

**Anthropology Department  
Brandeis University  
Fall 2023**

**ANTHROPOLOGY 114a  
Anthropology of Military and Policing  
Instructor: Dr. Janet McIntosh**

Instructor: Janet McIntosh, Brown 207

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 12:00-1:00, by appointment, please

Zoom link for office hours just in case we need it: <https://brandeis.zoom.us/j/93080963640>

Class times: Monday and Wednesday, 4:05-5:25

Class location: Brown 115

**Course Description:**

This course explores cultural dimensions of military and policing organizations—and their impact on communities—as they carry out their “violence work” (Seigal 2018). The military and police are institutions through which nation-states defend their perceived interests, assert their ideologies of “order,” and impinge on individual bodies (those of service members and civilians)—sometimes through ritual, discourse, or discipline, sometimes through violence. We examine the ideologically saturated, embodied, and linguistic transformations involved in becoming a member of a military or police force—and the way military and police work can dehumanize their targets and their own practitioners. We examine how inequalities are often built into the functioning of these institutions. As a case study of military misunderstanding, we will examine divergent perspectives on the conflict in Afghanistan by juxtaposing the experiences and ideologies of American Marines fighting the Taliban against the perspectives of Afghan Taliban suicide bombers. We also discuss the militarization of police forces and explore how police work sometimes augments the sense of danger among civilians—whether in the popular imagination or through maltreatment of marginalized communities. This syllabus focuses on institutions in the US, but our understanding will grow from cross-cultural comparison. In the final portion of the semester, we will discuss contemporary debates about how to reconceptualize policing in the US in light of mounting critiques of institutional racism and militarization.

Most of the readings on the syllabus are written by anthropologists or those with anthropological training. What makes an approach anthropological? We sometimes—though not always—use social immersion or “participant observation” to understand a milieu. We also tend to adopt particular stances and ask particular questions. For instance, anthropologists tend to be skeptical of the stories that institutions tell about themselves, and we often approach the stories of individuals with skeptical sympathy and sympathetic skepticism. We try to understand what things *mean* to cultural insiders; this gives crucial context to behavior while deepening our grasp of the diversity of human experiences. We attend closely to power dynamics and injustice. We

think holistically, often grounding macro-level phenomena (e.g. economics, political power, decisions to take military action) in the minutiae of experience, language and symbolism, and material practice. Sometimes we think and work across cultures, to deepen our understanding of a phenomenon. And many of us are happy to think with interdisciplinary tools, too.

I encourage students in the class to keep open the possibility that your understanding of topics you already have opinions about will expand and grow more nuanced through our conversations. I also take it as a tenet that I will be learning alongside you; my knowledge of this material is partial, so I'll be studying, too, and I often learn a lot from what my students bring to the table.

### **Learning goals include:**

- ❖ Coming to understand how “violence work” is endorsed by states, and how soldiering and policing identities (including willingness to kill) are constructed
- ❖ Gaining a greater understanding of contemporary military and policing cultures across a range of contexts
- ❖ Coming to understand experiences of those on the vulnerable end of military and police endeavors, across societies
- ❖ Garnering a tool kit from social theory to help analyze violence work
- ❖ Gaining an understanding of anthropological approaches to state power, embodiment, violence, personhood, gender, and suffering
- ❖ Thinking together about the complexities of police reform and abolition movements in the USA
- ❖ Working independently to analyze material in fresh ways
- ❖ Honing skills of oral presentation
- ❖ Honing skills of giving feedback to peers

### **Communication**

- When I make course announcements, I'll do so through the “Course Announcements” function on LATTE. These will land in your Brandeis email, and will also be archived in the “Course Announcements” section on LATTE. Please note the syllabus, assignments, powerpoints, and all readings will be available for download on LATTE, and thus should be accessible to screen readers. (Any Powerpoint slides presented in the class will be posted to LATTE soon after class.)
- Email is the best way to reach me; I will typically respond within a day or two. (If for some reason you don't hear from me, feel free to ping me again; high email volume and crushing deadlines are usually the culprits!)
- Clear and open lines of communication are important to owning your participation and engagement in the class. See below under “attendance,” and the “note on course content,” for instance.

### **Course Requirements:**

These course assignments have been modified to meet the **Oral Communications core requirement**.

