

GES: CRITICAL GEOGRAPHIES OF NATURE AND LAND

University of the Western Cape

Erin Torkelson

etorkelson@berkeley.edu

Time & Place: Tuesdays 10-12, Seminar Room

Office Hours: Tuesdays 12-2

Description:

Why do environmental issues incite such passion and protest? What cultural practices, discourses, and materialities converge in environmental struggles? This reading intensive honors seminar explores the cultural politics of nature, environment and land in diverse geographical and historical contexts. We ask: what are the dominant images of nature at work, how are those meanings debated and deployed by different actors, and what are the symbolic and material consequences of these conflicts for different constituencies. We examine specific environmental struggles where the politics of race, class, gender and cultural difference figure prominently.

This module seeks to ground distinctive conceptual approaches in diverse geographies, histories and environmental challenges, in South Africa, Africa, the Global South And North, in rural and urban contexts. We emphasize the integration of theory, analysis and empirical research and pose critical question to each other regarding our relationships to advocacy, activism and environmental justice. Special attention is devoted to colonial and imperial circuits through which global environmentalism emerged. We also look at how our conception of nature has been used to produce racial, gendered, and national differences. In turn, we examine contemporary post-colonial struggles and conflicts that politicize relations among environmental resources, rights and cultural identities. Such analyses require investigating relationships between practices of environmentalism, conservation, and sustainable development in relation to humanitarianism, militarism, violence, political economy, poverty & inequality; nationalism sovereignty; NGOs, donors and alleged beneficiaries; environmental justice, resource rights and imaginaries of alternative futures.

A note on content: Some of the material in this class may be upsetting. We will be discussing racism, gendered violence, exploitation, displacement, and war. If you have questions or concerns related to content, please make an appointment to speak with me in person.

Requirements:

Continuous Assessment Mark:

Class participation	10%
Reading Journals	20%
Presentations	20%

Final Exam (or Equivalent) Mark:

Final Paper Draft	10%
Final Paper	40%

Participation: You are expected to attend all scheduled classes having thoughtfully completed each day's assigned readings. Participation includes responding to instructor questions, participating in large and small group conversations and activities, and listening respectfully to other members of the class. Challenge yourself to speak if you have a tendency to stay silent and make space for others if you have a tendency to dominate discussion.

Reading Journals: We will be reading a lot of (sometimes dense) material this semester. I do not expect that you will remember or understand every single detail of the texts. Instead, I want you to read for comprehension of the major claims and broad themes of different kinds of texts. To focus your efforts, I ask that you read with several questions in mind, and attempt to answer these questions in **300-500 word reading journals**. **Journals should be posted on Ikamva two hours prior to our meeting time.**

- First, what are the central claims of the text? What is the author trying to prove, disprove?
- Second, how does the author support their claims? What kinds of evidence does the author use?
- Third, what are the implicit and explicit assumptions of the text? What does the author presume to be true?
- Fourth, how does this reading link to others? Does the author agree with other authors, or disagree?
- I also invite you to develop your own questions as you engage the material. For example, what was unclear about the work? What was unsatisfactory or unconvincing? What else might be relevant for understanding this issue?

My hope is that these reading journals will help you develop a system to take notes as you read. They will also form the basis of class discussion.

Class Presentations: All students will be responsible for giving two concise presentations (no more than 15 minutes) to help guide our discussions at the beginning of our sessions. We will sign up for presentations on the first day of class. The presentations are not meant to be a summary of the material we read, for everyone will have read it. Rather, identify conceptual commonalities or differences among the week's readings; analytically engage specific modes of inquiry, argument, or fieldwork practice; and raise what you take to be critical questions for our collective to explore. By 8:00 am on the day of your presentation, send me the following things:

- Two points of connection to previous readings
- Three questions to frame the discussion
- Three passages in the text to reference for discussion

I strongly suggest you meet with me the week before your first presentation to discuss the content.

Seminar Papers: You will be expected to write a **12 page paper (double spaced, times new roman, 2.5 cm margins)** on a South African environmental issue of your choosing. You will use the class readings to explore your issue. The paper should be a critical reflection on

themes and reading assignments. It must have an argument and you must marshal relevant evidence to support that argument. **We will do this in two parts: a first draft will be due April 28, and a second draft will be due May 20.** Part of your grade will depend on how much you improved between each draft. Further details will be provided in class. **Both the first draft and the final draft should be submitted through iKamva.**

Class Policies:

- **Communication:** All communication regarding the module will be issued via iKamva. Please check your UWC email and visit our iKamva site regularly.
- **Late Submissions:** If you are forced to miss an assignment submission due to illness or other valid reasons, you must submit a completed *Application for Late Assessment* (available from the Departmental Administrator in Room 140 Old Arts) along with a valid original doctor's certificate or other accompanying documentary proof within five (5) days of the due date. Applications received within this time period will be considered for the opportunity to be given additional time at the discretion of the lecturer for the assessment task submission. Students will be informed of the outcome of their application. Please note that students are not guaranteed the opportunity for a sick test. Only approved applications will have the opportunity.
- **Email/Questions:** I will respond to emails within 24 hours (48 hours on weekends and holidays) of receipt. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have regarding the topics or (if you are interested) graduate school. However, I will not substantively discuss material over email. If you have questions about a reading or want to discuss it in more depth, please ask during class, come to my office hours, or schedule an appointment with me.
- **Academic Integrity:** The basic rules of attribution for all academic assignments, including homework, require that:
 - A direct quotation (whether a single word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, or series of paragraphs) must always be identified by quotation marks, by indenting and single spacing, or by reduced type size of the quoted material, and a note must be used to state the exact source.
 - A paraphrase of the work of another must be acknowledged as such by a note stating the source.
 - Indebtedness to the specific ideas of others, or the summarizing of several pages, even though expressed in different words, must be acknowledged by a note stating the source.
 - In every instance, the use of another student's work must be acknowledged by a note.
 - Even the use of a student's own previous or concurrent work must be acknowledged; thus, a student must obtain the prior permission of both the previous and current instructors before submitting all or part of the same paper in more than one module.

