

# ETHNOGRAPHY OF VIOLENCE

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Spring 18  
11 MWF 11:30am-12:35pm; x: Tu 12:15-1:05pm  
Moore 110  
Instructor: Chelsey Kivland  
E-Mail: [chelsey.l.kivland@dartmouth.edu](mailto:chelsey.l.kivland@dartmouth.edu)  
Phone: (603) 646-3334  
Office: Silsby 410  
Office Hours: Mon 1-3pm

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## Overview

Violence is widely recognized as a problem in modern society, with policies and interventions to combat violence, or employ it, dominating local and global politics. Yet the meaning of violence is seldom analyzed. Using an ethnographic lens, this course explores what violence means to people—in terms of an affective experience, a political effect, and a culturally mediated event. We examine episodic and everyday forms of violence around the world in terms of the manifestations of power, structures of inequality, perceptions of difference, and politics of representation they engender. A seminar in the cultural anthropology of violence, this course raises key questions about violence in a globalized world and explores how to study it ethnographically.

The course format is *guided discussion*. Topics and readings will be clarified not through long lectures but rather focused summaries, open questioning, and guided discussions. Oral participation is mandatory and will provide an opportunity for you to shape the discussions and explore your particular interests.

## Goals

- Describe with confidence some of the key theoretical and methodological approaches of the anthropology of violence.
- Complicate reductive notions of violence—that it is an inherent human trait, a natural male drive, and a quantifiable object—by drawing links between its biological, social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions.
- Therefore, develop an understanding of violence as multi-dimensional, and be able to relate physical, structural, and symbolic forms of violence.
- Further develop an understanding of violence as autopoietic and be able to explain how violence begets violence.
- Make a case for how ethnography can address urgent, sensitive issues.

## Requirements

- **Participation** (5% of grade)
- **Quizzes** (10% of grade)
- **Mid-Term Exam** (25% of grade)
- **Group Research Project** (60% of grade)

## Books

- *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, eds.
- *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, Malkki
- *Born Fi' Dead*, Gunst
- *A Different Kind of War Story*, Nordstrom

## Rules

- RESPECT!
- No electronic device should be used in class unless you have my permission.
- Uphold Dartmouth's Principles of the Community  
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~deancoll/student-handbook/principles.html>
- Give credit where credit is due.  
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/sources/>
- Speak up! If you have any issue (e.g., religious observance, family duties, disability, illness) that hinders your participation in this course, please see me to make arrangements.
- Please be patient with e-mail. I try to respond within 24 hours.

## Milestones

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**Fri April 13:** Research Proposal Due

**Fri April 27:** Annotated Bibliography and Section Outlines Due

**Fri May 4:** Mid-term Exam

**Wed May 9:** Draft for Peer Review Due

**Sat June 2:** Final Paper Due

**I. Participation** (5% of grade). As an *interactive lecture*, you are expected to fully participate in class discussions and activities. You can demonstrate participation by having hard copies of readings in class, asking questions, taking notes, engaging in class activities, coming to office hours, or otherwise showing me that you are thinking about and trying to master the material—*enthusiastically!* Beyond accounting for 5% of your grade, your participation influences how I perceive and evaluate your overall contribution and knowledge acquisition in the course.

**II. Monte Carlo Quizzes** (10% of grade). The success of this class depends on your preparation. I will evaluate your preparation based on a series of Monte Carlo quizzes that will be assessed on a four-tier “check” scale, providing constructive feedback as needed. *Rules:* A Monte Carlo quiz is like other pop quizzes, except that the decision to administer the quiz is determined by chance. At the start of class, a student will roll a die. If the student rolls a 1 or 3, a quiz will be given. The question will be the “guiding question” marked with a “\*” on the syllabus. You will have *five minutes* to complete the quiz. It will be clear if one or all readings apply based on the question. Answers will be graded as follows: (1) check plus: your answer is clearly formulated, accurate, and demonstrates a sound understanding of the reading/concepts; (2) check: your answer is mostly correct, demonstrates some familiarity with the reading, but is incomplete or awkwardly formulated; (3) check minus: the answer is partially correct, demonstrates minimal familiarity with reading, or is poorly formulated; (4) zero: the answer demonstrates no familiarity with the reading.

