

DEATH & VIOLENCE
POLSCI 4DV3
Fall 2021, Term 1

Instructor: Catherine Frost
Email: frostc@mcmaster.ca
Lecture: Thursdays 11:30am-2:20pm
Room: Virtual (zoom links in Avenue)

Office: KTH 510
Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30-2:20pm

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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, trauma, grief and despair. Students should be alert to their own experiences going through these materials, and be aware that you can either step back from the material or seek support as appropriate. Please let me know if you experience distress related to any of our readings or discussions, as the goal is to address these topics productively, and your experience matters to how we approach these goals. 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.

Class Format

Virtual seminar.

Course Evaluation – Overview

1. Peer Interview (20%), due on date to be assigned
2. Listening paper (10%), due Oct 7
3. Participation (30%) due, ongoing
4. Take-home assignment (40%) due Dec 6

Course Evaluation – Details

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

Each week there will be a peer-interview presentation exercise on the topic of that week's assigned readings. Peer-interviews will be randomly assigned, but everyone will be appearing twice, once as interviewer and once as interviewee, with each appearance worth 10%. Interviewers will pose questions that help probe the ideas presented in the material. Interviewees will unpack the material by highlighting major arguments and their implications.

Listening paper (10%), due Oct 7

Write a 500-word paper that reflects on and clearly addresses the flow of class discussion that takes place on September 30 (in the second half of the class following the class presentations). The guidelines for good listening will be covered in the Dobson reading on Week 3, so the challenge is to put this guidance into action. A strong paper will note important contributions to the discussion, and identify shared ideas or agreements as well as points of difference. It will note who was speaking and address their contribution fairly and respectfully. Good listening also goes beyond recording events to notice patterns of speech, such as who or what was left out of discussion. It will take note of the setting, surroundings and ambient sounds of the environment that can shape the possibilities for discourse. It may also note silences or unexpected

voices. In short, the aim is not to be purely descriptive, or to go into extensive detail, but to be an open-minded observer. The exercise should reflect thoughtful engagement with what was heard, informed by a full understanding of that week's reading. It should provide complete citations for relevant readings although citations for class discussion are not required.

Participation (30%), due ongoing

Includes attendance and meaningful, well-prepared participation in discussion, and providing constructive feedback to your peers.

- An important element of participation is providing weekly peer evaluation and feedback for the interview presentations. Peer feedback should be submitted via Avenue no later than **noon on Friday**. Comments need not be lengthy but should identify what comments apply to which presenter individually by name, be constructive, avoid repetition, and provide examples of what worked and/or suggestions for improvement.
- Students are also encouraged to use the readings as a jumping off point for starting their own independent research and to bring this into class discussion (this 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.

Take-home assignment (40%) due Dec 6

Prepare a 1,500-2,000 word essay, with citations, addressing a choice of one of three questions that will be provided Nov 25.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (Sept 9)

Introduction

Week 2: Antigone (Sept 16)

- Sophocles, *Antigone*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bSnnufOx80>
- Bonnie Honig (2009) "Antigone's Grievs, Creon's Lament" *Political Theory* 37 (1): 5-43 (38)

Week 3: Listening (Sept 23)

- 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: The dead (Sept 30)

- 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: Bodies (Oct 7)

- 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).

Note: Listening paper due

Note: for more on the Canadian situation with unmarked Indigenous graves see the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee on deaths at residential schools available at:

http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Volume_4_Missing_Children_English_Web.pdf

Week 6: Midterm recess (Oct 14) NO CLASS

Week 7: Grief (Oct 21)

- 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).

Note: for more on the racialization of grief see W.E.B Du Bois' (1999) moving passage on the death of his young son, "Of the passing of the first-born," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Norton & Company) and Susan Mizruchi's essay "Neighbours, strangers, corpses: Death and sympathy in the early writings of W.E.B. Du Bois" which can be found in the same edition.

Week 8: Spectacle (Oct 28)

- 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).

Note: for more on photography and violence see Ariella Azoulay (2008) *The Civil Contract of Photography*. New York: Zone Books.

Week 9: Sacrifice (Nov 4)

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

Week 10: Self-sacrifice (Nov 11)

- 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: Extinction (Nov 18)

- 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: Disappearance (Nov 25)

- 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)

Note: For context, you can also consult the CBC archive of missing Indigenous women which gives details on the lives of these individuals.

<https://www.cbc.ca/missingandmurdered/>.

Week 13: Starvation & disease (Dec 2)

- James Daschuk (2013) "Treaties, famine and epidemic: Transition on the plains 1877-82" in *Clearing the Plains: Disease, politics of starvation, and the loss of aboriginal life*, Regina: University of Regina Press, pp. 99-126 (27)
- Bridget Conley and Alex de Waal (2019) "The purposes of starvation: Historical and contemporary uses" *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 17: 699-722. (23)

Note: Take home assignment questions provided in class & due Dec 6

Note: For more on starvation & disease in the Indigenous experience in Canada see also, John Molloy and Mary Jane Logan McCallum (2017) *A National Crime: The Canadian government and the residential school system*, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press; Tamara Starblanket (2018) *Suffer the little children: Genocide, Indigenous nations, and the Canadian state*. Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press; and Heather Howard (2014) "Canadian residential schools and urban indigenous knowledge production about diabetes" *Medical Anthropology* 33 (6): 529-545.

Week 14: Law & liberalism (Dec 8)

- 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

- Assignments should be submitted through Avenue to Learn.
- Students are expected to complete the assignments on schedule, except in cases of illness or immediate personal emergency covered by an MSAF.

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

[Insert policy on late assignments]

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

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”.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Academic Integrity Statement

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](#), 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.

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.

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.

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.