oppressors vs. oppressed
  - E.g. in Brownlow's case: black peri-urban population vs. white population
- Other binaries:
  - Women vs. men; modern vs. traditional; winners vs. losers (e.g. from environmental change); etc.

## CLASS QUESTION 4

Brownlow, 2006: “...I demonstrate how urban ecologies are politically inscribed and manipulated in a manner that reflects and reproduces social relations of power and inequality” (p.228)

Who (what social group) is pitched against whom in the case study? Who is powerful and who powerless?

Which is the **surface** and which the **base** structure in this case study?

- Cobs Creek Black community vs. Mayor Rizzo and co.
- Surface structure: urban ecologies
- Base structure: social relations of power and inequality

# Value of structuralism

- Refines approaches to study of domination: important
  - Domination brings inequality = undesirable
  - Inequality and power differentials: deeper roots of environmental degradation (e.g. Latin America – Paulson, 2005)
- Logic of dominant (e.g. capitalist) investment-> adverse effects:
  - spatial patterns of environmental racism (e.g. landfills in African-American communities)
- Tend to be underestimated in First World
  - Contribute to environmental conflict emerging out of environmental change (e.g. my Terra Alta case study)

Think of the technician who came in to fix the projector for the class. Now imagine that you have to explain to him what you have just learned about how power operates! How would you explain to him how power produces environmental change/ environments (e.g. a park)?

## **CLASSROOM ACTIVITY 2**

Block 3

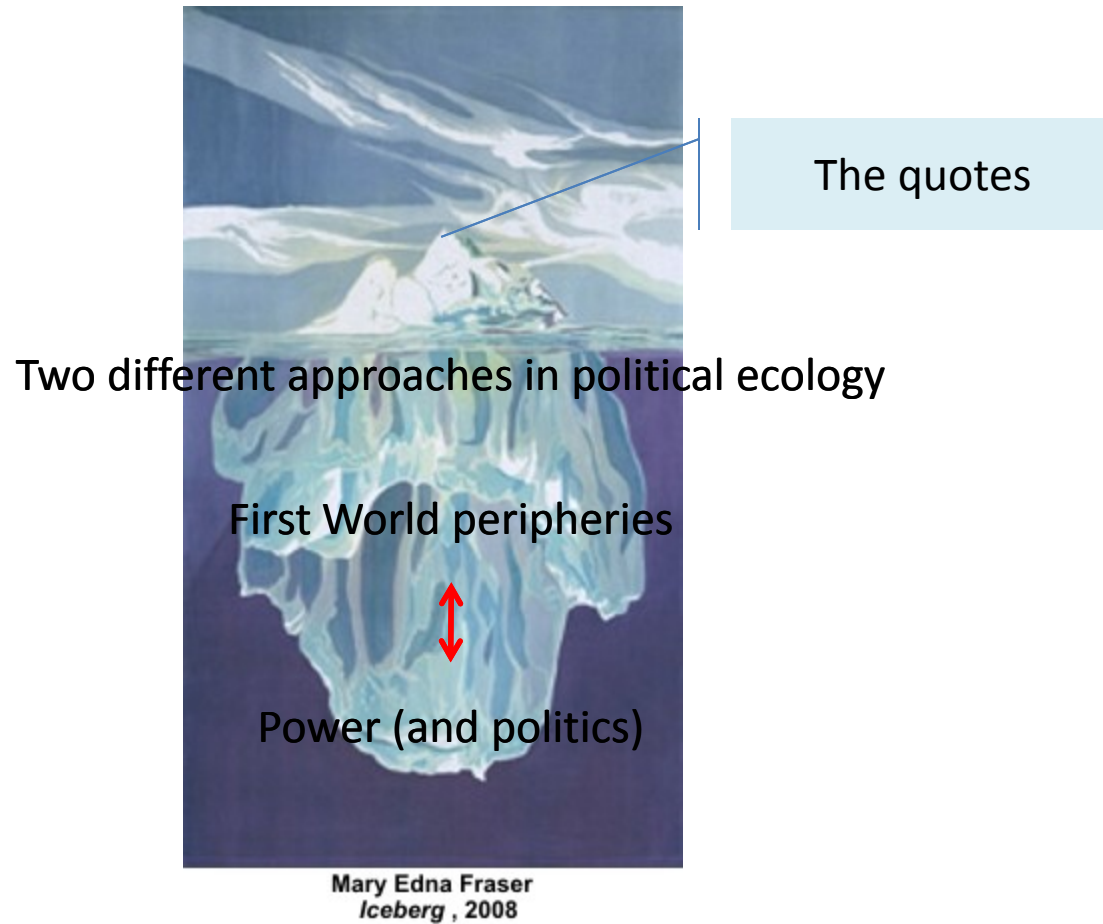
# **CLASSES 2 AND 3: TWO WAYS TO STUDY POWER AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE**



# Power and 'First World' Peripheries

- The aim: familiarise students with two main ways in which concept of **power** is employed in the field of political ecology
- Examine this by focusing at the specific **topic** of 'First World' peripheralisation
- Illustrate how political ecologists understand power to **operate** and how they use this understanding to produce different ways of **analysing** power
- After classes: able to **identify** the main ways in which power is employed to analyse environmental governance and change in political ecology, and **use** these for own research

# The iceberg approach



# Change in 'First World' peripheries and power

## Brownlow and St. Martin

- Both study 'First World Peripheries' (peri-urban Philadelphia; New England fisheries): Third World within
  - i.e. areas within the 'First World' which are marginalised and experience some 'Third World' conditions
  - e.g. high levels of unemployment, lack of productive economic opportunities, deindustrialisation, etc.

## Brownlow vs. St. Martin

- However, two different ways of conceptualising/ reading First World peripheries
  - Premised on two different understandings of how power operates
  - Lead to two different ways of studying power
- There are deeper theoretical differences between those two alternative ways of seeing First World peripheries
  - We examine these