**III. Mid-Term Exam** (25% of grade). The mid-term exam will consist of multiple choice questions and short-answer questions that call for you to make connections across the readings.

**IV. Group Research Project** (60% of grade). Each student will participate in writing a group research paper that develops an original analysis of violence in the world. Three to four students will be in each group, and you will collectively write a paper about 20 pages in length. The point of this paper is to allow you to **engage in anthropological research and theorizing, and to enable you to critically address and analyze an actual instance of violence as a cultural anthropologist would.** Successful papers are the product of multiple steps. This paper will include: Group Research Proposal (5%); Individual Section Outline (5%); Group Annotated Bibliography (5%); Group Peer Review (10%); Final Paper (25%); Presentation (10%). Further guidance on all aspects will be given in class. **\*\*Library Research Assistance.** Amy Witzel, Baker-Berry’s anthropology bibliographer, can help with library research at any stage of your project. [Amy.L.Witzel@dartmouth.edu](mailto:Amy.L.Witzel@dartmouth.edu)

#### **Rules and Ethics:**

**Respect and academic discourse:** A core social value in anthropology is *respect*. Acting with respect means honoring the worth of each person and their contributions to the community. In this classroom, you are likely to encounter ideas that you find surprising or even uncomfortable. You should feel free to express yourself; at the same time, you should also feel free to—respectfully—challenge ideas with which you disagree. This means listening and responding to each other with attentiveness, sincerity, and appreciation. It means recognizing that our diverse backgrounds and perspectives broaden our understandings of and abilities to address the social issues that concern us all.

**Absences:** Daily attendance is imperative. My way of taking attendance in this class is through the quizzes. I will excuse one absence/quiz, no matter the reason. If you miss additional classes, you will forfeit any quizzes. Missing three or more quizzes will result in a zero for this requirement. If you do not miss any classes, you may drop your lowest quiz grade. If you need to miss more than one class for a school-sponsored activity, serious illness, or family emergency, please communicate this with me, so we can develop a plan. Other absences will not be excused.

**Tardiness:** You are expected to arrive to class on time and stay for the entire period. Unexcused tardiness and premature departures will be treated as absences, with quiz grades forfeited.

**Late work:** The quarter system is a very fast-paced learning environment. Turning in assignments late creates a cascading problem for both the student, peers who are collaborating on assignments, and me. Unless there is a critical problem, I will deduct one letter grade for each day an assignment is late.

**Readings:** In order to refer to course readings in class, you are expected to bring hard copies of the readings—that is, the books and printed articles. Please see me if this is not possible to make alternative arrangements.

**Electronics in the classroom:** Students are not permitted to use cellphones or laptops in the class, barring special accommodations or permission from me. If I see you using you a device without permission, I will mark you absent for the day.

**Academic honor:** You are reminded that the Honor Principle applies to all work done in and outside of class. Research papers and take-home essays, if applicable, must contain citations to any content obtained from others. For guidelines, see “Sources and Citations at Dartmouth,” <http://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/learning/materials/sources-and-citations-dartmouth>.

**Students with disabilities:** Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities enrolled in this course that may need classroom accommodations or accessibility services are encouraged to make an office appointment to see me *as soon as possible*, and no later than the end of the second week of term. All discussions will remain confidential, although the Student Accessibility Services office may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

**Religious observances:** Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during this academic term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please come speak with me before the end of the second week of term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

## Course Schedule

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*Note on Schedule:* The schedule posted below is PROVISIONAL by design. I like to allow some flexibility to respond to student interests, current events, and other influences. Our readings may expand, contract, or morph throughout the term. The final word for what is due will be posted on the week’s folder in Canvas or come from me during the previous class period. Readings are listed in the order they should be read. VWF=*Violence in War and Peace*

### WEEK 1

Monday: *Introduction to the Course*

*Guiding Questions:* How can we think about violence anthropologically? How can we move from asking not *why* we commit violence but *how* we do it? How can we think not about the culture *of* violence but about the culture *in* violence? What’s behind the adage that “violence begets violence”?

Wednesday: *An Evolutionary History?*

Readings Chagnon, Napoleon, Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population

*Guiding Questions:* \*How might violence figure in a theory of evolution? How are violence, sex, and reproduction connected?

