

CONF 393/ PHIL 391
Philosophy, Conflict Theory, and Violence
Thursdays 4:30-7:10
Spring 2009
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And
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Office Hours: Thursdays 3:00-4:15 or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why violence? Why do some societies resort to violence as a means for settling conflicts, while violence is rare in other societies? This course examines the causes, sources, and origins of protracted violent conflicts between groups of various kinds—ethnic, religious, nationalistic. Students explore rival proposals that seek to explain such violence. Particular attention is given to notions of group identity and difference that are often exaggerated and exploited by protagonists of conflict. Clearly, such notions serve as a major source of protracted violence conflict.

Unit I of this course introduces students to certain recurring trends in global violence. Information about the “new” terrorism that has captivated world attention will also be presented. The 1994 Rwandan genocide will be examined as a case study. In Unit II rival explanations for such violence will be examined and evaluated. In particular, we study the psychological causes of mass violence. We also examine also the ideological approach associated with explanations of wars between nations and violent conflicts between religious groups. Unit III the course turns to a new topic in conflict analysis—the disempowering of civilians by conflict protagonists as a prelude to their devastation. Students explore how the relationship between the Enemy Other and the Innocent Other is a defining dimension of protracted conflicts involving identity groups (ethnic, racial, nationalistic). This relationship is thoroughly embedded in, and central to, the dynamics of conflict. Particular attention will be given to ways in which women and children are positioned (and then targeted) as dangerous. The devastating results are found in episodes of systematic rapes, torture, ethnic cleansing, displacement, and extreme violence.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To expose students to the major issues in the literature on the sources, sources, origins of group violence.
2. To explore the case of Rwandan genocide
3. To identify the major stages of development of a violent conflict.
4. To “test” proposals, hypotheses, and models presented in the literature with other cases studies of violent conflict.
5. To invite conjecture on alternative proposals for the sources of violent conflict.

TEXTS:

1. Philip Gourevitch, We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories from Rwanda. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1998.
2. V. D. Volkan, Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. 1997.
3. Chris Hedges, War is a Force that Gives us Meaning, Anchor Books, 2002. Paperback: 1-4000-3463-9
4. Carolyn Nordstrom, Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century. University of California Press. Paperback: 978-0-520-24241-8

Articles/book chapters:

1. Dennis Sandole, "Identity Under Siege: Injustice, Historical Grievance, Rage, and the 'New' Terrorism" [Sent by email]
2. Lucina and Gleditsch, "Monitoring Trends in Global Conflict: A New Dataset on Battle Deaths" [Sent by email]
3. Rambotham, et. al., "Statistics of Deadly Quarrels" in Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Chapter 3 [e-reserve]
4. Eric Weitz. "Nation, Race, and State Socialism" A Century of Genocide, Chapter Two [e-reserve]
5. Hannah Arendt: "On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding" in Essays in Understanding 1930-1954. [e-reserve]
6. A Simulation Study of the Psychology of Imprisonment Conducted at Stanford University. <http://www.prisonexp.org/>
7. Rothbart and Korostelina, "The Enemy and the Innocent of Violent Conflict" [Send by email]
8. Neta Oren, Daniel Rothbart, and Karina V. Korostelina, "Israeli Leaders' Deliberations over Striking Civilian Targets during the Lebanon War - a Social Psychological Analysis" [Send by email].

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Using the following link to search Electronic Reserves.
<http://furbo.gmu.edu/cgi-bin/ers/OSCRgen.cgi>

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Unit I. Trends in Global Violence

Session 1 (January 22): What is an analysis of global violence?

