

## **Encountering Others: Difference at home and abroad**

CC Alumni Reading Group Syllabus 2022-2023

*This reading syllabus is dedicated in memory of Keith Schoppa (1943-2022) who taught many seminars in CC. Professor Schoppa opened my eyes to the world outside the west, the importance of “encountering others,” and allowing yourself to be changed by such encounters.*

This syllabus is an abbreviated version of a recent CC seminar. The approach is not linear or historical, but rather, asks you to tack back and forth thematically putting different voices, views, and experiences into conversation. The seminar examines the central question: what are our options as humans when we encounter people who are different than ourselves? Through interdisciplinary readings from around the globe, both historical and contemporary, the class analyzes ways to navigate cultural, economic, and religious differences. The variety of genres address this central anthropological question from different angles and contexts and the authors represent a range of diverse global perspectives. Throughout the semester we tack back and forth between reading travelers from the past including Herodotus, Ibn Fadlan, and early explorers along with novels by Nadine Gordimer and Shūsaku Endō, all of which illustrate the ways that people encounter difference when one party or the other was travelling, exploring, conquering, or living far from home. To build on these travel accounts, we read a selection of recent social theory that analyzes the challenges and benefits of living in a pluralist society where we encounter difference on a regular basis at home. Guided by readings from contemporary thinkers such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, and Eboo Patel we examine what it means to live together with difference today.

A little context for this seminar: I have taught this course three times now in the spring of 2016, fall of 2018, and fall of 2020. You can pause a moment and think about our own historical context from 2016 to today and imagine some of the challenges that students and I faced in this countercultural approach to a passionate, reasoned, civil, and intellectual conversation about things that matter deeply and about which we disagree (often vehemently); but I suspect you will also see, immediately, the import of those fraught and unfinished conversations. What you have here is a shorter version of the course, focusing on complete texts as much as possible.

One final note: This topic will undoubtedly touch on issues that your reading group members are passionate about and disagree about. It will be nearly impossible not to come near any of the livewire issues of our day. You might find it helpful at the start to acknowledge the challenge that discussions across and about difference on the things that matter the most to us are critical and challenging. Thinking back to the best of your CC seminar discussions will help you push against the contemporary impulse to shout uninformed or partially informed talking points at each other.

There is much to think about and grapple with in each of these texts. Enjoy the conversation!

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### **Texts:**

- Gordimer, Nadine. 2001. *The Pickup*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. [9781250024046]
- Appiah, Anthony. 2006. *Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. [9780393329339]
- Travelers excerpts: Herodotus, Ibn Fadlan, Columbus, and Vespucci excerpts, Marshall Sahlins' article. [PDFs provided]
- Endō, Shūsaku, and Van C. Gessel. 1997 or 2018. *The Samurai*. New York: New Directions. [9780811213462 or 978-0811227902]
- Patel, Eboo. 2010. *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. [9780807006221]
- Barbara Kingsolver. 2013. *Flight Behaviour*. Harper. [978-0062124272]

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### First Discussion: Personal Encounters

**Reading:** Gordimer, Nadine. 2001. *The Pickup*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Nadine Gordimer (1923-2014) was a South African writer and political activist. She was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991. Gordimer's writing deals with moral and racial issues set in and around apartheid in South Africa. Several of her novels were banned under that apartheid regime and she was active in the anti-apartheid movement. *July's People* (1981) and *Sport of Nature* (1987) are her most famous novels. *The Pickup* is a later and less well-known novel that sets the stage for our thinking about encountering others through an intimate encounter.

This novel was written and set about a decade after the end of apartheid. *The Pickup* revolves around Julie Summers, a young professional in Johannesburg. In the background of this novel, we have the memories of apartheid South Africa, as seen through Julie and her friends who have moved past the issues that plagued their fathers' generation. But we also see, immigration and alienation, class and economic power, religious faith and faith in progress, and the human capacity for and challenge with understanding across these divides.

Gordimer's writing can be a challenge as she keeps her reader at a distance. This novel plays with the way we connect with other people, what we know when, and what we can never fully understand about another person. Through the relationship between two lovers, Gordimer gives us a deeply personal encounter across difference in status, gender, race, and religion with insights into two different cultures and class systems.

