

**CONF 302:003**  
**Culture, Identity and Conflict**  
Tuesdays: 10:30 am - 1:10 pm  
Thompson Hall 1017

Daniel Rothbart  
Professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution  
School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution  
[drothbar@gmu.edu](mailto:drothbar@gmu.edu)  
703-993-4474  
Spring 2015

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Why do some identity groups—ethnic, nationalistic, racial, cultural—address their grievances with an adversary group through the use of violence, setting in motion a downward spiral of conflict that engulfs large segments of the civilian populations? Why do other identify groups 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? This course addresses these questions through an examination of the causes, character and consequences of identity based conflicts. These represent the most common form of protracted violence conflicts today.

We examine how certain constructions of ingroup identity and outgroup difference centers on attention to the Other as dangerous and inherent degenerate. Taken as fixed realities of the social-political order, such constructions are developed through social psychological processes of scape-goating, bigotry and stigmatization. In many 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. Self-Identity
2. Case Studies: Genocidal violence in Rwanda and in Darfur
3. Group identity and difference
4. The politics of “Us versus Them”

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. To learn the primary social psychological processes associated with identity-formation and transformation
2. To learn the primary processes in the construction of boundary divisions between ingroup and outgroup
3. To apply the categories and processes associated with identity and difference to contemporary conflict contexts.
4. To critically analyze identity politics in conflicts settings

## **REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:**

1. V. D. Volkan, Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. 1997. ISBN: [0-8133-9038-9]
2. 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]
3. Philip Gourevitch (1998). We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories of Rwanda. Picador. ISBN: 0-312-24335-9 [paperback]
4. Harold Isaacs, (1975) Idols of the Tribe, Harper and Row. ISBN: 0-674-44315-2. [paperback]

## **Required Articles: [In Blackboard]**

Louis Kriesberg, "Identity Issues,"

R. Harré and L. van Langenhove, "Reflexive positioning: autobiography" in Positioning Theory, edited by Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove.

"The Rwanda Conflict: Origin, Development, and Exit Strategies"

Celia Cook-Huffman, "The role of identity in conflict"

C. Benson, "The Unthinkable Boundaries of Self: The role of negative emotional boundaries in the formation, maintenance, and transformation of identities"

Andrew Tudor, "A (macro) sociology of fear?"

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

Paul Scham, "The Historical Narratives of Israelis and Palestinians and the Peacemaking Process."

Karin Willemse, "Darfur in War: The Politicization of Ethnic Identities?"

Alex de Waal, "Who Are the Darfurians? Arab and African Identities, Violence and External Engagement"

Albaqir Alafif Mukhtar, "Beyond Darfur: Identity and Conflict in Sudan"

M.L. King “On Nonviolence”

Ralph Ellison, “Prologue,” Invisible Man.

**To access Blackboard:**

<https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp>

Login

Go to: Courses

Select CONF 302

Go to: Course Content

Go to: Readings Folder

**SCHEDULE, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

**UNIT I: Self-Identity**

**Week 1 [January 20]** Introduction to Course: Topics, Objectives, and Assignments

**Week 2 [January 27] Who am I?**

1. Louis Kriesberg, “Identity Issues,”  
<http://wiscomp.org/pp-v3-n2/formatted/louis.pdf>
2. R. Harré and L. van Langenhove, “Reflexive positioning: autobiography” in  
Positioning Theory, edited by Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove. In  
Blackboard

Tan Le TED Radio Hour

<http://www.npr.org/2013/10/11/229881828/what-does-identity-mean-for-an-immigrant>

**UNIT II: Case Study: Rwanda**

**Week 3 [February 3] Rwanda before the Genocide**

“The Rwanda Conflict: Origin, Development, and Exit Strategies”

**Week 4 [February 10] Genocide and beyond**

Gourevitch. We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families, pp. 1-171.

Film: “The Ghosts of Rwanda”

Assignment #1 Due

### **UNIT III: Foundations of Identity and Difference**

#### **Week 5 [February 17] Groups as Tribes**

Harold Isaacs, Idols of the Tribe, pp. 26-70.

#### **Week 6 [February 24] What are identity groups?**

1. Ashmore, Jussim, and Wilder, "Introduction: social identity and intergroup conflict," in Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction
2. Marilynn Brewer, "Ingroup Identification and Intergroup Conflict" in Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction, pp. 17-41.

