

## **Capitalist Nature**

CAT 124- Research Practicum

Tu/Thurs: 10:30 AM -12:30 PM

Instructor: Dr. Amrita Kurian

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Office Hours: Tuesday 9:30-10:30 AM (or by Appointment)

### **Course Introduction**

"Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it." (Santayana 1905)

Environmental crises abound. Wildfires, droughts, ocean acidification, and pandemics are occurring right here in our backyard. Both natural and social scientists claim that humans have played a defining role in creating these crises. This course takes a step back to critically analyze the role of human cultures not just in Nature's destruction but its construction as an idea. Notably, we will look at the role of capitalist cultures in the production and destruction of Nature. What does Nature mean to us? How is this understanding shaped by capitalism? How does a capitalist vision of nature affect our current actions towards conservation? The course encourages students to develop a deeper, more critical appreciation of concepts and ideas used in the management of environmental crises. These are some of the fundamental theoretical questions we will be asking in this course within the context of Western/US capitalism. Questioning our ideas about Nature will inadvertently force us to question our understanding of the human. This course hopes that a reflection on our past can guide our future actions.

The course aims to provide students with the toolkit to connect their personal and community experiences with the broader ecosystem within which we function. More importantly, the course seeks to nurture mindfulness toward the various kinds of natures in our backyards (Cronon 1995).

### **Course Learning Outcomes**

Remember, we are only scratching the surface of a canon built by scholars of environment and history. Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Break down the concepts of Nature and natural objects
- Consider how our conceptions of and engagement with Nature have been shaped by capitalism
- Critically engage with the contemporary environmental crisis through the historical lens of western capitalism
- Think collaboratively, debate respectfully, and learn to be more attuned to our immediate surroundings

- Learn ethnographic methods, analytical thinking, and independent research skills. Students are encouraged to put together historical and ethnographic research to make arguments about their everyday engagements with nature.
- Enrich their engagement with multiple communities (classmates, neighborhoods, digital, etc.).

### **Course Format**

**\*\*Hands-on learning is a significant component of a practicum. If for some reason you are unable to dedicate this time, please get in touch with the instructor.**

### **Tuesday Lecture and Discussion:**

Required readings will be **posted on canvas.ucsd.edu** or available via links on the syllabus (download UCSD VPN). Lectures for the week will be posted on the Canvas Home page **every Monday. Students must watch lecture videos (asynchronously) by class on Tuesday (10:30-11:30).**

Class hours on Tuesday (10:30-11:30) will be devoted to **extra-credit student presentations** and **discussions** via Zoom (synchronous) on the topic for the day. Students can volunteer to present a reading during class on Tuesday for extra-credit. Presentations will be followed by a class discussion. Bring your questions and comments to this session.

Use the instructor's zoom URL on Canvas to access the classroom.

### **Thursday Class Activity**

(see Canvas.ucsd.edu for the Weekly prompts)

Thursdays will be practicum hours. We will use this time to discuss Class Activities and the learning objectives for the course.

**Before classes on Thursday (10:30 AM),** submit that Week's Class Activity onto Canvas > Assignments and the Discussion Blog. **Students will present/read out their essays** during class on Thursday. Every student must volunteer to present their Weekly Class Activity 2 times during the summer session. [Sign-up sheets](#) for Class Activity Presentation via zoom on Thursday will be circulated by the instructor.

Use the instructor's zoom URL on Canvas to access the classroom.

### **Course Expectations**

Remember, the purpose of the class is to get you to start thinking, independently and together, of new ways to deal with the potential crises that lie ahead of us. Bring your expertise to the classroom as collaborators- as artists, scientists, or social scientists, as connoisseurs and

aficionados of various forms of Nature, and as residents of or foreign visitors to a neighborhood. Share it with your peers.

- Bring your enthusiasm. Bring your patience. I will too
- Commit time to the course. I will too
- Read. Try to engage with the readings. Relate the material to your life and your surroundings.
- Bring a question about that week's reading to class on Tuesday. Or bring a related issue. Come ready to DISCUSS.
- Do the Class Activity to the best of your ability. My feedback will match the effort you put into your work
- Come prepared to READ OUT LOUD & PRESENT your Class Activities
- Treat yourself, each other, and me as your allies. Imagine you are a member of an expert panel collaborating on our collective future. Whether pro-capitalist or anti-capitalist, scientist, or artist, TREAT YOUR ALLIES WITH RESPECT.
- Climate change is REAL.
- This class WILL critique our ways of thinking, our attitudes, and our belief systems. Come prepared to do some self-reflection and mindful critique.

## Grades

1. **Participation (20%):** Students are expected to bring guiding questions for the discussions on Tuesday. Students will be graded based on their reading and lecture completion, discussion questions, and participation in discussions [**If you are unable to attend the regular class for any reason, please notify the instructor.**]

On Thursdays, if you are not presenting, come prepared to listen and respond. Comment on a peer's discussion post every Thursday. Your responsiveness as an audience will add to your participation grades (via chat or in-person).

2. **Class Activity Blog (30%):** Students must submit a 600-800 words essay, based on the class activity for the day, **every Thursday** by 10:30 AM to Canvas (Discussion Thread & Assignments).
3. **Course Reflection (10%):** The Class Activity Essay for Week 5 is a Course Reflection. **600-800 words reflection due on Canvas by Saturday, 1<sup>st</sup> August**
4. **Presentation (15%):** Every student will read out their Class Activity essay and discuss their ethnographic experience 2 times during the summer session. The [Sign-up](#) available via Google Drive
5. **Final Project (25%): Ethnographic Essay**
  - Take Class Activity from Week 1, 2, 3, or 4 and develop it into a short research essay of 1500-2000 words

- Instructions will be posted on Canvas
- Discuss the topic and approach of your essay during Thursday Class Activity, Week 4
- **Final Submission to Canvas on 30<sup>st</sup> July**

**6. Extra-Credit:** Presenting a reading to the class once during the summer session will earn you a third of the letter grade (A to A+). [Sign-up sheets for Extra Credit Reading Presentations](#) will be circulated by the instructor.

