

Interdisciplinary Programmes

Academic year 2019-2020

Agrarian Worlds: Practice, Power, Place

DE130 - Spring - 6 ECTS

Monday 10h15 - 12h00

Course Description

This course examines the social and political dimensions of food and agriculture. It considers the ways in which agriculture shapes and is shaped by households and communities, ecological and social environments, as well as state, corporate, and regulatory institutions. Beginning with some of the preeminent nodes of agrarian worlds plantations, smallholder households, and factory farms we then move to explore key contemporary debates that engage the complexities of practice, power, and place in food and agricultural systems. These include sustainable certifications, land acquisition, biofuel and bioenergy development, and carbon sequestration. With attention to the close interlinkages of agriculture and environment in a world marked by ecological crises and intensifying inequality, at the end of this course, it is expected that students will develop an historically informed, multifaceted understanding of the social, political and cultural dimensions of food and agriculture.

> PROFESSOR

[Shaila Seshia Galvin](#)

[Office hours](#)

> ASSISTANT

[Facundo Daniel Rivarola Ghiglione](#)

[Office hours](#)

Syllabus

Attendance and Class Participation (20%): I expect you to come to class on time, having read and reflected on the readings, ready to participate by contributing your ideas and questions. Please inform me in advance should you need to miss class. Repeated absences will hinder not only your participation but also your success in the class overall. As part of your participation grade, you are additionally expected to attend and participate in the Lunch Briefing I will offer on May 5.

Discussion Questions (10%): Beginning in week 2, you will be required to post on Moodle two discussion questions linked to the readings assigned for that week. Your questions should be posted by 9am on the morning of class, and you should take some time to read through the questions that

others have posted before class. Your questions may address each reading separately, or they may link the readings together. You may use the questions to highlight aspects of the ideas, arguments, or suggestions in the readings that you would like to explore in greater depth, or had difficulty understanding.

Discussion questions will be assessed in terms of how well they engage with and offer a reflection on the assigned readings. They will be graded as follows:

6 – excellent (showing close reading and thoughtful reflection)

5 – good (some evidence of close reading and reflection, but questions are somewhat more general or less well connected to the readings)

4 – pass (submitted)

3 – not submitted

Discussion questions will be due every week (with the exception of Weeks 6, 14, and 15). Of the 11 weeks for which you will post questions, I will count only the best 9 toward the tally of your cumulative grade for this requirement.

Food (and fuel) for thought : case study research presentations (20%)

During Weeks 7-13, part of each class will be dedicated to the presentation of a case study which articulates closely with the theme of class for that day, and is focused on a set of agrarian practices and/or agricultural commodity. The purpose of the case study presentation is to explore a real-world example, which illuminates some aspect of the theme we are taking up in class, and allows us collectively to place the case in conversation with issues, questions, and problems raised by the assigned readings.

Possible topics for case studies will be circulated at the beginning of the semester, once enrollments have stabilized.

This project will require you to work in groups to research and prepare your presentation (no written work need be submitted). The formation of groups, and circulation of further guidelines, will take place early in the semester. To facilitate your research and making connections with the class for that day, groups are strongly advised to meet with me and the course TA to discuss their ideas and plans for the case study.

Two essays (50%)

To permit you to engage independently, and in greater depth, with the readings, as well as broader themes of the course, you will be required to write a shorter mid-term essay, and a longer final essay.

Mid-term essay (20%): You will have a choice of essay prompts to respond to, and these will be circulated at the beginning of the semester. This essay will require you to engage mainly with the course readings. The essay should be individually authored and 1,500 words in length. This essay will be due on Friday, April 3, 2020 at 9am.

Final essay (30%): Prompts for this essay will also be circulated at the beginning of the semester. The selection of prompts for this essay will allow you either to address a theme closely related to the course readings, or to craft your own question or problem that will allow you to pursue independent research beyond the course material. These essays may be written either individually, or in pairs. Single-authored essays should be 2,000 words in length, and co-authored essays 3,000 words. This essay will be due on Friday, May 29, at 9am.

