

English 476: Senior Seminar Slow Violence

Session: Fall 2013

TT 12:30-1:45 pm

Room: Simpkins 014

Instructor: Dr. Shazia Rahman

E-mail: s-rahman@wiu.edu

Phone: 309-298-1112

Office: Simpkins 224

Office hours: TT 9-10 am, M 3-5 pm, and by appt.

Course Objectives

Scholars in the field of ecocriticism often analyze works of fiction by exploring the relationship between humans and nature in one country. But what if ecocritics moved past the limitation of only one country and only fiction? Instead, what if ecocritics studied both works of fiction and nonfiction from around the globe? This is the question that postcolonial ecocritic Rob Nixon asks in his important new book, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. The purpose of this course is to read Nixon's book alongside the fiction and nonfiction of writer-activists from South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of his argument. First, we will discuss the effects of factory pollution on both people and the planet. Then we will explore the impact of the oil industry in the Gulf and Nigeria. We will end the course by considering the implications of tourism and war and its relation with the environment.

This course has been designated to meet the Writing Instruction in the Discipline (WID) graduation requirement. WID courses provide instruction in the processes and formats for the writing content and style needed to be an effective professional in a student's chosen field.

Required Texts

Burnt Shadows by Kamila Shamsie

Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor by Rob Nixon

Cities of Salt by Abdelrahman Munif

A Month and a Day by Ken Saro-Wiwa

Animal's People by Indra Sinha

A Small Place by Jamaica Kincaid

Recommended Text:

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

Methods of Teaching and Learning

The primary method of teaching and learning in this course will be class discussion. Student presentations will frame and produce these discussions, which will require careful reading in advance by all members of the class.

- Take readings notes, marking areas to help you understand and engage the material.
- Consider not only the texts but also the larger issues they raise.

- Interrogate the concepts and assumptions made by the reading.
- Connect relevant experiences, especially if they provide practical articulation of theories from our texts.
- **Bring 2-3 critical comments/ discussion questions to class every class meeting.**
*(Though I will not regularly collect these, I will spot check depending on class discussion.)
- Good discussion questions should be open-ended, have multiple answers, and provoke discussion that helps us understand not only the work in question but also how the work shapes our understanding of the topic at hand. Avoid questions that can be answered with yes, no, or some other simple sentence.

Required Work

The major writing requirement of this course will be a 12-15-page final research essay. This longer essay can come out of an oral presentation, 6-8 pages, if you prefer. Both the shorter and longer papers will grapple with at least one of the chapters in *Slow Violence* in relation to one of the primary sources. Both papers will advance a critical argument and engage in and contribute to an ongoing scholarly conversation

The final research essay will also refer to at least two secondary sources as you advance a critical argument. The rough draft for your final essay will be peer reviewed before it is due. On peer review day, you will bring a rough draft of your paper and a 2-page proposal that sketches out the scholarly conversation and your contribution to it. I will expect you to hand in your rough draft and your peer's comments along with your final draft so that I can track your improvement as well as grade your peer's review. **I will not accept the essay without a rough draft and peer's comments.** Your class participation grade will comprise not only in-class discussion but also the quality of your review.

In addition, you will teach one of the chapters from *Slow Violence* to the class by summarizing it, evaluating it, and leading class discussion (4-5 pages) in a way that enables everyone to learn. Organize this presentation by keeping in mind that your peers will have read the chapter you are discussing and will want to know its major theoretical contributions and the effectiveness of those contributions. Include three discussion questions in this assignment.

You will also be graded on class participation. I expect you to consider yourself a part of an intellectual community that requires thoughtful advance reading, regular and punctual attendance, and your active and engaged involvement in class discussion.

Breakdown of grades:	Summary-Evaluation	4-5 pages	10%
	Presentation on primary source	6-8 pages	30%
	Final Research Essay	12-15 pages	40%
	Class Participation		20%

Grading Scale

- A = 93-100%
- A- = 90-92%
- B+ = 87-89%

- B = 83-86%
- B- = 80-82%
- C+ = 77-79%
- C = 73-76%
- C- = 70-72%
- D+ = 67-69%
- D = 63-66%
- D- = 60-62%
- F = 59% and below

Course Policies

- Please contact me about accommodations for special learning needs.
- Attendance and active participation are required. You are allowed two excused absences but under-prepared students may be asked to leave class and will be marked absent. Reading carefully and bringing course texts is part of preparation.
- Feedback from you regarding the course is welcome at any time. Contact me or speak to Prof. Mark Mossman, chair of English and Journalism.
- Keep all graded assignments. Keep track of grades.
- Late work is not accepted unless you have prior permission from me.
- A U grade means that you have earned less than a C on your work. If you earn a U grade, you must meet with me to discuss how to improve and resubmit your work for re-grading within one week. If you do not do so, your original F or D grade will stand.

WIU Policies

- **ADA:** In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), academic accommodations may be made for any student who notifies the instructor of the need for an accommodation. For the instructor to provide the proper accommodation(s) you must obtain documentation of the need for an accommodation through Disability Resource Center (DRC) and provide it to the instructor. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to the instructor's attention, as he/she is not legally permitted to inquire about such particular needs of students. Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e. fire, tornado, etc.) should contact the instructor as to the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency. Contact Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 298-2512 for additional services.
- **Student Rights and Responsibilities:** <http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php>
- **Academic Integrity Policy:** Scholastic dishonesty of any kind will result in an F in the course and will be reported to CAGAS. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes scholastic dishonesty. I will also be happy to answer any questions you may have. You should also consult the University policy at <http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php>.

