Immersion Lecture: Critical Political Ecology

**Time of Event:**
Tuesday, March 1, 2016 - 11:30 to 12:15

**Video:**

In this lecture on critical political ecology, Dr. Paige West traces the history of the theory and how it emerged from the study of isolated communities and their connections to external structures that impact their social lives. She defines political ecology as a critical approach that sees environmental change as caused by both natural and human structures, with differential impacts for individuals within those structures. She highlights the role that female academics have played in advancing political ecology as a theory and method, and then focuses on the influence and concepts from Foucault, including discourse, power, and discipline. She then draws on examples from her own work in Papua New Guinea to exemplify the ongoing use of the political ecology frame, starting with characterizing contemporary Papua New Guineans as connected to the outside world and continuing by exploring coffee commodity chains as one form of local-global relationships. She ends by discussing updated understandings of Marx's ideas of accumulation and dispossession, suggests that there are both material and nonmaterial forms of these tendencies of modern global economic structures.

**Reading List**


**Presentation Slides**

Click here to download the presentation slides. [1]
Paige West joined the faculty at Barnard College and Columbia University in 2001, the year after earning her PhD in cultural and environmental anthropology at Rutgers University. She is currently Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University and chair of the department of anthropology at Barnard College. Dr. West’s broad scholarly interest is the relationship between societies and their environments. More specifically, she has written about the linkages between environmental conservation and international development, the material and symbolic ways in which the natural world is understood and produced, the aesthetics and poetics of human social relations with nature, and the creation of commodities and practices of consumption. Since the mid 1990s she has worked with indigenous people in Papua New Guinea. She is the author of three books and the editor of five more. She has also published many scholarly papers. In addition to her academic work, Dr. West is the co-founder of the PNG Institute of Biological Research, a small NGO dedicated to building academic opportunities for research in Papua New Guinea by Papua New Guineans. Dr. West is also the co-founder of the Roviana Solwara Skul, a school in Papua New Guinea dedicated to teaching at the nexus of indigenous knowledge and western scientific knowledge.

**Event type:**
Immersion Speaker

**Event Attendance:**
Private Working Group

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