

Université de Montréal
Département de littératures et de langues du monde
Section études anglaises
ANG 6650 Post-Colonial Literatures in English
Winter 2024

Instructor: Professor Heike Härting
Class: Wednesdays, 8:30 am to 11:30 am
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Postcolonial Studies in the Era of the Anthropocene

Course Description:

As the [climate] crisis gathered momentum in the last few years, I realized that all my readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism over the last twenty-five years, while enormously useful in studying globalization, had not really prepared me for making sense of this planetary conjuncture within which humanity finds itself today.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History* 25.

Chakrabarty's comment scandalized the field of postcolonial studies and provoked different responses and new trajectories to the field. For instance, while Robert Young argues that we are in an age of "postcolonial empowerment," Ian Baucom calls for a new vision of freedom and history he calls "history 4 degrees Celsius." What postcolonial scholars appear to agree on, however, is that the Anthropocene is not a value-free geological epoch that signals the impact of universal human activity on the Earth's support systems. Renaming it the capitolocene (Moore), the plantationocene, or the chthulucene (Haraway), various critics have foregrounded the different systems and relations of power and culpability, including colonialism, extractivism, and imperialism, that fracture a homogenous conception of the Anthropocene. Indeed, postcolonial geologist Kathryn Yussof suggests that there is not a singular Anthropocene, but a "billion black Anthropocenes." This class examines the conceptual continuities between discourses of climate change/the Anthropocene and colonialism/ imperialism. It looks at the Anthropocene through the prism of race, class, sexuality, and gender. What is the logic that divides or/and links these discourses? What is the position of the scholar in the field of postcolonial studies? What are the modes of literary representation? How do literary texts envision decolonial ways of articulating freedom, or, how do they critically position themselves against earlier anti-colonial texts, such as Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* or Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*? How do indigenous knowledge forms of decolonial living shift postcolonial thinking? Many contemporary postcolonial texts, including the ones selected for this course, respond to environmental degradation and anthropogenic transformation by way of experimenting with genres and subject positions. Magical realism and horror take on new meanings as they struggle with the representation of uncertainty and the unimaginable, while nonhuman voices and subjects take on greater autonomy and significance.

This course, then, is designed to familiarize you with both some key texts of postcolonial studies and pertinent current transformations and debates in the field. Given the field's highly theoretical and

political orientation, this course will ask you to undertake some practical, investigative work. The readings of this course are organized around several topics: **postcolonial subjects/refugees; extraction/degrowth economies; heat/wildfires; human/nonhuman (animal) relations**. Hence, you will be asked to interview members of Montreal's Climate Justice Movement, Canada Wildlife/Montreal's SPCA, Montreal-based journalists and/or scholars who work on degrowth, and Canadian Forest Services. Interviews should not exceed 20 minutes. Preferably, they will be conducted in person. If this is not possible, a registered zoom interview will be acceptable. I will provide names or contact emails to help you get your investigation off the ground. However, you are also invited to find your own NGOs or community organizations that work on one of these topics. You will work in groups consisting of three to four students to organize, conduct, and present your interviews. Your interview experience must be presented in class and can be integrated into your research essay. Details will be discussed in class.

Primary Texts:

Hickson, Ella. *Oil*. London: Nick Hern Books, 2016.
Erpenbeck, Jenny. *Go, Went, Gone*. New Directions, 2017.
Mbue, Imbol. *How Beautiful We Were*. New York: Random House, 2021.
Gosh, Amitav. *Gun Island*. Penguin Random House, 2019.
Fitzgerald, Helen. *Ash Mountain*. Orenda Books, 2020.
Nganang, Patrice. *Dog Days. An Animal Chronicle*. U of Virginia Press, 2006.

Secondary texts will be available on StudiUM at the beginning of the term. They will include texts by Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Kathryn Yussof, Amitav Gosh, Donna Haraway, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ian Baucom, and others.

Class Assignments:

1) Short in-class presentation of one theoretical text	20%
<u>2) Group work: (35%)</u>	
a) Questionnaire to be submitted to instructor in advance of the interview	10%
b) In-class presentation of interview experience and outcome	25%
3) Research Essay	40%
4) Participation	5%