

POL 351:
Necropower and the Politics of Violence
Whitman College, Spring 2013
Tuesdays 7:30-10pm
Maxey 108

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Off. Hrs.: M 8-10am, Th 2:30-4:30pm

Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe posits necropower as “the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (2003). This course explores necropolitics as a mode of political practice that intertwines the power to kill with a concept of population. What are the conditions of possibility by which certain populations are targeted for violence and death, while others are exempt? By what determination are some forms of violence designated political, while others remain ineligible for such a designation? Our approach to the study of violence will be theoretical, historical, empirically grounded, and comparative, with particular attentiveness to gendered and sexual forms of violence.

We begin with extended reflection upon the *aesthetic politics* of violence. As elaborated by philosopher Jacques Ranciere, aesthetic politics refers to the ways in which technologies and practices associated with the production of art – including visual, audio, and literary culture – reorganize that which can be sensed. For Ranciere, art and cultural practices that introduce new ways of seeing, hearing, and *sensing* our world are politically significant because they call attention to subjects, bodies, relations, and possibilities that were previously *invisible or inaudible*. Our examination of the aesthetic politics of violence will focus on the ways in which violence is visually and conceptually framed for our reception. How do prevailing ways of framing war and mass violence impede or illuminate their complex causes and effects?

We will then consider philosophical and legal typologies of violence. We will reflect upon the distinctions theorists make between various modes of violence and evaluate the explanatory value of these typologies. In addition, we will examine case studies of necropower and mass violence drawn from different historical era, within the varied contexts of Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe. Finally, we will explore various efforts to think and act against necropower, as well as consider what some argue to be the liberatory potential of violence. (Consideration of such views, of course, should in no way be interpreted as an unequivocal endorsement of the perpetration of violent acts!)

Required Texts

The following **required** books will be available at the Whitman College Bookstore.

1. Cavarero, Adriana. 2009. *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*. New York: Columbia University Press.

2. Butler, Judith. 2009. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.
3. Hoffman, Danny. 2011. *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia.* Durham: Duke University Press.
4. Required Articles will be posted to CLEo, under “Resources.” Please print these articles and bring them to class.
5. Course Blog: This will be used by both myself and students to post relevant news, links, and occasional lecture presentations.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

1. Discussion Participation.....20%
2. Discussion Leadership..... 20%
3. Textual Analysis Papers.....40%
4. Final Analytic Essay.....20%

1. Discussion Participation (20% of final grade)

This class follows a seminar format based entirely on discussions. **Active, respectful, and critical engagement with the course material and other students is essential for success in the course.**

Students are expected to have carefully read and reflected upon the assigned texts, fully prepared for discussion. **At a minimum, effective participation involves bringing your text(s) and printed discussion questions to each class.** Please also look up terminology with which you are unfamiliar in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (available electronically on the Penrose website), and ask about these terms in class.

How much you participate is less important than how you participate. Discussion of difficult subjects such as racialized and gender violence requires a safe classroom environment in which each student can be trusted to respond respectfully, thoughtfully, and substantively.

To participate most effectively, contribute comments that:

- a. are brief and focused,
- b. clarify issues under discussion,
- c. introduce new perspectives,
- d. weave points made earlier into the present discussion thread,
- e. draw out quieter voices by asking questions of clarification, and
- f. treat others with respect even while challenging their positions.

2. Discussion Leadership

Student discussion leaders play a crucial role in the success of the course. To that end, discussion leaders must take their responsibilities very seriously.

