

Ecocriticism and Global Environmental Justice (PSCI 0452/IGST 0452)

Fall 2025

Kemi Fuentes-George

Class Location	: Axinn 104	Time	: W 1:30 – 4:15
My Office	: RAJ B03a	Phone	: no
Office Hours	: TBA		

Accommodations and Mandatory Reporting

The following syllabus is tentative and subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Students with learning disabilities will be accommodated as necessary upon provision of appropriate documentation.

I expect my class to be an environment free of ethnic, class-based, and sexual harassment and discrimination. This applies to harassment about a student's orientation, and gender identity, including (but not limited to) deliberate misgendering.

PLEASE NOTE: I am, like every other professor on campus, a mandatory reporter. In other words, if I learn of an incident of "discrimination, harassment, or related retaliation," including sexual harassment, I am required to report this information to a Middlebury Human Resources Officer. This information will be held in the strictest confidence, but I will have to report it to the HRO. Professors are NOT trained to handle sexual harassment/assault cases.

Aims

What is global environmental justice, and how has it affected the ways in which the international society has responded to global environmental problems? Environmental catastrophe increasingly has a socioeconomic face, as globally vulnerable populations (women, minorities, and the poor) are those who bear the primary burden of ecological degradation.

In this class, we will explore the challenges to global environmental management through a lens that raises questions about justice. Among some of the things we will address are: how global capitalism affects the distribution of environmental goods and bads; whether transnational activist groups based in Northern countries are fit to comment on environmental problems in the South; how racial identities are shaped by, and shape global environmental problems; and how notions of universal justice and rights fit into the discussion of environmental management. We will take a critical approach to topics such as transboundary waste management, ozone depletion, deforestation, and indigenous rights to address, among other things, the following questions: What kind of knowledge matters in environmental governance? When do civil society actors influence environmental management? What kinds of civil society actors? Do environmental problems affect our shared humanity?

Turning in Assignments:

In the interest of sustainability, ALL assignments, unless otherwise noted are to be turned in electronically to Canvas. If you are having personal or other difficulties that are interfering with your ability to complete the assignments, you must let the instructor know as soon as possible so that accommodations can be made as necessary. Reasonable allowances will be made for all religious observances, family and medical emergencies. Please do not request extra credit or extensions after the fact.

Participation:

As a seminar, this class lives and dies by the quality of student participation. In turn, student participation is going to depend entirely on how prepared you are to delve into the readings and explore the content therein. Do you understand the concepts? Is there something new and informative? Or, conversely, off-putting and contestable?

As a result, before you do any readings, first think about (and write down) some initial thoughts inspired by the topic of that day. For example: Why should we talk about “justice” in the environment? Is geoengineering a “just” way to regulate environmental problems? Is environmental justice compatible with a national security state?

Second, as you begin reading the assigned articles, look for new concepts, terms, and definitions, and come prepared to go over these concepts/terms/definitions. Each day, we will go over the main concepts to ensure that we’re all on the same page about what they mean.

Third, highlight passages of interest in each article, and come prepared to discuss why they’re of interest to you. In the first part of the semester, we will start each class by going around and discussing key areas you’ve identified in the texts. This will be a great way to get people used to discussing the material. We may change this format as time goes on, and as people begin feeling more comfortable with the material.

If you’re not prepared to discuss particular passages, or if you haven’t picked any out, it’s going to look bad, and everyone is going to feel bad. In picking out passages, you might highlight & choose passages because they (for example):

1. Reinforce other articles that have been assigned
2. Contradict other articles that have been assigned
3. Seem counterintuitive or problematic, or completely wrong-headed
4. Validate something you’ve thought of before, but lacked the words to express
5. Clarified something in a helpful manner
6. Are fundamentally unclear, such that you have no idea what the author is trying to say
7. Any other issues that make those passages of interest. Note: EVEN (maybe particularly when) PASSAGES ARE UNCLEAR, MUDDLED, BIZARRE, those can still be very, very useful to discuss, so don’t be afraid of choosing sections that are completely wtf. Those can be tremendously helpful to highlight!!!

Please note: you can and are very highly encouraged to email me your questions or comments ahead of time.

Student Presentations:

Presentation and Follow-Up Papers

Each student will do 1 PRESENTATION (probably with a partner or two) of no more than 30 minutes over the course of the semester on the topic of the assigned day. In the presentation, you and your partner(s) should find some combination of one or two articles from either major journals/news magazines/news sources and/or policy documents /press releases/ statements from major global actors on an environmental problem connected to the relevant themes.

Major journals/news magazines/news sources could include *Foreign Affairs*, *Géopolitique*, *Radio Ambulante*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Diplomat*, *El Hilo*, and *National Geographic*. Major global actors that produce on the environment could include UNEP, the World Bank, the WTO, and the IPCC, as well as NGOs, such as Indigenous Environmental Network, the Basel Action Network, La Via Campesina, and the WWF.

