Cities of Contested Memory
MIT DUSP 11.494
Spring 2022 | Thursdays 2-5pm
Meets in: 9-450

Instructor: Delia Wendel
Email: wendel@mit.edu
Office: 9-521
Office hours: Tuesdays, 2p-4p: https://calendly.com/wendel-ddb
Course website: https://canvas.mit.edu/courses/12622

Course Description
Cities of Contested Memory explores relationships between built environments, memory, and belonging. Memory is both a faculty for dealing with previous experiences and a social, economic, and political force that shapes the legacy of the past. This course will highlight the study of spaces and spatial practices in which the future of the past is imagined, negotiated, and contested. In particular, it will emphasize three areas of critical importance to understanding the nature of memory in cities today: 1) the threats that rapid urban development and climate change pose to the remembrance of collective pasts; 2) the politics of representation evident in debates over authorized and marginalized historical narratives; and 3) the art and ethics of sensitively addressing the afterlives of violence.

Classes will draw intensively from readings in theory and about places and people. We will read texts by Michelle Caswell, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Avery Gordon, Maurice Halbwachs, Laura Harjo, Jason de León, Anne McClintock, and Toni Morrison, among others. We will consider these authors’ writings in relation to sites of memory and forms of memory justice. We will explore relationships between nostalgia and nation-building worldwide, non-linear relationships between memories and futures in Indigenous landscapes, truth-telling in South African cities, and memories and dispossession in Armenian and Palestinian homelands. We will also attend to memories embedded in more-than-human landscapes, exploring the afterlives (and half-lives) of nuclear and slow violence ecologies.

Land Acknowledgment
The lands that MIT occupies are the traditional unceded territories of the Wampanoag Nation and the Massachusetts Peoples. Those lands register the painful history of genocide, forced occupation, and the ongoing processes of colonialism and dispossession in which we and our institution are implicated. They also evoke memory, history, myth, and tradition, connecting past, present, and future in a rich cultural geography that interweaves landscape and identity. In this class, to honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples connected to this land today and from time immemorial, we acknowledge the erasures in the collective memory of this and all nations founded on stolen Indigenous territories. We seek to understand and honor the diverse counter memories and relationships of Indigenous peoples and landscapes, connecting that knowledge to actions in seeking to Indigenize our institution, our fields of practice, and to offer space and give up power in service of Indigenous peoples’ needs and aspirations.
Course Expectations and Grading

This is a course that will require the active participation of every individual—in completing all readings, preparing questions and comments for each class, and debating issues with respect and openness. In addition, each participant will develop a final project—using primary sources—that will take the form of either a research paper or creative intervention. Through our group discussions and projects, it will be our collective task to critically probe the ways that communities choose to remember (and spatialize) the past.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand memory not just as an individual faculty for remembrance, but an inherently social and often spatialized force. We explore how collective memories re-produce political and economic power, forge connections to others and a sense of belonging to place, animate struggles for recognition and inclusion, and enact an ethic of reciprocity between humans and with nature.

2. Make and reflect on analytic connections between concepts in memory studies and sites of memory in the world;

3. Employ Primary Sources in the representation of counter memories (those historical experiences that are lesser recognized, denied, or hidden by larger publics, the powerful, or the privileged). Engage with the challenges of navigating silences in archives and historical records.

4. Imagine and experiment with “doing” liberatory memory work—a method and ethos for representing the past that bears witness to experiences of harms and forms of resistance, activism, repair, and counter memory that respond to injustice.

Assignments:

Lead Discussion—Make Connections: 30%

This course is a seminar for close reading, critical discussion, and possibility-imagining. It requires the active and sustained participation of every individual. Each week, one student will present a case study (of their choosing) to exemplify and unpack concepts introduced in the assigned readings. Every participant (whether enrolled or a listener) will be asked to lead at least one class discussion.

For student discussion leaders: your job is to help your peers make connections between the concepts introduced in the texts AND places of memory in the world, whether historical or contemporary. Choose a case study that helps to draw out some issue or question from that week’s readings and topic. Engage the class: pose questions, elaborate examples, draw links to the readings, and/or present dilemmas—all of which should serve
to inspire discussion. Estimate around 30 minutes, with no more than 10 minutes dedicated to your framing and the remaining time to opening up discussion with peers.

For those not leading the discussion: your job is to do the assigned readings and be willing to talk and ask questions. You may find some of the material challenging to understand—there will be others who feel similarly! Please ask questions of concepts, passages, chapters, or theories to aid our collective comprehension. You may not fully understand or agree with a concept or theory, but you are obliged to try to make sense of them.