Contact

Email is the best way to contact me, and between 9am and 5pm during the working week I will do my best to respond to your email as soon as possible. At other times of day, and on the weekends, it may take me longer to respond. I will use Moodle to circulate class announcements, assignments,

resources, and other course-related information. I encourage you to attend my office hours, and I can also meet with you by appointment.

Academic Honesty

The free exchange of ideas, at the Graduate Institute and as members of a larger intellectual community, hinges on academic honesty and integrity. Plagiarism involves deliberately or inadvertently representing the work of others as one's own. Please refer to the Graduate Institute's policy on academic honesty and plagiarism, available in the "Academic Policies and Regulations" section of the Student Portal.

While research and knowledge advance in part because we use and build on the ideas of others, it is vital that we always acknowledge our sources. I encourage each of you to develop a consistent system for note taking, referencing, and citing your sources. Please use the Chicago author-date system for both in-text citations and bibliographies. See:
<http://www.chicomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

I encourage you to visit the Graduate Institute's Library where you will find information on training presentations for using bibliographic and referencing software such as EndNote and Zotero.

Please do not hesitate to see me if you ever have any questions about academic honesty and how it applies to your work.

Late Work

Late assignments will lose ¼ point for each day of lateness. Extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.

Technology in the Classroom

Use of technology within the classroom must be limited to only that which is necessary for note-taking or consulting course material. Please disable Wi-Fi settings on laptops or tablets to minimize sources of distraction to you and others during class. I do not allow the use of cell phones or other mobile devices inside the classroom.

Week 1 | February 17: Introduction

Ehrlich, Paul R., and John P. Holdren. 1971. "Impact of Population Growth." *Science* 171(3977): 1212-1217.

Nero's Guests. 2009. Directed by Deepa Bhatia. (56 min.) Available on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4q6m5NgrCJs>

Gopalakrishnan, Tarun. "Poor agri, dietary practices have intensified climate change: IPCC." *Down to Earth*. 8 August, 2019. Accessed at: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/climate-change/poor-agri-dietary-practices-have-intensified-climate-change-ipcc-66086>

Meyer, Robinson, "This land is the only land there is." *The Atlantic*. 8 August, 2019. Accessed at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2019/08/how-think-about-dire-new-ipcc-climate-report/595705/>

Week 2 | February 24: Agriculture and ecological crisis I: the Dust Bowl

Worster, Donald. 1979. *Dust Bowl : the southern plains in the 1930s*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 5 : "Sodbusters"

Cronon, William. 1991. *Nature's metropolis : Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W. W. Norton. Chapter 3, "Pricing the Future: Grain."

Week 3 | March 2: Agricultural revolutions and questions of power

- Evenson, R. E., and D. Gollin. 2003. Assessing the Impact of the Green Revolution, 1960 to 2000. *Science* 300 (5620):758-762.
- Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapter 1: Nature and Space.

Week 4 | March 9: Spaces and scales of agrarian worlds: smallholder and plantation systems

- Mintz, Sidney Wilfred. 1985. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York, N.Y.: Viking. Chapter 2: Production.
- Carney, Judith. *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001. Chapter 3: "Out of Africa: Rice Culture and African Continuities."
- McC. Netting, Robert. 1993. *Smallholders, Householders: Farm Families and the Ecology of Intensive, Sustainable Agriculture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Chapter 1: "The Technology and Knowledge of Intensive Farm Practices."

Week 5 | March 16: Ethical life and agrarian societies: from moral economies to food sovereignty

- Scott, James C. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant : Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976. Chapter 6: "Implications for the Analysis of Exploitation: Reciprocity and Subsistence as Justice."
- Agarwal, Bina. 2014. "Food Sovereignty, Food Security and Democratic Choice: Critical Contradictions, Difficult Conciliations." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 41, no. 6: 1247-68.

