

Bodies and Power
CSPT 500/600, Poli 533/633
DTB A357 (Thursday 2:30-5:20pm)

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Seemingly everywhere, politics of the body is now the most intensively contested site of key trajectories of power and resistance. From issues of gendered violence, global movements of white nationalism to sharply contested issues surrounding sexual orientation with all the prohibitions, disavowals and backlash involved in the maintenance of an essentially heterosexual intelligibility as the essence of contemporary normativity, questions concerning the meaning of the body—its material presence, its sheer multiplicity, its internal repressions and outward dominations—is increasingly the real scene of contemporary politics. Nowhere is the contested designation of the body, whether by race, class, gender or ethnicity, its place, that is, as a site of phantasmatic projections, of internal splits in identity, of struggles between an image of the body that is imposed and one that is waiting to be created through personal and collective struggle—more acutely expressed than in that fateful conjuncture that is critical race theory, postcolonial politics and new social movements. Here, issues concerning which bodies will be brought into visibility and which will be effectively disappeared, which bodies will be granted the right to be mourned and which are to be excluded from ethical consideration, and which bodies will be targeted by a politics of abuse value demonstrate the presence of often bitterly clashing perspectives on the body as a key site of contested power and resistance. From state-sanctioned attacks on Muslim bodies, generalized moral indifference to the fate of nomadic flows of immigrants, asylum-seekers and those fleeing murderous violence, deportations and indefinite detention to the upsurge in white nationalism, bodies and power is now the street politics of the contemporary epoch. In light of Black Lives Matter, indigenous resurgence and continued violence against Muslim communities, there is an urgent necessity to critically theorize a dominant culture of “white masks” seemingly terrified by the rise into visibility of black skin, brown skin, red skin.

As a way of theorizing bodies, power and resistance in the contemporary era, the seminar will bring three important texts into conversation: Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, Hamid Dabashi’s *Brown Skin, White Masks*, and Glen Coulthard’s *Red Skin, White Masks*. What’s at stake in the above texts is both an acute understanding of what actually happens—what deprivations, violence, and phantasmatic logic—when ‘whiteness’ becomes the universal sign of bodily presence and which forms of resistance might work to undermine the white mask of politics, culture and society. The discussion of Fanon, Dabashi and Coulthard will be deepened by reference to other critical perspectives, including Avery Gordon’s concept of the “hauntological imagination,” Homi Bhabha’s interrogation of postcolonial identity and Edward Said’s

persuasive thesis that “Orientalism” is the essence of the current regime; Judith Butler’s theorization of “precarious life” and Wendy Brown’s understanding of “wounded attachments” as the real psychic energy animating the politics of white rage.

Texts:

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove Press, 1967.

Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks*

Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 2003.

References:

Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Judith Butler, *Precaious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London: Verso, 2006.

Wendy Brown, *States of Injury*, Chapter 3, “Wounded Attachments,” Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995