

Postcolonial Theory at the Limits of the Animal

Instructor: Jason Sandhar



Images: Venantius Pinto

Course Description

Postcolonies are bursting with animals. Cattle, elephants, stray dogs, oxen, parrots, baboons, geckos, rats, and cockroaches jostle with buses, trucks, cars, autorickshaws, cyclists, pedestrians, beggars and the IT class, soothsayers and criminals, in the streets of Mumbai, Cape Town, and Kingston. Barring a handful of exceptions, however, most Western theorists ignore these animals and the people who live with them—they also overlook racist confluences of the two in popular and, indeed, scholarly discourse. Drawing on some of the most provocative and exciting interventions at the nexus of postcolonial theory and critical animal studies, this course considers anticolonial resistance, animal labour, other-than-human agency, and rights discourses in response to the shared precarity of humans and other animals in Africa, the Americas, and South Asia. Racist constructions of Zimbabwean bodies as “pestiferous life” will complicate our assumptions about the species boundary in southern Africa. As we shift to the Americas, we will deconstruct the historical triangulation of the plantation, global seafaring, and mercantilism to consider how Africans resisted the dehumanizing atrocities of the slave trade. Finally, our turn to South Asia explores the species boundary as a legal construct. Here, we will analyze the legal standing of cows and locate Bengal’s feral children in Giorgio Agamben’s distinction between naming and the word. Readings include, but are not limited to, texts by Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga, Alexander Weheliye, Sylvia Wynter, Claire Jean Kim, Neel Ahuja, and Parama Roy.

Required Texts

Coetzee, J.M. *The Lives of Animals*
Kapil, Bhanu. *Humanimal*
Kim, Claire Jean. *Dangerous Crossings*
Singh, Joseph Amrito and Robert M. Zingg.
Wolf Children and Feral Man
Weheliye, Alexander. *Habeas Viscus*
Wynter, Sylvia. *On Being Human as Praxis*

Texts not listed above will be available via OWL



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Methods of Evaluation

Response Essay	15
Participation	15
Seminar Presentation	25
Paper Proposal	15
Final Essay	30

Unit I: Postcolonial Theory at the Limits of the Animal

Week 1

Sinha and Baishya. "Postcolonial Animalities" (please read ahead of our first meeting)

Week 2

Wynter and McKittrick. "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species?" (*On Being Human as Praxis*)

Unit II: Africa's Pestiferous Life

Week 3

Weheliye. "Blackness"; "Bare Life"; "Racism" (all in *Habeas Viscus*)
Mbembe. "Necropolitics."

Week 4

Mavhunga. "Vermin Beings."
Singh. "Humanimal Disposessions"

Week 5

Coetzee. *The Lives of Animals*

Unit II: Race and Humanimal "Intimacies" in the Americas

Week 6

Lowe. "The Intimacies of Four Continents"
Ahuja. "Dread Life: Disease Interventions and the Intimacies of Empire"

Week 7

Kim. "Impassioned Disputes"; "Animals, Nature, and the Races of Man" (*Dangerous Crossings*).

Week 8

Chen. "Language and Mattering Humans"

Unit III - India: Entomopolitics and Finding Language in the Feral Child. Also Cows

Week 9

Roy. "White Ants, Empire, and Entomopolitics"
Sivasundaram. "The Animal and Human in the Idea of Race"

Week 10

Seshadri. "The Wild Child: Politics and Ethics of the Name"

Singh. *Wolf Children and Feral Man*
Kapil. *Humanimal*

Week 11

Narayanan. "Cow Protection as 'Casteised Speciesism'"

Roy. "Abstinence: Manifestos on Meat and Masculinity"

Wrapping Up

Week 12

Mignolo. "Sylvia Wynter: What Does it Mean to be Human?"