Weekly Multimedia Posts: 30%

Each week, you will submit a short reflection (at minimum 5 sentence; at most 500 words—choose whichever serves you best that week) on what you think are the most interesting, puzzling, or strange issues raised in the texts assigned for that week. The purpose of the Posts is to develop your own archive of weekly reflections and help prepare your contributions to class discussions. Be precise and aim for critical reflection: elaborate on a question or analysis that arises from the readings. Provide evidence from the texts to support your views and interpretations using consistent citation practices (Author Last Name, Year: Page Number). Be creative: add video clips, images, newspaper clippings, passages or quotations from a text, etc. to convey your thoughts in multimedia.

Weekly Posts are due before the start of each class via Canvas. It is recommended (but not required) that you do so via the online document shared by the class (allowing you to see the reflections of your colleagues and for us to grow a community of diverse views). Navigate to the google slide deck via the Session Folder on Canvas. Alternatively, if you prefer: send a PDF via email to wendel@mit.edu before the start of class. There is no penalty for choosing the alternative! Students who lead discussion do not need to submit a post for that session.

Final Project: An Essay/“Un-Essay” on Counter Memory 40%

The Final Project is either a research paper or “un-essay” that unpacks a site of counter memory. Do so with primary sources and pay attention to the types of stories those sources allow you to tell. Describe the prevailing or authorized narrative(s) to which your counter memory responds. Analyze the ways the counter memory is known, shared, and operates in relationship to the aspirations or claims of the remembering group.

If you are developing a research paper, plan to write around 5,000 words. Elaborate on the above guidance to explore the “work” your site of counter memory does along with the context of contestation in which it is immersed. Make connections to relevant literature that we cover in the course (with citations).
If you are developing an “Un-Essay,” you can present your topic in any way you choose without formatting restrictions (see assignment guides for other Un-Essays by Daniel Paul O’Donnell and Ryan Cordell). Notable examples from previous classes include a long-form poem that evoked the oral history traditions of Berber communities in contradistinction to colonial and world heritage written treatments of Berber lives, and a collage of photographs and illustrations of a homeless encampment as an exercise in contrasting municipal devaluation and individual attachments to place. Include a 1,000 word project rationale that elaborates on the memory studies concepts you engage (with citations) and reflects on what, how, and why you developed your particular creative intervention. Include some form of visual or written representation of the “thing” that you create.

A Primer on Primary Sources:
Primary sources of information are those that provide first-hand accounts of the events, practices, places, or conditions that you are researching. In the context of the Final Project and your documentation of counter memories, primary sources can be fleeting. There are omissions and mischaracterizations in most archives because repositories of history often reflect the values and the positionalities of those that keep them. So one of the primary tasks around the search for primary sources for your Final Projects is to look for archives that explicitly document the views and experiences of those excluded; or to look for other types of sources (in visual art or song, oral history or legal briefs, etc.) that record histories and memories in other ways.

Primary sources can be historical or contemporary. Some examples of primary sources include: interviews with Boston residents last week, photographs of Nairobi from the 19th century, creative works, financial records, diaries, letters, newspaper articles, and oral histories (to name a few). Note that spatial data can be considered a primary source—the key here is that whether you collect it or someone else does, that it be available to you in some pre-analysis form.

Please do not consider primary sources as unassailable truths by default. Like all sources, they must be contextualized, verified, and taken to be representative of some (but not a full) window on experience.
### 2022 Course Summary of Session Topics and Assignment Deadlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Session Topic</th>
<th>Assignment Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Feb 3</td>
<td>Class Introduction</td>
<td>In-Class: Post 01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Feb 10</td>
<td>The Future of the Past</td>
<td>Post 02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Feb 17</td>
<td>Sites of Collective Memory</td>
<td>Post 03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Feb 24</td>
<td>Archival Research Workshop</td>
<td>Post 04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Mar 03</td>
<td>The Invention of Tradition</td>
<td>Post 05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Mar 10</td>
<td>Sites of Counter Memory</td>
<td>Post 06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Mar 17</td>
<td>Memory Justice</td>
<td>Post 07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mar 24</td>
<td>NO CLASS (Spring Break)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Mar 31</td>
<td>Memory and Home</td>
<td>Post 08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Apr 07</td>
<td>Memory and Migration</td>
<td>Post 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Apr 14</td>
<td>Ghost Ecologies</td>
<td>Post 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Apr 21</td>
<td>Class dedicated to progressing final projects</td>
<td>Sign up to meet with DW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Apr 28</td>
<td>Works in Progress Workshop I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>May 05</td>
<td>Works in Progress Workshop II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May 10</td>
<td>[last day of Spring classes]</td>
<td>Final Project due</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Post XX” refers to the “Weekly Multimedia Posts”. See above for details.

