

Masters in Environmental Studies
Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic
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Class 1

Introduction: capitalist natures

Christos Zografos, PhD

JUH-UPF Public Policy Centre, Department of Political and Social Sciences, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona, Spain

christos.zografos@upf.edu

Introductions

- Introduce myself
- Students introduce themselves
 - Name
 - Course you are doing in Masaryk University
 - Place of origin
 - First degree in ... from ... University

Class outline

- Introduction to course:
 - Logistics
 - Evaluations, etc.
- Introduction to some key terms for the course
 - Fields and sub-disciplines used in the course
 - Terms/ concepts: politics, power, political ecology, etc.
- Class: Capitalism and environmental transformation
 - *“Capitalism inevitably produces environmental degradation”*
 - *“Resource exhaustion is a condition for capitalism”*

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Course structure

- Course aims
 - How power influences **environmental change and governance**
 - Environmental social science: political ecology + environmental history
 - Develop critical understanding of environmental change and relevance of **power and politics** in producing it
- Course logic
- Structure of classes
 - **Reading and assignment (bring printed in class; marked)**
 - Answer assignment in class (individually, small groups, whole class)
 - Classroom activities
 - Lecturing: expand points from reading; summarise class
 - * Notes pages of ppt

Course evaluation

Essay (70%)

- Max 1,000 words (excluding references)
 - **Deadline: Friday 14 December 2018**
 - Late submissions: **'Fail'**
 - If you get less than 50% overall mark, then chance for another short essay (couple of weeks approx.)
 - **Individual** or **Collective** essay
 - Collective: maximum 2 students per group
 - Group will produce *one* essay
 - I mark the essay, i.e. both students get same mark
- ❖ **Topic:** Klein, N. 2016. *Let Them Drown. The Violence of Othering in a Warming World.*

Performance criteria:

1. Explain in your own words (i.e. without copy-pasting Klein's text) (i) what Klein means by "othering" as a source of clim change vulnerability that is violent, and (ii) what she suggests as a way of dealing with climate change risks and hazards
2. Evaluate Klein's argument: do you agree/ disagree with Klein, and why?
 - State your opinion and support it with arguments and evidence from other studies (e.g. from our course) or data/ examples (e.g. info from media)
3. Using class bibliography to support your answers

Attending all 3 classes: obligatory

Evaluation tool	% of final mark
Assignments and participation in classroom	30%
Final Essay	70%

Class participation (30%)

- Student commitment and performance in answering class assignment: 10% per assignment
- You should hand in each assignment printed at beginning of class
- Also: eager to participate and constructive comments in classroom
- Will provide written feedback to each class assignment and you can also ask me in person after the class

Grades:

- I personally mark all assignments from a scale of 1 to 10
 - 1-5 = FAIL
 - 9 and 10 = DISTINCTION
- But: for **MUNI system** purposes I only assign 'Pass' or 'Fail'
- i.e. if you want to know more about your mark, email me
- **Erasmus** students: need grades before? Contact me

A note on answering assignments

- File name of your assignments
 - Your name assignmentnumber
 - E.g. **Christos Zografos 3. Christos Zografos ESSAY**

NOTHING ELSE PLEASE!

How to answer your assignment:

- First, **answer** the question, e.g. in one sentence
- Then, substantiate, **support** your answer with **arguments** and **evidence** from the text
 - Avoid being descriptive: don't answer by simply describing a situation and don't re-state what the question says!
 - Will use answer to today's assignment (later in class) to explain what I mean – give you a 'model' answer to use both for assignments and the essay

Other

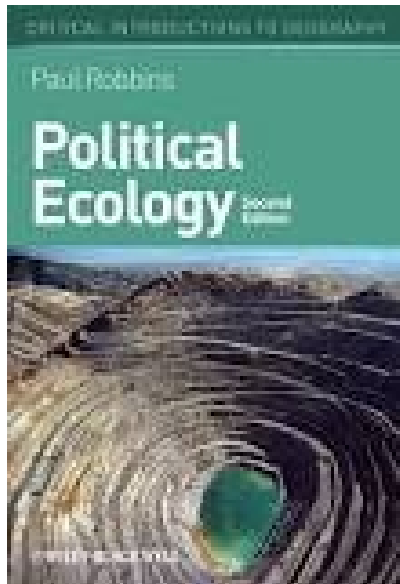
- Can reach me through my email christos.zografos@upf.edu
- Help with English (unknown words): <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
- Do you have any questions re: course programme, structure, outputs, etc.?

