

**Masters in Environmental Studies**  
Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic  
November 2019

# **Class 1**

## **Introduction: capitalist natures**

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**PUBLIC POLICY CENTER**



# 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 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 13 December 2019**
    - 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 upload (IS) each assignment 2 hours before class
- I provide feedback to each class assignment (IS Notebook) and you can also ask me in person after the class
- Also: eager to participate and constructive comments in classroom

## Grades:

- I personally mark all assignments from a scale of 1 to 10
  - 1-4 = FAIL
  - 5-8 = PASS
  - 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. **Zografos Christos 3. Zografos Christos 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](mailto:christos.zografos@upf.edu)
- Help with English (unknown words): <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
- Do you have any questions re: course programme, structure, outputs, etc.?

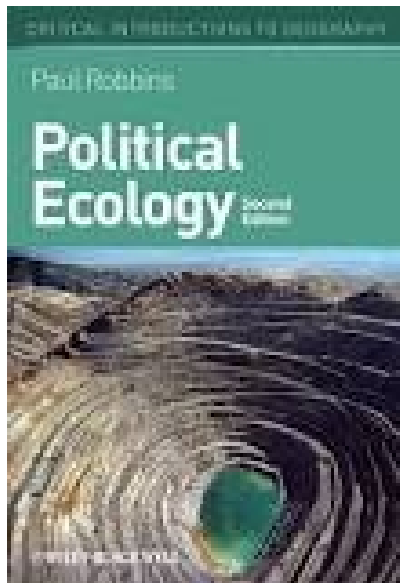


## **2. INTRODUCTION TO KEY TERMS**

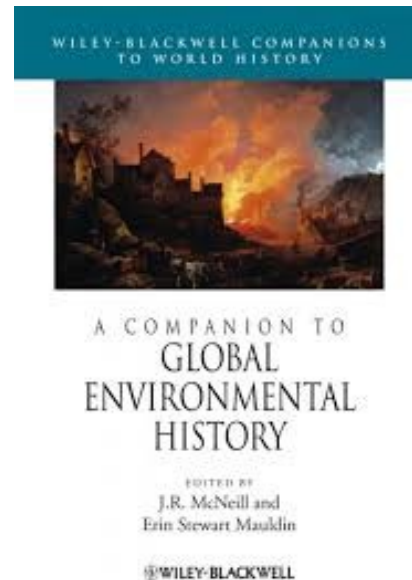
# Fields and disciplines

Interaction: humans – environment