Syllabus is subject to change. Changes will be announced in advance.
Topics and Assignments by Session

Feb 3 | Class Introduction
Introduction to class topics, course progression, and assignments. Collective creation of values to uphold in our discussions. We’ll end the session with an in-class thought exercise.

Weekly Assignment—Post 01: To be completed in class.

No readings assigned.

Feb 10 | The Future of the Past
Our cities and environments are shaped by contested memories. Throughout the world, public spaces represent hegemonic narratives, bearing little trace of marginalized histories and reinforcing forms of erasure, exclusion, and irreverence. At the same time, counter-memories persist, waning with and defying time, in struggles against forgetting and to forge belonging. In this session, we draw in diverse scholars and archival and planning practitioners to discuss the future of the past, the nonlinear relationships of future-past-present, and what is at stake in forgetting and remembering.

Weekly Assignment—Post 02: Develop a quick multimedia and/or written reflection on at least two concepts, passages, or aspects of the readings that you find interesting, strange, or puzzling from this week. The purpose of the weekly assignments is twofold: to help you develop a personal archive of your reflections in this class and to help refine what you might contribute to our class discussion.

Required reading:

Supplementary reading (not required):

**Feb 17 | Sites of Collective Memory**

A collective memory refers to a *shared* remembrance; one often integral to forming a sense of community and/or identity. This session will explore the slippery concept of collective memory and its relationships to place. What are the roles of places in registering and activating collective memories? Are cities repositories of historical texts to be read, interpreted, and translated? Or are urban environments perhaps more elusive, layered as palimpsests and filled with haunted sites? Inspired by Toni Morrison’s essay, “The Site of Memory,” we will discuss what “sites” of collective memory are and how they center the politics of recognition and forms of belonging.

**Weekly Assignment—Post 03:** Develop a quick multimedia and/or written reflection on at least two concepts, passages, or aspects of the readings that you find interesting, strange, or puzzling from this week.

**Required reading:**

**Supplementary:**
Feb 24 | Archival Research Workshop

We will visit with archivists in MIT Distinctive Collections (the Institute’s Archive) for a short introduction to “doing” primary source research. The second half of our class will be spent discussing archives and primary sources in relation to the Gordon and Stoler essays.

Weekly Assignment—Post 04: Reflecting on the pieces by Gordon and Stoler, what questions or ideas do they open up regarding methodology and epistemology for your final project? Elaborate on a few first-draft thoughts. Also, and in preparation for our Workshop, prepare a quick list of some primary sources you would like to engage with in your final project (see Kai Alexis Smith’s guide, below). Bring questions for how to find/ work with those sources to our session in the archives.

Required Reading:

Please do the following to prepare your access to MIT’s Distinctive Collections
- Create an account with MIT-DC (this is different from your general MIT Library access): [https://mit.aeon.atlas-sys.com/logon](https://mit.aeon.atlas-sys.com/logon)
- Don’t forget to bring your MIT ID to class
- Please do not bring any food or drink
- Bring minimal belongings to class—we will store coats and bags in the archive lockers on-site.

Review online guides before class:
- Environmental historian Bill Cronon has compiled an excellent primer on “doing” historical research with primary sources: [http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/documents.htm](http://www.williamcronon.net/researching/documents.htm)
- MIT Librarian Kai Alexis Smith’s definition page for primary and secondary sources and curated list of resources for social and racial justice research for the Racial Justice Teach-In: [https://libguides.mit.edu/racialjustice/primarysecondary](https://libguides.mit.edu/racialjustice/primarysecondary) and [https://libguides.mit.edu/racialjustice/digarchives](https://libguides.mit.edu/racialjustice/digarchives)

Supplementary:
Mar 03 | The Invention of Tradition

Memory is not merely a faculty for registering prior experiences; it is also a source of national and political identity and a force for marketing the past (whether for cultural means or economic gains). We will read the introduction to the canonic Hobsbawm and Ranger book, *The Invention of Tradition*, together with Svetlana Boym’s theory of nostalgia. Both texts help us to explore theses on the instrumentalization of history and memory.

