

Violence Peace Justice

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Office Hours: by appointment
Tuesdays: 10:45-14:00

Course Description

This course examines the relationship between violence, peace, and justice by exploring how different forms of political violence, including war, colonialism and settler colonialism, military occupation, genocide, and structural violence shape societies, identities, and political orders. Rather than treating violence solely as episodes of armed conflict, the course considers violence as both a historical event and an enduring social structure whose effects continue through memory, displacement, racial and class inequalities, and struggles for justice.

Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from political theory, postcolonial studies, decolonial feminist scholarship, memory studies, ethics, and international law, students will critically examine competing understandings of violence, peace, and justice. Particular attention is given to how colonialism, race, gender, and power shape both experiences of violence and efforts to address their legacies through human rights, transitional justice, museums, and oral history methods. Through comparative case studies, such as World War II, French colonial rule in Algeria, the Vietnam War, the Lebanese Civil War(s), the Yugoslav wars, and Israeli rule and occupation in Palestine, including Gaza, students will analyze how different historical contexts illuminate broader debates about genocide, accountability, the rule of law, due process, reconciliation, and the possibilities and limits of achieving peace and justice.

Requirements

Students are expected to complete the assigned readings or films before each class and engage with them critically. Critically engaging a text involves trying to identify the author's central argument, note recurring concepts or themes, and consider how the text relates to the course's overall themes, previous readings and discussions. Taking notes while reading is strongly encouraged, as is marking passages that raise questions or seem particularly significant. If you encounter unfamiliar terms or difficult sections, try to identify precisely what is confusing and bring those questions to class. You are not expected to understand every reference or argument immediately. Part of the purpose of the seminar is to work through challenging material collectively and to examine points of ambiguity or disagreement within the texts. Because this is a discussion-based course, regular and thoughtful participation is an essential component of the course. Students are encouraged to contribute by asking

questions, responding to one another's ideas, and offering interpretations grounded in the readings.

Course readings that are not provided with a link in the below schedule will be posted on Google Classroom. Students who have accommodation arrangements are encouraged to inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James

Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long
(m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu)

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment and Grade Breakdown

Class Participation (15%): Participation will be evaluated at the end of each session. Students will be assessed based on the general enthusiasm, frequency and quality of the questions they raise. Regular attendance and completion of all reading assignments is also required. Recurrent absences will substantially decrease the final grade. (up to two unexcused absences are allowed).

Class Presentations (25%): Each student will be expected to make a 15-20 minute presentation about a particular week's readings of their own choice over the course of the semester. In a ppt. presentation students should address, the author, central question and argument of the work in their own words, methodology used, and conclude with three critically engaging questions posed to the class to spark discussion. Presentations should aim to connect with the key course themes and theories discussed in previous weeks and readings as much as possible and students should be prepared to show how they arrived at their conclusions from actual reading of the text. Creative approaches to reading and understanding the key arguments made in the reading are welcome. Students can engage films and literary works for instance that they find relevant to the reading they chose. Presentations will begin in the third week.

In-Class Writing Assignments (20%)

Throughout the semester, students will complete a series of short in-class writing assignments (approximately 500-700 words each) based on the assigned readings, films, or class discussions. These exercises are designed to help students develop their analytical writing, prepare for seminar discussion, and connect theoretical concepts to historical and contemporary case studies. Writing assignments may ask students to analyze a key concept or argument, compare authors' perspectives, critically reflect on a film or oral testimony, or apply course concepts to a particular historical or contemporary example. Students are expected to support their

arguments with evidence from the assigned materials rather than personal opinion alone.

Oral History Project (40%)

Students are expected to complete an oral history project based on the experiences of a family member or member of their community. The project explores how personal experiences of violence, conflict, displacement, injustice, or resilience intersect with broader historical, political, legal, and social processes.

Students will conduct a video- or audio-record an oral history interview (with the participant's informed consent) and submit a 2,000-word analytical essay connecting the narrative to concepts and theories studied in the course, such as violence, justice, colonialism, gender, memory, and transitional justice. They should situate the interview within its historical context and consider how factors such as race, class, gender, or ethnicity shape experiences of violence and justice. Students are expected to include, as an appendix to their essay, a point-by-point statement explaining whether and how they used generative AI in completing the assignment. This statement should specify which AI tool(s) were used, the purpose for which they were used (e.g., brainstorming, outlining, editing, feedback ed), which sections of the work involved AI assistance, and how the student verified any AI-generated content. Failure to disclose the use of AI may be treated as a breach of academic integrity.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Course Content Notice

This course explores difficult but timely questions about war, colonialism, human rights, memory, and peace. As part of this exploration, some readings, films, documentaries, and personal testimonies **may** include descriptions or depictions of violence and other challenging historical and contemporary events that some may find uncomfortable. Please keep in mind that these materials, if any, mainly in the films on Syria, South Africa and Zimbabwe, Liberia and Mozambique, are included to

support critical learning and thoughtful discussion rather than for any graphic content. As a seminar group thinking together we should all approach them with care, respect, and sensitivity, recognizing that students bring diverse experiences, identities, and perspectives to the classroom. Students are expected to engage respectfully with one another, listen thoughtfully, and contribute to discussions in a manner that fosters an inclusive, respectful, and supportive learning environment, both inside the classroom and outside of it. If you have concerns about any course materials or anticipate that particular content may affect your full ability to analyse and think critically you are encouraged to speak with the instructor. Every effort will be made to ensure that all students feel respected, supported, and able to engage in meaningful dialogue throughout the course.

Course Schedule:

Most weeks include a documentary or feature film that complements the readings. These films are intended to deepen students' understanding of the week's themes by providing historical context, illustrating lived experiences, and stimulating discussion. They should be viewed as resources for critical engagement rather than as objects of film analysis.