- 1) **Class attendance and participation**
- 2) One in-class “**Reading Response**” during the course of the semester, that includes an orally presented 8-10 minute response to the readings, and one or two provocative discussion questions you pose to the class.
- 3) Furnishing written **feedback to three of your peers** on their Reading Responses. Your feedback will concern the content of their presentation, and the form as well. Ideally, your feedback will not only evaluate but will engage the content, moving the conversation forward.
- 4) One oral **Final Presentation**, 10 minutes long, in the final classes of the semester. You will receive feedback from me on that, which you can use toward your Final Paper.
- 5) One **Final Paper**, 12-15 pp long (or 15-20 pp for graduate students), based on your Final Presentation.

### **Grading:**

- 1) **Class attendance and participation: 25%**
- 2) **In-class “Reading Response”: 15%**
- 3) **Peer Feedback (3 of them): 15%**
- 4) **Final Presentation: 20%**
- 5) **Final Paper: 25%**

### **Policy on Attendance:**

Attendance is mandatory and will be factored into your grade (see above). Please contact the instructor in advance of class via email if you must be absent. Clear and open lines of communication are important to owning your participation and engagement in the class. If you have to miss class, you can mitigate this by submitting a 2-3 page response paper that indicates you have done the readings for that day, and have engaged with their implications and their links to other course material. Such make-up exercises are due to the professor within 10 days of the missed class. However, make-up response papers are not equivalent to being fully present.

### **Assignments and due dates:**

I'll post all assignments to LATTE. Grades are lowered by 1/3 of a grade for each weekday late.

**Workload:** Success in this 4-credit class is based on the expectation that students will commit on average at least twelve hours per week to the coursework (including class meetings, reading, thinking, preparing your oral presentations and written work, etc.).

**Accommodations:** Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation. I want to support you and I'm open to conversation about the best way to do so. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781-736-3470 or [access@brandeis.edu](mailto:access@brandeis.edu).

**Academic Integrity:** As always, you are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. You may only submit your own original work in this course. Please carefully cite the sources of

all authors and persons you have drawn upon in your written work (whether their work appeared in print or online). Plagiarism (from published or internet sources, or from another student) is a serious violation of academic integrity. Please consult [Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities](#) for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. [Citation and research assistance](#) can be found on the [university library website](#).

**A note on course content:** The course materials in ANTH 114a include references to and discussions of disturbing material, including violence and killing; racial, ethnic, and gender-based discrimination and disparagement; and acute political disagreements. I expect those in class will never deliberately *use* language, imagery, or assigned material to disrespect, offend, or wound, but if you opt to enroll in this class, please know we will necessarily *talk about and analyze* language, imagery, and acts that are dehumanizing, racist, sexist, violent, and deadly. (To take an example, we will read the excerpt of memoir by an American who served in the Vietnam war; he relates the way he and other Marines thought and talked in combat, and...it's not pretty—something he understands very well, today. We are reading it to understand the mindset propelling the American war machine.) I will not give content or trigger warnings for these as we go, partly because there will be too many to count—so please read on.

Everyone will encounter this material differently, based on their life experience. Occasionally, you may need to take a pause for your own well-being; please communicate with me if this needs to happen during class time. At the very start of the semester, please also consider whether this class is even right for you. It involves considerable exposure to painful and potentially traumatizing material, and you may not want to subject yourself to so much of it. If you do opt in to the class, some of you may feel not every author or conversation handles this upsetting material to your satisfaction—in fact, just how to do so is an ongoing debate in the academy and beyond, and please know that as your instructor I sometimes find myself wrestling with this question. I welcome conversation about ways class participants can care for themselves and others in light of this challenging material.

**Laptops etc.:** Except in cases of documented need/special petition, I prefer that you not take notes on a laptop in class. It has proven too hard for students to resist the temptation to check email and social media during class time; this is a distraction to your neighbors and sometimes even to the professor. Please also refrain from using hand-held devices.

## **SCHEDULE**

**(no classes Monday Sept 4<sup>th</sup>; it's Labor Day)**

**Wednesday Sept 6<sup>th</sup>**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Monday Sept 11<sup>th</sup>**

**THE SOLDIER AS A GOOD MACHINE (USA):**

\*MacLeish, Ken. 2015. “The Ethnography of Good Machines.” *Critical Military Studies* 1(1): 11-22.

\*MacLeish, Ken. 2013. Ch. 2, “Heat, Weight, Metal, Gore, Exposure.” In *Making War at Fort Hood: Life and Uncertainty in a Military Community*. Princeton University Press.

### **Wednesday Sept 13<sup>th</sup>**

#### LANGUAGE AND MILITARIZATION (USA)

\*Cohn, Carol. 1987. “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals.” *Signs* 12(4): 687-718.