**Political ecology** (next)

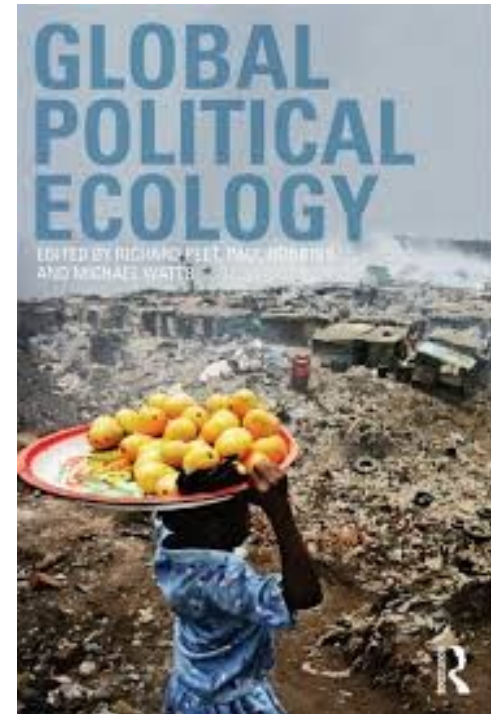


**Environmental history**



# 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)

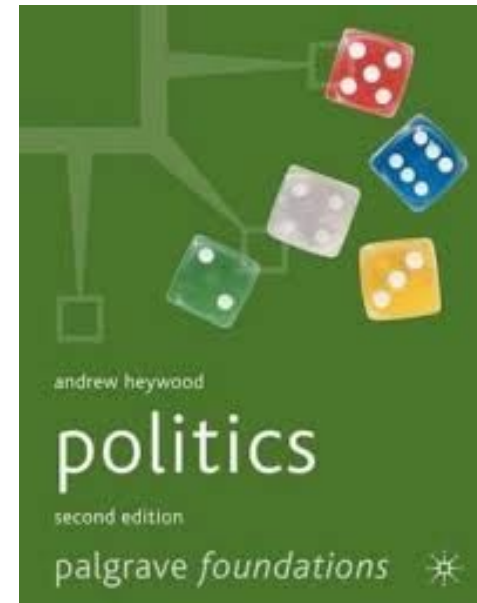


# Two Detours

- 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 (“4<sup>th</sup> 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



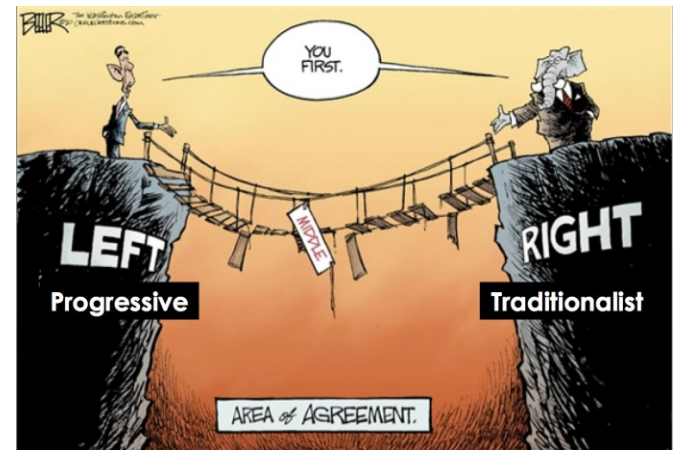
Source: alexandramitchell.wordpress.com

- 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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)

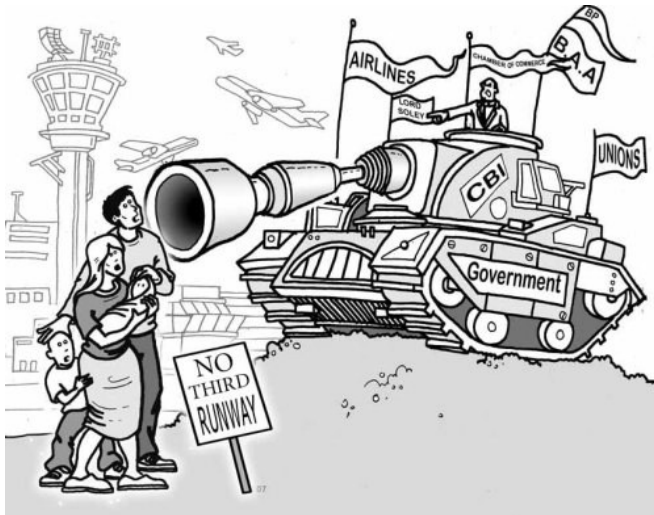


Source: Public Domain

# 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](http://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](http://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.*

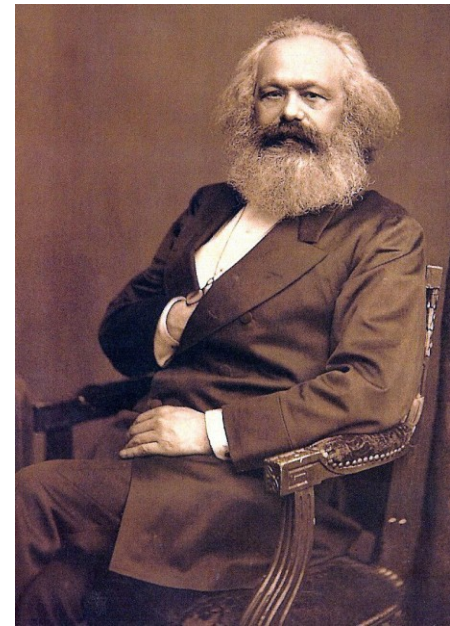
*Do you agree or disagree? And, why?*

## **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
  - Why does it require this? (see explanation, next)
- 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



Operational costs = 20€/ h

Invest (put in prod) = 50€/ hour

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

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

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**

# Why Inevitable?

Why K degrades those conditions (Spence 2000)?