1.Week 1 (September 5)

Introduction:

2.Week 2: (September 12)

Power versus Violence

When does political power rely on consent, and when does it rely on force? Can violence ever create a stable political order? What distinguishes legitimate authority from coercion? How should we think about peace if violence is not the same as power?

Required Readings

Hannah Arendt (1970). *On Violence*. Read pp. 3–30

Watch: *The Battle of Algiers*, directed by Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966 (youtube)

3.Week 3: (September 19):

Theories of Violence and the Causes of War

What are some of the Competing explanations for the origins of war? How do political, economic, and ideological structures contribute to violence? What

assumptions about power, sovereignty, and the state underpin mainstream theories of war?

Required Readings

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Book I, Chapter 1 ("What Is War?") (1-8).

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1946/1946-h/1946-h.htm - chap01>

Jack S. Levy (2011). "Theories and Causes of War."

4. Week 4: (September 26)

Postcolonial Theories of Violence: Anticolonial warfare

What does colonialism look like as a lived system of violence, and how does that contribute to theories of liberation and justice? How does Fanon challenge conventional understandings of war, peace, and justice? What does the film reveal about colonial violence that is difficult to grasp from the text alone?

Required Readings

Frantz Fanon (1961). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Read "Concerning Violence."

Watch "Concerning Violence" Directed by 2014. Göran Hugo Olsson.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6J6v-zzEZ9Y>

5. Week 5: (October 3)

Postcolonial Theories of Violence: Sovereignty, Colonialism, and Necropolitics

Who has the power to decide who lives and who dies? How do colonies become laboratories of violence? What is the relationship between occupation, race, and sovereignty? Is colonial violence any different from interstate war?

Required Reading

Achille Mbembe; Necropolitics. *Public Culture* 1 January 2003; 15 (1): 11–40

6. Week 6 (October 10)

Gendering Violence

Required Reading

Laura Sjoberg (2013). *Gendering Global Conflict*. Chapter 1.

Watch *For Sama* (2019).

In-class writing:

Choose one:

-How does the film expand our understanding of violence beyond direct physical harm?

-How does Sjoberg's critique of "war-as-battle" help us understand the everyday violence depicted in *For Sama*?

-Does *For Sama* offer a vision of peace or justice? If so, where and how?

-How might a gendered approach to peacebuilding differ after watching this film?

Week 7: (October 17)

The Law and Liberation: Iraq

Is Nonviolence the Path to Freedom? What are some of our assumptions about law, peace and non-violence? Can legal institutions themselves ever introduce or reproduce violence?

Required Reading

Samira Esmeir (2007). "The Violence of Non-Violence."

Watch

About Baghdad (2004) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSX_gAhuCEo. A film by Sinan Antoon Bassam Haddad Maya Mikdashi Adam Shapiro Suzy Salamy

WEEK 8 NO CLASSES MID-TERM

WEEK 9 (October 31)

Never Again? Holocaust Memory and the Postwar International Order

How did the Holocaust shape the postwar international order? What does "Never Again" mean? Has genocide become the dominant lens for understanding mass violence? How do Holocaust memory and international law shape contemporary responses to genocide and mass atrocity?

Required Readings:

Moses, A. Dirk. 2021. *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Read Introduction the intro, pages 1-46

Jewish Currents. "Bad Memory." *Jewish Currents*, July 5, 2023.
<https://jewishcurrents.org/bad-memory-2>

WEEK 10 (November 7)

Transitional Justice after Apartheid: Truth, Reconciliation, and Accountability

Can societies achieve justice without criminal punishment? What is the relationship between truth, reconciliation, and accountability after mass violence? What are the possibilities and limitations of transitional justice?

Required Readings

Mamdani, Mahmood. 2002. "Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC)." *Diacritics* 32 (3/4): 33–59.

Film

Cry Freedom. Directed by Richard Attenborough. Universal Pictures, 1987.

While watching write notes and think of the following:

Apartheid as a system of structural violence. Truth commissions, amnesty, and criminal accountability. Reconciliation and the politics of memory. The possibilities and limitations of transitional justice after systemic oppression.

11. Week 11: (November 14)

Remembering Atrocities and Mass Violence: Museums, Memory, and Decolonization

How do museums shape public understandings of war, colonialism, and mass violence? Who decides what is remembered, forgotten, or commemorated? How do museums negotiate questions of justice, historical responsibility, and decolonization? Can public memory contribute to reconciliation?

Required Readings

Nguyen, Kim Hong. 2017. "A Postcolonial Museum of War."

Online Exhibition

Remembering Vietnam.

Virtual Museum Visits

Pentagon Vietnam War Exhibit.

Remembering Vietnam.

12. Week 12: (November 19)

Oral History Project Planning

Students will begin developing oral history projects that connect personal or family histories to broader themes of violence, memory, justice, displacement, gender, colonial legacies, and social inequality.

The Oral History Manual will be provided and discussed in class. Students should come to class already

13. Week 13 (November 26)

The Gaza Genocide and the Crisis of the International Legal Order

How does Gaza challenge the post-1945 international legal order? Has international law fulfilled its promise to prevent mass atrocities and ensure accountability? What would justice require in the aftermath of mass violence?

Required Readings

B'Tselem. 2025. *Our Genocide*

https://www.btselem.org/publications/202507_our_genocide?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Mokhiber, Craig. 2025. "Law on Trial: Gaza and the Future of the International Legal Order." *Dialectical Anthropology* 49 (1): 121–144

14. Final Project Presentations (in-class) and Paper due (December 8)

Oral history presentations and class conclusion.