In the presentation, you and your partner(s) will, and using the articles you found, do the following:

- 1) Explain the main points of the article you found that you want to highlight that are relevant to the course. Does the article provide information on how gender shows up in environmental stress? Does it explore the challenges of the economic commodification of nature? Does it detail the militarization of global conservation? Things like that.
- 2) Explain how the readings and points can help us contextualize and make sense of what the article shows. This would include things like: “this article highlights how violence is used in conservation programs in ways that illustrate x author’s discussion of the concept *fortress conservation*,” or something like that.
- 3) DO NOT SUMMARIZE THE READINGS. The assumption is that the class will have read the assigned course materials, so we should be all familiar with the terms and ideas (ahem), but not with the information the presenters are bringing.
- 4) If relevant, you might also use the article you find to critique the readings (where are their arguments thin, what do they miss, how could they be strengthened – if possible)
- 5) Bring up key questions/debates from the article you find to frame the class discussion

PLEASE NOTE: The format of the presentation is completely open. You can present as a mock debate, conversation with the class, with a video, slideshow, or any other format you wish. It’s entirely up to you, as long as you engage substantively with the readings and material.

You should submit a presentation follow-up 1 week after your presentation wherein you respond to the points raised in class by the other students and professor (for a total of 1 FOLLOW-UP PAPER per student). The follow- up papers can be written in a more informal style, but should be formatted to the following specifications:

12pt Times New Roman/Cambria/Calibri/Garamond font

1" margins

Single-spaced

1,000 – 1,500 words MLA/APA/Chicago citation style

Response Papers:

2 papers total, one due at the end (Friday) of **Week 4** and the other in **Week 10**

Over the course of the semester, each student is to submit 2 RESPONSE PAPERS for the semester (see due dates above).

Please read the following CAREFULLY: Here's how you write a response paper:

Write a synthesis of and response to the assigned readings/documentary covering at least TWO days of the preceding weeks. In this synthesis, you should

- 1) Choose a clear thesis statement. That is, one main argument, drawn from the readings, that you are going to make. For example, if I did a set of readings on trade, labor, and globalization in different countries, my thesis statement could be something like: "Globalization has weakened the labor force in x countries. As we have seen, labor movements in different areas have responded by y." Please note, here I have deliberately chosen a topic that does not come up in the class, purely as an example.
- 2) Elaborate on your point by making clear and relevant references to the assigned readings. You do not necessarily have to refer to ALL the readings, but I expect you will refer to the ones that are relevant to the point you are making.
- 3) Write a conclusion that brings your points together.

Response papers will be assessed by how well they meet the following criteria:

- 1) Clarity of thesis statement. Make sure your paper has a point that makes sense. Please note: this is general advice that is applicable every single class you ever take, and every single writing assignment/task for the rest of your life.
- 2) Organization of points. Do not ramble. Have a clear train of thought.
- 3) Quality of writing. Phrasing, grammar, clarity of expression – these are all important, not only in this course, but in life.
- 4) Ability to incorporate readings into your argument. No matter how well a paper is written, if it does not show engagement with the assigned readings, it will be penalized.
- 5) Ensure that the points you are making in the body, and the readings you choose build on your thesis. Don't get off track.
- 6) Depth of analysis and originality. I don't want to read just a regurgitation of the points. For example, do not write a paper in which you say: "Author 1 said this. Author 2 said that. The end." I want to see your reflections on the readings, which will look something like this: "Author 1 said this. Author 2 said that. This shows the importance of x to y situation." The more engaged, original, creative, and insightful your analysis is, the better your paper will be.

Response papers are to be formatted to the following guidelines.

12pt Times New Roman/Cambria/Calibri/Garamond font

1" margins

Single-spaced

1,000 – 1,500 words MLA/APA/Chicago

citation style

Research Paper: Due on the second day of finals as scheduled by the Registrar

Each student will write a research paper on environmental justice in an environmental issue-area of their choice. For example, you may write about a transnational campaign to protect indigenous land-use rights; a global third- party certification scheme; or advocacy and awareness-building efforts by an ENGO coalition in environmental justice. In so doing, you should talk about some of the themes that have been raised in class, such as (but not limited to): the role of capitalism, state authority, racism, post-coloniality, privatization, the role of narratives, and gender issues. You must show how these affect the global and transnational governance of the environment in your issue area. Whether you take a critical approach or not is entirely up to you. Your final paper should also be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for undergraduate research (e.g., the Journal of Politics and Society, published by Columbia University). Follow the formatting guidelines for the journal.

Please note: students are required to keep a research paper journal, updated weekly, in which you talk about your research paper so I can track your progress. It doesn't have to be that deep. Just updates on whether or not you have a topic yet, idea about timeline, what you're thinking about, etc.