2. INTRODUCTION TO KEY TERMS

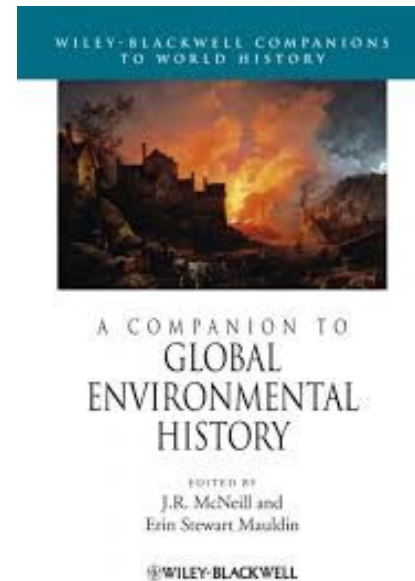
Fields and disciplines

Interaction: humans – environment

Political ecology (next)

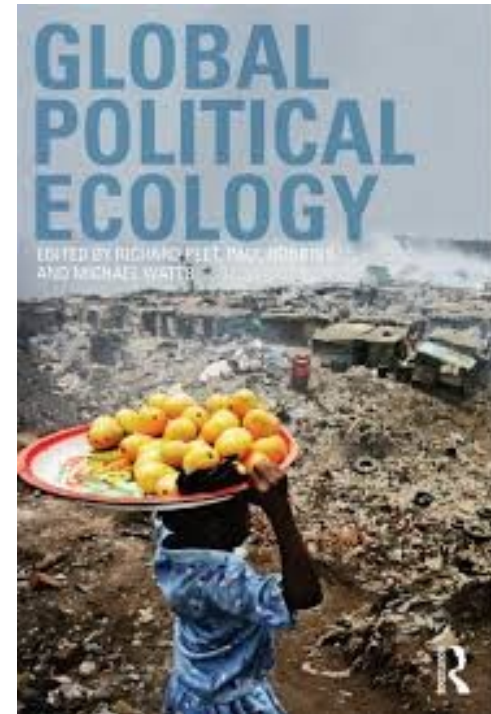


Environmental history



Political ecology (Simsik, 2007)

- Field: to understand relationship human societies – nature
- Environmental change is intrinsically **political**
 - Decisions (environmental governance)
 - Consequences (e.g. environmental conflict)
- Environmental change: unequal distribution of ‘goods’ (benefits) and ‘bads’ (costs)
 - Winners and losers -> generation of conflict



What do we mean by “political” in PE?

- Politics as power
 - Power as a key *analytical* term for studying politics
- In political ecology:
 - Power as a social **relation** built on **asymmetrical** distributions of resources and risks (Hornborg, 2001)
 - So, we study: **practices** and **processes** through which power is *yielded and negotiated* (Paulson et al., 2005)

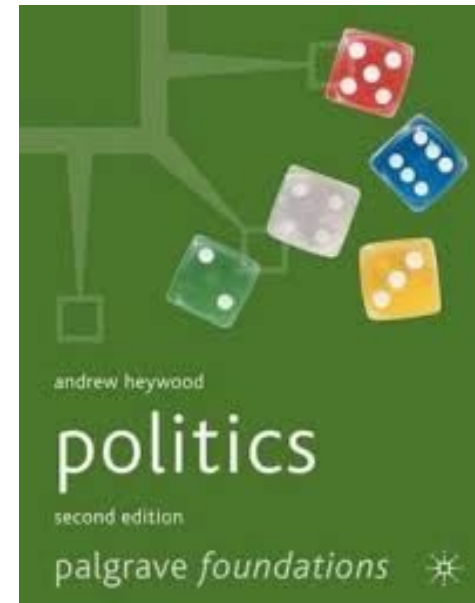


Two Detours

- At this stage, I need to make two detours (pause for a minute) to highlight two conceptual issues relevant before moving on
 1. Definition of “politics”
 2. Definition of “power”