- a. In a group with 1-2 other students, **each student will be responsible for leading discussion twice** during the course of the semester. A sign-up sheet will be distributed so you can choose which two class discussions you wish to lead.
- b. Discussion leaders should meet as a group outside of class and **create a set of discussion questions** to be distributed through the CLEo listserv by *no later than Sunday evening, 8 pm*, on the weekend preceding the class. ****All students are required to print, reflect on, and bring these questions to class.****
- c. Obviously, discussion leaders should have completed all the assigned readings prior to your group meeting. **Please use this group meeting to clarify concepts, themes, and arguments of the text(s), discuss disagreements of interpretation, and lay out the terrain you intend to cover in class discussion.** The quality of the class will depend on the quality of discussion questions you generate, so prepare them with adequate time and care. I may also add to, delete, or edit your questions for clarity and coherence. *Email me a draft of your discussion plan for comments by no later than 10am on Sunday.*
- d. Discussion leaders will **begin class with a brief presentation of 10-15 minutes** that will:
- (1) highlight discussion objectives,
 - (2) provide a brief biographical sketch of the assigned author(s), and
 - (3) provide any brief historical-empirical context for discussion of texts, as necessary.
- e. **Distribute responsibilities** among group members for the presentation, and for discussion leadership generally, as you see fit. Discussion leaders will facilitate throughout the class period, though I will intervene as necessary to keep discussion focused and productive. It requires substantial skill and careful planning to facilitate an effective discussion. You are encouraged to **utilize innovative strategies**, and to discuss your discussion leadership approach with me during my office hours. Discussion leadership techniques that are particularly effective in **ensuring all students' meaningful participation** will be assessed the highest evaluations.
- f. Your role as discussion leaders is to **guide the class' engagement of the text(s)** in ways that:
- (1) draw out primary themes,
 - (2) identify and analyze key arguments,
 - (3) clarify confusing concepts,
 - (4) make productive comparisons across texts, and
 - (4) highlight implications for our understanding of contemporary violence.
- g. **Discussion questions will be graded like a formal writing assignment**, with each set of questions counting for 5% of the final grade. Please make sure that all questions are carefully edited before sending them out to the class listserv.
- h. Apart from the written discussion questions, **the quality of your discussion leadership** will also be assessed, with each discussion leadership session counting for 5% of your final grade.
- i. Individual discussion leaders are expected to take clear responsibility for specific questions during the course of the discussion. Each member of the discussion leadership team should

assume responsibility for an equal number of questions. **Each student leader is expected to take an active role in guiding class discussion, both as an individual and as a member of a team.** Extreme unevenness in the quality of individual contributions to the team effort will cause the entire group's grade to suffer.

3. Textual Analysis Papers (40% of final grade)

Students are required to write **(8) Textual Analysis Papers** throughout the course. These are **not** merely bulleted discussion notes hurriedly thrown together at the last minute. These are short, focused writing exercises that require you to undertake serious critical analysis of the assigned texts. **These papers should demonstrate clear argumentation and elegant, nuanced textual analysis.**

You may choose any 8 of the class sessions during which **you are not responsible for leading discussions**, to submit a Textual Analysis Paper.

While you can occasionally choose to focus on a section of the readings (especially when the readings are very complex, or you have identified a particularly interesting and challenging issue), in general you are expected to analyze the readings in their entirety. These papers, even in their brevity, are supposed to be broad, rather than disproportionately in-depth in scope. Some things to focus upon in these papers include:

- identifying central theme(s) and/or questions.
- identifying the central argument(s).
- identifying the evidence mobilized by the author(s) to support their argumentation.
- identifying agreements, divergences, and connections among authors.
- critically engaging the argument(s) made in the readings. What new directions are enabled? What is compelling? What is not? What remains unaddressed?

Additional requirements:

- a. Write these papers using your own words and distinct voice.
- b. Include page numbers for all textual references.
- c. Provide a word count!
- d. You are encouraged to quote the text directly, but any direct quotes should not be included in your overall word count.
- e. Papers should be **600-800 words** in length.
- f. Papers should be posted to your CLEo Dropbox **prior to the start of class, on the day for which the readings are assigned.**
- g. You should also **come to class with a hard copy** to turn in.
- h. In fairness to all members of the class, no late papers will be accepted, as these will have benefited from class discussions. **No exceptions!**

4. Final Analytic Essay (20% of final grade)

Each student will write a final analytic essay in response to a prompt provided by me two weeks before the last day of class. The paper will ask you to reflect on the course material and discussions in their entirety. The paper should be approximately **7-8 pages** in length, double-spaced, using 12 point font, with 1" margins, and carefully edited before being turned in. The

final paper **must be posted to your CLEo Dropbox and submitted in hard copy by 6 pm on the last day of class** in the lockbox outside my office.