### Tips for reading:

- 1) I encourage you to pause and reflect or answer the following questions along the way to enhance the way the story unfolds, and the characters develop. In class we discuss after page 64, page 170, and the end.
- 2) I encourage you to mark at least one passage (1-3 pages) that the group can close read and probe considering the novel's overall themes.

### Discussion questions:

- It is good to think about who the characters are and how they grow over the course of the novel. What do you make of Julie, of Abdu?
- What do you make of Gordimer's prose, the "—," her style of writing conversation? Does her writing style help us *feel* the disconnect between the characters? Does it draw us in because we must work harder to follow the lines of thought?
- There are two distinct settings in this novel. What do we know about each? What don't we know? How are they different or similar? What work is Gordimer doing with these two settings.
- At many points throughout the novel, Gordimer is thinking about our experience of time when we are waiting, when we don't have control over circumstances, and when we do. Phrases indicating waiting or being in a holding pattern like "no future only present," "in the meantime," and the like pepper the text. How does this add to the novel?
- What are key moments when we see the privileges and constraints of the context on these characters? Put another way, when do they have choices, resources, and when don't they?
- What will happen next, after the end? Is this a cruel ending?

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- After having read the whole novel, return to the opening few pages. How is Gordimer setting the scene here? What do we expect? Do those expectations play out? Do you return to this passage with new insight at the conclusion?
- What do we learn from this particular encounter, from their different circumstances, personalities, desires?
- What is easier or harder between Julie and Abdu, to translate or to comprehend? How do we separate out their individual personalities and the more shared aspects of this personal encounter.

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### Second Discussion: Cosmopolitanism

**Reading:** Appiah, Anthony. 2006. *Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co

Kwame Anthony Appiah (AP-ee-ah) is a prolific philosopher and ethicists with interests in the philosophy of language and mind as well as African intellectual history. For much of his career, Appiah was the Rockefeller University Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University before moving to New York University (NYU) in 2014 where he holds an appointment in the Department of Philosophy and NYU's School of Law. He currently serves as This year Appiah President of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Appiah was born in London but raised in Kumasi Ghana. His mother was a scholar of heritage, and his father was a lawyer, the head of the Ghanaian Bar Association, and, for a time, the Ghanaian representative to the UN. Appiah is thinking globally, having lived in Ghana, England, and the US—this book is about the possibility of a global community.

In *Cosmopolitanism* Appiah asks a simple question: what do we owe to others in our global age? In answering that question, he tacks back and forth between thinking at the global and the local level, positing a potential ethic for a world in which we are connected to others beyond our local communities, nations, even continents. His thesis is provocative and good to think with: “So there are two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism. One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences” (xv). Thus, this text aims to think through how we live together as global citizens with different values. Or put another way—given that there seems to be no set of universal values we can all agree on, are we left to a “to each their own” cultural relativism or can we live together better than that while holding different values?

With this text you will be forced to grapple with issues that we, as a culture, are not comfortable talking about—difference, justice, inequality; you will likely find that you disagree about what humans are like, and maybe even what they should be like. As a truly global philosopher, Appiah is well-equipped to start us thinking about what it means to be citizens of the world—cosmopolitans.

#### Tips for reading:

- 1) There are a lot of ideas, arguments, and examples peppered throughout this book. As you read make note of which examples or images helped elucidate a central issue or theme for you? Which ones made you think or raised new questions? If you find that nothing makes you think more deeply as you read or if it is making you angry, consider taking a step back and reading generously. This text will challenge *everyone* at one point or another; that is its **beauty**. Remember: you don't have to agree with him to allow the text to help you think deeply about something.
- 2) Appiah is good at recapping the central argument and pointing to the next point in the end of each chapter. You might find making note of those helpful for tracking the argument.

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### Discussion Questions:

- Why cosmopolitan? What does he mean by it? Does it work for you?
- What do you make of his thesis? Does he successfully support it? It puts into tension two things that we usually assume are two different inclinations or choices. Does trying to hold both, however difficult, shift the way you approach difficult conversations with people who think differently than you?
- There are a handful of places where Appiah makes stark claims, the first of these is on p. xx when he says, you can't respect human diversity and expect all to become cosmopolitan (xx). Similarly, the final paragraph of the introduction lays out the complex terrain of his overall project, ending with the importance of being in conversation. What is the challenge here and what parts of his text might be meeting the challenge and where does he fall short?
- Each time I teach this text students ask a version of the following set of questions: Is he telling us we have to like traveling? What if you didn't grow up internationally like him? Can you be cosmopolitan if you are from a small town where everyone is like you? What if, you just don't care about people who are different than you. You don't mean them any harm, you don't hate them, but really aren't that curious about their way of lives. Does that make you anti-cosmopolitan?
- Throughout the text Appiah uses a range of examples and metaphors or scenarios (the shattered mirror, "tolerate my intolerance," differing cultural understandings, conflicts between faith and medicine, repatriation, the golden rule) Is there one instance, scenario, example, metaphor that resonated with you? Was there one that really made you think (even if you disagree in the end)? Where were you persuaded in ways that surprise you?
- What is his argument about the role of reason vs. emotion and the role of warring values in our debates?
- How might we add the rise of social media to this picture. Does it connect us further or isolate us into echo chambers? Does it give us a different answer to Appiah's question?
- How have things changed since he was writing? Are there new issues, problems, challenges that cosmopolitanism helps us think through? What do you wish you could ask Appiah?
- Climate change might be the quintessential example of Appiah's main points today. The sides disagree on the facts and the interpretation of the facts, moreover, there are values and gut assumptions about the world and our place in it behind our views.
  - We disagree if the earth is warming significantly;
  - or if that warming is caused primarily by human activity;
  - or what nations/companies/communities should do about it (politics and economics);
  - or what individuals can/should do about it.

Are there other contemporary examples that through Appiah's cosmopolitanism helps us think about the ways we disagree and how to navigate those differences in community?

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### Third Discussion: Travelers

**Readings:** Excerpts from travelogues available as PDFs emailed to the reading group leaders.

This session we are shifting gears a bit to read a collection of travel narratives across the ages—Herodotus (c450BCE), Ibn Fadlan and the silk road (921-922 CE), and Asia and the Americas in the age of discovery in the 1600s. The final article is by cultural anthropologist Marshall Sahlins which gives us three distinct encounters and worldviews in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Tips for reading:

- You will want to skim some and select where to focus your attention. You could divide this into two sessions—Herodotus and Ibn Fadlan; Age of Discovery and Sahlins.
- Read for what the author is paying attention to. What do they notice and comment on—terrain, flora and/or fauna, culture, law, wealth, gender roles, race, religion.
- I sometimes tell students to pick a theme to track through all four texts—plants, animals, gender relations, religion, terrain, myth/folklore, food, or clothing, etc.
- Some helpful terminology for thinking with these texts:
  - Acculturation—changes that follow contact with other cultures; tends to be multi-directional
  - Assimilation—when one culture joins another, it is more unidirectional although both cultures always change in some ways

HERODOTUS: (c 484-521/415 BCE)

Herodotus wrote his *Histories* in the mid-400s B.C. He is sometimes referred to as the “father of history” and some consider this the first “world history.” His book was intended first and foremost as the story of the Greeks' long struggle with the Persian Empire, but Herodotus also included everything he was able to find out about the geography, history, and peoples of the world in which he lived. *Histories* provides one of our most detailed pictures of the world known to the Greeks of the 5th century B.C.E.

Herodotus was an adventurous traveler. His research for this book took him from his home in Halicarnassus in Asia Minor—the peninsula of western Asia between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean—through most of the then known world. His geographical descriptions are based on the observations that he made on this journey, combined with what he learned from the people he met. Herodotus saw his surroundings far more realistically than did most of his contemporaries; sometimes he even goes to the extent of doubting the truth of a story he reports second-hand.

One fun fact about the excerpts you have here: most classes that teach this text are thinking about Greek history especially the events leading to the Peloponnesian war (431-404). Most classes excerpt out the sections we are reading as digressions and wanderings which muddy the narrative of the tensions between Greek and Sparta. Flipping that narrative, I cut out all Peloponnesian war stuff to home in on the traveler.

AHMAD IBN FADLAN (c 879-960 CE):

From roughly 500-1500CE the East was thriving, many argue more than Europe, which was in the “dark ages” or Middle Ages. In this part of the world, trade routes ran from Africa through Japan and the largest and most thriving cities in the world were all—Delhi, Beijing,

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Constantinople, and Baghdad. This area is often referred to as the silk road, although that terminology was not used until 1877; moreover, it was not really one road, but rather a morphing set of trade and travel routes and silk was just one of the many goods that circulated along with knowledge, culture, and religion. The silk road carried travelers back and forth serving as a postal system, trade routes bringing silk, ceramics, spices, ivory, foods, furs, steel, ideas, and religion. While Christianity ruled Europe, here Islam and Buddhism both spread and thrived, along with a bit of Judaism and some Christians like Marco Polo.