Grading: Due on the last day of the finals period

Grading will be done by **self-assessment**. Details and handouts to follow.

The self-assessment is to be turned in by the last day of the finals period

Grading		Contribution
Participation (showing up, preparedness, discussion, etc.)		moderate
Response Paper x2		Each paper is moderate
Presentation and Discussion Leading		moderate
Follow Up Paper		minor
Research Paper		major
	Journal of progress	
	Final paper	

Textbooks:

The following textbooks are REQUIRED. Copies of some of them will also be made available electronically.

Mitchell, Audra. 2023. *Revenant Ecologies: Defying the Violence of Extinction and Conservation*. University of Minnesota Press

Neta Crawford. 2022. *The Pentagon, Climate Change, and War: Charting the Rise and Fall of US Military Emissions*. MIT Press (copies available on Canvas)

Iheka, Cajetan. 2021. *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics*. Duke University Press

Pellow, David Naguib. 2007. *Resisting global toxics: Transnational movements for environmental justice*. MIT Press.

Center for International Governance Innovation [CIGI]. 2018. Special Report. Available online at:

<https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/documents/UNDRIP%20Fall%202018%20lowres.pdf>

COURSE READINGS AND SCHEDULE

Week 1: What is Environmental Justice? A Contested Subject

Sept 10 Readings

- Fuentes-George, Kemi. 2021. "The Comparative Politics of Environmental Justice." In Sowers et al, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Environmental Politics* (Canvas)
- CIGI Special Report, pp. 53-61
- Schlosberg, David and David Carruthers. 2010. Indigenous Struggles, Environmental Justice, and Community Capabilities. *Global Environmental Politics*, 10 (4): 12-35 (Canvas)
- Pellow, David Naguib. 2016. Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies. *DuBois Review*, 13 2 (1): 221-236 (Canvas)

Week 2: Biodiversity Conservation and Indigenous Rights – A Contested Relationship

Sept 17 Readings

- Rai, N.D., Devy, M.S., Ganesh, T., Ganesan, R., Setty, S.R., Hiremath, A.J., Khaling, S. and Rajan, P.D., 2021. Beyond fortress conservation: the long-term integration of natural and social science research for an inclusive conservation practice in India. *Biological Conservation*, 254, p.108888. (Canvas)
- Banerjee, S. and Dunaway, F., 2023. Beyond fortress conservation: postcards of biodiversity and justice. *Environmental History*, 28(1), pp.180-207. (Canvas)
- *Revenant Ecologies* Chapter 2: (Bio)Plurality
- "WWF's Secret War." *BuzzFeed News*, March 4, 2019. Available online at: <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tomwarren/wwf-world-wide-fund-nature-parks-torture-death>

Week 3: International Conventions as Rights Defenders: UNDRIP and ILO Convention 169

Sept 24 Readings

- Côté, Isabelle et al. 2025. The Global Implementation of UNDRIP: A thematic overview. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 29 (2): 306-330 (Canvas)
- CIGI Special Report pp. 1-32
- Larsen, Billy. 2020. Contextualizing Ratification and Implementation. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 24: 94-111 (Canvas)
- UN Office of the High Commission on Human Rights. "The Universal Declaration: A Catalyst for Environmental Human Rights Action." Available at: <https://bit.ly/481ex5M>
- Bentham, Jeremy. 1843. Critique of the Doctrine of Inalienable, Natural Rights. Available online at: <https://www.ditext.com/bentham/bentham.html>

In-class exercise on international environmental institutions and environmental rights

Week 4: How the Stories We Tell Shape the Natural World

Oct 1 Readings

- *African Ecomedia*, Introduction
- *Revenant Ecologies*, Apocalyptic Conservation
- Saab, Anne. 2023. "Discourses of Fear on Climate Change in International Human Rights Law." European
- Bettini, Giovanni. 2013. Climate Barbarians at the Gate? A Critique of Apocalyptic Narratives on 'Climate Refugees.' *Geoforum*, 45: 63 – 72 (Canvas)
- Fagan, Madeleine. 2017. "Who's Afraid of the Ecological Apocalypse? Climate Change and the Production of the Ethical Subject." *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 19 (2): 225-244 (Canvas)

In-class exercise on narratives and ethical subjects

Week 5: State Formation and the Struggle for Rights

Oct 8 Readings

- *Revenant Ecologies*, Chapter 4: "Invasive States"
- *Resisting Global Toxics*, Chapter 1
- National African American Reparations Committee. 2022. Slavery Fueled Our Climate Crisis. Available online at: <https://reparationscomm.org/reparations-news/slavery-fueled-climate-crisis-reparations-can-slow-it-down/>
- Emily Schmidt. 2024. Through Colonial Practices of Extractivism. *The Arctic Institute*. Available online at: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/through-colonial-patterns-extractivism-self-governance-sustainable-path-forward/>
- Go to the NDN Collective's page on LANDBACK, and read about some of the anti-colonial struggles in the movement there: <https://ndncollective.org/landback/>

Week 6: Transnational Networks as Rights Defenders: Advocacy and Waste

Oct 15 Documentary In-Class Screening and Discussion:

- In class, we will be watching “A Week in one of World's Largest Toxic Waste Dumps.”

