

violence and the postcolony: topics in african history

**HIAF 161 History Colloquium
Fall 2007
Tues. 3-5.50
HSS Room 6008**

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Our impressions of Africa are shaped by images of violence. Yet the logics, mechanisms, and costs of conflict across the continent are shockingly absent from popular discussions. This absence allows us to normalize suffering and pathologize an entire continent as peculiarly genocidal, somehow prone to self-destruction. In this course we will look for counterbalances to common images of war-torn Africa by seeking insights into conflicts from multiple perspectives: those of soldiers, survivors, refugees, returnees, academics, and journalists. In short, this course considers the complicated logics of postcolonial violence by assembling myriad snapshots of the experience, economies, and meanings of conflict from the 1960s to the present, from Algeria to Sierra Leone, from insurgency to genocide.

Through readings and discussions we will reflect on the particularities of multiple conflicts as well as their relevance for understanding broader trends in the modern world. Our guiding question will be: how have postcolonial conflicts taken their particular forms? To this end we will consider, 1) the meanings of violence for national and local relationships, and 2) how conflicts in Africa have been connected to larger economic and political fields of interaction. Thus, we will situate African conflicts in deeper histories, those of colonial hierarchies, Cold War geopolitics, and post-Cold War international relations. This framing will focus our attention on how conflicts across the continent have both been affected by and affected global conditions.

Required readings:

Greg Campbell, *Blood Diamonds: Tracing the Deadly Path of the World's Most Precious Stones*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004.

Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.

Nuruddin Farah, *Links*. New York: Penguin, 2005.

Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, *Darfur: Short History of a Long War*. New York: Zed Books, 2006.

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

Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*. New York: Picador, 2006.

Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Thomas Turner, *The Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth, and Reality*. New York: Zed Books, 2007.

ASSIGNMENTS:

(1) Three short papers, 5 pages in length each (**8 pages for graduate students**), will be due in my **email inbox** no later than 3pm on 23 October, 13 November, and 7 December. Each essay assignment consists of two questions: the first question asks you to consider a particular aspect of each reading; the second question urges you to synthesize insights from all three of the unit's readings. **Each set of questions appears on this syllabus below the heading of its due date. PLEASE consider these questions *as you read* the assigned texts. Doing so will make it much easier to answer the questions.**

NOTE: All late submissions will be penalized by subtracting one half grade (i.e., from A to A-) for each day late. Plagiarism in any form is not permitted. Any plagiarized paper will receive an F and be forwarded to the appropriate university administrator.

All written work must be checked closely for spelling and grammatical errors.

(2) Short presentation (10 minutes) of one or more of the readings. You will be required to present the basic arguments, evidence, and conclusions of one or more of the readings, depending on the size of the class. A sign-up sheet will be circulated the first week of class.

EVALUATION:

Final grades will be calculated in the following manner

- 1) Papers: 70 percent (20% 1st, 25% 2nd, 25% 3rd)**
- 2) Active class participation (including presentations): 30 percent**

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS

2 october, meeting one
introductions

PART ONE – the social relations of violence

9 october, meeting two
Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.

16 october, meeting three
Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

23 october, meeting four
Nuruddin Farah, *Links*. New York: Penguin, 2005.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE

How does each author seek to explain the effects of violence on everyday life? Together, what do these diverse accounts reveal of how people rationalize and cope with conflict?

PART TWO – *identity and genocide*

30 october, meeting five

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

6 november, meeting six

Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.

film: *Ghosts of Rwanda*

13 november, meeting seven

Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*. New York: Picador, 2006.

SECOND ASSIGNMENT DUE

How does each reading use identity as a theme for explaining violence? What general conclusions can we draw about the Rwandan Genocide from these reflections on identity?

PART THREE – *perpetuating conflict*

20 november, meeting eight

Thomas Turner, *The Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth, and Reality*. New York: Zed Books, 2007.

film: *The Peacekeepers*

27 november, meeting nine

Greg Campbell, *Blood Diamonds: Tracing the Deadly Path of the World's Most Precious Stones*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004.

4 december, meeting ten

Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, *Darfur: Short History of a Long War*. New York: Zed Books, 2006.

7 december

final assignment due via email at 4pm

How does each work explain the factors contributing to the perpetuation of conflicts? How are these explanations similar and/or different?