Detour 1: defining *politics* in political science

- Politics: the study of power (Heywood, 2002):
 - Politics: the art of government
 - Politics: public affairs
 - Politics: compromise and consensus
 - Politics as power (“4th definition” of politics)
- ✧ Simply present these to situate you
 - not comment on strengths and limitations



Politics: the art of **government**

- Notion that politics = '**what concerns the state**'
 - Traditional view of discipline
- To study politics = to study **government**, or the exercise of authority
- Politics associated with 'policy'



Source: <https://thehill.com>

Politics as public affairs

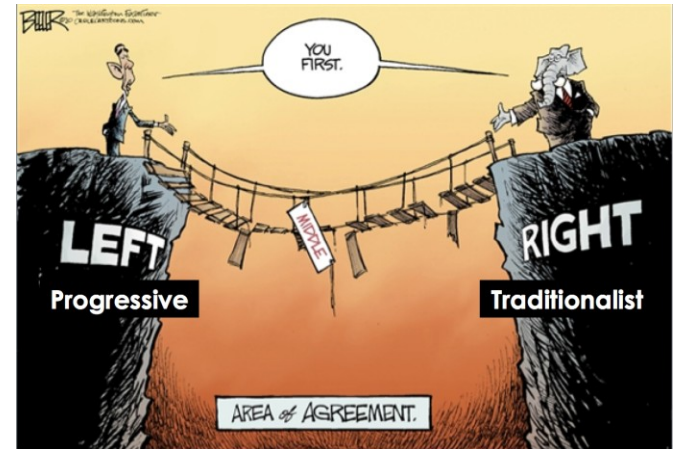


Source: alexandramitchell.wordpress.com

- Beyond the narrow realm of government: 'public life' or 'public affairs'
 - ✧ 'the political' – 'the nonpolitical' = *public* vs. *private* spheres of life
- **State** (=the public) – **Civil Society** (=the private) distinction
- Politics: **activities + responsibilities** exercised by **public bodies**

Politics as **compromise** and **consensus**

- Beyond arena *where* politics conducted
- Politics: **way in which decisions are made**
 - particular **means of resolving conflict**: by compromise, conciliation and negotiation, rather than via use of force and violence
 - ‘art of the possible’: a “political solution”
 - Crick (1962): “a conciliation solution to the problem of order”



Source: <http://www.learningspy.co.uk>

Politics as power

Politics:

- Not confined to a particular sphere (government, state or 'public' realm)
- At work in all social activities and every corner of human existence
 - Leftwich (1984): at heart of *all* collective social activity, formal and informal, public and private, in *all* human groups, institutions & societies
- Concerns production, distribution and use of resources in the course of social existence
 - is **power**: ability to achieve a desired outcome through whatever means
- Takes place at every level of social interaction within families, amongst small groups of friends just as much as amongst nations and on the global stage
- Radical feminist assertion: 'the personal is the political'

Detour 2: defining *Power*

- The 4th definition of politics
 - Power as a key ***analytical*** term for studying/ understanding politics
- ❖ But what exactly is/ do we mean by power?
 - Max Weber: “*chance of a man or a number of men to realise their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others*”
- In political ecology:
 - Two ways of understanding and studying power (how it operates)