Criteria for the Evaluation of Discussion Participation and Leadership:

Discussion participation and leadership will be graded according to the criteria below. An individual's discussion contribution need not display all the qualities characteristic of a certain grade in order to receive that grade. That is, each student's contribution will be judged according to both general tendencies and specific accomplishments, in light of the following standards:

D and F range:

- Failure to participate.
- Obstructing the advancement of the discussion and the exchange of ideas.
- Failure to prepare the material.
- Absences.
- As a discussion leader, student is silent, seriously misrepresents the authors in question, attempts to lead the class in clearly counter-productive directions, and/or speaks in ways that work against the creation of an energetic, participatory, and reflective environment for discussion.

C range:

- Demonstrates a rudimentary or superficial grasp of the material.
- Active listening.
- Infrequent or poor quality references to the text to support student's views.
- Comments fail to advance the discussion.
- A serious problem with the level of participation, either in excess or in deficit.
- As a discussion leader, student speaks very little, asks interpretive questions about the text(s) that are not very provocative, and suggests comparisons to other texts that are not well thought-through. Student does little or nothing to foster an energetic, participatory, and reflective environment for discussion.

B range:

- Student offers comments that actively advance discussion.
- Ideas offered are substantive and based soundly on references to the text – participant is obviously well prepared for class.
- Active listening and volunteering of ideas.
- As a discussion leader, student speaks regularly and with enthusiasm, asks interpretive questions about the text(s) that are provocative, and suggests comparisons to other texts that are clear and compelling. Student is obviously concerned with trying to foster an energetic, participatory, and reflective environment for discussion, and succeeds in doing so to a significant degree.
- Overall, student may demonstrate inconsistent participation and/or leadership, fluctuating between A-range and C-range work.

A range:

- All the attributes of the B range, except that participation is consistently of the highest

quality and the most appropriate quantity.

- Student contributes notable insights into texts, especially those that make connections to other readings or question common assumptions.
- Student is engaging and articulate in style.
- Student enhances the participation of others in the class, even when s/he is not performing the assigned role of discussion leader.
- As a discussion leader, student speaks regularly and with enthusiasm, asks interpretive questions about the text(s) that are exceptionally provocative, and suggests comparisons to other texts that are especially insightful. Student is obviously concerned with trying to foster an energetic, participatory and reflective environment for discussion, and succeeds greatly in doing so.

Schedule of Assignments

Week 1.

1/15

- Mapping the course, introductions
- What compels us to study violence?
- On the concept of political community – listen and discuss, “All Our Relations,” Ulali
- View: *Murder by Proxy: How America Went Postal* (2010, Dir: Emil Chiaberi, 73 minutes)

Aesthetic Regimes of Violence

Week 2.

1/22

- Chow, Rey. “The Age of the World Target: Atomic Bombs, Alterity, Area Studies” (25-43), *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory & Comparative Work* (2006: Duke University Press). **CLEo**
- Ranciere, Jacques. “The Intolerable Image” (83-106), in *The Emancipated Spectator*, Transl. Gregory Elliott (2009: Verso). **CLEo**
- Zizek, Slavoj. “Introduction: The Tyrant’s Bloody Robe” and Ch. 1 “SOS Violence” (1-39) in *Violence: 6 Sideways Reflections* (2008: Picador). **CLEo**

Week 3.

1/29

- Cavarero, Adriana. *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*. (1-124)

Week 4.

2/5

- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War*, Introduction, Chptrs. 1 & 2 (1-100)

Week 5.

2/12

- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War*, Chptrs. 3-5 (101-184)

Necropower & Africa

Week 6.

2/19

- Mamdani, Mahmood. "Making Sense of Political Violence in Postcolonial Africa" (1-24), *Identity, Culture and Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 2, December 2002. **CLEo**
- Mbembe, Achille. Transl., Libby Meintjes. "Necropolitics" (11-40) *Public Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter 2003. **CLEo**

Recommended:

- Foucault, Michel. "Governmentality," **CLEo**
- Mbembe, Achille. "Sovereignty as a Form of Expenditure" (148-166) **CLEo**

Week 7. (MID-SEMESTER)

2/26

- Hoffman, Danny. *War Machines*, Preface, Introduction, Part I: Chptrs. 1-3 (1-126)

Week 8.