Readings

- *Resisting Global Toxics*, Chapters 2 and 3
- *African Ecomedia*, Chapters 2-3 (to be read before we watch the documentary together in class)
- Go to the website of the Basel Action Network, and read about their projects: <https://www.ban.org/>

Week 7: Privatization, Neoliberalism and Nature

Oct 22 Readings:

- Kolinjivadi et al. 2017. Neoliberal Performatives and the ‘Making’ of Payment for Ecosystem Services. *Progress in Human Geography*, 43 (1) (Canvas)
- Go to the Indigenous Environmental Network page on Carbon Trading here: <https://www.ienearth.org/category/climate-justice/carbon-trading-and-offsets/>
- Listen to *Radiolab*, “Ghosts in the Green Machine” podcast. Available online at: <https://radiolab.org/podcast/ghosts-in-the-green-machine>
- Fuentes-George, Kemi. 2023. “The Legacy of Colonialism on Contemporary Climate Governance.” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 24 (1): 91-98 (Canvas)

Week 8: Naturalized Injustice – Disasters and Social Marginalization

Oct 29 Readings:

- “Climate-Linked Ills Threaten Humanity,” The Washington Post, Sept 5, 2023. Available online at: <https://wapo.st/3sHayv2>
- García-López, Gustavo. 2018. “The Multiple Layers of Environmental (In)Justice in Contexts of (Un)Natural Disasters. *Environmental Justice*, 11 (3): 101-108 (Canvas)
- Shelton, Jason and M. Nicole Coleman. 2009. After the Storm: How Race, Class, and Immigration Concerns Influenced Beliefs About the Katrina Evacuees. *Social Science Quarterly*, 90 (3): 480 – 496 (Canvas)
- Bradley, Megan. 2017. More Than Misfortune. *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 11 (3): 400-420 (Canvas)

Watch up to 1:11:11 of “When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Parts – Part I and II.” Available online at: HBOMAX and on YouTube

Week 9: Climate and National Security – Strange Bedfellows

Nov 5 Readings

- *The Pentagon, Climate Change, and War*, Introduction and Chapters 5, 6, and 8
- “Tackling the Climate Crisis.” US Department of Defense series. Available online at: <https://www.defense.gov/spotlights/tackling-the-climate-crisis/>

Week 10: Large Dams and Intersecting Injustice

Nov 12: Documentary Screening in Class

- “Explained: World’s Water Crisis,” Netflix

Preparatory Readings to be Completed Before Class:

- Braun, Y.A., 2011. Left high and dry: An intersectional analysis of gender, dams and development in Lesotho. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13(2), pp.141-162. (Canvas)
- Khagram, S., 2002. Restructuring the global politics of development: the case of India’s Narmada Valley
- Kaneti, M., 2020. Dams, neoliberalism, and rights: Mainstreaming environmental justice claims. *Sustainable Development*, 28(2), pp.424-434. (Canvas)
- Dams. *Restructuring world politics: Transnational social movements, networks, and norms*, pp.206-30. (Canvas)
- Read about the Narmada Bachao Andolan struggles up to 2019 here: <https://narmadaandolan.org/category/home/articles/>

Week 11: Half the Sky: Gender, Knowledge, and the Environment

Nov 19 Readings

- Buck, Holly Jean, Andrea R. Gammon, and Christopher J. Preston. 2014. Gender and Geoengineering, *Hypatia* 29(3): 651-669 (Canvas)
- Carey, M., Jackson, M., Antonello, A. and Rushing, J., 2016. Glaciers, gender, and science: A feminist glaciology framework for global environmental change research. *Progress in Human Geography*, 40(6), pp.770-793 (Canvas)
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3): 575-599 (Canvas)
- *Revenant Ecologies*, Earth/Body Violence
- CGI Special Report, pp. 33-42 and 73-84

THANKSGIVING RECESS

Week 12: Final Thoughts: Imagining a Better World

Dec 3 Readings

- *African Ecomedia*, Chapter 4

- *Revenant Ecologies*, Chapter 7 and Conclusion
- *Resisting Global Toxics*, Chapter 7
- Solnit, Rebecca. 2023. Why Climate Despair is a Luxury. The New Statesman. Available online at: <https://www.newstatesman.com/environment/2023/07/rebecca-solnit-climate-despair-hope>