\*McIntosh, Janet. “Yelling,” Ch. 2 in *Death Talk: Language and Military Necropolitics in the USA*. Draft material for manuscript in preparation.

(Supplement: McIntosh, Janet. 2021. “Language and the Military: Necropolitical Legitimation, Embodied Semiotics, and Ineffable Suffering.” *Annual Review of Anthropology*.)

### **Monday Sept 18<sup>th</sup>**

#### MILITARY MASCULINITY, EMBODIMENT, INJURY (Turkey, USA)

\*Açiksöz, Salih Can. 2019. Excerpt from *Sacrificial Limbs: Masculinity, Disability, and Political Violence in Turkey*. University of California Press. Second chapter optional.

\*Wool, Zoe. 2015. Ch. 1, “The Extra/ordinary Atmosphere of Walter Reed.” *After War: The Weight of Life at Walter Reed*. Duke University Press.

(Supplement: Belkin, Aaron. Bring Me Men.)

### **Wednesday Sept 20<sup>th</sup>**

#### “MILITARY VALUES” and HUMAN RIGHTS (USA, Latin America)

\*McIntosh, Janet. “Broken Rules and Head Games,” Ch. 4 in *Death Talk: Language and Military Necropolitics in the USA*. Draft material for manuscript in preparation.

\*Gill, Leslie. 2004. “Introduction” and (optional) Ch. 6, “Human wrongs and rights,” *The School of The Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas*. Duke University Press.

(Supplement: Boyd, Matthew. Humane)

**(Monday Sept 25<sup>th</sup>: Yom Kippur; no classes)**

**Tuesday Sept 26<sup>th</sup> (a “Brandeis Monday”, so we have class)**

FILM: “COMBAT OBSCURA” (Miles Lagoze) (Americans in Afghanistan)

(Begin reading David Edwards' *Caravan of Martyrs*, our contrast case...)

**Wednesday Sept 27<sup>th</sup>**

IDENTITY, HONOR, and VIOLENCE WORK I (Afghanistan)

\*Edwards, David B. 2017. Chs 1-5, *Caravan of Martyrs: Sacrifice and Suicide Bombing in Afghanistan*. University of California Press.

**Monday Oct 2<sup>nd</sup>**

IDENTITY, HONOR, and VIOLENCE WORK II (Afghanistan)

\*Edwards, David B. 2017. Chs 6-8, *Caravan of Martyrs: Sacrifice and Suicide Bombing in Afghanistan*. University of California Press.

\*<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/07/06/afghanistan-war-malkasian-book-excerpt-497843>

**Wednesday Oct 4<sup>th</sup>**

MISCOMMUNICATION, OTHERING, ANTHROPOLOGY (Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan)

\*McHugh, John D. 2008. "Lost in Translation," *The Guardian* June 12, 2008.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2008/jun/11/afghanistan.johndmchugh>

\*Gusterson, Hugh. 2010. "The Cultural Turn in the war on Terror," in *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency*. Eds. John D. Kelly, Beatrice Jauregui, Sean T. Mitchell, and Jeremy Walton. University of Chicago Press. Pp. 279-296.

(Supplement: Nomi Stone)

**(Monday Oct 9<sup>th</sup>: Indigenous Peoples Day; no classes)**

**Wednesday Oct 11<sup>th</sup>**

ETHNOGRAPHY OF A WARZONE (Mozambique)

\*Nordstrom, Carolyn. 1997. Ch. 2, "Setting the Stage," and Ch. 3, "Ethnography of a Warzone." Ch. 4, "Living on the Frontlines," and Ch. 5, "The Grotesque and the Terror-able: The Ultimate Defeat of War." In *A Different Kind of War Story*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

[Note: I will select from among these chapters as the time draws closer]

**Thursday Oct 12<sup>th</sup>: "Brandeis Monday," so we have class**

WARZONE IN THE FIRST PERSON, and, MINDING THE DEAD (Vietnam)

\*Excerpt from Ninh, Bao. 1987. *The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam*. Penguin.

\*Kwon, Hoenik. 2008. "The Ghosts of the American War in Vietnam." *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 6(1). <https://apjjf.org/-Heonik-Kwon/2645/article.html>

### **Monday Oct 16<sup>th</sup>**

DEHUMANIZING AND DEHUMANIZED: SOLDIERS AND THEIR REVELATIONS  
(Americans in Vietnam)

\*Anderson, Doug. 2009. Excerpt from *Keep Your Head Down: Vietnam, The Sixties, and a Journey of Self-discovery*. Norton. Pp. 75-137.

