

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 Calcutta, Nairobi, and Kingston. Drawing on some of the most provocative interventions at the nexus of postcolonial theory, animal studies and posthumanism, this course dwells between the human and the animal to interrogate what Megan Cole Paustian astutely calls the “human-human divides” embedded in the divide between humans and other animals. In so doing, we will consider 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.

Required Texts

Kapil, Bhanu. *Humanimal*
Kim, Claire Jean. *Dangerous Crossings*
McNeil, J.R. *Mosquito Empires*
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
Conference paper proposal	10
Conference paper	25
Final Essay	35

Unit I: Postcolonial Theory at the Limits of the Animal

Week 1

Sinha and Baishya. "Postcolonial Animalities"

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

(please read ahead of our first meeting)

Week 2

Weheliye. *Habeas Viscus*

Unit II: Pestiferous Life

Week 3

Mavhunga. "Vermin Beings."

Mbembe. "Necropolitics."

Week 4

Crosby. Selections from *Ecological Imperialism*.

McNeil. *Mosquito Empires*.

Roy. "Quinine, Malaria, and Mosquitoes."

Unit II: Race and Interspecies "Intimacies"

Week 5

Lowe. "The Intimacies of Four Continents"

Ahuja. "Dread Life: Disease Interventions and the Intimacies of Empire"

Saha. "Among the Beasts of Burma."

Week 6

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

Chen. "Language and Mattering Humans"; "Queer Animality" (*Animacies*)

Week 7

Govindrajan. *Animal Intimacies*.

Unit III - Pestiferous Life II

Week 8

Roy. "White Ants, Empire, and Entomopolitics"

Sivasundaram. "The Animal and Human in the Idea of Race"

Unit IV - The Wild Child

Week 9

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

Singh. *Wolf Children and Feral Man*

Kapil. *Humanimal*

Unit V Carnopolitics

Week 10

Chigateri. "Glory to the Cow."

Narayanan. "Cow Protection as 'Casteised Speciesism'"

Narayanan. "Jugaad and Informality as Drivers of India's Cow Slaughter Economy"

Week 11

Roy. "Abstinence: Manifestos on Meat and Masculinity"

Gandhi. *The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism*

Wrapping Up

Week 12

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