

CONF 302:002
Identity and Conflict
Tuesdays, 10:30-1:15

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Why violence? Why do some communities respond to local skirmishes with a ferocity that seems disproportional to the threat posed by the enemy and spirals out of control, setting in motion a sequence of violence, at multiple levels of society, engulfing large segments of the civilian populations in its wake? Conversely, why do other communities address similar grievances with their neighbors peacefully, containing the potentially damaging impact of their malice, allegedly, and avoiding the kind of self-perpetuating enmity that often fuels the downward spiral of conflictual relations between the conflict parties?

These questions are addressed as primary topics of this course. We examine how, in the prelude to violent conflicts, certain notions about the character, activities and ambitions of an adversary can be elevated to essential “realities” about the Outgroup. The social psychological processes of scape-goating, bigotry, and stigmatization, are examined as resorting to violence as a way to address grievances. In many conflict contexts, these processes represent reactions to a shared sense of peril, intensified by fears that the perceived enemy has the capacity and will to dominate, punish, or vanquish the “good people” at home.

This course is organized around the following major topics:

1. Basic concepts of identity and difference
2. Ethnic Identity and Conflict
3. National Identity and Conflict
4. The Moralpolitics of Identity Conflict

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:

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. ISBN: 0-312-24335-9 [Paperback]
2. V. D. Volkan, Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. 1997. ISBN: [0-8133-9038-9]
3. Ashmore, R. D., Jussim, L. and Wilder, D. (2001). Social Identity, intergroup conflict and conflict reduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 0-19-513743-4 [paperback]

4. D. Rothbart and Korostelina, K. (2006). Identity, Morality, and Threat: Studies in Violent Conflict. Lexington Book. ISBN: 10: 0-7391-1618-5 [paperback].

5. Harold Isaacs, (1975) Idols of the Tribe, Harper and Row. ISBN: 0-674-44315-2. [paperback]

Article:

http://www.beyondintractability.org/user_guides/identity_conflicts/?nid=5306#essays_conflicts

SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Week 1 [January 25] Introduction to Course: Topics, Objectives, and Assignments

UNIT I: Identity and Difference

Week 2 [February 1] Identity Groups Living in Peace and in War

1. Identity Conflicts at <http://www.beyondintractability.org>
2. Harold Isaacs, Idols of the Tribe, pp. 26-46
3. Dennis Sandole, "Identity Under Siege," in Identity, Morality and Threat, pp. 59-100.

Assignment #1: Letter to a friend about your personal identity. Due date is Week 4: February 15.

Week 3 [February 8] Ingroup-Outgroup Difference

1. Marilynn Brewer, "Ingroup Identification and Intergroup Conflict" in Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction, pp. 17-41.
2. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and Intergroup Conflict," in Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction, pp. 42-68.

UNIT II: Ethnic Identity

Week 4 [February 15] Ethnic Conflicts—Psycho-cultural Perspective

Vamik Volkan, Bloodlines, pp. 19-29, 36-49, 81-100.

Week 5 [February 22] Construction of Group Difference

Isaacs, Idols of the Tribe, pp. 46-93, and 115-144.

Assignment #2: Ethnic identity paper. Due date is: Week 7 [March 8].

Week 6 [March 1] Ethnic Conflicts—the Case of Rwanda

Philip Gourevitch, We Wish to Inform You....” pp. 47-171.

Week 7 [March 8] Ethnic Conflicts—the Case of Rwanda

Film: Ghosts of Rwanda

UNIT III: National Identity

Week 8 [March 22] American Identity

1. Jack Citrin, et. al., “The Meaning of American National Identity,” in Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction, pp. 71-100
2. Harold Isaacs, Idols of the Tribe, pp. 171-204.

[Film: A class Divided]

Week 9 [March 29] National Conflicts

1. David Alpher and D. Rothbart, “‘Good Violence’ and the Myth of the Eternal Soldier” in Identity, Morality and Threat, pp. 241-278.
2. Edward Tiryakian, “Coping with Collective Stigma: the Case of Germany” in Identity, Morality and Threat, pp. 59-100.

Assignment #3: National identity paper. Due date is: Week 11 [April 12].

Week 10 [April 5] Middle East Conflicts

1. Volkan, Bloodlines, pp. 146-167.
2. Herbert Kelman, “The Role of National Identity in Conflict Resolution” in Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction, pp. 187-212.

[Film: West Bank Story]

UNIT IV: The Moralpolitik of Group Identities

Week 11 [April 12] Religious Conflicts

1. Harold Isaacs, Idols of the Tribe, pp. 144-170.

2. S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, "Islamic Tradition of Nonviolence," in Identity, Morality and Threat, pp. 211-237.

Assignment #4: Final paper on case study and intervention, due May 10.

Week 12 [April 19] Identities and Threat Narratives

Rothbart and Korostelina, "Moral Denigration of the Other," in Identity, Morality and Threat, pp. 29-58.