Ibn Fadlan set out in 921 as a member of an embassy of the Abbasid caliph of Baghdad to meet the kind of the Volga Bulgars. He is most well-known for his account of a ship burial. The Caliph was the political ruler of the Islamic Empire. The Abbasid Caliphate was the third of the Islamic caliphates to succeed the Islamic prophet Muhammad. The Abbasid dynasty descended from Muhammad's youngest uncle from whom the dynasty takes its name. They ruled as caliphs, from the 750 CE to 1258 with their center in Baghdad. At this time, the capital city of Baghdad became a center of science, culture, philosophy, and invention during the Golden Age of Islam. One of the appeals of Islam for Central Asia was its strict and clear law. All the *umma* (community of the faithful) were governed by the idea that “before God, all Muslim worshippers were equal regardless of clan, family, or region.” It was also forbidden for a Muslim to kill or enslave another Muslim, so for clans and tribes on the steppes this had the potential of cutting across the hierarchies and protecting you from your neighbor’s aggressions. We see some of this playing out in Fadlan’s account.

### THE AGE OF DISCOVERY:

This book brings together excerpts of travel narratives from 1600 through 1800, gathered from both the East and the West. I have included Peter Mancall’s introduction to the volume and texts in this reading. Here we have large scale exploration combining trade, missionary, science (botany, agriculture, anthropology), and military all together on ships. In many of these writings, we see that the explorers were familiar with earlier travel writing and the ancients in particular. Columbus had a copy of Marco Polo on board with him.

### Discussion Questions:

- What is each author like as a traveler, narrator, ethnographer, cultural critic?
- Watch for repeated patterns, or differences in his encounters. Where is he generous, intrigued, judgmental.
- Find one episode, discussion, description that we need to delve into. The length will vary depending on what you chose.
- All the authors speak of having seen or heard of things that we now know as mythology or folklore? Which of these stand out to you?
- What are some similarities across these travelogues from different times and places?
- What are some significant differences across these travelogues from different times and places?
- Were there places where the author is more generous and curious and places where they were more judgmental or disapproving? Where did they find lessons they wanted to take home?



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MARSHALL SAHLINS, “COSMOLOGIES OF CAPITALISM.”

Marshall Sahlins (1930-2021) was an influential cultural anthropologist who spent his career at the University of Chicago. His work focused on the Pacific. This essay is the text of a lecture he gave in 1988. For our purposes, the framework in the beginning is dated and tells us more about Sahlins’ theory and the moment he was writing. And yet, the ethnographic picture and overall comparison he gives us helps us put three different worldviews in dialogue in important ways. The heart of the essay focusses on three snapshots of encounters with others in China, Melanesia and Hawaii, and British Columbia in the year 1793.

### Tips for reading:

- As you read, focus on what is happening in each of the cases he is looking at beginning on page 9. Then you can spin back out to his overall argument, and how we might put it in dialogue with our conversations about globalization today.
- Tabu—is a traditional Polynesian religious concept denoting something holy or sacred that includes a restriction or implies a prohibition. The English word taboo derives from this later meaning and dates from Captain James Cook's visit to Tonga in 1777.
- Mana—is a foundation of the Polynesian worldview; it is the spiritual life force energy or healing power that permeates the universe. Anyone or thing can have Mana. It is a cultivation or possession of energy and power, rather than a source of power. To have mana implies influence, authority, and efficacy.
- Potlatch—is a gift giving festival/ritual in Pacific northwest. It often involved a demonstration of wealth, like being able to host the lavish party. It involved hosting a meal sometimes for several days and gift giving. Some claim the English term “potluck” came from potlach, as outsiders witnessed a shared meal, but the origin is unclear.

### Discussion Questions:

#### China

- What is important about this worldview, hierarchy, cosmology?
- What is the encounter like—who is involved, assumptions on each side?
- What are the goods at stake here?