Readings:

WEEK 1 (Feb 4): Histories of Nature: Ideas, Discourses Materialities

- Williams, R. 1980 [1972]. Ideas of Nature. In *Problems in Material Culture*. London: Verso. (pp 67-85).
- Selection of local news articles on nature/culture issues from the last decade

WEEK 2 (Feb 11): Imperial Routes of Global Environmentalism

- Philip, Kavita. 1998. English Mud: Toward a Critical Cultural Studies of Colonial Science. *Cultural Studies* 12(3): 300-331.
- Livingstone, D. 2002. Tropical Hermeneutics and the Climactic Imagination. *Geographische Zeitschrift Bd. 90 H2(2002)*: 65-88.
- Fairhead, James, Melissa Leach, And Ian Scoones. 2012. Green Grabbing: A New Appropriation of Nature? *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(2): 237-261.

WEEK 3 (Feb 18): Naturalizing Differences of Race, Gender & Culture

- Magubane, Z. 2003. Simians, Savages, Skulls and Sex: Science and Colonial Militarism in Nineteenth-Century South Africa. In *Race, Nature and the Politics of Difference*. Moore et al., pg 99-121.
- Thongchai Winichakul 2000 The Quest for "Siwilai": A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam. *Journal of Asian Studies* 59(3): 528-549.
- Mbembe, Achille 2000 At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa. *Public Culture* 12(1): 259-284.

WEEK 4 (Feb 25): Reterritorializing Nature, Cosmopolitics & Earth-Beings

- de la Cadena, M. 2010. Indigenous cosmopolitics in the Andes: conceptual reflections beyond "politics." *Cultural Anthropology* 25(2), 334-370.
- Gordillo, Gaston 2011 Longing for Elsewhere: Guarani Reterritorializations. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53(4):855-881

WEEK 5 (Mar 3): Political Ecologies and Gendered Livelihoods

- Carney, Judith A. 2000. The African Origins of Carolina Rice Culture. *Cultural Geographies* 7(2):125-149.
- Ferguson, J. (1985). The Bovine Mystique: Power, Property and Livestock in Rural Lesotho. *Man*, 20(4), 647-674.

WEEK 6 (Mar 10): Parks, Protected Areas & Environments of Exclusion

- Brooks, Shirley. "Re-reading the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Game Reserve: Constructions of a 'Natural' Space", *Transformation*, 44 (2000).
- Neuman, Roderick P. 2004. Moral and Discursive Geographies in the War For Biodiversity in Africa. *Political Geography* 23: 813-837
- Delcore, Henry D. 2007 The Racial Distribution of Privilege in a Thai National Park. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38(1): 83-105

WEEK 7 (Mar 17): Land, Property, Extraction

- Scott, J.C. (1998). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 11-52.
- Hong, G.K. (2014). Property: in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. Edited by Bruce Burgett & Glen Hendler, New York, NYU Press.
- Whyte, K. (2017). The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice, and U.S. Colonialism. *Red Ink: An International Journal of Indigenous Literature, Arts, & Humanities*, 19(1), 154-169.

WEEK 8 (Mar 31): Community Violence and Ungovernable spaces

- Watts, Michael. (2004). *The Sinister Life of Community: Economies of Violence and Governable Spaces in the Niger Delta*. Working Paper No 3, Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley.
- Yeh, Emily 2003, Tibetan Range wars: Spatial Politics and Authority on the Grasslands of Amdo. *Development and Change* 34(3):499-523.

WEEK 9 (Apr 7): Toxic Traces, Radioactive Life, and Environmental Justice

- Ranganathan, Malini. (2016). Thinking with Flint: Racial Liberalism and the Roots of an American Water Tragedy. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 27(3), 17–33.
- Hecht, Gabrielle. (2012). The work of invisibility: Radiation hazards and occupational health in South African uranium production. *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 81, 94-113.
- Masco, Joseph 2004. Mutant Ecologies: Radioactive Life in Post-Cold War New Mexico. *Cultural Anthropology* 19(4):517-550.

WEEK 10 (Apr 14): Militarizing Milieus, Security Regimes and Environmental Politics

- Meché, B. 2019. Bad Things Happen in the Desert: Mapping Security Regimes in the West African Sahel and the ‘Problem’ of Arid Spaces. In R. Woodward ed. *A Research Agenda for Military Geographies*. London: Edward Elgar.
- Kosek, Jake 2010 Ecologies of Empire: On the Uses of the Honey Bee. *Cultural Anthropology* 25(4): 650-678.

WEEK 11 (Apr 21): Climate Change, Crisis, and who defines the Anthropocene?

- Crutzen, P J. (2006) "The "Anthropocene". *Earth system science in the anthropocene*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg, pp. 13-18.
- Todd, Z. (2015). Indigenizing the Anthropocene. *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environment and Epistemology*, 241-254.
- Vergès, F. (2017). Racial Capitalocene. In: Johnson, G. T. and A. Lubin (eds.) *Futures of Black Radicalism*. New York: Verso. Available online: <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3376-racial-capitalocene>

WEEK 12 (Apr 28): Course Review & Rough Draft Due via Ikamca

ASSESSMENT: 20 May - Final Draft Due via Ikamva