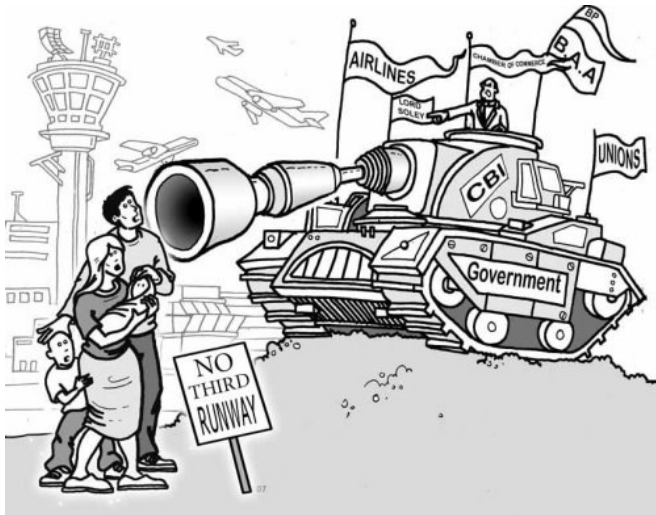


Source: Public Domain

Two types of power

Sovereign power

- Capacity (of state and its institutions) to **legitimately impose** will; e.g. enclose resources for conservation
- Note 1: multiplies/ controls degradation
- Note 2: non-legitimate force as well



Source: mechanicsofpower.wordpress.com

Internalised power

- Power also expressed on how individuals come to obey and take things as natural (e.g. enclosure; property)
- Internalising control and authority as normal and natural
- How power is *exercised within* individuals



Copyright: David Hayward (source: geotimes.co.id)

3. CAPITALIST NATURES: CAPITALISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Robbins explains that “[f]or materialists, environmental degradation is... inevitable in capitalism” (p. 46).

Explain in your own words why is this the case, and how does such degradation occurs.

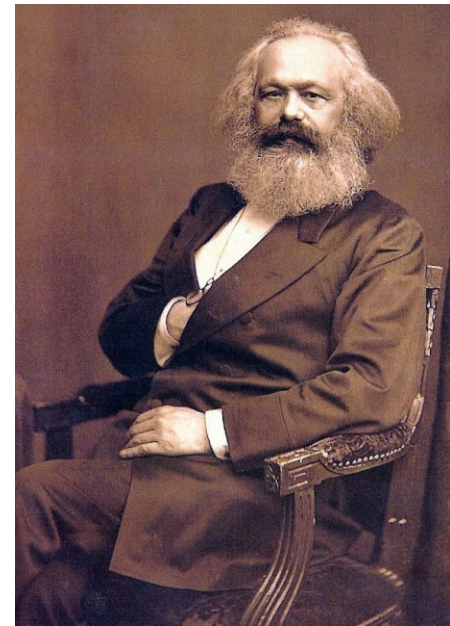
Do you agree or disagree? And, why?

CLASS ASSIGNMENT 1

Answer: the green materialist claim

Robbins, 2004, p.51: ***because***

- “all progress in capitalistic agriculture is the progress in the art, not only of **robbing** the **labourer**, but of robbing the **soil**; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards **ruining the lasting *sources* of that fertility**” (Marx, 1967)



Detour 3: Answering assignments by *explaining claims*

- Claim/ argument:
 - The class question (Robbins' assertion)
- A. Reasoning (reasons)
 - Marx's "because..."
 - Simply said: Because capitalist accumulation, a central aspect of capitalism, **requires** the degradation of the environment in order to keep the system (Km) going
- B. Evidence
 - With examples
- C. Then: your evaluation/ view
 - But again: claim, reasoning, evidence

A. Reasons (LOGICAL EXPLANATION)

- Value surplus
- Capital accumulation and why it works
- How capital accumulation degrades the environment
- Why degradation is inevitable

Value surplus: what is it?

- Marx (1867)
 - “Yield, profit or **return on production capital invested**, i.e. amount of the increase in the value of capital...”
 - ...after it goes through the production process
 - General formula for Capital (Marx): **M-C-M'**



How is it generated?

Owner (shoe in mkt) = 40€
4 pairs (produced in 1h) = **€160**

Worker prod (machine):
10€/ 15min = 40€/ hour
or: 4 pairs/ hour



Source: <http://utama.info/>

Worker labour (wage) produces
one shoe in 1h worth = **10€/ hour**

Operational costs = **20€/ h**

Invest (put in prod) = **50€/ hour**

Profit (above value investment) = **80€/ hour**

Why is it necessary?

