

Social Life of Plants

Spring 2019

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF PLANTS

Class Number 10652 (ANT 4930)

Lecturer: Dr. Augusto Oyuela-Caycedo

Lecture sessions: Thursday 4:05 pm.-7:05 pm.

Meeting Location: Turlington 2346

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This class is an introduction to the study of the social life of plants. Biologists can reconstruct the genetic relationships of plants and their diversity as well as the process leading toward genetic modifications. Anthropologists and archaeologists can provide the hard evidence on how, where, and when these processes of domestication and socialization of plants took place. Today with the new approaches in post-humanism and the decentralization of the relationship between humans and plants, it is possible to develop new lines of inquiry. More importantly, archaeologists as anthropologists can ask why humans domesticated specific plants and what this means for the social organization of societies in terms of control, use, management and dispersion of plants, but also from the perspective of the plant, we can ask the same questions. In this course, we will explore some of the explanations of the mutual interactions of plants and peoples, and their importance in the process leading toward diverse forms of social relationships around the planet that range from kin groups to state societies and post-human interactions. We will do this by addressing issues like the human social interactions with specific plants in terms of relations of production that generate structures of power and the creation of multispecies plants (Biotechnology, Bioengineering). We will also address the plants that favor these structures due to their specific characteristics.

In this course, we will examine specific social histories of plants around the planet and what this means today.

Course Objectives:

We hope that the students will be able to answer and understand some basic questions such as:

1. What is the social life of plants? Why can we talk about social plants?
2. When, where and why did social plants originate around the planet?
3. What was the impact of social plants on the social structure of societies?
4. What were the effects social plants had on the political and economic structures of human society?
5. What social plants are relevant for hunter-gatherer groups today and in the past?
6. What was the contribution of social plants to the formation of state societies and empires?
7. What are the new multispecies plants in the post-human world.
8. What human social relations have favored social plants in the past and in the present?
9. Why it is important to understand the histories of some basic social plants and what does it mean for human societies and the planet?

Textbooks:

Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. 1993. *Rice as Self*. Princeton.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. 2017. *The mushroom at the end of the world: on the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton.

Paige West. 2012. *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive, The Social World of Coffee From Papua New Guinea*. Duke University Press.

Optionals: James C. Scott. 2017. *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. Yale University Press.

John Hartigan Jr. 2017. *Care of the Species: Races of Corn and the Science of Plant Biodiversity*. University of Minnesota Press.

EVALUATION. Short analysis paper (20%), class presentation of paper (20%), two exams (each 20%), and class participation (20%).

GRADE SYSTEM:

Grading Scale: Grades will be awarded according to the following scale in effect by the university:

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Grading Scale

A 93 – 100% C- 70 – 72.9%

A- 90 – 92.9% D+ 68 – 69.9%

B+ 88 – 89.9% D 63 – 67.9%

B 83 – 87.9% D- 60 – 61.9%

B- 80 – 82.9% E 0 – 59.9%

C+ 78 – 79.9%

C 73 – 77.9%

A complete listing of university policy pertaining to grades may be found at <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>

Assignments: You are expected to do the following:

- Read the assigned material BEFORE coming to class. Many students have difficulties understanding the lectures because they do not read the material prior to class. Do NOT be one of these students.
- Participate actively in the discussion of the articles and the reading material.
- Presentation of short papers as assigned by the instructor.
- Short analysis paper (3 pages) on a documentary.
- Produce an original paper with clear objectives and ideas. The topic will be defined in agreement with the professor. The focus must be on a social plant (8 pages). The students will have 10 minutes for the presentation and 10 minutes for questions.

Disclaimer: Some adjustments may be made in the schedule and class requirements during the course of the semester. All changes will be announced.

ATTENDANCE is required. Students who are unable to come to class on a regular basis due to special circumstances should see the instructor at the beginning of the term to discuss such circumstances. Finally, please avoid at all costs coming in or walking out of the classroom in the middle of lectures. This is most rude and disruptive.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1. Jan. 10: Introduction to the course.

Week 2. Jan. 17: Toward a new materialist theory or post-human approach?

Readings: Deleuze and Guattari. Chapter *Rhizome*. Reading Franklin. Optional: Kirksey & Hemreich 2010 and Janzen and Martin 1982

Week 3. Jan. 24: The evolution or co-evolution. Genetics, kin selection and other forms of social reproduction of plants.

Readings: Murphy chapter 4 and 5 Optional: Jackson 1996 and Rindos 1980. Murphy chapter 6 and 7. Optional: kin recognition in plants. Dudley 2007 or/and 2009. Karba and Shiojiri.

Week 4. Jan. 31: Religious plants and social commodification.

Read selected chapters of Andrew Russell and Elizabeth Rahman (editors) 2016. *The master plant: tobacco in lowland south America*. Bloomsbury academic.

Week 5. Feb. 7 *First Exam.*: The diversity of social structures of plants, part I (tubers: yams, taro, manihot and others).

Read chapter of Karl S. Zimmerer. 1997. Changing fortunes: biodiversity and peasant livelihood in the Peruvian Andes. University of California press.

Week 6. Feb. 14: The diversity of social structures of plants, part II

Week 7. Feb. 21: Social plants of inequality (Poaceas).

Reading chapter of James C. Scott. 2017. *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. Yale University Press.

Week 8. Feb. 28: Social plants of identity.

Read Ohnuki-Tierney, Emiko. 1993. *Rice as Self*. Princeton University Press.

Week 9. Mar. 2-9: spring break.

Week 10. Mar. 14: Capitalist social plants. (cotton, cocoa, rubber, coffee)

Read Paige West. 2012. *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive, The Social World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea*. Duke University Press.

Week 11. Mar 21: Documentary: All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace 2/3 - The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts (2011).

<http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/all-watched-over-by-machines-of-loving-grace/> (Links to an external site.)[Links to an external site.](#)

or

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2eagvn> (Links to an external site.)
[Links to an external site.](#)

Week 12. Mar. 28: Post human plants?

Reading: Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. 2017. *The mushroom at the end of the world: on the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton University Press.

Week 13. Apr. 4: Changes in the social plant species to multispecies: not “Frankenstein” but “The fly”.

Selected chapter of John Hartigan Jr. 2017. *Care of the Species: Races of Corn and the Science of Plant Biodiversity*. University of Minnesota Press.

Week 14. Apr. 11: Final comments and paper presentations.

Week 15. Apr. 18, Paper presentations. **Paper due**

.Week 16. Apr. 25-26, reading days.