



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

SYLLABUS DEL CORSO

Environmental Justice and Geopolitics of The Sea

2627-1-F7504Q009

Aims

1. Knowledge and understanding: acquire a deep understanding of the main issues related to the study of oceans and transnational spaces from the perspectives of critical geopolitics, environmental geopolitics, and environmental justice; understand the scientific literature and narratives concerning oceanic geopolitics and the ongoing dynamics of sea-power competition.
- 2) Applied knowledge and understanding: develop advanced skills to critically analyze documents, and media narratives related to ocean governance and environmental justice; apply interdisciplinary methods to study geopolitical, environmental, and social dimensions of maritime spaces.
3. Making judgments: exercise critical judgment on the geopolitical strategies and environmental justice challenges linked to ocean governance and resource control; evaluate competing interests and power relations shaping the transnational management of seas and oceans.
4. Communication skills: communicate clearly and effectively complex ideas and analyses on environmental justice and geopolitics of the sea to diverse audiences.
5. Learning skills: develop the capacity to independently conduct interdisciplinary studies and research on environmental justice and maritime geopolitics; cultivate critical awareness of evolving scientific debates and geopolitical developments related to oceans and transnational environmental issues.

Contents

After a short introduction to the most recent theoretical approaches to political geography and critical geopolitics, the course focuses first on the historical representation of the ocean as a "political and social space" and on how the sea can be framed by international geopolitical discourse, in relation to the processes of territorialisation, geo-

power and extra-territoriality of marine spaces.

The second part of the course deals with more specific issues of political ecology and covers the topics of environmental justice/injustice, with particular reference to the themes of protection/conservation of marine areas, ocean grabbing and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Detailed program

First part (Elena dell'Agnese)

The political geography of the sea: the "classical" approach

A (critical) political geo-graphy of the sea? thinking about the sea / representing the sea / exploiting the "geopolitical features" of the sea

Geo-graphy and the power of representation /Dividing (and naming) the ocean sea: the East Sea/ Sea of Japan issue

The territorialisation of the sea /Territorial claims and islands disputes: the Dokdo-Takeshima issue

Geographical definitions and island disputes: the Sankeku-Diaoyu issue/ climate change and vanishing islands/reefs: Okinotori: a shima, or a reef?

A classical approach to the geopolitics of the sea/ the myth of sea power: A.T. Mahan theoretical positions / China as a maritime power and the South China Sea competition (Spratly, Paracel and more)

Sea power, sea nodes and islands as U.S. bases: The Hawai'i and Pearl Harbor, Midway and Wake, Guam

Sea power, sea nodes and islands as overseas U.S. bases/ bases of empire and lily pads: Guantanamo, Micronesia and Marshall Islands, Okinawa, Diego Garcia

LSMPAs (Large Scale Maritime Protected Areas): conservation or geopolitics?

Extra-territoriality and Cruise tourism as an example of globalization

Geopolitics of the oceans and environmental justice

Second part (Marco Nocente)

Environmentalism, Environmental Justice and the Blue Economy
Colonialism, power and more-than-human justice

Conceptualising the 'Blue Economy'.

Case studies: ocean grabbing practices

Case study: the neoliberal politics of conservation (Marine protected areas, exclusive economic zones, National parks)

Environment and memory: The politics of island conservation

Case study: Prison Islands

Opposing the Blue Economy: Policymaking and Indigenous Epistemologies
Food sovereignty policies

Indigenous epistemologies

Environmental Justice seminars

Environmental justice and Migrations in Senegal

Visual Analysis of Environmental Conflicts: The Cases of Venice and Taranto

Prerequisites

none

Teaching form

42 hours / English / delivered didactic: 70% (30 hours) / interactive didactic : 30% (12 hours)

Textbook and teaching resource

Suggested readings:

First part:

De Santo, E. M. (2024). *Securitizing Marine Protected Areas: Geopolitics, Environmental Justice, and Science*. Taylor & Francis.

Second part:

The articles and chapters in **bold** are mandatory.

The students who attended the course should select another additional article (see point 1, 2, 3, 4)

The students who didn't attend the course should select other two articles (see point 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5).