Capital accumulation



THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN.

<http://weknowwhatsup.blogspot.com.es>



Source: <http://freedombunker.com>

"Accumulate, accumulate! This is Moses and the Prophets!" (Marx, Capital, Vol 1)



Niger Delta (Nigeria) (Image: Socialistisk Ungdom – SU/Flickr)



Tar Sands from space (source: <http://stephenleahy.net>)

Extracting surplus from nature

Intensity of extraction > restoration

Second contradiction of capitalism



Source: <http://sovietrussianow.blogspot.com/es/>

- *Capitalism degrades the material basis upon which it depends*
- James O'Connor (1988): contradiction capital accumulation vs. **production conditions**
- Degrading production conditions is **inevitable**

B. EVIDENCE: The case of soil erosion

- ❑ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0F2c1ECuo4>
- Soil erosion (www.omafra.gov.on.ca): the wearing away of a field's topsoil
 - By natural physical forces of water and wind
 - or through forces associated with farming (e.g. tillage)
- Impacts:
 - Food production; famine risk
 - Diffuse water pollution



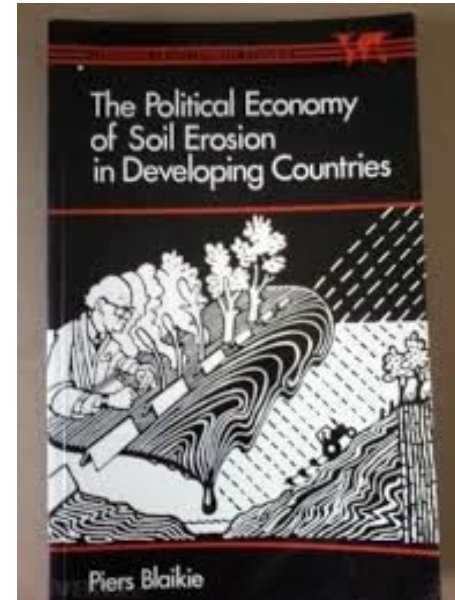
Source: www.newsecuritybeat.org

Policy failure

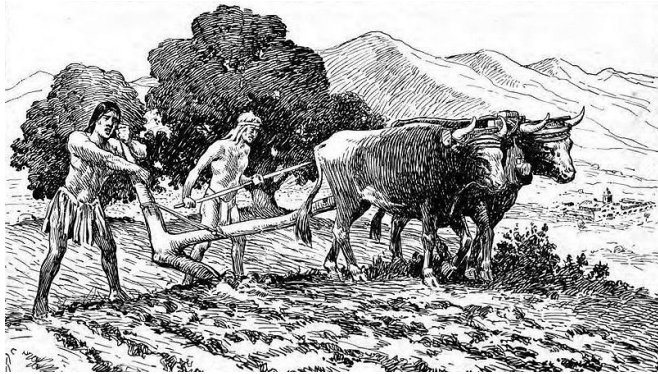
Blaikie (1985) 'The political economy of soil erosion in developing countries'

The problem (RQ):

- Techniques to deal with soil erosion may be successful
- But policies have failed



Why do policies fail 1?



Source: commons.wikimedia.org

Classic **model** of soil conservation

* Blaikie identifies 3 major problems

1. Erosion = environmental problem
 - Ignores social problems leading to erosion
 - Coercion and force
2. Laying blame on land-users
 - Including: overpopulation
3. The solution: link users to market economy

Why do policies fail 2?

- How about some **fundamental** assumptions?
 - The causes of soil erosion: outside afflicted area
 - The state is not neutral
 - Always winners and losers from erosion and conservation
- **Root causes** of soil erosion: *effect of capitalist economy*
 - *Farmers forced to degrade the land in order to delay their own destruction*
 - **Capitalist production** encourages mining of soils

4. TYPES OF CAPITAL ACCUMULATION

Types of capital accumulation

- Two types of capital accumulation with adverse environmental impacts (degradation):
 1. Primitive/ Original accumulation
 2. Accumulation by dispossession



Source: <http://pixgood.com>

1. Primitive accumulation

The question: how did some people managed to accumulate capital in the first place?

