

SOCI 438 (A01) - Issues in Contemporary Sociology: The Sociology of Violence

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. William Little

Course Description and Objectives

The problem of violence is pervasive, yet it is a difficult one to think through. We are routinely exposed to violence in the media and often in daily life. In many respects we are products of a history of violence—colonization, war, the formation of nation-states, structural violence, patriarchal relations, capitalist globalization. Nevertheless violence is difficult to grasp. We do not conceptualize or respond to all types of violence equally. One set of concerns in the sociology of violence therefore involves how we distinguish between a violence we understand to be *political* and everyday “informal/individual” violence, or a violence that, whatever its brutal effects on individuals are, is somehow without political consequence. How do we recognize different kinds of violence differently? Another set of concerns involve the discourses that establish a relationship to violence: the linguistic resources and regularities that generate and legitimate violent modes of conflict behaviour. There are surely numerous ways to put violence into narrative—by finding criteria to judge it or legitimate it, by inscribing it into the formation of identity, by presenting it as an element in stories of good and evil, by placing it at the origins of society itself, and so on —yet violence itself would also seem to mark the border of narrative, or of reason and logos more generally. Again, a difficult problem. Where someone like Georges Bataille characterizes violence by its transgressive and inassimilable nature, Hannah Arendt shows how violence can also be banal and routine, built into the ordinary structures of everyday life.

With these questions in mind we examine violence in a number of different contexts: the colonization of the Americas, micro-level or situational ‘street’ violence, the martial arts in media and practice, and contemporary political violence.

Course Pre/Co-requisites:

Minimum third-year standing; and declared Honours or Major in Sociology; or permission of the Department

Required Textbook

We will read a selection from the following:

- Taussig, Michael. 1987. *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Collins, Randall. 2008. *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Wacquant, Loic. 2003. *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. New York, Oxford University Press
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2008. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador
- Butler, Judith. 2006. *Precarious Lives: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso.
- Vahabzadeh, Peyman. 2019. *Violence and Nonviolence: Conceptual Excursions into Phantom Opposites*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press

**This on-line outline is only intended to give an overall sense of the course. Detailed course outlines will be made available for all registered students on the first day of class. Only those outlines are to be considered official.