Friday: *The Most Controversial Anthropologist*

Readings Lizot, Jacques, *On Warfare: An Answer to Napoleon Chagnon*

Film *Secrets of the Tribe* by José Padilha **stream at home**

*Guiding Questions:* \*What are some of the critiques of Chagnon's framework? Why is Chagnon said to be the most controversial anthropologist? Can we find any common ground in the work of Chagnon and Lizot?

## WEEK 2

Monday: *The Role of Emotion*

Readings Rosaldo, Renato, *Grief and a Headhunter's Rage* (VWP)

*Guiding Questions:* What role does emotion play in the propagation of violence? \*When and how did Rosaldo come to truly understand the connection between grief and rage? Can reciprocity and emotional vengeance be put together in a theory of violence?

Wednesday: *The Role of Order and Routine*

Readings Milgram, Stanley, *Behavioral Study of Obedience* (VWP)

Arendt, Hannah, *From Eichman in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (VWP)

*Guiding Question:* Why do people obey orders to hurt even when it goes against their moral convictions? \*In what ways can the extreme violence of the Holocaust be construed as "banal"?

Friday: *The Role of Honor*

Readings Hinton, Alexander Laban, *Why did you Kill?* (VWP)

FILM: *Act of Killing* by Joshua Oppenheimer **stream at home**

*Guiding Question:* How do people become killable through the sociopolitical context of communism? \*How was honor, and the defense of honor, at play in the Cambodian genocide? What are the rewards and tolls of becoming a killer?

## WEEK 3

Monday: *Violence for the State*

Readings Fanon, Frantz, *Concerning Violence*

FILM: *Battle of Algiers* by Gillo Pontecorvo **stream at home**

*Guiding Question:* \*How might violence be construed as freedom? Is all violence morally equivalent? What are the consequences of liberating oneself or the nation through violence, if we acknowledge that violence begets violence?

Wednesday, January 21: *Violence by the State*

Readings Feldman, Allen, *On Cultural Anesthesia: From Desert Storm to Rodney King*

*Guiding Question:* \*What is cultural anesthesia, and how is it produced through the fabrication of images? How did King become killable, or what did it take, culturally, to render him non-human?

Friday: Discussion on Ferguson and #BlackLivesMatter

Readings Select articles (no quiz)

*Guiding Questions:* What similarities or differences do you see between the Rodney King case and that of Michael Brown? How was a history of police exploitation tied to the frustrations that erupted in protest? How might we read this scenario and the ongoing #BlackLivesMatter movement as a quest for the valorization of life?

\*\*\**Research Proposal Due*

## WEEK 4

Monday: *Ethnic Conflict and the Polity*

Readings Malkki, Liisa, Purity and Exile: (Intro, Ch. 1)

*Guiding Questions:* \*Why does Malkki characterize her project as an ethnography of the “sociohistorical processes of making and unmaking categorical identities and moral communities”? How were the racial categories that enabled the genocide tied to colonialism?

Wednesday: *Ethnic Conflict and the Polity, cont.*

Readings Malkki, Liisa, Purity and Exile (Ch. 2, 3)

*Guiding Questions:* \*What is the “mythico-history,” why is it not “false” in the simple sense? What processes of “othering” were involved in the making of the killable subject, and how were these tied to notions of race? How did the mythico-history live on in the conditions of the refugee camp?

Friday: *Ethnic Conflict and the Polity, cont.*

Readings Malkki, Liisa, Purity and Exile (Ch. 4, 5,6)

*Guiding Questions:* \*Why was the mythico-history relatively absent among the town refugees? What were some of the multiple meanings the past held for town refugees in contrast to the camp refugees? How were town and camp constructed as socially distant from each other?

## WEEK 5

Monday: *Gender and Symbolic Violence*

Readings Bourdieu, Pierre, Gender and Symbolic Violence (VWP)

*Guiding Questions:* \*What is symbolic violence? How is violence internalized and enacted on oneself? How do gender roles and hierarchies enable violence to, quite paradoxically, *feel good*?