Week 13 [April 26] Beyond Threats

Ashmore, et. al., in Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction, pp. 213-250.

Philip Gourevitch, We Wish to Inform You...." pp. 177-291.

Week 14 [May 3] Summation

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Participation.

Each class session will include a discussion-component that calls for active participation. Of course, regular attendance is expected. [10% of course grade.]

2. **Assignment #1: Letter to a friend about your personal identity.**

Write a long letter to a friend in which you reveal and explain your social identity. In this letter you should highlight the groups, large or small, that establish who you are, and how you have been influenced by such associations. It is essential that you include the concepts and doctrines presented in the two chapters by Brewer and Eriksen [see readings for week 3]. The following topics should be addressed:

1. The essential elements of each group—what coheres its members, what are the primary group characteristics, and what kinds of action and behavior are typical of the group. Again, you may choose to contrast your group with others within the category, for example, indicating how Americans are not like the French. Show the impact of this on the actions/behaviors of Americans. Provide contrasting differences to other nationalities. Again, the group can be large, as in a nationality, or small, as with your immediate family.
2. Major influences of group on you—how exactly has the group determined who you are, as an individual, and what you do. You may choose specific incidents or patterns of events, such a regular attendance to religious services.
3. Identity salience—has your membership in a group become more, or less pronounced, increasing or decreasing in salience at a particular period of time?
4. Interactions of group membership--how has your association in one group influenced, determined, affected, or altered your association in another group?

The paper should be between 4 and 5 pages double spaced. **Assignment #1: Letter to a friend about your personal identity.** Due date is Week 4: February 15. The grade comprises 20% of the course grade.

3. **Assignment #2: Ethnic identity paper.**

Write a paper analyzing ethnic identity of your choice (identity of your own ethnic group or any other ethnic group) based on theoretical ideas of V. Volcan. You can gather information about the ethnic group from your research—books, articles, chapters by researchers. You may choose to interview representatives of the group. In your paper should address the following topics: (1) past episodes of chosen trauma, (2) past or present examples of chosen glory, (3) the normative implications of trauma and glory—what should be done regarding relations with an adversary group? The paper should be between 4 and 5 pages double-spaced.

Stages:

- a. The first draft of the paper is due Week 7 [March 8]. The grade comprises 10% of the course grade.
- b. You will receive feedback--comments, recommendations, advice for improving this draft.
- c. The second draft of the paper is due Week 9 [March 22]. The grade comprises 10% of the course grade.

4. **Assignment #3: National identity paper.**

Write a paper in which you provide an in-depth analysis of national identity of Americans living in the U.S. One primary objective of this paper is to use the central categories and doctrines of identity-formation as presented in the readings above, especially from the work of Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Marilyn Brewer, and Jack Citrin. The paper should be between 4 and 5 pages double-spaced. Due date is: Week 11 [April 12]. The grade comprises 20% of the course grade.

5. **Assignment #4: Final paper on case study and intervention.**

The case study can be drawn from the organizational, communal, national, or international level and should involve identity conflict in any form. Be sure to analyze conflict based on theoretical ideas and notions you studied during the course. Show how theoretical analysis can help to understand identity conflict and can serve as a basis for the intervention. Plan to present the results of your paper during last two classes. The research paper should be 8-10 pages in length double space. Due date is May, 10. The grade for final draft comprises 30% of the course grade.

WRITING INTENSIVE COURSE:

This course fulfills the writing intensive requirement for majors in conflict analysis and resolution. It does so through a sequence of assignments that totals 5000–6250 words. The sequenced assignments include drafts and revisions of

Assignment #1: Letter to a friend about your personal identity [1000-1250 words].

Assignment #2: Ethnic identity paper [1000-1250]

Assignment #3: National identity paper [1000-1250]

Assignment #4: Final paper on case study and intervention [2000-2500 words].

Thanks to the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, this course is supported by a Writing Fellow, Kim Ruff: [kruff@masonlive.gmu.edu]. Every student will be required to meet with Ms. Ruff at least once during the semester. She has had training in the Writing Center as a tutor and is available to provide oral and written feedback on drafts, as well as offer individual and group instruction on common writing problems or issues. Writing fellows also meet with the professor to discuss writing in the course; they do not give grades on papers, nor are they editors or proofreaders. Ms. Ruff will introduce herself during our first few classes and will attend most classes. We are fortunate to have her working with us this term.

HONOR POLICY and Plagiarism:

All George Mason University students have agreed to abide by the letter and the spirit of the Honor Code. You can find a copy of the Honor Code at academicintegrity.gmu.edu. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee for review. With specific regards to plagiarism, three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. If you have questions about when the contributions of others to your work must be acknowledged and appropriate ways to cite those contributions, please talk with the professor.

ICAR requires that all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit a student's work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. ICAR's policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace or substitute for it.