

DEATH & VIOLENCE

Fall 2019

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Seminar: Tuesdays 2:30-5:20pm
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Course Description

Is violence a form of politics? Is death the end of politics or can power continue to operate beyond the grave? Why are dead bodies such politically powerful objects? Do the dead have agency? This course considers topics in mortality and vulnerability including self-sacrifice, revolution, tragedy, grief & the hallowed dead. There will be a special focus on the development and use of listening skills in the course.

Please Note: This course will deal directly with difficult topics, including descriptions and representations of corpses, and discussions of suicide, grief and despair. Students should be alert to their own experiences going through these materials. Please speak to me if you experience distress related to any of our readings or discussions, as the goal is to address these topic productively. You can reach the Student Wellness Centre at (905) 525-9140 x27700 or by email at: wellness@mcmaster.ca.

Course Objectives

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

- Identify what makes violence *political*, including when violence has political origins or implications;
- Make meaningful distinctions between different kinds of political violence;
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of justifications for political violence;
- Contextualize the importance of mortality to contemporary political issues;
- Practice skills that counteract the drive toward political violence; and
- Analyze contemporary events in light of the theories covered in the course.

Required Materials and Texts

- The majority of your course readings are available in the Avenue to Learn site for this course. Please remember that Avenue is sometimes down, so access the readings well in advance.
- Remaining readings are from the following text, which has been ordered into the bookstore
 - Albert Camus. 2005 [1942] *The Myth of Sisyphus*. New York: Penguin Books.
 - Sophocles. 2003: *Antigone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Class Format

Seminar.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Peer Interview (20%), due on date to be assigned
2. Listening paper (10%), due Oct 8
3. Participation (30%) due, ongoing
4. Take-home assignment (40%) due Nov 29

Course Evaluation – Details

Peer Interview (20%), due on date to be assigned

Participate in a peer-interview exercise on the topic of that week's assigned readings. Each week will have one peer-interview pair randomly assigned. Each student will both be an interviewer and an interviewee, with each appearance worth 10% each.

Listening paper (10%), due October 8

Write a 500 word paper that reflects on and clearly address the flow of class discussion on October 1, It should include important contributions, shared ideas or agreements, points of difference, and the silences you detected among in what was and was not addressed. The aim of the paper is to showcase the value of listening skills, but the aim is not purely descriptive, and it should reflect some thoughtful engagement with what is heard, informed by a full understanding of the reading. It should provide complete citations for relevant readings although citations for class discussion are not required. A good listener will also note who was speaking and address their contribution fairly and respectfully.

Participation (30%), due ongoing

Includes attendance and meaningful participation in discussion. Students are encouraged to use the readings as a jumping off point for starting their own independent research and to bring this into class discussion (does not need to be based on scholarly sources, but does need to be reliable, so youtube, activist blogs, news reports, etc. are appropriate so long as they are vetted as legitimate). It stands in favour of your participation if you can **post links** to material in Avenue or bring and circulate relevant

materials at class; and at a minimum students should come to class prepared to discuss examples of issues from recent and current political events that would help the class think about the topics of specific readings. Another way to participate is through an exercise of 'presencing,' which is where you share information on an individual whose story (as it concerns violence, death, or they could be missing) has received limited attention in the media or popular discourse. The aim of the exercise is a way to bring this loss to awareness. Every student should aim to address at least one specific loss experience during the course.

Take-home assignment (40%) due Nov 29

Prepare a 1,500-2,000 word essay, with citations, addressing a question that will be provided November 26.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (Sept 3)

Introduction

Week 2 (Sept 10)

Antigone

- Sophocles. 2003: *Antigone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 3 (Sept 17)

Listening

- Andrew Dobson. 2014. "Learning about listening" in *Listening for democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 48-80 (32).
- Elaine Scarry. 1985. "Introduction" in *The body in pain: The making and unmaking of the world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-23 (20).