#### Hawaii

- What is important about this worldview, hierarchy, cosmology?
- What is the encounter like—who is involved, assumptions on each side?
- What are the goods at stake here?

#### The Pacific Northwest

- What is important about this worldview, hierarchy, cosmology?
- What is the encounter like—who is involved, assumptions on each side?
- What are the goods at stake here?

What story is Shalin’s telling with these three snapshots?

How does this connect with, add to, encounters and perspectives seen through this syllabus this far?

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### Fourth Discussion: Religion and culture

**Reading:** Endō, Shūsaku, and Van C. Gessel. 2018. *The Samurai*. New York: New Directions.

Shūsaku Endō (1923-1996) was a novelist known for his unique perspective writing as a Japanese Catholic author. Many of you read his novel *Silence* in Word and Image, which was made into a movie directed by Martin Scorsese in 2016. *The Samurai* guides the reader through a series of encounters from Japan, through Nueva España, to Spain and Rome. Along the way, we see Endō's true genius for helping us see the familiar through different eyes. At its heart, this novel is about faith, loyalty, sacrifice and betrayal; along the way we get thick cultural and religious encounters along with the politics of trade and imperialism. This is the book that students take home to their families, read together, and discuss. It is a rich and deep encounter.

Amazingly this story is based on historical events of which there are scant remaining details. Hasekura Rokuemon Tsunenaga (1571-1622) was a Japanese samurai who was killed as a *kirishitan* (Christian) in 1622. He was a samurai retainer to Date Masamune, the Sendai Daimyō. From 1613-1620 Hasekura was the leader of a diplomatic mission to Pope Paul V. The image above is a painting of Hasekura painted in Europe on his journey. Note the boat in the background.

A little context for this historical period in Japan. Like Hasekura's mission, the novel is set just after the *Sengoku* period (Age of warring states). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) unified much of central Japan. He was assassinated in 1582 and succeeded by Hideyoshi Toyotomi (1536-1598) who finished unification. As a part of his reign, Hideyoshi banned Christianity and Christians from Japan, beginning with the southernmost island of Kyūshū. On February 5, 1597, Hideyoshi had twenty-six Christians killed as an example to Japanese who wanted to convert to Christianity. Hideyoshi died suddenly in 1598 and his underage son/successor Hideyori lost power to Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) in 1603. The Tokugawa shogunate held power until 1868. "Naifu" and *His Lordship* in the novel refer to Tokugawa. This novel is set at the moment when Japan was on the verge of cutting off all ties with the west, except for Dutch trade ships which were allowed to dock at Nagasaki.

#### Tips for Reading:

- 1) This novel draws out themes that emerged in the travel narratives we read. Endō is adept at helping us see the world through Hasekura's eyes and he, too, attends to new sights, and sounds, smells and foods, foliage, and fauna.
- 2) For Christians, the language of "The Lord" easily means God, but the term, of course, comes from political hierarchies. The word lord was used for *daimyō* (warlord), and *shogun* (military/political leader) and those higher than you in Japan. This novel plays with that duality of trying to understand lords and relationships. This nuance can be lost on Christian readers. Are there other places where the translation of Christianity into Japan and from Japanese to English helps you see things differently, from a different angle?

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Figure 1: Hasekura portrayed during his mission in Rome by Archita Ricci, 1615  
([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasekura\\_Tsunenaga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasekura_Tsunenaga))

### Discussion questions:

- At the start of a novel, it is good to think about the characters and setting and emerging themes. Then we want to turn our attention to encounters.
- Read the first page and a half as a group. What do you notice? What imagery is important? Having read the novel what themes do you see here on page one?
- What is Rokuemon/the samurai like? The Priest/Velasco, Yozō, Nishii, Tanaka, Matsuki, other characters that stood out to you?
- Animal and land imagery abounds throughout the novel: birds, ants, peasants land, the new world and Spain and Rome. What imagery kept coming up? What moved you?
- One of Endō's real talents is giving us an important view of Christianity from the outside. This is particularly interesting because he was Catholic and yet the history of Christianity in Japan is one of an external religion. What are important images of Christianity in the novel?
- Throughout the novel, the samurai's musings about "what it means to worship someone suffering/dying on a cross" are ripe for discussion. [pp. 83, 108, 122, 159-60, 167, 216]
- The Japanese man in Nueva España is another pivotal moment worthy of thinking through?
- Close read the Baptism scene (p172-178). Is this what the whole novel has been leading up to?
- At the end of the novel, is the samurai a Christian? Was the mission successful?
- Who is Christ like in this novel?
- What is a Lord like in this novel?
- What other themes, scenes, encounters do you want to discuss with other readers in your group?