#### **Week 7 [March 3] Identity and Emotions**

Celia Cook-Huffman, "The role of identity in conflict" In Blackboard

C. Benson, "The Unthinkable Boundaries of Self: The role of negative emotional boundaries in the formation, maintenance, and transformation of identities" In Blackboard

Andrew Tudor, "A (macro) sociology of fear?" In Blackboard

Film: A Class Divided

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/>

#### **Week 8 [March 17]: Constructing Group Difference**

1. V. Volkan, Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism, pages 19-29, 36-49, 81-100.
2. Rothbart and Korostelina, "Moral Denigration of the Other," in Identity, Morality and Threat, pp. 29-58. In Blackboard

Assignment #2 Due

### **UNIT IV: The Politics of "Us versus Them"**

#### **Week 9 [March 24]: Middle East Conflicts**

1. V. Volkan, Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism, pages 146-180.
2. Paul Scham, "The Historical Narratives of Israelis and Palestinians and the Peacemaking Process." In Blackboard

**Week 10 [March 31]: Identity and the Crisis in Darfur Guest Lecturer: Adeeb Yousif]**

1. Karin Willemse, “Darfur in War: The Politicization of Ethnic Identities?” In Blackboard
2. Alex de Waal, “Who Are the Darfurians? Arab and African Identities, Violence and External Engagement” In Blackboard

**Week 11 [April 7]: Identity and the Crisis in Darfur [Guest Lecturer: Adeeb Yousif]**

Albaqir Alafif Mukhtar, “Beyond Darfur: Identity and Conflict in Sudan” In Blackboard

Film: Beats of the Antonov

**Week 12 [April 14] Nationalism and Conflict**

Harold Isaacs, Idols of the Tribe, pp. 171-204.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and Intergroup Conflict,” in Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction, pp. 42-68.

Jack Citrin, et. al., “The Meaning of American National Identity,” in Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction, pp. 71-100

**Week 13 [April 21]: Race in America [Guest Lecturer: Dr. Tehama Lopez Bunyasi]**

M.L. King “On Nonviolence” in Blackboard

Ralph Ellison, “Prologue,” in Invisible Man. In Blackboard

**Week 14 [April 28] Summation**

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

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**1. Participation.**

Each class session will include a discussion-component that calls for active participation. Since you are expected to attend each of the fourteen sessions of this course, each session that is missed will result on a reduction of the participation grade, according to the following matrix:

Out of a maximum of 100 points for the participation grade:

One unexcused absence results in 10 point reduction in participation grade  
Two unexcused absences results in 20 point reduction in participation grade  
Three unexcused absences results in 30 point reduction in participation grade  
Four unexcused absences results in 40 point reduction in participation grade  
And so on...

An unexcused absence is one in which I do not receive an adequate explanation for absence on or before the class session. The best means for communication is email: drothbar@gmu.edu.

The participation score represents 20% of course grade. So, for example, if your participation score is 80, as a result of two unexcused absences, then this score will be factored into 20% of the course grade.

**2. Assignment #1: A current identity-based conflict**

Write a short paper—about 1000 words—on the identity-related elements of a current conflict, using as your point of departure an article from the Washington Post. From this article, identify the identity groups participating in the conflict, the ways in which the groups interact, and the implications of their interaction to the conflict itself. Also, provide a brief history of their interactions, leading up to the current hostilities. This paper is worth 20% of course grade. It is due Week 4: February 10. Late submissions will receive a lower grade.

**3. Assignment #2: Foundations of Identity and Difference**

Write a paper of about 2000 words on any one of the primary topics addressed in weeks 5 through weeks 8, as indicated in the syllabus. For example, you can address the topic “What are identity groups?” with particular attention to the course material for this topic. Your paper must include the following elements:

1. A clear formulation of the issue, problem or theme associated with the primary topic that you select.
2. A summary of the central issue, problem or theme from the course material that is relevant to your topic.
3. Supporting arguments that give depth to the issue, problem and theme you address.
4. Reliance on at least three additional academic/scholarly sources of information to supplement your analysis.

This paper is due Week 8, March 17. It is worth 20% of your course grade. Late submission will result in a reduced grade.

**4. Assignment #3: The Politics of “Us versus Them”**

Write a paper of about 2000 words on the politics of identity and difference, selecting one of the major themes of weeks 9 through 13. Your paper must include the following elements:

1. A clear formulation of the issue, problem or theme associated with the primary topic that you select.

2. A summary of the central issue, problem or theme from the course material that is relevant to your topic.
3. Inclusion of supporting arguments that give depth to the issue, problem and theme you address.
4. Reliance on at least three additional academic/scholarly sources of information to supplement your analysis.

This paper is due Week 13, April 21. It is worth 20% of your course grade. Late submissions will result in a reduced grade.

**5. Assignment #4: Final Exam:**

The final exam will comprise cover the major themes of the class, which serves as a comprehensive review of the course. This will be a take home exam, distributed Week 14 [April 28] and due one week later, noon May 5<sup>th</sup>. The grade comprises 20% of the course grade. No late submission will be accepted.

**WRITING INTENSIVE COURSE:**

This course fulfills the writing intensive requirement for majors in conflict analysis and resolution.

**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](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.