

**University of Toronto,**  
Faculty of Arts and Science,  
Department of Political Science,

Academic Year 2023-2024

**Topics in Comparative Politics III: Epidemics and Phobia**  
**POL379H1 F; LEC0201**

**Instructor:** Prof. Ato Kwamena Onoma

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**Class time:** Wednesday 9-11am

**Office Hours:** By appointment

**THEMES:** This class will explore the relationship between epidemics and phobia with an emphasis on mapping and making sense of the forms that phobia takes during public health crises. We will also examine the extent to which epidemics constitute defining moments that inflect longstanding social dynamics. The following are some questions that we will explore: What is the relationship between health-related xenophobia and other forms of xenophobia? Do epidemics always coincide with xenophobia? Why are some groups scapegoated while others are not? Which members of scapegoated groups are targeted during epidemics? How do epidemics play into *intra*-group interactions? This course will help students to reflect on broader questions of mobility, identity and belonging while advancing their knowledge of the more specific issues of epidemics and phobia.

**FORMAT AND REQUIREMENTS:** This is a lecture with a significant discussion segment. This course will be in-person. The course will be divided into two sections. The first part of the course will help students grasp the dominant literature on xenophobia linked to public health crises. In the second section of the course, we will critically interrogate the dominant literature on the relationship between epidemics and xenophobia. We will detect its gaps and flaws and explore ways of further enriching it.

**PREREQUISITES:** 1.0 credit in POL/ JPA/ JPF/ JPI/ JPR/ JPS/ JRA courses

**ASSESSMENT**

- *Informed and consistent class participation (30%)*
- *Open book take-home mid-term assignment (30%):* You will have two weeks to submit your response (4 double-spaced pages each, Times New Roman, font 12: around 1500

words) to one of two questions posed by the instructor. Submit your response in MS Word format on Quercus by **9am on October 18, 2023**. A 2% penalty will be assessed each day the submission is late without excuse.

- *Open book take-home final assignment (40%)*: You will have two weeks to submit your response (4 double-spaced pages each, Times New Roman, font 12: around 1500 words) to one of two questions posed by the instructor. Submit your response in MS Word format on Quercus by **9am on December 10, 2023**. A 2% penalty will be assessed each day the submission is late without excuse.

**ABSENCE**: Students who absent themselves from class should complete the Absence Declaration form available to them directly on ACORN. Students should also inform the instructor of their absence.

**EXTENSIONS**: The deadlines for submission of assignments are hard deadlines. Extensions will only be granted in extraordinary circumstances.

**PLAGIARISM**: “Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will be dealt with accordingly. For further clarification and information on plagiarism please see Writing at the University of Toronto <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources>”.

**ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS**: The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/> as soon as possible.

**COURSE MATERIALS**: The materials below are required readings that must be completed before class. Most are available electronically either as links through the library’s website or as PDFs. You can locate the electronic links and PDF files under library resources on the course page in Quercus. Readings that are not available electronically can be found on short term loan – Course Reserve at Roberts Library.

### ***Week 1 (September 13): The problem of xenophobia***

- **Preoccupation:** What is the nature of the problem of xenophobia?
- **Readings:**
  - Landau, L. 2012. "Introducing the demons." In *Exorcising the Demons Within: Xenophobia, Violence and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa*, edited by Loren Landau. pp. 1-25. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
  - Jackson, Stephen. 2006. "Sons of which soil? The language and politics of autochthony in Eastern D.R. Congo." *African Studies Review* 49 (2): 95-123.

### ***Week 2 (September 20): Epidemics and xenophobia: Scope, forms and location***

- **Preoccupation:** What is the historical and geographic scope of xenophobia related to outbreaks of infectious diseases? What types of epidemics have spurred hatred towards those cast as other? To what extent is epidemic era phobia linked to broader angst over invading foreigners?
- **Readings:**
  - Dionne, Kim Yi and Fulya Turkmen. 2020. "The politics of pandemic othering: Putting COVID-19 in global and historical context." *International Organization* 74 (S1): E213-E230.
  - Tickin, Miriam. 2017. "Invasive others: Toward a contaminated world." *Social Research* 84 (1): xxi-xxxiv.

