

**CONF 302- 003**  
**Culture, Identity and Conflict**  
**Fall 2015**

**Instructor: Phil Gamaghelyan    Class: Wednesdays 7.20pm – 10.00pm**  
**Email: fgamagh2@gmu.edu    Classroom: KH 242**  
**Office: Northeast Module II, Room 117**  
**Office Hours: by appointment**

What is identity? What is culture? How does our understanding of these categories influence conflicts and other aspects of our relationships? In CONF 302 we will explore how the complex and multidimensional concepts of identity and culture, as well as the related categories of ethnicity, nation, patriotism, racism have emerged, gradually transformed and gained prominence in conflict and conflict resolution. We will discuss the meaning of these concepts as they continue to be contested both within and outside of academia. We will examine how socially salient identities are constructed, groups and ideologies formed, how patterns of domination and marginalization emerge and transform and the ways in which conflicts are born and transformed.

CONF 302 fulfills all of the writing-intensive requirements for the Conflict Analysis and Resolution (CAR) major through the assignments listed in the syllabus. In addition, each class member is strongly encouraged to attend Writing Center workshops for further instruction. See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>.

### **Grading**

**This course will be evaluated in the following way:**

Presence and active participation: 20%  
Reflective Essay: Self-identity: 10%  
Book Review: 20%  
Analytic Essay: Group identity: 20%  
Final paper: 30%

### **Participation (20%):**

This is an interactive class that meets only once a week, therefore your active participation is essential to learning. Consequently, the participation accounts for 20% of your final grade. Your participation will be evaluated based both on your attendance and your contributions to our class discussions. You will be graded on the *quality* and the *regularity* of your contributions. When reading the texts, try to think about the following: what are the authors' main points? Are they compelling? Do you agree or disagree with the author? Why? What do the other authors you studied have to say about the questions of identity, culture and conflict?

To receive a high grade for participation you should be an active and regular contributor to our discussions, as well as a generous listener. In other words, it is not only the quantity of your contributions but the quality and your presence that matters, as well as your ability to listen openly to others' perspectives.

The use of laptops in class is strongly discouraged. If you insist on having a laptop open for note-taking, please limit the use of it to class-related activities. Web browsing is easy to spot, it sharply decreases the attention devoted to the class and affects your and others' participation and will, therefore, negatively impact your grade.

### **Reflective Essay: Self-identity: 10%**

Think about all the social groups you are part of: which ones are of particular importance? Why? What role do you play in each of them? Is your participation voluntary or is it imposed?

In writing this paper, describe your most salient identities and give examples of how they influence your values, relationships, career choices. Is your identity constant or changing? Does context have influence on what parts of your identity are salient at a give time? The paper should be 2 – 3 pages in length, 1,5 spaced, 12-point font.

### **Book Review: 20%**

You will have two weeks plus extra 3 days to read Philip Gourevitch's "We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families" and write a book review on it.

In class, we will discuss what a book review is and how to write it. Due by midnight on October 10.

You can consult on-line resources on writing a book review, such as:

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/bookrev/index.htm>

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/book-reviews/>

### **Analytic essay: identity, culture and conflict resolution (20%)**

In this paper you should analyze the various approaches to concepts of culture and identity and their impact on our understanding of conflict and conflict resolution. The paper should include the following:

- description of theories of identity and culture (1 page to 1,5 page);
- critique of theories of identity and culture and outlining and justifying what is your own understanding of these concepts as of today (1 page);
- discussing with the help of a case study, how the theories that correspond to your understanding of culture and identity impact your understanding of conflict and conflict resolution (1 page to 1,5 page).

The paper should be 3 – 4 pages in length, 1,5 spaced, 12-point font. Due by midnight on November 14.

## **Final Paper Synthesis: (30%)**

This case study of an identity-conflict can be drawn from personal, organizational, communal, national, or international level.

The paper should have a well-developed theoretical framework that builds on the readings studied in class but is not limited to them. The theoretical section should be followed by a case study of a conflict and suggestions for conflict resolution intervention, both informed by your theoretical background. Be sure NOT TO present description of a conflict or suggestions for resolution that are independent of your theory. Your grade will depend on your ability to integrate your theory with your case study and your suggestions for conflict resolution intervention.