3/5

- Hoffman, Danny. *War Machines*, Part II: Chptrs. 4-7 (127-251)

SPRING BREAK 3/11-3/22

Necropower & Asia

Week 9.

3/26

Required:

- Robinson, Geoffrey. "Mass Violence in Southeast Asia" (69-88) in Abraham, Newman and Weiss, eds., *Political Violence in South and Southeast Asia: Critical Perspectives* (2010: United Nations University Press). **CLEo**
- Hedman, Eva-Lotta. "State of Siege: Political Violence and Vigilante Mobilization in the Philippines." **CLEo**
- Wieringa, Saskia. "Sexual Slander & the 1965/66 Mass Killings in Indonesia: Political and Methodological Considerations," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 41, No. 4, November 2011, pp. 544-565.

Recommended:

- Hamilton-Hart, Natasha. "External influences on political violence in Southeast Asia" (112-135), in *Political Violence in South and Southeast Asia*. **CLEo**

Week 10.

4/2

- Chatterjee, Partha. "Sovereign Violence and the Domain of the Political" (82-100)

CLEo

- Das, Veena. "Language and Body: Transactions in the construction of pain" (67-89), *Daedalus*, Winter 1996. **CLEo**
- Das, Veena. "Sexual Violence, Discursive Formations and the State" (2411-2422), *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31, No. 35/37, Sept. 1996. **CLEo**

Week 11.

4/9 **UNDERGRADUATE CONFERENCE – NO CLASS**

Necropower & the Americas

Week 12.

4/16

Required:

- Davis, Diane. "The Political and Economic Origins of Violence and Insecurity in Contemporary Latin America: Past Trajectories and Future Prospects," in *Violent Democracies in Latin America*, Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel M. Goldstein, eds., (2010: Duke University Press Books).
- Franco, Jean. "Rape: A Weapon of War" (23-35) **CLEo**
- Smith, Andrea. Ch. 1. "Sexual Violence as a Tool of Genocide" (7-34) in *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (2005: South End Press). **CLEo**

Recommended:

- Arias, Enrique Desmond and Daniel M. Goldstein. "Violent Pluralism: Understanding the New Democracies of Latin America," in *Violent Democracies in Latin America*.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization" (225-247), *Public Culture* 10(2), 1998. **CLEo**

Week 13.

4/23

Required:

- Deer, Sarah. "Toward an Indigenous Jurisprudence of Rape," *Kansas Journal of Law and Public Policy* 14 (2004) **CLEo**
- Smith, Andrea. *Conquest*, Ch. 2 "Boarding School Abuses and the Case for Reparations" (35-54) **CLEo**
- Smith, Ch. 4 "'Better Dead than Pregnant:’ The Colonization of Native Women’s Reproductive Health" (79-108) **CLEo**
- Smith, Ch. 5 "'Natural Laboratories:’ Medical Experimentation in Native Communities" (109-118) **CLEo**

Recommended:

- Deer, Sarah. "Decolonizing Rape Law: A Native Feminist Synthesis of Safety and Sovereignty," *Wicazo Sa Review*, Fall 2009: 149-167. **CLEo**
- Amnesty International USA. 2007. *Maze of injustice: The failure to protect Indigenous women from sexual violence in the USA*. **CLEo**

Liberation & Violence

Week 14.

4/30

- Benjamin, Walter. "Critique of Violence" (277-300), in *Selected Writings, Vol. I* (1999: Belknap/Harvard) **CLEo**
- Fanon, Frantz. "On Violence" (1-62), in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Transl. Richard Philcox (2004: Grove Press) **CLEo**
- Critical Resistance and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. "Gender Violence and the Prison-Industrial Complex" in *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (2006: South End Press) **CLEo**

Week 15.

5/7 Last day of class

- Potluck
- Final Analytic Essays due