**Weekly Assignment—Post 05**: Develop a quick multimedia and/or written reflection on at least two concepts, passages, or aspects of the readings that you find interesting, strange, or puzzling from this week.

**Required reading:**

**Supplementary:**

Mar 10 | Sites of Counter Memory

A counter-memory is a type of collective memory that challenges a dominant perspective or an erasure or omission from authorized or popular histories. In this session we will build upon Foucault’s concept of “counter memory” to explore the forms of representation and memory practices that make marginalized or oppositional experiences visible in a public sphere. We will also begin to consider the processes and power structures that authenticate and govern collective and counter memories. Andrea Roberts’s research on Black counterpublics and Jorge Otero-Pailos’s on the preservation of unofficial narratives will focus our discussions.
Weekly Assignment—Post 06: Develop a quick multimedia and/or written reflection on at least two concepts, passages, or aspects of the readings from this week. What questions or approaches do they open up for your final project?

Required reading:

Supplementary:

Mar 17 | Memory Justice

In this session, we consider memory as means to enact justice; as a moral responsibility or a civic commitment to remember the past. We explore the role of memory in exposing truths and repairing harms, and the ways that such memory work exceeds and falls short of judicial action. To help us to unpack the concept and stakes of “memory justice,” we will draw from texts by political theorist W. James Booth and psychologist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. The latter piece will guide our understanding of testimonies heard within the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission on apartheid-era crimes to consider the relationships between telling and listening to traumatic memories, affect, and aesthetics in forms of restitution. Judith Mason’s iconic “Blue Dress” artwork and debates around its function as a form of justice will help to ground our class discussion.
**Weekly Assignment—Post 07:** Develop a quick multimedia and/or written reflection on at least two concepts, passages, or aspects of the readings that you find interesting, strange, or puzzling from this week.

**Required reading:**

**Supplementary:**

**Mar 24 | NO CLASS (Spring Break)**

**Mar 31 | Memory and Home**

In this session, we consider memory as a form of belonging, manifest in home and ideas of homeland in the context of conflict, erasure, and forced ruination. We will attend to the ways that memories of home shape time and bring life to loss. Not merely confined to the realm of commemoration, we will also explore how memories of home animate futurist claims for land rights and reparations. Our focus for the session will be Palestinian homes and Village Memory Books.
**Weekly Assignment—Post 07**: Develop a quick multimedia and/or written reflection on at least two concepts, passages, or aspects of the readings that you find interesting, strange, or puzzling from this week.

**Required reading:**

**Supplementary**

**Apr 07 | Memory and Migration**

What are the relationships between memory and migration? We will consider the role of memory in reconstituting one’s humanness, an opposition to the figure of the refugee, the displaced, out of place. We will also consider the experience of migrant border crossings, exploring how the material traces of yesterday offer alternatives to dominant narratives on illegality and belonging. Our sites of memory this week will include Arizona’s desert landscape near the Mexican border and Buluwayo-Johannesburg-Iowa.

**Weekly Assignment—Post 09**: Develop a quick multimedia and/or written reflection on at least two concepts, passages, or aspects of the readings that you find interesting, strange, or puzzling from this week.

**Required reading:**
- Julia Creet, “Introduction: The Migration of Memory and Memories of Migration,” *Memory*


Supplementary:

Apr 14 | Ghost Ecologies

This session will explore the nature and temporalities of memories that are mediated through ecological environments. What is the collective memory of forests that witness and are shaped by man-made disaster? How do these “ghost ecologies” allow us to attend to a violence of delayed destruction, spread out in time and space, and rendered deliberately invisible? We will explore the environment as primary source for hidden casualties, both human and non-human, of “slow violence”.

Weekly Assignment—Post 10: Develop a quick multimedia and/or written reflection on at least two concepts, passages, or aspects of the readings that you find interesting, strange, or puzzling from this week.

Required reading:

Supplementary:

Apr 21 | Final Project One-on-Ones

We’ll meet at the start of class to briefly discuss the guiding questions for your final projects that the class will collectively produce. Thereafter: one-on-ones with Delia to discuss progress in your final projects.

Assignment: Write a list of questions to help guide or encourage critical reflection in the process of developing your counter-memory projects. We will collect your contributions in an online document to encourage comments and building on each other’s’ work.

Apr 28 | Work in Progress Workshop I

This session is primarily dedicated to a conversation on Final Project ideas, questions, and challenges.

