

Syllabus of Record

Program: CET Brazil: Social Justice & Inequality in São Paulo

Course Code / Title: (SP/ANTH 320) Environmental Issues and Social Impact on Brazilian Traditional Populations

Contact Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Anthropology / Environmental Studies, Sociology, Latin American Studies

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites / Requirements: Prior coursework in environmental and/or social sciences is recommended, but not required.

Description

Brazil stands as a global environmental powerhouse and a potential leader in advancing efforts to fight climate change. Yet, the country grapples with numerous challenges to diagnose, prevent and contain ecological threats and social impacts that derive from them, which frequently lead to infrastructural disasters, population displacement and social unrest. Employing an interdisciplinary anthropological lens, this course addresses the complex interplay between environmental challenges and social dynamics in Brazil, offering a comprehensive exploration of how ecological issues are deeply interwoven with national identity, cultural heritage, poverty, inequality, and struggles for social justice. Beginning with an overview of the historical construction of Brazil's national identity as a "tropical paradise," students then explore the profound impacts of deforestation, urbanization and unregulated environmental policies on indigenous, quilombola and other traditional populations, and the pervasive issue of environmental racism that exacerbates social inequalities. Using the notion of environmental racism as a guiding principle, this course offers an in-depth investigation of the role of race, class, gender and origin in environmental discourse, exploring how marginalized communities organize themselves and mobilize to defend their land and rights against predatory extractivism and political neglect.

Objectives

Through their participation in this course, students:

- Gain an understanding of the constitutional premises around land property and distribution in Brazil along with the constitutional rights of traditional populations.
- Identify current and pressing issues affecting traditional populations, their practices and lifestyle in light of recent environmental issues and disasters.
- Gain theoretical tools to develop critical assessment of the interplay between the interests of the extractivist economic model, political interests, and the needs/desires of traditional communities.
- Develop awareness of contemporary environmental and social issues in Brazil, and increase intercultural sensitivity.

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Course Requirements

Active participation is essential in this course. Students are expected to attend each class and field-based course component, as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy. Students are expected to read all assigned materials before the relevant class session and come prepared to participate thoughtfully in class discussions. Reading assignments are generally 20-30 pages per class session.

Graded assignments include:

- **Seminar presentation:** Each student delivers a timed presentation followed by a Q&A session. Presentations are based on a previously assigned topic and should include a well-articulated overview of the topic at hand, a critical and contextualized reflection on the practical challenges surrounding the topic, and discussion starters for peers to engage with during Q&A.
- **Field reports:** Students write two short field reports describing and reflecting on their field experiences during visits to traditional communities. These reports should not only be descriptive, but also draw on class discussions and readings to highlight differences and similarities between what is spoken about these communities and students' actual on-site experience.
- **Final paper:** This 7-10-page essay comprises an original analysis of one of the topics covered during the semester. The essay should contain a literature review and be based on class discussions, field activities, and students' own outside research. The essay is expected to present an integrated analysis that zeroes in on one aspect of Brazil's current environmental situation. It should present a historical overview of what led to the present problem, illustrate and contextualize the problem through data (broadly defined), engage with multiple and diverse perspectives on the object of analysis using class readings and outside sources, and showcase the student's ability to discuss multifaceted topics in a coherent and cohesive manner.

Grading

The final grade is determined as follows:

- Participation 8%
- Seminar presentation 20%
- Field reports (2 at 16%) 32%
- Final paper 40%

Readings

Anjos, Anna Beatriz. "Brazilian Youth Fight to Decolonize Climate Justice." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 54, no. 1 (2022): 30-35.

Bullard, Robert D. "Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement." In *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices From the Grassroots*, edited by Robert D. Bullard et al., 15-39. Boston: South End Press, 1993.

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Carmo, Felipe Fonseca do, et al. "Fundão Tailings Dam Failures: The Environmental Tragedy of the Largest Technological Disaster of Brazilian Mining in Global Context." *Perspectives in Ecology and Conservation* 15 (2017): 145-151.

Cole, Luke, and Sheila Foster. "Environmental Racism: Beyond the Distributive Paradigm." In *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*, 54-79. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

Costa, William. "Transnational Guarani Land Defense and Solidarity." *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 2023.

Fernandes, Geraldo Wilson, et al. "Deep into the Mud: Ecological and Socio-Economic Impacts of the Dam Breach in Mariana, Brazil." *Natureza & Conservação* 14, no. 2 (2016): 35-45.

Global Witness. *Enemies of the State? How Governments and Business Silence Land and Environmental Defenders*. Global Witness, 2019.

Meira, R. M. S. A., et al. "Brazil's Mining Code Under Attack: Giant Mining Companies Impose Unprecedented Risk to Biodiversity." *Biodiversity and Conservation* 25, no. 2 (2016): 407-409.

Piciullo, Luca, et al. "A New Look at the Statistics of Tailings Dam Failures." *Engineering Geology* 303 (2022).

Sanches, Rosely Alvim. "Caiçara Communities of the Southeastern Coast of São Paulo State (Brazil): Traditional Activities and Conservation Policy for the Atlantic Rain Forest." *Human Ecology Review* 8, no. 2 (2001).

Schwarcz, Lilia Moritz. "Commentary: Brazil as a Continuous Laboratory of Races." *American Anthropologist* 116, no. 4 (2014): 721-722.

Schwarcz, Lilia Moritz. "A Mestizo and Tropical Country: The Creation of the Official Image of Independent Brazil." *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 80 (April 2006).

Stepan, Nancy Leys. "National Identities and Racial Transformations." In *"The Hour of Eugenics": Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America*, 1-20. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.

Outline of Course Content

Module I: National Identity and Nature

- This first module provides an overview of Brazilian history through the lens of land exploration, the connection with nature and geographical locations held not only by traditional populations but also appropriated by incoming settlers and enslaved peoples, and the various forms through which this connection manifests in Brazilian society to produce meanings, arguments, destruction, resistance, and a project of Brazil and Brazilian identity. Subtopics include:

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- The idea of Brazil: “País tropical, abençoado por Deus e bonito por natureza” (tropical country, blessed by God and beautiful by nature)
- Brazil: A history of nature, not human acts

Module II: Environmental Issues in Brazil

- This module mobilizes the concept of ‘environmental racism’ to explore the impact of environmental issues on socially and spatially vulnerable traditional populations. It discusses the different localized forms of neglect, violence and abuse these populations face, and how these populations organize themselves to resist such threats. Topics to be covered include:
 - Traditional populations: Who are they, as defined by the constitution?
 - Deforestation: Violence as method
 - The Amazon as a case in point
 - Environmental racism: Class, race and inequality
 - Mobilization by traditional populations: Quilombolas’ struggles
 - The multiple levels of violence against environmental activists and local community leaders
 - Environmental racism in the city: Resistance amongst the youth
 - Mobilization by traditional populations: The Guarani people

Module III: Predatory Politics, Predatory Extractivism, and Catastrophes in Brazil

- This final module addresses environmental issues from the perspective of political decision-making and political agendas. After discussing in the previous module how different forms of environmental racism materialize at the local level, this module takes a step back to look at the broader political picture to understand the political powers, decisions, and public policies that might facilitate environmental disasters and hinder positive environmental efforts. Topics include:
 - Predatory mining
 - Mariana and Brumadinho as case studies (or similar cases)
 - Real estate and resistance by traditional populations
 - Caiçaras’ resistance (or similar cases)
 - Predatory politics and environmental consequences