“England is not a free people, till the poor that have no land,
have a free allowance to dig and labour the commons...”

Gerrard Winstanley, 1649



Source: <https://theliberi.wordpress.com>

Primitive accumulation: example

English 15th – 19th century enclosures



Source: www.fs.fed.us

Ecological effects of sheep overgrazing

Ecological degradation: widespread soil erosion and deforestation

2. Accumulation by dispossession

David Harvey (2004):

Neoliberal **policies** in western nations from 1970s onwards...

...result in **centralization of wealth and power** in the hands of a few...

...by **dispossessing the public** of their wealth or land (publicly-owned assets, e.g. water, forests, etc.)...

...that pass to become **private property**

- Privatisation: main practice



Reuters: Roy Letkey (source: www.abc.net.au)

Robertson, 2000: privatising wetlands



Before...



After?

Source: <http://www.biodiversityoffsets.net/>

- “No Net Loss”: George Bush Senior
- When wetlands stand in the way
- Solution: **restoration wetlands**
- Accumulation by dispossession
 - Privatising public assets
 - Dispossessing public of ecological wealth
- Restored wetlands: a biodiversity and ecosystem perspective

Implications: environmental movements

- Labour movement



- Environmental movement

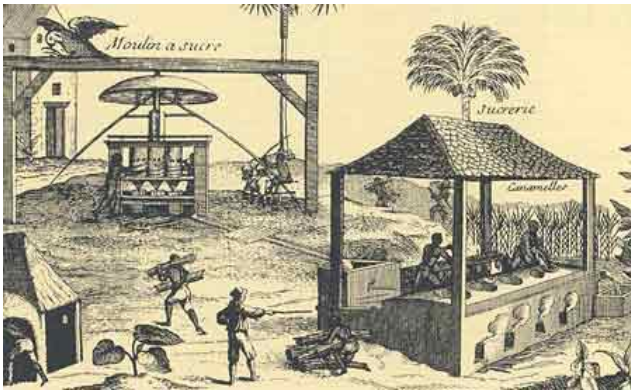


Image credit: america.gov/Flickr

5. DEGRADATION AS A CONDITION FOR CAPITALISM

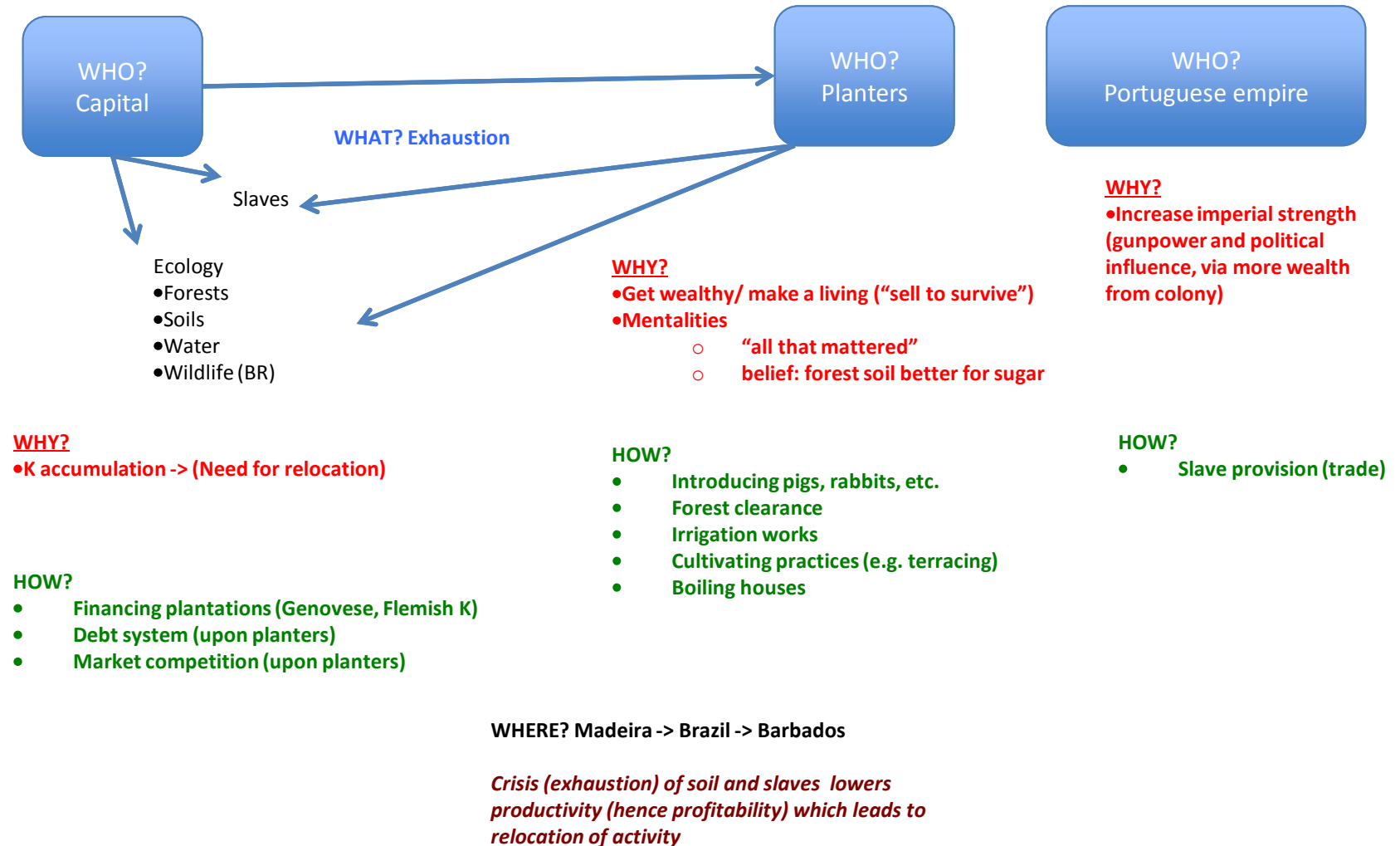
Classroom activity

- ❑ Read: “Sugar and early modern world-economy” (J. Moore, 2000)
- Split into groups of 5 persons
- Discuss and decide:
 - Who did what to whom and where?
 - How did they do it and why?



Source: www.dansukker.co.uk

Who does what, etc.: my mindmap



Commodity frontiers