- It is driven by individual capitals seeking to shore up their profitability through cost-cutting which degrades, or fails to maintain, the material and social conditions of their own production
- But these conditions are common to capitalist production as a whole, so capital-in-general is confronted with higher costs further down the road, in order to repair the damage done to the shared conditions of production by the short-termism of individual capitals (O'Connor, 1998)

# B. EVIDENCE: The case of soil erosion

- ❑ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0F2c1ECuo4>
- Soil erosion ([www.omafra.gov.on.ca](http://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](http://www.newsecuritybeat.org)

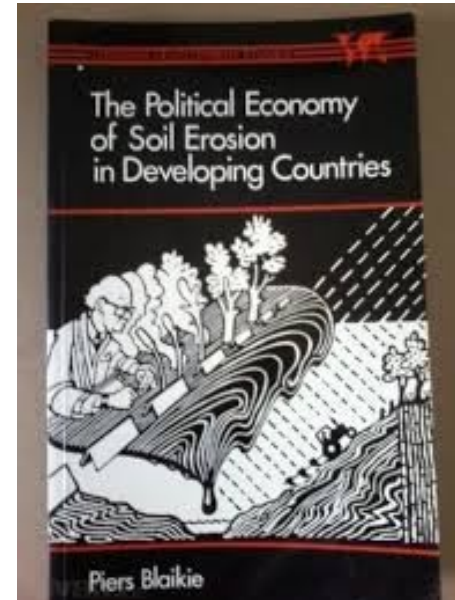


# Policy failure

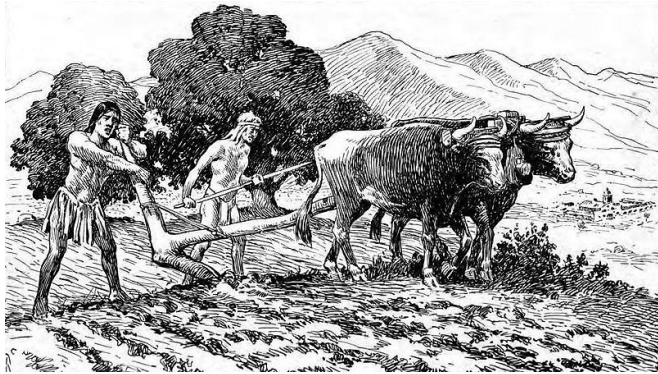
*Blaikie (1985) 'The political economy of soil erosion in developing countries'*

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?
  - 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 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosures



Source: [www.fs.fed.us](http://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](http://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
  - Dispossession of public of ecological wealth
- Restored wetlands: a biodiversity and ecosystem perspective