Assignment: Prepare a short presentation that briefly introduces your counter-memory. Choose two topics or questions from our collectively produced document to unpack and explore with the class in discussion. The point of the presentations is to crowdsource ideas, find connections to others’ work and bewilderment, and have a conversation on counter memory.
  - Create a few slides to anchor your words.
  - Add your slides to the class’s Google Slide Deck (link via Canvas)
  - Be sure to include your name and preliminary project title on every slide

May 05 | Work in Progress Workshop II

Second session (if needed, given our numbers) dedicated to a conversation on Final Project ideas, questions, and challenges.

Assignment: Prepare a short presentation that briefly introduces your counter-memory. Choose two topics or questions from our collectively produced document to unpack and explore with the class in discussion. The point of the presentations is to crowdsource ideas, find connections to others’ work and bewilderment, and have a conversation on counter memory.
  - Create a few slides to anchor your words.
  - Add your slides to the class’s Google Slide Deck (link via Canvas)
  - Be sure to include your name and preliminary project title on every slide
May 10 | FINAL PROJECTS DUE

Send in an email to wendel@mit.edu by the end of the day.

General Class Guidelines:

Course Values Foundation:

No one is required to agree with one another, but everyone should try to understand others’ points of view. We will practice an active, daily welcoming of all manner of visible and invisible differences forged from our individual abilities, beliefs, backgrounds, and identities. Please consider this class an opportunity to be open and empathetic, to disagree with respect, and to think constructively about difficult topics. If this standard is not being upheld in our class or I can do more to foster an inclusive environment, please speak with me.

In this course, I will hold you to the high standard of academic integrity expected of all students at MIT. I do this for two reasons. First, it is essential to the learning process that you are the one doing the work and developing meaning from it. Second, it is important that there be a level playing field for all students in this course and that the rigor and integrity of the Institute’s educational program are maintained. Please review MIT’s Academic Integrity policy and related resources (e.g., working under pressure; how to paraphrase, summarize, and quote; etc.) and contact me if you have any questions about appropriate citation methods, the degree of collaboration that is permitted, or anything else related to the Academic Integrity of this course.

Mutual respect and academic integrity are paramount values in this class.

Late Assignments and Absences:

If you need an extension for an assignment deadline, please communicate with me well in advance so that we can find a reasonable alternative. If approved, the assignment will not be marked down. Likewise, absences related to medical issues or religious observance will be excused with advance or timely notice. In fairness to your colleagues: late assignments (for which you do not have advance approval) and unexcused absences will result in the reduction of your grade.

COVID-related absences: Any student who presents with COVID-like symptoms should firstly take care of your health needs, follow protocols with MIT Atlas attestations and MIT Medical for testing and next steps, and reach out to me (wendel@mit.edu) as soon as possible to arrange for continuity of participation. Please do not feel pressure to attend in-person if you have any suspicion of COVID exposure. The course is not designed for asynchronous participation. But we will attempt a hybrid class setting if needed.
**Student Support:**

This class is committed to equal access and fostering a supportive environment for learning.

Students who need disability accommodations, please contact [Disability and Access Services](https://mit.edu/disability) so that they can address your requests. You only need to do this once; thereafter please just inform me via email that you have been approved for accommodations and I will work with DAS to assist you.

If you are dealing with an issue that is impacting your ability to attend class or complete work, please write to me or contact one of the two support services listed below.

**Undergraduate Students: Student Support Services (S3)**

Website: [https://studentlife.mit.edu/s3](https://studentlife.mit.edu/s3)

If you are dealing with a personal or medical issue that is impacting your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an exam, you should contact a dean in Student Support Services (S3). S3 is here to help you. The deans will verify your situation, provide you with support, and help you work with your professor or instructor to determine next steps. In most circumstances, you will not be excused from coursework without verification from a dean. Please visit the S3 website for contact information and more ways that they can provide support.

**Graduate Students: GradSupport**

Website: [https://oge.mit.edu/development/gradsupport/](https://oge.mit.edu/development/gradsupport/)

As a graduate student, a variety of issues may impact your academic career including faculty/student relationships, funding, and interpersonal concerns. In the Office of Graduate Education (OGE), GradSupport provides consultation, coaching, and advocacy to graduate students on matters related to academic and life challenges. If you are dealing with an issue that is impacting your ability to attend class, complete work, or take an exam, you may contact GradSupport by email at gradsupport@mit.edu or via phone at (617) 253-4860.