- Claim: “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (Jameson, 2003)
- Because the capitalist economy is inherently expansionary, and so are its – unavoidable – adverse ecological effects (degradation)
- Evidence: Madeira and the expansion of “the sugar commodity frontier” to Brazil (and Barbados)

Commodity frontiers

Why inherently expansionary?

- “*Recurrent waves of socio-ecological **exhaustion** – understood as the inability of a given bundle of human/extra-human natures to deliver more work to capital – **implicate** recurrent waves of geographical **expansion**” (Moore, 2014)*
- The necessity of (constant) frontier making
 - Sites of incorporation of new resources

Significance of commodity frontiers

- Importance: how ecological exhaustion in one place drives quest for new spaces/ ecologies and labour resources elsewhere to exhaust
 - In order to accumulate more K to invest for producing more K
 - Ecological degradation is not only an *effect* of capitalist economy expansion, but is also a **condition** for its existence
 - Moore 2003: “*Without the Americas there was no capitalism; without capitalism, there were no Americas*” [as we know them]
- The world as an integrated economy
 - World-systems analysis
- Term also used to describe conflicts today: <https://ejatlas.org>

6. SUMMARISING

Take away points

- Environmental change is **political**
 - **Winners and losers** from environmental change
 - **Political economy**: role in producing change and injustice
 - Asymmetrical **power relations** (more, next classes)
- Political economy of capitalism (capitalist natures)
 - Capital accumulation and the quest for value surplus **produce** environmental degradation
 - But also: environmental degradation is itself a **condition** for K accumulation (surplus value)