Grading Criteria for the shorter and longer papers

Both the 6-8 page and the 12-15 page essays about a primary source should be well-structured around a thesis, provide textual evidence for the argument and be written in standard English relatively free of mechanical errors. Both the 6-8 page and the 12-15 page papers should refer to at

least one of the chapters from *Slow Violence* in addition to the novel you have chosen to discuss. The 12-15-page research paper should also refer to at least two peer-reviewed works. You must make your argument in the context of other critics and their arguments. Why is your essay important? What does it consider that others do not? Remember that your essay must refer to the entire primary source even if the class has not yet finished reading all of it when you give them your presentation.

An **A** paper is a tightly structured, well-written, nuanced argument which provides plenty of textual evidence to back up its claims. The first paragraph contains a clearly-articulated thesis with a roadmap briefly stating the points which will be elaborated later.

A **B** paper might provide a thesis in the first paragraph but the paper itself may not be as well-organized around that thesis. For instance, sometimes these papers do not clarify how each paragraph relates to the thesis. As a result, these papers do not sound as convincing as A papers.

A **C** paper might provide an argument that only reveals itself at the end of the paper. This kind of paper usually lacks a thesis in the first paragraph because the writer has not rewritten the introductory paragraph to match the final version of the paper.

A **U** paper is unacceptable. One reason for this might be that there is no thesis let alone an argument. Random thoughts are not a paper. Another reason might be that the thesis is completely negated by the paper itself. Or, sometimes too many mechanical errors will make it impossible for the paper to argue a thesis because the reader can't follow the writer's thoughts. If you do not choose the last book, you will have the option of rewriting the first paper within a week.

The U paper and the University Writing Center

The University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available at the Writing Center is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The University Writing Center is located in Simpkins Hall 341. Call for an appointment (298-2815) and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.

If you earn a U on a paper, **you must** meet with me to discuss how to improve and **go to the writing center for help in rewriting the paper** which will be due in a week. This will help you bring your grade up to a C. If you do not do so, you will receive the original F for that paper. Remember that you must prove that you went to the writing center by handing in their form with the paper.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1: The Environmentalism of the Poor

20 August 2013: Introduction

22 August 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 1-44 _____

Week 2: Indra Sinha

27 August 2013: Sinha, *Animal's People* pages 1-91

29 August 2013: Sinha, *Animal's People* pages 92-187

Week 3: Bhopal, India

3 September 2013: **no class**

5 September 2013: Sinha, *Animal's People* pages 188-277 _____

Week 4: The Urban Poor

10 September 2013: Sinha, *Animal's People* pages 278-366 _____

12 September 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 45-67 _____

Week 5: Abdelrahman Munif

17 September 2013: Munif, *Cities of Salt* pages 1-92

19 September 2013: Munif, *Cities of Salt* pages 93-183

Week 6: The Persian Gulf

24 September 2013: Munif, *Cities of Salt* pages 184-275

26 September 2013: Munif, *Cities of Salt* pages 276-365

Week 7: Arabic Political Fiction

1 October 2013: Munif, *Cities of Salt* pages 366-454

3 October 2013: Munif, *Cities of Salt* pages 455-545 _____

Week 8: Petro-despotism

8 October 2013: Munif, *Cities of Salt* pages 546-627 _____

10 October 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 68-102

Week 9: The Ogoni People

15 October 2013: Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day* pages vii-xiv, 1-79

17 October 2013: Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day* pages 80-157 _____

Week 10: Pipedreams

22 October 2013: Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day* pages 158-224 _____

24 October 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 103-127 _____

Week 11: The Bombing of Nagasaki

29 October 2013: Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* pages 1-93

31 October 2013: Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* pages 94-189

Week 12: Bird-shaped Burns

5 November 2013: **no class**

7 November 2013: Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* pages 190-282 _____

Week 13: Precision Warfare

12 November 2013: Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* pages 283-370 _____

14 November 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 199-232 _____

Week 14: Tourism

19 November 2013: Kincaid, *A Small Place* pages 1-81 _____

21 November 2013: **Peer Review, Research Paper Rough Draft Due**

Thanksgiving Break

Week 15: Wrap-Up and concluding discussion

3 December 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 233-262 **Final Research Paper Due** _____

5 December 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 263-280 _____

Sign Up Sheet

Please sign up for **two** presentations: one 4-5-page summary-evaluation and one 6-8-page essay on a primary source.

4-5 page summary-evaluation of a chapter of *Slow Violence*:

Week 1: The Environmentalism of the Poor

22 August 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 1-44 _____

Week 4: The Urban Poor

12 September 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 45-67 _____

Week 8: Petro-despotism

10 October 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 68-102 _____

Week 10: Pipedreams

24 October 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 103-127 _____

Week 13: Precision Warfare

14 November 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 199-232 _____

Thanksgiving Break

Week 15: Wrap-Up and concluding discussion

3 December 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 233-262 **Final Paper Due** _____

5 December 2013: *Slow Violence* pages 263-280 _____

6-8 page essay:

Week 3: Bhopal, India

5 September 2013: Sinha, *Animal's People* _____

Week 4: The Urban Poor

10 September 2013: Sinha, *Animal's People* _____

Week 7: Arabic Political Fiction

3 October 2013: Munif, *Cities of Salt* _____

Week 8: Petro-despotism

8 October 2013: Munif, *Cities of Salt* _____

Week 9: The Ogoni People

17 October 2013: Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day* _____

Week 10: Pipedreams

22 October 2013: Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day* _____

Week 12: Bird-shaped Burns

7 November 2013: Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* _____

Week 13: Precision Warfare

12 November 2013: Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* _____

Week 14: Tourism

19 November 2013: Kincaid, *A Small Place* _____

21 November 2013: **Peer Review, 12-15-page Research Paper Rough Draft Due**

Thanksgiving Break