Wednesday, February 18: *Gender and Symbolic Violence, cont.*

Readings Cohn, Carol, Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals

*Guiding Questions:* How is nuclear war gendered? \*How does the gendering of nuclear war enable and justify it?

Friday: *Structural Violence*

Readings Farmer, Paul, On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below (VWP)

*Guiding Questions:* \*What is structural violence? How might violence be seen as emanating from everyone but no one in particular—and what are the consequences of thinking in this way? Can forms of violence be ranked in a “triage” fashion?

**\*\*\*Outlines and Annotated Bibliography Due**

## WEEK 6

Monday: *Sovereign Violence to Disciplinary Violence*

Readings Hobbes, Thomas, The Leviathan (selections)

Foucault, Michel, Right of Death and the Power over Life

*Guiding Questions:* \*How and why is *equality* a precondition for *warre*? How can one argue that the enactment of an ultimate power over people—that is, *sovereignty*—lead to the end of *warre*? What are the substantive and historical differences between sovereign and disciplinary power?

Wednesday: *Resisting Domination*

Readings Comaroff, Jean and John, *Criminal Obsessions after Foucault*  
Feldman, Allen, *The Breaker's Yard*

*Guiding Questions:* \*How and why might sovereign power be experiencing a revival in the contemporary period? How do people (e.g., prisoners) resist disciplinary power? How do these tactics prove and disprove Foucault's argument?

Friday: **Mid-term Exam**

## WEEK 7

Monday: *Violence and Technology*

Readings Kivland, "The Magic of Guns"

*Guiding Questions:* How do guns "script" violence in urban Haiti? \*How might it be useful to think the gun and the human as a composite agent of violence? How might we think of technology as not a neutral tool but rather a totem implicated in webs of meaning?

Wednesday: Discussion on *Mass Shootings in the US*

Readings Select articles (no quiz)

*Guiding Questions:* What are some of the sociopolitical factors that explain the prevalence of mass shootings in the US? What is meant by the "white privilege" of the "lone wolf"? What do you think it will take to stop mass shootings?

**\*\*\*Draft for Peer Review Due by Canvas to Partner Group**

Friday: **Peer Review**

## WEEK 8

Monday: *Transnational Gang*

Readings Gunst, Laurie, *Born Fi Dead* (Part 1)

*Guiding Questions:* How is the legacy of slavery tied to contemporary forms of violence in Jamaica? \*How is gang violence political at the national and global level?

**\*\*\*Peer Review Reflection Due**

Wednesday: *Transnational Gang, cont.*

Readings Gunst, Laurie, *Born Fi Dead* (Part 2)

**FILM: *Shottas* by Cess Silvera stream at home**

*Guiding Questions:* How is pop culture—films, music, etc.—implicated in gang violence? \*Would you argue that pop culture plays a causal, correlational, or expressive role in Jamaican urban violence—and on what basis? How can we think of urban Jamaica as exhibiting not a culture of violence but a culture *in* violence?

Friday: *Terrorism Rethought*

Readings Mahmood, Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*  
Farivar, Masood, *Fire on the Mountain*

*Guiding Questions:* \*What is wrong with thinking of good Muslims and bad Muslims, or good Westerners and bad Westerners, as an explanation for terrorism? Why is it that "cultural" explanations tend to avoid history and politics, and how might we think culture differently in order to account for the sociohistorical context?

## WEEK 9

Monday: *Undoing Violence*

Readings Nordstrom, Carolyn, A Different Kind of War Story (Ch. 3 & 5)

*Reading Questions:* \*What is the anthropology of listening, and why is it necessary to an ethnography of violence? Why can one not answer the question, “*what is violence?*,” in the singular?

Wednesday: *Undoing Violence, cont.*

Readings Nordstrom, Carolyn, A Different Kind of War Story (Ch. 6,7,&Epilogue)

*Guiding Questions:* How is the grotesque implicated in the making and unmaking of war? \*How do traditional healers (*curandeiro*) go about undoing the effects of war? What is entailed in remaking people out of violence and into peace?

Friday: *Presentations*

## WEEK 10

Monday: *Memorial Day--NO CLASS*

Wednesday: *Presentations and Concluding Thoughts*

**\*\*\*Peer Evaluations Due**

**Final Papers Due Saturday, June 2**