Session 2 (Jan. 29): The “New Terrorism”

- a. Dennis Sandole, “Identity Under Siege: Injustice, Historical Grievance, Rage, and the ‘New’ Terrorism” [Send by email]
- b. Rambotham, et. al., “Statistics of Deadly Quarrels” in Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Chapter 3 [e-reserve]

Session 3 (Feb. 5): Statistics about Deadly Conflicts

- a. Lucina and Gleditsch, “Monitoring Trends in Global Conflict” A New Dataset on Battle Deaths” [Send by email]

Session 4 (Feb. 12): Genocide in Rwanda

Philip Gourevitch, We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families. Part 1

Session 5 (Feb. 19): Genocide in Rwanda

- a. Gourevitch, We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families. Part 2
- b. “Ghosts of Rwanda” (documentary film)

Unit 2: Explaining Global Violence

Session 6 (Feb. 26): Chosen Traumas

V. D. Volkan, Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism, pp. 50-end of book.

Session 7 (March 5): Conference: Genocide Prevention: SUB II Ballroom, starting at 5:00-7:30 pm.

Session 8 (March 19): The Plague of Nationalism

- a. Eric Weitz. "Nation, Race, and State Socialism" A Century of Genocide, Chapter Two. [e-reserve]
- b. Hannah Arendt: "On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding" in Essays in Understanding 1930-1954. [Send by email]

Session 9 (March 26): Zimbardo Experiments on Violence

A Simulation Study of the
Psychology of Imprisonment
Conducted at Stanford University
<http://www.prisonexp.org/>

Session 10 (April 2): The Force of Memory

Chris Hedges, War is a Force that Gives us Meaning.

Unit 3: The Enemy and the Innocent

Session 11 (April 9): Distinguishing Enemy from Innocent of violent Conflict

- a. Rothbart and Korostelina, "The Enemy and the Innocent of Violent Conflict" [Send by email]
- b. Neta Oren, Daniel Rothbart, and Karina V. Korostelina, "Israeli Leaders' Deliberations over Striking Civilian Targets during the Lebanon War - a Social Psychological Analysis" [Send by email].

Session 12 (April 16): Gender Violence

- a. Carolyn Nordstrom, "Making Things Invisible" Shadows of War, Chapter 3
- b. _____, "Finding the Front Lines" Shadows of War, Chapter 4

Session 13 (April 23): Violence and Power

- a. Carolyn Nordstrom, "Violence" Shadows of War, Chapter 5
- b. _____, "Power" Shadows of War, Chapter 6

Session 14 (April 30): Summary

Final Exam (Thursday, May 7, 4:30 to 7:15).

Course Requirements:

1. First exam covering Units 1 of the course.

- The exam will be distributed Feb. 26 and due March 5. This exam is worth 20 % of course grade. This exam cannot be rescheduled, except under conditions of emergency.
2. Second exam covering Units 2 of the course. This exam will be distributed April 2 and due April 9. This exam is worth 20 % of course grade. This exam cannot be rescheduled, except under conditions of emergency.
 3. Term paper: Reflections on Civilians in War.
The primary objective of this paper is to provide a critical study of presentations at a conference entitled “Civilian Devastation in War,” hosted by ICAR.

Dates: Friday, March 27, 2009
Saturday, March 28, 2009
Location: George Mason University
Arlington Campus
3330 Washington Blvd.
Arlington, VA

Your paper will focus on three presentations of your choice from this conference. The analysis will draw upon information from the following sources: readings from our class, information given in the lecture and discussion, possible interviews with the conference speakers, additional information from library search (much more than Wikipedia). For your paper 30% of course grade.
This paper is due Session 13; April 23.

4. Final exam. The exam questions will be distributed May 1, and the answers are due May 8, at 7.10pm. 20%

5. Class participation

The class participation grade rests on regular attendance to class sessions, participation during class, and active listening. The usual courtesies regarding the classroom environment are expected. All electronic equipment, cell-phones, and communication devices will be turned off, except laptops that are used solely for in-class note-taking. [10% of course grade.]

Honor Policy:

All students are expected to abide by the Honor Code:

Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work. Failure to comply with this code may result in academic penalty in accordance with the procedures of the Honor Committee.