

PHIL 391/CONF 393
Philosophy, Conflict Theory, and Violence

Spring 2008

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And

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Office Hours: Thursdays 3:00-4:30 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.

The course content is organized as follows. Unit I introduces students to certain recurring trends in global violence. Information about the “new” terrorism that has captivated world attention will also be presented. In Unit II rival explanations for such violence will be examined and evaluated. In particular, we study the psychological perspectives on the causes of violent behavior. We also examine also the ideological approach associated with explanations of wars between nations and violent conflicts between religious groups. Unit III examines the recent surge in violence between ethnic groups. V. Volkan’s method for analyzing the causes and conditions of such conflict are explored. Students examine the 1994 genocide in Rwanda as a “test” of Volkan’s theory. In Unit IV the course turns to a new topic in conflict analysis—the characterization of the innocent by belligerent as a defining element of the conflict. 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. As women are thought to harbor, support, assist, or possibly join the ranks of the militant enemy, they are subjected to a malignant repositioning during times of protracted conflicts. 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. Princeton University Press. "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. Anatol Rapoport, The Origins of Violence, Chapters 4 and Chapter 5. [e-reserve]
7. Rothbart and Korostelina, "Introduction: Identity, Morality, and Threat" in Rothbart and Korostelina, eds, (2006) Identity, Morality, and Threat: Studies in Violent Conflict. [Send by email]
8. Rothbart and Korostelina, "Moral Denigration of the Other" in Rothbart and Korostelina, eds, (2006) *Identity, Morality, and Threat: Studies in Violent Conflict*. [Send by email]
9. Rothbart and Korostelina, "The Enemy and the Innocent of Violent Conflict," in Conflict Resolution: Core Concepts, Theories, Approaches and Practices, [Sent by email]

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COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Unit I. Trends in Global Violence

Session 1 (January 24): What is an analysis of global violence?

Session 2 (Jan. 31): The “New Terrorism”

- a. Dennis Sandole, “Identity Under Siege: Injustice, Historical Grievance, Rage, and the 'New' Terrorism” [Send by email]
- b. Chris Hedges, War is a Force that Gives us Meaning, pp.1-82.

Session 3 (February 7): The Force of Memory

Chris Hedges, War is a Force that Gives us Meaning, pp. 83-185.

Session 4 (Feb. 14): Statistics about Deadly Conflicts

- a. Lucina and Gleditsch, “Monitoring Trends in Global Conflict” A New Dataset on Battle Deaths” [Send by email]
- b. Rambotham, et. al., “Statistics of Deadly Quarrels” in Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Chapter 3 [e-reserve]

Session 5 (Feb. 21): 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]

Unit 2: Explaining Global Violence

Session 6 (Feb. 28): Chosen Traumas

V. D. Volkan, Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism, Preface,

Session 7 (March 6): The Attitudinal Perspective: We and They

Anatol Rapoport, The Origins of Violence, Chapters 4 and 5. [Send by email]

Session 8 (March 20): Threat Narratives and identity-based conflicts

- a. Rothbart and Korostelina, “Introduction: Identity, Morality, and Threat” in Identity, Morality, and Threat: Studies in Violent Conflict. [Send by email]
- b. _____, “Moral Denigration of the Other” in Identity, Morality, and Threat: Studies in Violent Conflict. [Send by email]

Session 9 (March 27): [Research session]

Unit 3: Genocide in Rwanda

Session 10 (April 3): The preconditions for Genocide

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

Session 11 (April 10): Post-conflict tensions

a. Philip Gourevitch, We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families. Part 2

b. "Ghosts of Rwanda" (documentary film)

Unit 4: The Enemy and the Innocent

Session 12 (April 17): Global 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 24): Violence and Power

a. Carolyn Nordstrom, "Violence" Shadows of War, Chapter 5

b. _____, "Power" Shadows of War, Chapter 6

c. Rothbart and Korostelina, "The Enemy and the Innocent of Violent Conflict" [Send by email]

Session 14 (May 1): Summary

Final Exam. 20% of course grade. (Thursday, May 8, 4:30 to 7:10).

Course Requirements:

1. First exam covering Units I and II of the course. In-class Exam.
25% of course grade. This exam cannot be rescheduled, except under conditions of emergency.
2. Final exam covering Units III and IV of the course
25% of course grade. This exam cannot be rescheduled, except under conditions of emergency.
3. Term paper. The Paper offers a critical comparative analysis of two perspectives on the causes of violence. It is due session 12 (April 17) and represents 25% of course grade.
4. Journal. A journal includes summaries of each assigned reading, approximately one page for each chapter or article. They will be submitted in two installments during the semester. The grade for the journal will comprise 25% of your 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.