

POL 351:
Necropower and the Politics of Violence
Whitman College, Spring 2014
Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:30-3:50pm
Maxey 108

Prof. Melisa Casumbal
casumbms@whitman.edu
Office: Maxey 133, 509-527-5889
Office Hours: Mondays & Thursdays, 4-5pm

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 Rancière, 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 Rancière, 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 also 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 eras, within the varied contexts of Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe. Finally, we will explore various efforts to think and act against necropower.

Required Texts

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

1. Baaz, Maria Eriksson and Maria Stern. 2013. *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War?: Perceptions, Prescriptions, Problems in the Congo and Beyond*. London: Zed Books.
2. Butler, Judith. 2009. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.
3. Puar, Jasbir. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham:

Duke University Press.

4. Roberts, Dorothy. 1997. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Vintage Books.

Required Articles: These will be posted to CLEo, under “Resources.” You are required to print these articles and bring them to class.

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. Course material is divided into discrete, weekly units. In a group with 1-2 other students,

each student will be responsible for leading discussion for (2) week-long units of class during the course of the semester. A sign-up sheet will be distributed so you can choose which two weeks of class discussions you wish to lead.

b. Discussion leaders should meet as a group outside of class and **create a set of discussion questions for the entire week's texts** to be distributed through the CLEo listserv by *no later than Monday evening, 8 pm*, on the day 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 Monday.*

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 (7) of the weekly units** during which you are not responsible for leading discussions to submit a Textual Analysis Paper.

**** All students are required to write (1) 'Textual Analysis Paper' on the Power & Privilege Symposium 2/20.**

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 **300-500 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.

1/21

- Mapping the course, introductions
- What compels us to study violence? What is violence?

I. Violence & Visuality: Aesthetic Regimes of Violence

Week 1.

1/23

- 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**
- Wood, Amy Louise. "Lynching Photography and the Visual Reproduction of White Supremacy," *American Nineteenth Century History*. September 2005, Vol. 6, Issue 3, p.373-399. **CLEo**

Week 2.

1/28 – UNIT 1

- Ranciere, Jacques. "The Intolerable Image" (83-106), in *The Emancipated Spectator*, Transl. Gregory Elliott (2009: Verso). **CLEo**
- Sobchack, Vivian. "Inscribing Ethical Space: Ten Propositions on Death, Representation, and Documentary," *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. p.227-257

Week 2.

1/30 – UNIT 1

- Projansky, Sarah. "The Elusive/Ubiquitous Representation of Rape: A Historical Survey of Rape in U.S. Film, 1903-1972," *Cinema Journal*. Autumn 2001, Vol. 41, Issue 1,

p.63-90. 28 pp.

II. Approaching Violence

Week 3.

2/4 – UNIT 2

- Cavarero, Adriana. *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*. Chptrs. 1,2,3,5,7,8,9 (4-13, 20-24, 29-46)
- Appadurai, Arjun. “Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization” (225-247), *Public Culture* 10(2), 1998. **CLEo**

Week 3.

2/6 – UNIT 2

- Mamdani, Mahmood. “Making Sense of Political Violence in Postcolonial Africa” (1-24), *Identity, Culture and Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 2, December 2002. **CLEo**
- Žizek, Slavoj. “Introduction: The Tyrant’s Bloody Robe,” **CLEo**

Recommended:

- Ch. 1 “SOS Violence” (1-39) in *Violence: 6 Sideways Reflections* (2008: Picador). **CLEo**

Week 4.

2/11 – UNIT 3

- Foucault, Michel. First lecture, *The Birth of Biopolitics, Lectures at the Colleges de France, 1978-1979*. 1-22.
- Foucault, Michel. “Police (continuation),” *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Colleges de France, 1977-1978*. 333-358.

Week 4.

2/13 – UNIT 3

- Lazzarato, Maruizio. “From Biopower to Biopolitics”

Week 5.