1: Environmentalism, Environmental Justice and the Blue Economy:

• **Mohai, P., Pellow, D. and Roberts, J. T. (2009). *Environmental justice. Annual review of environment and resources*, 34, 405-430.**

• Schlosberg, D. (2007). *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature*. Oxford University Press. (Chapter 1 and 2: "Defining Environmental Justice" and "Distribution and Beyond: Conceptions of Justice in Contemporary Theory and Practice").

• **Midlen, A. (2021). *What is the Blue Economy? A spatialised governmentality perspective. Maritime Studies*, 20(4), 423-448.**

• Brock, A. J., & Dunlap, A. (2021). Normalising corporate counterinsurgency: Engineering consent, managing resistance and greening destruction around the Hambach coal mine and beyond. *Political Geography*, 102521.

2. Conceptualising the blue economy, ocean grabbing and the neoliberal politics of conservation:

• Barbesgaard, M. (2018). Blue Growth: Savior or Ocean Grabbing? *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 45(1), pp. 130–149.

• O'Neill, B. F., Schneider, M. J., & Lozano, A. G. (2025). Toward a critical environmental justice approach to ocean equity. *Environmental Justice*, 18(2), 90-99.

• Okafor-Yarwood, I. (2019). 'Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and the complexities of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) for countries in the Gulf of Guinea'. *Marine Policy*, 99, pp. 414–422.

• Hung, P. Y. (2025). Bordered-in, Bordered-out, and overlapping territorialities in ocean space: the case of

fisheries. In *Ocean Governance (Beyond) Borders* (pp. 75-98). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

- Ojeda, D. (2012). Green Pretexts: Ecotourism, Neoliberal Conservation and Land Grabbing in Tayrona National Natural Park, Colombia'. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39(2), pp.357–375. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39(2), pp. 357–375.

- Rambaree, K. (2020). Environmental justice in the case of the Chagos marine protected area: Implications for international social work. *Sustainability*, 12(20), 8349.

3. Environment and memory: the politics of conservation

- Agnoletto, P., Di Quarto, F., & Nocente, M. (2024). Capraia Island and Its Representation in Audiovisual Media: Recounting a carceral, agro-pastoral and eco-touristic landscape. *Shima*, 18(2), 140-155.

- Nocente, M. (2026), Small islands at the centre of the sovereign projects: carceral historical geographies of Asinara and Capraia, in: Di Matteo, G. (eds.). *Islands as crossroads: reimagining mobilities in the Mediterranean*, Posidonia collana di studi insulari, 173-190.

- Astudillo, F. J., Hunt, C. A., Aizpurúa, I. I. and Carvajal-Contreras, D. R. (2024). From Prison Islands to Island Paradises: Are Violent Histories Being Overwritten with Nature-Based Tourism Imaginaries?. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*, 26(2–3), pp. 243–265.

4. Opposing the Blue Economy: Neoliberal policymaking and Indigenous Epistemologies

- Trauger, A. (2014). Towards a Political Geography of Food Sovereignty: Transforming Territory, Exchange, and Power in the Liberal Sovereign State. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(6), pp.1131–1152.

- Ulloa, A. (2017). 'Perspectives of environmental justice from indigenous peoples of Latin America: A relational indigenous environmental justice'. *Environmental Justice*, 10(6), pp. 175–180.

- Camargo, X. S. (2019). 'The ecocentric turn of environmental justice in Colombia'. *King's Law Journal*, 30(2), pp.224–233.

5. For students who do not attend the seminars:

- Benetti, S., Gamba, S., & Grasso, M. (2023). Taranto: a flickering landscape of illusory progress, vanished hope, and invisible beauty. *Landscape Research*, 48(8), 1054-1072.

- Walker, S., Giacomelli, E. (2024). Encountering mobility (in)justice through the lived experiences of fishing communities in Dakar and Saint Louis, Senegal. *MOBILITIES*, 0, 1-17 [10.1080/17450101.2024.2334705].

Semester

Second Semester

Assessment method

The final exam consists of an individual oral interview focused on the course content, with particular attention to maritime geopolitics and environmental justice. Students will be asked to discuss case studies and open-ended questions that encourage interdisciplinary reflection. The evaluation will assess theoretical knowledge, critical application, independent judgment, and communication skills. There are no midterm exams or in-term assessments.

Office hours

by appointment, in person or online

Sustainable Development Goals

GENDER EQUALITY | CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | CLIMATE ACTION |
LIFE BELOW WATER | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