# Implications: environmental movements

- Labour movement
- Environmental movement

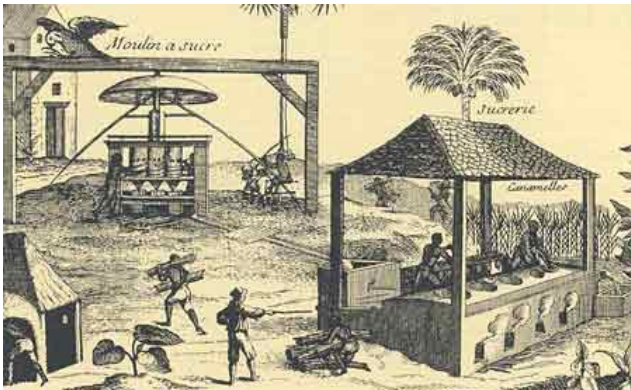


Image credit: america.gov/Flickr

# **5. DEGRADATION AS A CONDITION FOR CAPITALISM**

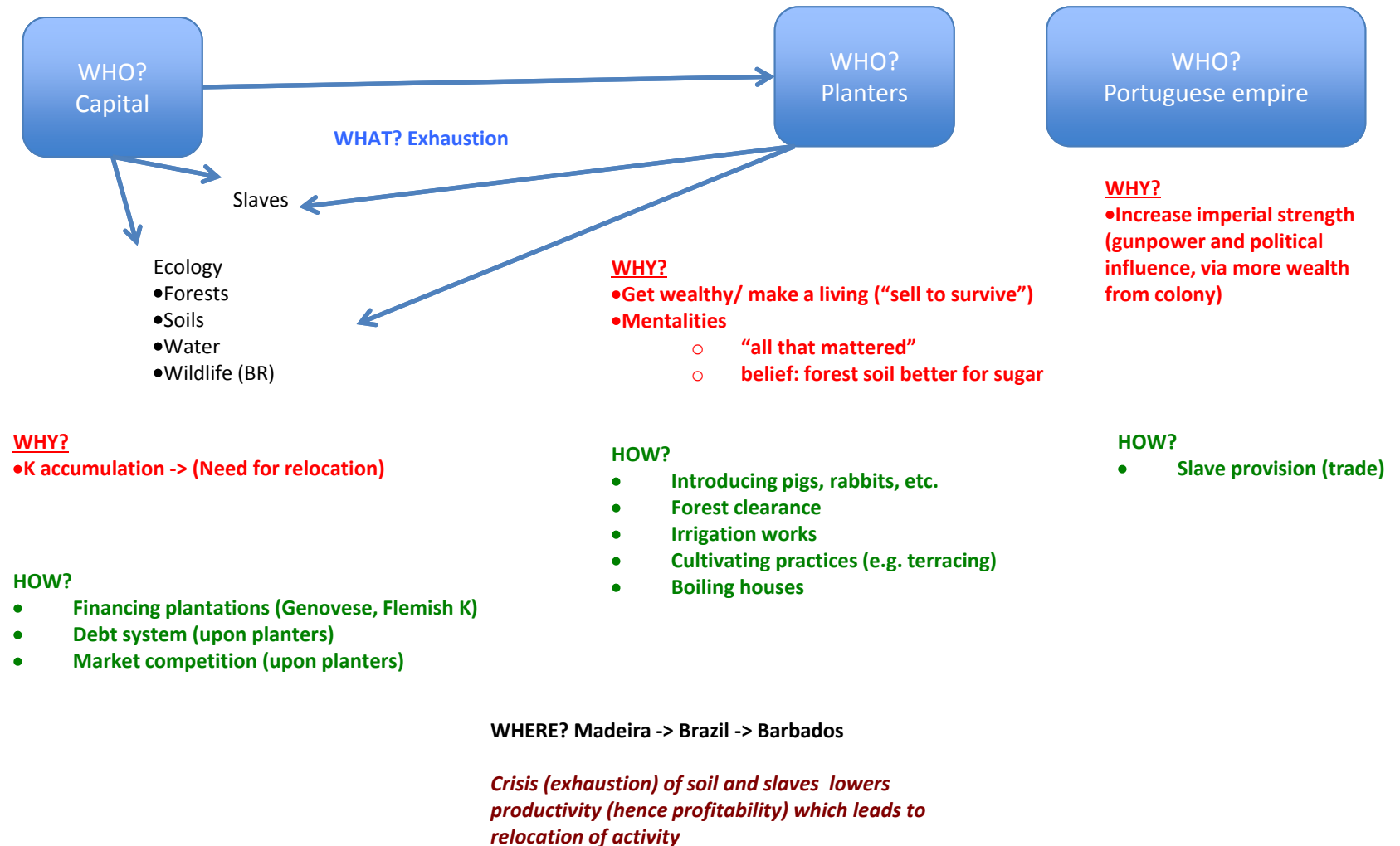
# Classroom activity

- ❑ Read: “Sugar and early modern world-economy” (J. Moore, 2000)
- Split into 3-4 groups (max: 6 persons)
- Discuss and decide:
  - Who did what to whom and where?
  - How did they do it and why?



Source: [www.dansukker.co.uk](http://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)