2/18 – UNIT 4

- Mbembe, Achille. Transl., Libby Meintjes. “Necropolitics” (11-40) *Public Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Winter 2003. **CLEo**

Recommended:

- Mbembe, Achille. “Sovereignty as a Form of Expenditure” (148-166) **CLEo**

Week 5. College-Wide Power and Privilege Symposium – No class

2/20

- Attend one morning and one afternoon event of the symposium
- Submit TAP to CLEo prior to next class addressing the following: How can the issues we’ve discussed thus far be related to issues examined in the symposium?

Week 6.

2/25 – UNIT 4

- Berlant, Lauren. “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency),” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 33, No. 4, Summer 2007. P.754-780.

Week 6.

2/27 – UNIT 5

- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War*, Chptr. 1: Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect (33-62)
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War*, Chptr. 2: Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag (63-100)

Week 7. (MID-SEMESTER)

3/4 – UNIT 5

- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War*, Chptr. 3: Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time (101-135)

Week 7.

3/6

- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War*, Chptr. 4: Non-Thinking in the Name of the Normative (137-163)

Week 8.

3/11 – UNIT 6

- Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages*. Preface & Introduction: homonationalism and biopolitics, ix-xxviii, 1-36
- Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages*. Chapter 1: The sexuality of terrorism, 37-78

Week 8.

3/13 – UNIT 6

- Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages*. Chapter 2: Abu Ghraib and U.S. sexual exceptionalism, 79-113

SPRING BREAK 3/15-3/30

Week 9. **Jasbir Puar in town**

*** REQUIRED: Monday 3/31 Jasbir Puar lecture, 7pm, location TBA**

4/1 – UNIT 7

- Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages*. Chapter 3: Intimate control, infinite detention: rereading the *Lawrence* case, 114-165
- **Jasbir Puar writing assignment due**

Week 9.

4/3 – UNIT 7

- Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages*. Chapter 4: “The turban is not a hat”: queer diaspora and practices of profiling & Conclusion: queer times, terrorist assemblages, 166-222

Week 10. UNDERGRADUATE CONFERENCE – NO CLASS

4/8

Week 10.

4/10 – UNIT 8

- 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:

- Deer, Sarah. “Toward an Indigenous Jurisprudence of Rape,” *Kansas Journal of Law and Public Policy* 14 (2004) **CLEo**

Week 11.

4/15 – UNIT 8

- Smith, Andrea. *Conquest*, Ch. 2 “Boarding School Abuses and the Case for Reparations” (35-54) **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**

Week 11. WPSA CONFERENCE – NO CLASS

4/17

Week 12.

4/22 – UNIT 9

- Baaz, Maria and Maria Stern. *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War?: Perceptions, Prescriptions, Problems in the Congo and Beyond*. London: Zed Books, 2013. Introduction, Chapters 1 (“Sex/gender violence”) and 2 (“‘Rape as a weapon of war?’”), pp.1-63

Week 12.

4/24 – UNIT 9

- Baaz & Stern, *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War?*, Chapters 3 (“The messiness and uncertainty of warring”), 4 (“Post-coloniality, victimcy and humanitarian engagement: being a good global feminist?”), and 5 (“Concluding thoughts and unanswered questions”), pp.64-114

Week 13.

4/29 – UNIT 10

- Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body*. Intro & Chapter 1: Reproduction in Bondage, 3-55

- Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body*. Chapter 2: The Dark Side of Birth Control, 56-103

Week 13.

5/1 – UNIT 10

- Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body*. Chapter 3: From Norplant to the Contraceptive Vaccine: The New Frontier of Population Control, 104-149

Week 14.

5/6 – UNIT 11

- Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body*. Chapter 4: Making Reproduction a Crime, 150-201
- Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body*. Chapter 5: The Welfare Debate, 202-245

Week 14.

5/8 – UNIT 11

- Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body*. Chapter 6: Race and the New Reproduction, 246-293

Week 15.

5/13 Last day of class

- Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body*. Chapter 7: The Meaning of Liberty, 294-312
- Final Analytic Essays due