

Sp. 450 S: “Living With Scarcity: Nature and Environment in Modern and Contemporary Spain”

I imagine this class as an interdisciplinary exploration of the environment and (Spanish, Hispanic) culture that is organized around three broadly conceived thematic segments, entitled: “Nature - Cruel Mother”, “Economic Development and the After-Life of Nature”, and “Nature as Commodity (Environmental Politics of Consumption).” These segments are not tightly defined by some logical or systematic imperative, but rather seek to approach the notion of “scarcity” in a way that is both historical and literary or figurative.

At the center of the first two thematic units are three literary works that chronicle the transformation of the twentieth century Spanish society through the prism of nature: cruel and inhospitable nature of the Las Hurdes region (“Nature-Cruel Mother); a harsh Castilian countryside that is home to equally harsh and resilient people; abandoned villages that are remembered as it were post-mortem, through the eyes of their last living inhabitants (“Development and After-Life of Nature”). I set these representations of the mid-century Spain against the background of visual and critical accounts that speak to the transformation of the environment in our day and age. At the end of the first section, we will see the documentary *Manufactured Landscapes* and analyze aerial pictures from a recently published document “Changes in the land usage in Spain: Implications for Sustainability.” This governmentally sponsored document shows in a detailed and graphic way the alteration of the Spanish landscape in the last fifty years. At the end of the second section, we will switch gears both spatially and temporally, and from a dying village of Leon move to the Mexican writer Luis Sepúlveda’s novel about whaling, followed by the documentary *Our daily bread*, which deals with food industry. Albeit in different ways, all these works address the issue of the life, death and after-life of nature (villages, forests, animals).

The third section, “Nature as Commodity” is the shortest one, and it deals with the environmental implications of the present-day redrawing of political and cultural borders, exemplified by tourism, globalization and economic migrations. Instead of an in-depth exploration of these phenomena, the section aims to give students a glimpse of the conflicts generated by the creation of the new foci of scarcity and abundance.