

**CURRENT PROBLEMS IN ANTHROPOLOGY II:
WRITING THE DISASTER: ENGAGING CONTEMPORARY VIOLENCE
Fall 2021**

Instructor: Basit Kareem Iqbal **Seminar:** Mondays, 8:30-11:20 (Zoom, link from A2L)
Email: iqbalb3@mcmaster.ca **Office Hours:** Mondays, 12-1 (Zoom, link from A2L)

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Course Description

Our world is built and sustained by violence; our collective and intimate lives are shaped by it. It is a longstanding topic of social-scientific investigation. This course does not theorize violence as a way of containing it (this is violence; that is not) or moralizing about it (violence is bad; or, some violence is good) or even distinguishing its types (structural vs. symbolic vs. state). Our aim instead is to think

anthropologically -- closely, contextually, comparatively -- about some of its contemporary formations. We will begin with critical theories of violence (Foucault, Arendt, Benjamin) and its racial infrastructure (Fanon, Hartman). We will consider the presentation of violence in image and narrative (Sontag, Butler) and its inheritance across generations (Han, Stevenson). And we will reflect on specific technologies of violence: torture, suicide bombing, and violation, for example (Ismail, Butler, Asad, Das). Throughout the seminar, reading ethnography, political theory, fiction, and film, we will keep a particular focus on the difficult representation of traumatic experience: seeking a form that does not sensationalize or instrumentalize or sanitize violence.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Express an understanding of theoretical and ethnographic approaches to violence
- Articulate central positions developed in the academic and public literature
- Critically and effectively communicate key arguments, both orally and in writing
- Locate themes, concepts, and topics from this course in relation to those from other courses

Required Materials and Texts

Other than the following, all course materials will be available on Avenue or through the McMaster library website. Please rent the films no earlier than two days before the relevant class, since some of them have timed streaming restrictions. Some of them we will watch during class time.

Book:

- Johannes Anyuru, *They Will Drown in their Mothers' Tears*, trans. Saskia Vogel (Two Lines Press, 2019)

Films not on Kanopy:

- Fatih Akin (dir.), *In the Fade/Aus dem Nichts* (2017) (\$4.99 on YouTube and Apple TV)
- Talal Derki (dir.), *Return to Homs* (2013) (\$3.99 on YouTube and Apple TV)
- Denis Villeneuve (dir.), *Incendies* (2010) (\$4.99 on YouTube and Apple TV)

Class Format

Weekly 3-hour seminar, held synchronously over Zoom. Our seminar will take advantage of the virtual format in various ways (break-out rooms, collective note-taking, an emphasis on visual and mixed-medium material).

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Four response papers (5% each) – 20%
2. Participation over the course of the term– 10%
3. Presentation and discussion facilitation – 20%
4. Peer review workshop – 10%
5. Term paper – 40%

Course Evaluation – Details

1. Four response papers (5% each), due weekly

Please upload four short response papers (2 pages, double spaced) to the relevant week's discussion thread on Avenue). They are due by 8pm on the Sunday night before our Monday morning class. They will be available there for everyone in the seminar to read; we may read or refer to them in class. These short papers should identify 1-2 key passages of the texts and comment on what you find important, significant, or difficult. That is, you are to practice close reading rather than summary reading. You may choose which texts to write about, so long as at least 2 response papers are submitted before week 6.

2. Participation over the course of the term (10%)

Every seminar session will begin with a few minutes of collective discussion (brainstorming, gathering questions, noting difficult passages). If we have a film to complete that day, we will watch it next. Then I will give a short lecture on the main themes and context of the day's material, after which we will have the day's presentation and broader discussion. The course material is conceptually and thematically complex; we will work through dense passages together in class each week. Read closely; watch the films attentively; be generous and courteous to others in the seminar.

3. Presentation and discussion facilitation (20%)

In the first week of the semester, you will sign up to present on the course readings and facilitate discussion in one of our meetings. This involves a 20-minute presentation of the course materials and 20 minutes of facilitating discussion (see the presentation assignment handout). Please upload a written version of your presentation to the Avenue dropbox beforehand.

4. Peer review workshop, on December 6 (10%)

The final class session will include a peer review workshop in which you will present and comment on each other's paper drafts or outlines. More details on format will be provided closer to the date.

5. Term paper, due December 17 (40%)

You may write your paper (10-12 pages, double spaced; Chicago-style citations) on any theme covered in the course, preferably one that is relevant and of interest to you. You are expected to draw on at least two of our course readings and five external sources. Feel free to build on the analyses you began in your response papers and presentation. Upload it to the Avenue dropbox by 11pm on December 17.

Weekly Course Schedule and Readings

Seminar 1 (September 13)

Against Moralism

- Introduction to the course, discussion of the following (no need to read beforehand):
 - Sven Lindqvist, "Bombing the Savages," trans. Linda Haverty Rugg, *Transition* 87 (2001): 48-64
 - Uday Mehta, "Violence," *Political Concepts*, <http://www.politicalconcepts.org/violence-uday-s-mehta/>
 - *Film*: Raoul Peck, "The Disturbing Confidence of Ignorance" (60 min), part 1 of *Exterminate All the Brutes* on Kanopy (**watch in class)

Seminar 2 (September 20)

From Ends to Means

- Richard J. Bernstein, *Violence: Thinking without Banisters* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), chapter 2 (“Walter Benjamin: Divine Violence?”) (first four sections only)
- Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Violence,” *The New York Review of Books* (February 27, 1969)
- Michel Foucault, “*Society Must be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 43-64 (lecture 3)
- *Film*: Peck, “Who the F* is Columbus” (60 min), part 2 of *Exterminate All the Brutes* on Kanopy (**watch in class)