\*Terry, Wallace. 1984. "Account of Private First Class Reginald "Malik" Edwards from Phoenix, Louisiana." In *Bloods: Black Veterans of the Vietnam War: An Oral History*. Presidio Press. Pp. 1-15.

### **Wednesday Oct 18<sup>th</sup>**

POST-VIETNAM: WHITE POWER AND MILITARIZED POLICING (USA)

\*Belew, Kathleen. 2018. Ch 1, "The Vietnam War Story," Ch. 2, "Building the Underground," and Ch 8, "Ruby Ridge, Waco, and Militarized Policing." In *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*. Harvard University Press.

### **Monday Oct 23<sup>rd</sup>**

Doug Anderson comes to class after all!

(For homework, please watch the documentary we would have watched in class... we can fold it into the Wednesday discussion along with discussion of the Van Maanen reading, below)

In-class Documentary: *Do Not Resist* (2016, Director: Craig Atkinson) (USA)

### **Wednesday Oct 25<sup>th</sup>**

POLICE STANCES AND DEHUMANIZATION (USA)

\*Van Maanen, John. 1978. "The Asshole." In *Policing: A View from the Street*. Eds. Peter K. Manning and John Van Maanen, pp. 221-237

### **Monday Oct 30<sup>th</sup>**

CONSTRUCTING DANGER, EMBODYING LAW AND ORDER (France)

\*Fassin, Didier. 2013. "Situation," and "Ordinary," in *Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing*. Polity Press.

### **Wednesday Nov 1<sup>st</sup>**

RACE AND ECONOMIES OF POLICING/ INCARCERATION (USA)

\*Jill Lepore. 2020. "The Invention of the Police." *The New Yorker*. July 20, 2020.  
<https://tinyurl.com/f26p2n7w>

\*Davis, Angela Y. 2003. Chapters 1 and 5 from *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Seven Stories Press.

**Monday Nov 6<sup>th</sup>**

CARCERAL COMPLICATIONS (USA)

\*Steinmetz, Emily. 2021. “Vigilante Symbolism, Violence, and the Carceral State.” Anthropology News, Nov. 8. 202. <https://www.anthropology-news.org/articles/vigilante-symbolism-violence-and-the-carceral-state/>

**Wednesday Nov 8<sup>th</sup>**

VARIETIES OF SURVEILLANCE (Australia, Turkey)

\*Akarsu, Hayal. 2020. “Digital Hailing: Social Media and Police Work” *Exertions*. <https://saw.americananthro.org/pub/digital-hailing-social-media-and-police-work/release/1?readingCollection=be9c3444>

\*Wynn, L. L. 2021. “The Pandemic Imaginerie: Infectious Bodies and Military-Police Theater in Australia.” *Cultural Anthropology* 36(3): 350-359.

**Monday Nov 13<sup>th</sup>**

RECKONINGS (USA)

\*Brief film, “The Scars of Being Policed While Black.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/opinion/the-torture-letters-police-violence.html> New York Times and Laurence Ralph.

\*Ralph, Laurence. 2020. Excerpts from *The Torture Letters: Reckoning with Police Violence*. University of Chicago Press. (ix-100; 191-209)

**Wednesday Nov 15<sup>th</sup>**

ABOLITION? REFORM? I (USA)

\* Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. 2021. “The Emerging Movement for Police and Prison Abolition.” *The New Yorker*, May 7, 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/ny33yxsu>

\*Brooks, Rosa. 2021. Excerpts from *Tangled up in Blue: Policing the American City*.

**Monday Nov 20<sup>th</sup>**

ABOLITION? REFORM? II (USA)

\*VanDerWerff, Emily. 2020. “The Narrative Power of ‘Abolish the Police’.” *Vox*, June 8, 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/rcaaphvt>

\*The Argument. 2021. “Policing is Not Broken, It’s ‘Literally Designed to Work in This Way: Jane Coaston Debates Three Proposals to Fix America’s Broken Policing.’” April 28, 2021.  
<https://tinyurl.com/ur37mjn6>

**Wednesday Nov 22<sup>nd</sup>—Thanksgiving break; no class**

**Monday Nov 27<sup>th</sup>—STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

**Wednesday Nov 29<sup>th</sup>— STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

**Monday Dec 4<sup>th</sup>—STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**

**Wednesday Dec 6<sup>th</sup>—STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**