### **Important Policies**

It is the responsibility of all students to familiarize themselves with UCSD's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). Violations of academic integrity in this course will not be tolerated and can result in an automatic F as well as university sanctions.

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), which is located in University Center 202.

Students are expected to adhere to the [UCSD Principles of Community](#), especially during discussion sections and when writing public blog posts.

**Zoom Etiquettes:** Keep yourself muted upon entry. Try not to interrupt a person while they are speaking. Keep your videos on [if you cannot, notify the instructor via email]. **Synchronous Zoom sessions and chats will be recorded and archived.** Most importantly, be patient.

**Follow Quarantine Protocols when conducting Ethnographic Research.** Ethnographic Research is about pushing your social boundaries, to make social connections, to see and listen to people outside of our immediate comfort zone. However, we are also living in a time when social connections have severe physical limitations for you and your potential collaborators. The course requires you to do ethnographic research, but do not use it to endanger yourself or others in the process. Course Activities will include different options to enable you to make safe choices. You are encouraged to always error on the side of caution. Please do not hesitate to contact the instructor if you are uncertain about completing assignments in a way that ensures both achievement of practicum objectives and maintenance of your and your community's health.

**COVID 19 Resources:** <https://basicneeds.ucsd.edu/covid/index.html>

\*\* The reading list maybe revised by the instructor. You will be notified of such changes. Please make sure you are using the latest version of the syllabus.

### **Readings and Class Activity List**

#### **Week 1 (30<sup>th</sup> June & 1<sup>st</sup> July): Taking an Anthropological Approach to the Problem of Environment**

##### Tuesday Lecture and Discussion

- Syllabus, Introductions

##### Thursday Class Activity: Landscape Memories

- Discuss Lambertini, Marco, "The Coronavirus is not good for nature." *Al Jazeera*, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/coronavirus-good-nature-200508120555480.html>
- Landscape Memories Essay Due (see Canvas-Assignments for the Prompt)

#### **Week 2 (7<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> July): Stepping Back: Problems with Our Ideas of Nature**

##### Tuesday Lecture and Discussion

- Cronon, William. "The trouble with wilderness: or, getting back to the wrong nature." *Uncommon ground: toward reinventing nature*. New York: WW Norton & Company, 1995.
- Discuss Malik, Kenan. "Let's stop romanticising Nature. So much of our life depends on defying it." *The Guardian*, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2020  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/10/lets-stop-romanticising-nature-so-much-of-our-life-depends-on-defying-it>

##### Thursday Class Activity: Interviews on Nature

#### **Week 3 (14<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> July): Capitalist Economy of Nature**

##### Tuesday Lecture and Discussion

- Patel, Raj, and Jason W. Moore. *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*, University of California Press, 2017. Pages 1-43  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsd/detail.action?docID=4820021>.

If you are interested in more on capitalism: <https://www.thedigradio.com/podcast/feminism-for-the-99-with-tithi-bhattacharya/>

Thursday Class Activity: Story of the Supply Chain

**Week 4 (21<sup>st</sup> & 23<sup>rd</sup> July): Commoditizing Water**

Tuesday Lecture and Discussion

- Kaplan, Martha. "Fijian water in Fiji and New York: Local politics and a global commodity." *Cultural Anthropology* 22.4 (2007): 685-706.
- OR
- Kaplan, Martha. "Lonely drinking fountains and comforting coolers: paradoxes of water value and ironies of water use." *Cultural Anthropology* 26.4 (2011): 514-541.

Recommended: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/23/millions-of-americans-cant-afford-water-bills-rise>

Thursday Class Activity: Independent Research (two activities)

**Week 5 (28<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> July): Ways of Living in a Damaged World**

Tuesday Lecture and Discussion

Kafer, Alison. "Bodies of nature: The environmental politics of disability." *Disability studies and the environmental humanities. Toward an eco-crip theory* (2017): 201-241.

OR

Gan, Elaine, et al., editors. "INTRODUCTION: HAUNTED LANDSCAPES OF THE ANTHROPOCENE." *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, University of Minnesota Press, MINNEAPOLIS; LONDON, 2017, pp. 1–15.

Le Guin, Ursula K. "DEEP IN ADMIRATION." *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, edited by Anna Tsing et al., University of Minnesota Press, MINNEAPOLIS; LONDON, 2017, pp. 15–21.

Thursday Class Activity: Ethnographic Essay Progress Check-in & Course Reflection (10%)

**Final Submissions: Ethnographic Essay on 30<sup>th</sup> July**

**Course reflection due on 1<sup>st</sup> August**

## Research Resources

Cultural Anthropology on Environment: <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/citation-matters-an-updated-reading-list-for-a-progressive-environmental-anthropology>

Barnes, J. and M. Dove (eds) 2015. *Climate Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives on Climate Change*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Engagement - Environmental Anthropology Blog  
@Engaged\_EAnthro  
<https://aesengagement.wordpress.com/>

Planet Money, NPR Podcast

The Dig: Capitalism and Slavery  
<https://blubrry.com/jacobin/44012648/the-dig-capitalism-and-slavery-part-1/>

PBS NewsHour, Summer reading lists for young people at a time of crisis  
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/summer-reading-lists-for-young-people-at-a-time-of-crisis>