Be ready to present the outline of your paper during the last few weeks of the semester. The final paper should be 10 pages in length 1,5 spaced, 12-point font.

Due dates: please discuss your choice of the case study by November 4.

**The Final Papers are due by midnight on December 15.**

**The papers should be submitted electronically to [fgamagh2@gmu.edu](mailto:fgamagh2@gmu.edu).**

### **Grading:**

The assignments and the course will be graded according to the following chart:

A + is assigned to work that goes far beyond the class requirements, and brings to conversation creativity, intellectual excellence and alternative vision.

A is assigned to work that clearly meets all requirements, and contains visible elements of creativity, self-reflection and insight.

A- is assigned to work that meets all requirements, but does not go beyond the course material.

B+ is assigned to work that meets the basic requirements, but has some visible room for improvement.

B is assigned to work that meets the basic requirements, but has considerable room for improvement.

B - is assigned to work that represents a visible attempt to meet the basic requirements, but falls short from meeting them.

C+ C and C- are assigned to work that satisfies only parts or limited parts of the requirements.

D is assigned to unsatisfactory work that reflects a low degree of participation and effort.

### **Plagiarism and Honor Codes:**

You can find a copy of the Honor Code at [academicintegrity.gmu.edu](http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu).

You are expected to abide by George Mason University's Honor Code while preparing all work for this class. If you have any questions about Honor Code issues (e.g., whether you are permitted to discuss an assignment with a fellow student), are uncertain about how to cite a source, or if you have observed Honor Code violations, please discuss these with the Professor.

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](http://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.

S-CAR 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. S-CAR's policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace or substitute for it."

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#### **Student Services:**

**GMU Writing Center:** The Writing Center seeks to foster a writing climate on campus and beyond by offering free writing support to George Mason students, faculty, staff and alumni.

No matter what your writing abilities are, writing specialists can help you develop the skills you need to become a successful writer.

Free services include: One-on-one 45 minute sessions with a writing specialist; online writing lab; one-on-one sessions with an ESL specialist; workshops on such topics as documenting sources, grammar and punctuation; writing handouts on a variety of subjects; a library of handbooks and writing manuals; [and an] online chat with a tutor about papers submitted to the Online Writing Lab" (<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>).

#### **Disability Support Services:**

Any student with documented learning disabilities or other conditions that may affect academic performance should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Support Services (993-2474) to determine the possible accommodations you might need; and 2) contact her or his instructor to discuss reasonable accommodations.

"George Mason University is committed to providing appropriate services and accommodations that allow self-identified students with disabilities to access programs and activities at the university as stated in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. To achieve this goal, the university maintains and supports the Disability Resource Center Office, which is responsible for assuring that students receive the services and accommodations to which they are entitled. The professional staff of the Disability Resource Center Office coordinate services for students with disabilities, determine reasonable services and accommodations on the basis of disability, and act as a liaison between students and faculty/administration on concerns relating to services and accommodations"

<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/advising/dss.html>).

### **Required Books:**

Kevin Avruch. 2012. Context and Pretext in Conflict Resolution: Culture, Identity, Power, and Practice.

Philip Gourevitch. 1999. We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories from Rwanda. New York: Picador.

Rogers Brubaker. 2006. Ethnicity without Groups. Harvard University Press.

Benedict Anderson. 2006. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. Revised Edition.

**All other readings are available either on-line (links are provided in the syllabus) or on GMU Blackboard**

### **Schedule**

#### **Week 1: Sep 2**

##### **Overview of the course**

Welcome, introductions. Expectations and concerns from the class

**Please review the course syllabus and come prepared to discuss it.**

Readings:

In preparation to this class, please review the following literature:

“Identity Conflicts” at

[http://www.beyondintractability.org/user\\_guides/identity\\_conflicts/?nid=5306](http://www.beyondintractability.org/user_guides/identity_conflicts/?nid=5306)

Kriesberg, Louis, 2003. “Us versus Them.” at

[http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/identity\\_issues/](http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/identity_issues/)

Gardner, Robert 2003. “Identity Frames.” At

[http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/identity\\_frames/](http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/identity_frames/)

### **Identities and Identity Conflict Resolution**

#### **Week 2: Sep 9**

##### **Identity**

Readings:

Rothman, J. and M., Olson - From Interest to Identities: Toward a New Emphasis in Interactive Conflict Resolution (available on blackboard)

in Rogers Brubaker. 2006. Ethnicity without Groups  
Introduction

Ch. 1. Ethnicity without Groups

Ch 2. Beyond “Identity” [with Frederick Cooper]

**Reflective Essay on Self-Identity assignment is due by midnight on Thursday, September 10.**

### **Week 3: Sep 16**

#### **Ethnicity and Conflict**

Readings: in Rogers Brubaker. 2006. Ethnicity without Groups

Ch 3. Ethnicity as Cognition [with Mara Loveman and Peter Stamatov]

Ch 4. Ethnic and Nationalist Violence [with David Laitin]

Ch 5. The Return of Assimilation?

### **Week 4: Sep 23**

#### **Nationalism and Patriotism, case studies**

Readings: in Rogers Brubaker. 2006. Ethnicity without Groups

Ch 6. “Civic” and “Ethnic” Nationalism

Ch 7. Ethnicity, Migration, and Statehood in Post–Cold War Europe

Ch 8. 1848 in 1998: The Politics of Commemoration in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia [with Margit Feischmidt]

## ***Rwanda***

### **Week 5: Sep 30**

#### **Case Study: Rwanda**

Readings:

Philip Gourevitch. We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families.

(the section to be read from the book will be discussed in class)

### **Week 6: October 7**

#### **Book Review**

**Readings:**

on-line resources on book review

**In class: documentary, Rwanda's Untold Story**

<https://vimeo.com/107867605>

**Book Review assignment is due by midnight on Saturday, October 10**

## **Nation State and Conflict**

**Week 7: October 14**

**Culture and Nations**

Readings:

**In Benedict Anderson. Imagined Communities.**

- Introduction and Chapter 2, 3 and 4

**Week 8: October 21**

**Nationalism, Imperialism, Patriotism and Racism**

Readings:

**In Benedict Anderson. Imagined Communities.**

- Introduction and Chapter 5, 6, 7 and 8

**Week 9, October 28**

**Memory: Collective Remembering and Forgetting**

Readings:

**In Benedict Anderson. Imagined Communities.**

- Introduction and Chapter 9, 10 and 11

Case Study:

Dwyer, Leslie 2009. "A politics of silences: violence, memory and treacherous speech in post- 1965 Bali." In Alex Hinton and Kevin O'Neill, eds., *Genocide, Truth, Memory and Representation: Anthropological Approaches*. Durham: Duke University Press. Available on Blackboard.

**Week 10: November 4**

**Simulation: Cambodia (materials to be handed out in class)**

Readings:

Halpern, J. and H., Weinstein - *Rehumanizing the Other: Empathy and Reconciliation*.

## **Culture in Conflict and Conflict Resolution**

**Week 11: November 11**  
**Culture**

Required:

In Kevin Avruch. Context and Pretext in Conflict Resolution:

- 1 Introduction: Culture, Conflict, and Conflict Resolution
- 2 Context and Pretext in Conflict Resolution
- 3 Culture, Relativism, and Human Rights

**Analytic Essay assignment is due by midnight on Saturday, Nov 14**

**Week 12: November 18**  
**Culture, Identity and Conflict**

Required:

In Kevin Avruch. Context and Pretext in Conflict Resolution:

- 4 Constructing Identity
- 5 Type I and Type II Errors in Culturally Sensitive Conflict Resolution Practice

**Final paper presentations**

**Week 13: November 25**  
**No Class. Thanksgiving Break**

**Week 14: Dec 2**  
**Culture, Power and Conflict Resolution**

Required:

In Kevin Avruch. Context and Pretext in Conflict Resolution:

- 6 Culture Theory, Culture Clash, and the Practice of Conflict Resolution
- 7 Negotiating Beyond Interests: The Poverty of Buyer and Seller
- 8 After Violence: TRCs and Reconstructing Identity
- 9 Conflict Resolution and the Dilemma of Power

**Final paper presentations**

**Week 15: Dec 9**  
**Last Day of Class**

**Final paper presentations**

Reflections, evaluation

**Final papers due on Dec 15 by midnight**

**Please email the electronic copies of the paper to [fgamagh2@gmu.edu](mailto:fgamagh2@gmu.edu). Please keep a backup copy in case of any problems.**