Week 6 | March 23: Invisible Hands: Labor and Migration in American Agriculture

- Film: The Harvest/La Cosecha: The Story of the Children Who Feed America (Shine Global 2010, 80 minutes)

Week 7 | March 30: The factory farm

- Dunn, Elizabeth. 2007. "Escherichia Coli, Corporate Discipline and the Failure of the Sewer State." *Space and Polity* 11 (1):35-53.
- Pachirat, Timothy. 2011. *Every twelve seconds : industrialized slaughter and the politics of sight*, New Haven: Yale University Press. Chapter 3, "The Kill Floor"; Chapter 6, "Killing at Close Range".
- Blanchette, Alex. 2015. "Herding Species: Biosecurity, Posthuman Labor, and the American Industrial Pig." *Cultural Anthropology* 30(4):640-669.

Week 8 | April 6: Transforming land relations through acquisition and enclosure

- Levien, Michael. 2012. "The Land Question: Special Economic Zones and the Political Economy of Dispossession in India." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 39 (3-4):933-69.
- Stock, Ryan, and Trevor Birkenholtz. "The Sun and the Scythe: Energy Dispossession and the Agrarian Question of Labor in Solar Parks." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* (2019): 1-24.

Week 9 | April 13: Vacances de Pâques (no class)

Week 10 | April 20: The new food/energy complex: farming fuel

- Borras, Saturnino M.; Jennifer C. Franco; S. Ryan Isakson; Les Levidow, and Pietje Vervest. 2016. "The Rise of Flex Crops and Commodities: Implications for Research." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 43 (1):93-115.
- Baka, Jennifer. 2017. "Making Space for Energy: Wasteland Development, Enclosures, and Energy Dispossession." *Antipode* 49 (4): 977-96.
- Levidow L (2013) EU criteria for sustainable biofuels: Accounting for carbon, depoliticising plunder. *Geoforum* 44:211–223.

Week 11 | April 27: Agriculture and ecological crisis II: land, agriculture, and climate change

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Special Report on Climate Change and Land*. Summary for Policymakers. August 2019.

Ford, James D., Laura Cameron, Jennifer Rubis, Michelle Maillet, Douglas Nakashima, Ashlee Cunsolo Willox, and Tristan Pearce. "Including Indigenous Knowledge and Experience in IPCC Assessment Reports." *Nature Climate Change* 6, no. 4 (2016/04/01 2016): 349-53.

Leach, Melissa, James Fairhead, and James Fraser. 2012. Green grabs and biochar: Revaluing African soils and farming in the new carbon economy. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 39 (2):285-307.

Week 12 | May 4: Certifying Sustainable Futures? Fair Trade

Jaffee, Daniel. 2009. "Better, but Not Great': The Social and Environmental Benefits and Limitations of Fair Trade for Indigenous Coffee Producers in Oaxaca, Mexico'." In *The Impact of Fair Trade*, edited by Ruerd Ruben, 195-222. Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers.

Besky, Sarah. 2008. "Can a Plantation Be Fair? Paradoxes and Possibilities in Fair Trade Darjeeling Tea Certification." *Anthropology of Work Review* 29 (1):1-9.

May 5 *Lunch Briefing: Sustainable Agriculture's Promise and Perils***Week 13 | May 11: Certifying Sustainable Futures? Organic agriculture**

Mansfield, B. "Organic Views of Nature: The Debate over Organic Certification for Aquatic Animals." *Sociologia Ruralis* 44, no. 2 (Apr 2004): 216-32.

Aistara, Guntra A. *Organic Sovereignities: Struggles over Farming in an Age of Free Trade*. Culture, Place, and Nature: Studies in Anthropology and Environment. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018. Chapter 6: Between Conventionalizations.

Seshia Galvin, Shaila. 2018. "The Farming of Trust: Organic Certification and the Limits of Transparency in Uttarakhand, India." *American Ethnologist* 45 (4):495-507.

Week 14 | May 18: Endings and beginnings: the future of food and agriculture

In class discussion of key themes and questions addressed in and emerging from the course

Week 15 | May 25: Consultations on final papers in lieu of class