

Professor Stacey Balkan

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Spring 2023 office hours: Mondays 4:00-5:00pm (via Zoom), Wednesdays & Fridays 10:00am – 11:00am & 12:30pm - 1:30pm (CU325).

English Dept. Office: 561-297-3830

**LIT4434-001: Literature and the Environment**  
**Spring 2023**  
**Wednesday & Friday, 11:00am – 12:20pm, SO 385**

...the Anthropocene did not arise fully formed from the brain of James Watt, the steam engine, and coal, but rather from a long historical process of economic exploitation of human beings and the world, going back to the sixteenth century and making industrialization possible.

Christophe Bonneuil & Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene* (2016)

**Land Acknowledgement:** As participants in this class we recognize that Florida Atlantic University resides on the ancestral territories of the Apalachee, the Muscogee Creek, the Miccosukee, and the Seminole nations. This acknowledgement is not a memorial, but a testament to the ongoing histories of Indigenous peoples to whom we offer our gratitude as we work and live on these lands.

**Course Description:** As a study in Literature and the Environment, this course will explore the intersecting histories of literary expression, landscape ideology, colonialism, and historical trauma. We shall question popular understandings of “environment” and “nature” that have historically privileged such aesthetic traditions as “wilderness” over the economic imperatives of survival, or habitability; and we shall, consequently, consider competing notions of “environmentalism.” We shall also query how, in an era marked by cataclysmic shifts to our global climate, we can begin to think collectively about the fate of our species without ignoring the long history of economic development that has rendered postcolonial states more vulnerable to the devastating impacts of climate change. Finally, we shall follow thinkers like Sylvia Federici in imagining not a “planet of slums” but a “planet of the commons,” and a future beyond apocalypse—or that which plagues local cinema outlets and television screens; and we shall, correlatively, consider the role of the arts in cultivating such futures. Readings shall include works by a variety of thinkers, writers, and activists including bell hooks, Jamaica Kincaid, Arundhati Roy, Rob Nixon, Françoise Vergés, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Indra Sinha, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Tommy Pico, Ross Gay, and Imbolo Mbue.

**Required Texts:**

Imbolo Mbue, *How Beautiful We Were*, ISBN-13: 978-0-593-13242-5

Tommy Pico, *Nature Poem*, ISBN-13: 978-1941040638

Indra Sinha, *Animal's People*, ISBN-13: 978-1416578796

\*All readings appended with an asterisk (\*) will be made available on Canvas.

**Class requirements:**

1. Weekly syntheses of assigned readings. You may respond to the readings in a variety of ways: offer a close reading of one of the primary literary works; pose a series of engaging questions about the texts under discussion; engage with and elaborate postings by fellow students; discuss a theme that has been developing in the course; and/or recap and build on earlier conversations using the new material of the day. These postings must be made *no later* than 5pm each Tuesday. The goal is to use our online discussions to build threads of discussion in class.
2. Midterm Examination: the midterm examination will consist of several close readings from assigned texts—exam to be completed in class.
3. Seminar paper (7-10 pages): you are to produce a formal critique of selected works inclusive of appropriate secondary source material. We will discuss secondary source material, including our library's electronic resources as well as a host of digital archives focused on Environmental Humanities research, as we move through the semester. Primary and secondary source material must be reflective of the work of our class. \*Proposals for alternative final projects—podcasts, lesson plans, creative works, and more—are enthusiastically encouraged!

**Grading policy:**

1. Weekly discussion board: 40%
2. Midterm Examination: 20%
3. Seminar paper: 25%
4. Participation in class discussions: 15%

**Attendance/Lateness Policy:**

Your presence is vital to our classroom community, so regular attendance is required. You will be permitted *two absences* after which your grade will be negatively affected. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss assigned texts and to produce written responses both in class and at home. *\*Medical documentation is required for remote attendance in this course.*

**Grade Scale:**

Florida Atlantic University follows a plus/minus (+/-) grading system. Numeric Values for this course are as follows: 93-100 A+; 92-90 A-; 89-87 B+; 86-83 B; 82-80 B-; 79-77 C+; 76-73 C; 72-70 C-; 69-60 D; 59-0 F

**FAU ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

Students are expected to attend all of their scheduled University classes and to satisfy all academic objectives as outlined by the instructor. The effect of absences upon grades is determined by the instructor, and the University reserves the right to deal at any time with individual cases of non-attendance. Students are responsible for arranging to make up work missed because of legitimate class absence, such as illness, family emergencies, military obligation, court-imposed legal obligations or participation in University- approved activities. Examples of University-approved reasons for absences include participating on an athletic or scholastic team, musical and theatrical performances and debate activities. It is the student's responsibility to give the instructor notice prior to any anticipated absences and within a reasonable amount of time after an unanticipated absence, ordinarily by the next scheduled class meeting. Instructors must allow each student who is absent for a University-approved reason the opportunity to make up work missed without any reduction in the student's final course grade as a direct result of such absence.

**STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES:** In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS)—in Boca Raton, SU 133 (561-297-3880); in Davie, LA 203 (954-236-1222); or in Jupiter, SR 110 (561-799-8585) —and follow all SAS procedures. For more information, see <http://www.fau.edu/sas/>

**COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS) CENTER:** Life as a university student can be challenging physically, mentally and emotionally. Students who find stress negatively affecting their ability to achieve academic or personal goals may wish to consider utilizing FAU’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Center. CAPS provides FAU students a range of services – individual counseling, support meetings, and psychiatric services, to name a few – offered to help improve and maintain emotional well-being. For more information, go to <http://www.fau.edu/counseling/>

**CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the university mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the university community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see: [http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg\\_4.001\\_5-26-10\\_FINAL.pdf](http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg_4.001_5-26-10_FINAL.pdf)

**Class Schedule: (subject to change depending on class progress)**

**Week 1: Imagining Eden(s) (1/11, 1/13)**

*Genesis*, Chapter 1: 27-28\*

Raymond Williams, “Nature,” from *Keywords*\*

Andrew Marvell, “The Garden”\*

Robin Wall Kimmerer, from *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*\*

**Week 2: What we talk about when we talk about the “environment”...in South Florida (1/18, 1/20)**

Campbell McGrath, “The Everglades”\*

Laura Ogden, from *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*\*

Karen Russell, “The Gondoliers”\*

Gabriel Ojeda-Sagué, “Losing Miami, I.”\*

**Week 3: The “Trouble with Wilderness” (1/25, 1/27)**

John Locke, “On Property”\*

Robin Wall Kimmerer, “The Serviceberry: An Economy of Abundance”\*

Tommy Pico, *Nature Poem*

**Week 4: “What Might Environmentalism Look Like if we Began, not from Wilderness, but the Plantation?” (2/1, 2/3)**

Sonya Posmentier, “Introduction,” from *Cultivation and Catastrophe: The Lyric Ecology of Modern Black Literature*\*

bell hooks, “Earthbound: On Solid Ground”\*

J. Drew Lanham, “Birding while Black”\*

Ross Gay, “A Small Needful Fact”\*

**Week 5: Reading Global Environments (2/8, 2/10)**

Françoise Vergés, “The Racial Capitalocene”\*

Rob Nixon, “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism”\*

Ramachandra Guha & Juan Aliers, “Introduction,” from *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*\*

Marisol de la Cadena, from “Uncommoning Nature: Stories from the Anthropo-Not-Seen”\*

Amitav Ghosh, from *The Hungry Tide*\*

**Week 6: Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental (In)justice (2/15, 2/17)**

Kyle Powys-Whyte “Settler-Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Justice”\*

Arundhati Roy, from *Walking with the Comrades*\*

**Week 7: The Flowers of Empire: Sowing Toxicity (2/22, 2/24)**

**\*I will be attending the “After Oil” conference this week—see Canvas for discussion board assignments.**

Jamaica Kincaid, “The Flowers of Empire”\*

Aldous Huxley, “Wordsworth in the Tropics”\*

Neema Avashia, “Chemical Bonds”\*

Indra Sinha, *Animal’s People*

**Week 8: Environmental Toxicity in the Global South (3/1, 3/3)**

Indra Sinha, *Animal’s People*

**Week 9: Spring Break (3/8, 3/10)**

**Week 10: Environmental Toxicity in the Global South (3/15, 3/17)**

Indra Sinha, *Animal’s People*

**Week 11: Extraction, Energy, and “Cheap Nature” (3/22, 3/24)**

Raj Patel & Jason W. Moore, “Cheap Nature”\*

After Oil Collective, from *Solarities: Seeking Energy Justice*\*

Kan Saro-Wiwa, “Ogoni! Ogoni!”\*

Imbolo Mbue, *How Beautiful We Were*

**Weeks 12 & 13: Figuring Extraction (3/29, 3/31 & 4/5, 4/7)**

Imbolo Mbue, *How Beautiful We Were*

**Week 14: Imagining Climate Futures (4/12, 4/14)**

After Oil Collective, from *After Oil*\*

Shelley Streeby, "Introduction," *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making Through Science Fiction and Activism*\*

Stacey Balkan, "Can Solarpunk Save the World"\*

Naomi Klein, from *The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Rico Takes on the Disaster Capitalists*\*

**Week 15: Solarpunk (4/19, 4/21)**

Kate V. Bui, "Deer, Tiger, Witch"\*

Natsuma Tanaka, "A Life with Cibi"\*

Phoebe Wagner, "Children of Asphalt"\*

**\*Seminar papers (or alternative projects) due on Thursday 4/27 via Canvas.**