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### Fifth Conversation: Interfaith practices

**Reading:** Patel, Eboo. 2010. *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Eboo Patel is an American author, speaker, educator, and interfaith leader. As we learn in this book he holds a doctorate in sociology of religion from Oxford, where he studied on a Rhodes scholarship. Patel was born and raised in Chicago where he still lives and where Interfaith America, his organization, is located. As a civic leader he believes that religious diversity is an essential and inspiring dimension of American democracy. (<https://www.interfaithamerica.org>).

This is a different kind of book that our other texts, an autobiography with a purpose. Patel is outlining his journey to founding the Interfaith Youth Core. His story gives us details to think about the potential for religious pluralism, the role of both faith and diversity on college campus, and the importance of service in a life of faith. In each chapter of the book, Patel learns a lesson about faith, life, encountering difference, and working in the world. In reflecting on his life, he cites the lessons he learned from different people.

The Readings include a PDF of exercises that IFYC uses to cultivate conversation across faith. You could make use of them for a conversation or just think across them about the approach.

#### Discussion questions:

- Thinking along the lines of argument, what problem is he trying to solve? What is his thesis?
- In the first chapter, Patel asks: How does one ordinary young person's commitment to a religion turn into a suicide mission and another ordinary young person's commitment to that same faith become an organization devoted to pluralism? (12) Is this still a central question in our world or have things changed.
- In each chapter of the book, Patel learns a lesson about faith, life, encountering difference, and working in the world. In reflecting on his life, he cites the lessons he learned from different people. Which of these "lessons" stood out to you as particularly important?
- In a book that is without a doubt about religious pluralism, one of the surprising aspects is that he finds that in his personal life it is important to be with someone of your faith. What do you make of this? Does it complicate his argument?
- There is always tension between learning from someone else's life. What lessons that Patel learned resonate with you? What seems particular to him?
- What part of this is true, still true, what has changed? What is/are the central challenges for living together with difference today?
- On page 115, Patel outlines the important components of interfaith work—intercultural encounter, social action, interfaith reflection, Ubuntu. What do you think?
- Interfaith Youth Core has been doing great work across campuses for over a decade. How might this work in other organizations or institutions: communities, K-12 schools, among churches?

### Sixth Conversation: Climate and climate

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**Reading:** Barbara Kingsolver. 2013. *Flight Behaviour*. Harper.

Barbara Kingsolver is a well-known American fiction writer. She grew up in rural Kentucky and spent some time in the Congo with her family. Many of her novels are shaped by the landscapes and culturescapes she knows best. I must confess that I have never managed to fit this book into my class. It is on the long side for just one text of many during a semester and there is always so much to cover. But since you have more time, and it isn't a hard read, I have included it in this syllabus. The encounter in this novel is between the worlds that collide when monarch butterflies arrive on a farm in rural Tennessee when their migration patterns are disrupted by climate change. In the novel, this unexpected phenomenon is understood as a nuisance, miracle, scientific phenomenon, crisis, and sign of the end times all at once. The encounters in this novel are highlight the different lives we lead in the USA in gracious ways. In particular, class, access to education, science, religion, and life in a rural community all come together.

### Tips for Reading:

- The story is engaging. Remember to read it in the context of all the other things you have read for this syllabus so that you can home in on the ways that the characters encounter others as they interact with this miracle/climate phenomenon.

### Discussion questions:

- What do you make of the main characters: Delarobia Turbow? Ovid Bryon? Cub? Bear and Hester?
- What affect do the butterflies have on the characters? Town?
- How are the butterflies or their appearance understood differently by the characters or across the novel?
- What role does religion play in this novel? Find a passage that is elucidating.
- What role does science play in this novel? Find a passage that is elucidating.
- What are some of the differences between the worldviews in this novel?
- What role does class, education, religion, gender play in how this phenomenon is understood?
- In my questions for *Cosmopolitanism*, I asked a question about the ways we disagree about climate change (see above). Do any of those disagreements across values, language meaning, play out in this novel?