Seminar 3 (September 27)

A World of Violence

- Ursula Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (4 pages)
- Elizabeth Povinelli, “The Child in the Broom Closet: States of Killing and Letting Die,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 3 (2008): 509-530
- *Film*: Peck, “Killing at a Distance or ... How I Thoroughly Enjoyed the Outing” (60 min), part 3 of *Exterminate All the Brutes* on Kanopy (**watch in class)
 - *Recommended*: Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 1-15 (“Introduction: Negotiating the Boundaries of Political Violence”)

Seminar 4 (October 4)

Representing Violence

- *Film*: Peck, “The Bright Colors of Fascism” (60 min), part 4 of *Exterminate All the Brutes* on Kanopy (**watch in class)
- Susan Sontag, “Regarding the Torture of Others,” *The New York Times Magazine*, May 23, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine/regarding-the-torture-of-others.html>
- Sharon Sliwinski, “On Photographic Violence,” *Photography and Culture* 2, no. 3 (2009): 303-315
- Judith Butler, “Torture and the Ethics of Photography,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25 (2007): 951-966

Fall Break (October 11)

Seminar 5 (October 18)

The Racial Infrastructure

- *Film*: Göran Olsson (dir.), *Concerning Violence: Nine Scenes from the Anti-Imperialistic Self-Defense* (2014, 1h 30) (on Kanopy) (**watch first half before class)
- Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961]), 1-25
- Dionne Brand, *Inventory* (2006) (10-page excerpt)
- Saidiya Hartman, “The End of White Supremacy, An American Romance,” *BOMB Magazine*, June 5, 2020, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/the-end-of-white-supremacy-an-american-romance/>

Seminar 6 (October 25)

Inheriting Violence

- Clara Han, *Seeing Like a Child: Inheriting the Korean War* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 1-59

Seminar 7 (November 1)

A Pedagogy of Violence

- Salwa Ismail, *The Rule of Violence: Subjectivity, Memory, and Government in Syria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1-64 (introduction and chapter 1)
- *Film*: Talal Derki (dir.), *Return to Homs* (2013, 1h 34) (**watch first half before class)

Seminar 8 (November 8)

Horror

- Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 1-5, 65-96 (introduction, chapter 3, epilogue)
- *Film*: Fatih Akin (dir.), *In the Fade* (2017, 1h 46) (**watch first half before class)
 - *Recommended*: Haitham Bahooora, "Writing the Dismembered Nation: The Aesthetics of Horror in Iraqi Narratives of War," *The Arab Studies Journal* 23, no. 1 (Fall 2015): 184-208

Seminar 9 (November 15)

Unbelonging part 1

- Johannes Anyuru, *They Will Drown in their Mothers' Tears*, trans. Saskia Vogel (Two Lines Press, 2019), first half
- Judith Butler, "Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time," *The British Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 1 (March 2008): 1-23.

Seminar 10 (November 22)

Unbelonging part 2

- Anyuru, *They Will Drown in their Mothers' Tears*, second half
- Mayanthi Fernando, "State Sovereignty and the Politics of Indifference," *Public Culture* 31, no. 2 (2019): 261-273

Seminar 11 (November 29)

Trauma and Witness

- *Film*: Denis Villeneuve (dir.), *Incendies* (2010, 2h 10) (**watch first half before class)
- Veena Das, "The Act of Witnessing: Violence, Gender, and Subjectivity," in *Violence and Subjectivity*, eds. Veena Das, Arthur Kleinman, Mamphela Ramphele, and Pamela Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 205-225
- Jean Genet, "Four Hours in Shatila," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 12, no. 3 (Spring 1983): 3-22

Seminar 12 (December 6)

Breaking Narrative

- Lisa Stevenson, "A Proper Message," in *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*, eds. Anand Pandian and Stuart J. McLean (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 209-221
- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *A Short History of the Blockade: Giant Beavers, Diplomacy, and Regeneration in Nishnaabewin* (University of Alberta Press, 2021)
- Peer review workshop

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

Response papers are to be posted to the week's discussion thread on Avenue. The written version of your presentation and your final term paper are to be uploaded to the respective dropbox on Avenue. Email me your term paper proposal.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

Late assignments will receive a 5% deduction per day late or part thereof—starting 24 hours after the assignment due date. Accommodations will be made for extenuating circumstances.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

Please use an MSAF to cover missed work that is worth less than 25% of your grade. An MSAF exception can be requested through your faculty office for work worth greater than 25% (with appropriate documentation).

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic

integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

University Policies

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Privacy Protection

In accordance with regulations set out by the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, the University will not allow return of graded materials by placing them in boxes in departmental offices or classrooms so that students may retrieve their papers themselves; tests and assignments must be returned directly to the student. Similarly, grades for assignments for courses may only be posted using the last 5 digits of the student number as the identifying data. The following possibilities exist for return of graded materials:

1. Direct return of materials to students in class;
2. Return of materials to students during office hours;
3. Students attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with assignments for return by mail;
4. Submit/grade/return papers electronically.

Arrangements for the return of assignments from the options above will be finalized during the first class.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

ADVISORY STATEMENTS

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AUTHENTICITY / PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

ONLINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

REQUESTS FOR RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC TERM WORK

McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF): In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar “Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar’s Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law

protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

