The Postcolonial Animal
ANST-UA-600
Animal Studies
New York University
Fall 2017

Tuesdays & Thursdays 12:30-1:45pm
Professor Thiyagarajan nat3@nyu.edu
Room: 194 Mercer St. 207
Office hours: on Google Calendar
Office: 285 Mercer Street, 10th Floor

Course Description

“Encountering the postcolonial animal means learning to listen to the voices of all kinds of ‘other’ without either ventriloquizing them or assigning to them accents so foreign that they never can be understood.”
---Phillip Armstrong

This course examines the environment and postcolonial animals in contemporary transnational literature and film. From natural resource extraction, deforestation, and the pollution of waterways to the introduction of invasive species, the trade in animal products, such as furs, ivory or silk, and species extinction due to overhunting and habitat destruction, colonization has left its mark on the natural world. Close consideration will be given to situating the environment and animals in relation to key issues of nation, imperialism, globalization, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, indigeneity, as well as language and representation.

We will investigate such questions as:
1. How do postcolonial texts represent the role of the environment and animals in colonization and postcolonialism?
2. How has colonization influenced the relationship between postcolonial subjects and animals?
3. How do postcolonial authors envision a particular relationship to animals and engage with the ongoing effects of environmental degradation?
4. Who is the postcolonial animal?

Required Texts (available at the NYU bookstore, on Google Drive, or elsewhere as indicated. Please note that readings are subject to change.)
Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment 2nd Edition. (Available in NYU bookstore or library)
Amitav Ghosh The Hungry Tide
Indra Sinha Animal’s People
J.M. Coetzee Disgrace
Leanne Simpson This Accident of Being Lost

Grading Criteria & Overview

Grading Criteria: This seminar is designed to develop close reading, critical thinking, and conceptual analysis across a range of interdisciplinary subjects and texts. Active participation alongside careful reading and analysis is required to work through assumptions, unpack prior knowledge, and build and awareness of the significance and implications of the course topics. For all assignments (including participation) the grading criteria seeks: comprehension, clarity in presentation and writing, and innovative, critical thinking. All written assignments must use current MLA formatting.

In this seminar, you will be graded based on the following:

Participation (20%)
The success of our seminar depends on active, lively, and thoughtful engagement with both the readings and your fellow students’ work. You are expected to read the required materials for the week, bring them to class with you, be prepared to discuss them during the seminar, and to listen attentively. Since the seminar runs on active discussion, I cannot re-teach you the material you miss if you are absent. Missing more than one class without permission will negatively impact your grade. If you cannot make it to class, please email me in advance and arrange to get notes from your peers.

Reading Responses (15%)
You will be required to complete five 250-word reading responses throughout the semester. Complete these at your own pace, but you cannot submit more than one per week, two must be submitted before November, and you cannot hand one in on the last day of class. Responses will be handed in at the beginning of class and should provide a quick summary of one text assigned that week along with a close reading or analysis that the text inspired for you.

Seminar Presentation and Blog Post (20%)
Within the first two weeks of the course I will assign your presentation dates. Presentations are 10-12 minutes and should be
thought of as discussion starters or ways of engaging your peers in a conversation. For your presentation, you will choose an animal featured in the text assigned for that day and describe that animal’s history as a colonial/postcolonial subject. The animal you choose can be one who is featured prominently in the text or one who appears in more subtle or fleeting ways. If more than one person is presenting on the same text, you must coordinate to ensure that you each present on a different animal. After your presentation, you will synthesize your research into the colonial/postcolonial lives of your particular animal and post it on the blog I have created for this class. We will, in the end, create a kind of postcolonial animal archive.

Final Essay Proposal and Bibliography (15%)
In 3 double-spaced pages (not including bibliography) your proposal should outline the main arguments and ideas for your final paper. You are expected to include a concise description of your specific thesis statement and question that you will explore in your paper. Also include a short annotated bibliography with four sources that you intend to use. Your annotations should be no longer than a few sentences that describe the author’s main points and explain how that text will be useful for your paper.

Final Essay (30%)
~20 double-spaced pages including bibliography. This will serve as an assessment of what you have learned in the course overall.

Class Administration
Students who require accommodation for a disability should consult with the Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/students-with-disabilities. Plagiarism results in failure in the class and referral to an academic dean. Plagiarism includes: copying sentences or fragments from any source without quotes or references; not citing every source used in your papers; citing internet information without proper citation; presenting someone else’s work as your own; or copying verbatim from any source. You are subject to CAS’s guidelines on plagiarism: cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity.

Email Policy: Other than coming to my office hours, email is the best way to communicate with me. I will respond to emails within two days of receiving them and may take longer over the weekends or holidays.

Extensions/Incomplete: Extensions and incompletes will only be granted under exceptional circumstances. Please get in touch and discuss these requests with me well in advance of the assignment deadline.

Reading and Assignment Schedule
*Exact readings TBD and are subject to change.

Week 1: introductions
9/5: Introductions
9/7: Videos/Readings available online: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “The Danger of a Single Story” (TED Talk) & Junot Diaz’s “The Mongoose and The Émigré” (NYT)

Week 2: Colonialism/Postcolonialism
Week 3: Postcolonial Ecocriticism
Week 4: The Postcolonial Animal
Week 5: Reframing Foundational Texts
Week 6: Disgrace
Week 7: Primates, Conservation, and Postcolonial Environments
Week 8: Food, Colonialism, and Alimentary Tracts
Week 9: The Hungry Tide – Dolphins, Diaspora, and Biology
Week 10: The Hungry Tide – Tigers, Indigeneity, Intimacy
Week 11: Oceans

11/16: Class Cancelled *Final Paper Proposals Due

Week 12: Reconsidering Animal Rights Debates
11/21: The Cove & Neel Ahuja’s “Species in a Planetary Frame”

Week 13: Animal’s People – Environmental Racism
Week 14: Animal’s People – Post-humanitarian Fictions
Week 15: This Accident of Being Lost

12/18: Final Paper Due