### ***Week 3 (September 27): Epidemics and xenophobia: Motivations***

- **Preoccupation:** Why do outbreaks of infectious diseases coincide with phobia targeting others?
- **Readings:**
  - Trauner, Joan. 1978. "The Chinese as medical scapegoats in San Francisco, 1870-1905." *California History* 57 (1): 70-87.
  - Eichelberger, Laura. 2007. "SARS and New York's Chinatown: the politics of risk and blame during an epidemic of fear." *Social Science and Medicine* 65 (6): 1284-1295.

### ***Week 4 (October 4): The media and xenophobia***

- **Preoccupation:** What role does the media play in epi/pandemic othering?
- **Reading:**
  - Monson, Sarah. 2017. "Ebola as African: American media discourses of panic and otherization." *Africa Today* 63 (3): 2-27.

**Week 5 (October 11): *The link between epidemics and xenophobia***

- **Preoccupation:** Do epidemics always coincide with xenophobic outbursts?
- **Readings:**
  - Cohn, Samuel. 2012. "Pandemics: waves of disease, waves of hate from the Plague of Athens to A.I.D.S." *Historical Journal* 85 (230): 535-555.

**Week 6 (October 18): *Long-standing stereotypes***

- **Preoccupation:** What role do long-standing stereotypes play in epidemic era phobia?
- **Readings:**
  - Cohn, Samuel. 2007. "The Black Death and the burning of Jews." *Past and Present* 196 (1): 3–36.

**Week 7 (October 25): *Targeting patterns***

- **Preoccupation:** Why are some migrants and migrant communities targeted in xenophobic outbreaks while others are spared?
- **Readings:**
  - Onoma, Ato. 2020. "Xenophobia's contours during an Ebola epidemic: Proximity and the targeting of Peul migrants in Senegal." *African Studies Review* 63 (2): 353-374.

**Week 8 (November 1): *Breaching boundaries 1***

- **Preoccupation:** How do we make sense of kindness towards others during epidemic-era xenophobic outbursts?
- **Readings**
  - Napier, David. 2017. "Epidemics and xenophobia, or, why xenophilia matters." *Social Research* 84 (1): 59-81.

**Week 9 (November 15): *Breaching boundaries 2***

- Onoma, Ato. 2020. "Epidemics, xenophobia and narratives of propitiousness." *Medical Anthropology: Cross-cultural Studies in Health and Illness* 39 (5): 382-397.

**Week 10 (November 22): *Beyond dichotomies***

- **Preoccupation:** To what extent is the self/other dichotomy useful in reading social cartographies, including during epidemics?

- **Readings**

- Napier, David. 2012. "Nonself help: how immunology might reframe the Enlightenment." *Cultural Anthropology* 27 (1): 122-37.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2012. "The other who is also oneself: Immunological risk, danger, and recognition." *Cultural Anthropology* 27 (1): 162-67.

***Week 11 (November 29): Epidemics and intra-group interactions: Distancing home***

- **Preoccupation:** How do epidemics impact intra-group relations? Does epidemic era phobia necessarily spare in-group members?
- **Reading:**
  - Onoma, Ato. 2018. "Epidemics and intra-communal contestations: Ekeh, 'les Guinéens' and Ebola in West Africa." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 56 (4): 595-617.

***Week 12 (December 6): Epidemics and intra-group relations: Distancing emigrants***

- **Preoccupation:** How do epidemics impact intra-group relations? Does epidemic era phobia necessarily spare in-group members?
- **Reading:**
  - Onoma, Ato. 2021. "The allure of scapegoating return migrants during a pandemic." *Medical Anthropology: Cross-cultural Studies in Health and Illness* 40 (7): 653-666.