Week 4 (Sept 24)

The dead

- John Seery. 1996. "The academy" in *Political theory for mortals*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp. 1-42 (42).
- Thomas W. Laquer 2015. Part I: "Do the dead matter?" in *The work of the dead*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 35-54 (19).

Week 5 (Oct 1)

Bodies

- Katherine Verdery. 1999. "Dead bodies animate the study of politics" in *The political lives of dead bodies*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, pp. 23-53 (30)
- John Bourneman. 2014. "Abandonment and victory in relations with dead bodies" in Finn Stepputat ed., *Governing the dead*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 229-49 (20).

Week 6 (Oct 8)

Grief

- Judith Butler. 2004. "Violence, mourning, politics" in *Precarious life*. New York, NY: Verso, pp. 19-49 (30).
- Simon Stow. 2017. "A homecoming for Mrs. King: On the democratic value of African American responses to loss," in *American Mourning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 57-102 (45).

Notes: Listening paper due

Week 7 (Oct 15-18) Reading Week

Week 8 (Oct 22)

Spectacle

- Carlin A Barton. 1994. "Savage miracles: The redemption of lost honor in Roman society and the sacrament of the gladiator and the martyr" *Representations* 45: 41-71 (30)
- Kimberly Juanita Brown. 2014. "Regarding the pain of the other: Photography, famine and the transference of affect" in Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu, eds., *Feeling photography*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 181-201 (31).

Week 9 (Oct 29)

Sacrifice

- Rene Girard. 1977. Chapters 1-3 in *Violence and the sacred*, Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 39-88 (49).

Week 10 (Nov 5)

Self-sacrifice

- Achille Mbembe, , 2003. "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15 (1): 11-40 (29).
- Fierke K. M., 2013. "Political self-sacrifice" in *Political self-sacrifice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 33-54 (21).
- Nicholas Michelsen,. 2015. "The political subject of self-immolation" *Globalizations* 12 (1): 83-100 (17).

Week 11 (Nov 12)

Extinction

- Ashlee Cunsolo Willox. 2012. "Climate change as the work of mourning" *Ethics & the Environment* 17(2): 137-64 (27).
- Wendy Shaw & Alistair Bonnet. 2016. "Environmental crisis, narcissism and the work of grief" *Cultural geographies* 23(4): 565-79 (14)

- Claire Jean Kim. 2017. Murder and Mattering in Harambe's House. *Politics and Animals* 3: 1-15 (15).

Week 12 (Nov 19)

Disappearance

- Sarah Stillman. 2007. "The missing white girl syndrome': Disappeared women and media activism" *Gender & Development* 15(3): 491-502 (11).
- Amartya Sen. 1990. "More than 100 million women are missing" *The New York Review of Books* (December 20). (15)

Week 13 (Nov 26)

Mortality

- Albert Camus. 2005 [1942] *The Myth of Sisyphus*. New York: Penguin Books.

Notes: Take home assignment questions provided in class & due Nov 29.

Week 14 (Dec 3)

Law & Liberalism

- Robert Cover. 1986. "Violence and the Word" *The Yale Law Journal* 95 (8): 1601-29 (29).
- D. Stephen Long, & Geoffrey Holdsclaw,. 2011. "Is anything worth dying for?" in Michael L. Budde and Karen Scott, eds. *Witness of the body*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, pp. 171-89 (18).

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

- Students are expected to complete the assignments on schedule, except in cases of illness or immediate personal emergency covered by an MSAF.
- Submission by e-mail will not be accepted unless specifically requested by the instructor.

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

MARK	GRADE
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

- Late penalties of 10% per day (including weekends) will be assigned to work that arrives after the assignment deadline.
- Grade appeals should be made no sooner than 24 hours after the work is returned. If sufficient grounds exist, an assignment will be re-evaluated. Please note that re-evaluation may also result in a grade being lowered.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

- Unexplained absences not covered by an MSAF will affect participation grades. MSAFs should also be submitted in the case of illnesses that impact on a student's ability to complete an assignment.

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.

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 requiring a RISO accommodation 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

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

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 behavior 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.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

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.

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.