THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE GENEVA

INSTITUT DE HAUTES ÉTUDES INTERNATIONALES ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT
GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

International History and Politics

Academic year 2021-2022

Violence, History and Memory in Twentieth-Century Africa

HI062 - Autumn - 6 ECTS

Tuesday 10h15 - 12h00

Course Description

This course offers historical, theoretical and empirical perspectives on the impact of political violence in the modern history of Africa. Opening with debates over theories of violence, memory, justice, and the complex temporalities that entwine them, the course then proceeds through a series of case studies. These include the violence of colonisation and decolonisation, postcolonial secession conflicts, contrasting forms of genocide, political oppression, liberation struggles and civil war. In each case, we may consider the causes and means of violence, issues of gender, youth, religion, politics or ethnicity, and the ways that these experiences have shaped collective memories, political practices of memorialisation, and difficult representations of the past. Throughout, questions of culpability, ethics and moralities will be tackled in relation to the various approaches to healing and 'living together again', dominated by the pressures of memory, silence, oblivion and, in some cases, justice.

PROFESSOR

Aidan Russell

Office hours

ASSISTANT

Paul Théo Deshusses

Office hours

Syllabus

The course is conducted in seminar format, with three or more articles or chapters for compulsory class reading to be discussed for each session.

All students must read, and come prepared to discuss, all the class texts. These will be posted on Moodle and the collaborative tool Perusall, where the texts can be collectively annotated with notes, queries and observations for further discussion. Once during the course, each

student will also act as lead discussant for one class text: taking special responsibility for shaping debate and analysis of that text in advance of the class on Perusall, as well as during the session itself. Together, these forms of class participation will be evaluated as 30% of the final grade.

There will be two assessed pieces of written work. The first, a short paper of 2,000 words, should be a critical assessment of one author or theoretical perspective from the first three weeks on violence, memory and justice. It will be submitted by midnight on Sunday 31 October, and constitute 25% of the final grade. The second will be a long paper of up to 5,000 words, exploring in detail any question or historical case related to the course. Chosen topics must be confirmed with the professor by Tuesday 23 November, at which stage an outline, summary or partial draft may be submitted for feedback. Final submission will be midday on Friday 7 January, and it will constitute 45% of the final grade.

Important dates:

- Discussant commentary on Perusall: midday the day before the relevant class.
- Short paper submission: Sunday 31 October.
- Long paper topic confirmed: Tuesday 23 November.
- Long paper submission: Friday 7 January 2022

Overall assessment:

- Term paper: 45%
- Short paper: 25%
- Participation and discussion: 30%

A full reading list, further bibliography and sample essay questions will be distributed in the first class. For background reading, see the following key texts:

Amadiume, Ifi and Abdullahi An-Na'im, eds. (2000), *The Politics of Memory: Truth, Healing and Social Justice* London: Zed Books.

Ben-Ze'ev, Efrat, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter, eds., (2010) *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press

Bevernage, Berber, (2010) Writing the Past Out of the Present: History and the Politics of Time in Transitional Justice. *History Workshop Journal* 69, no. 1: 111-131.

Diawara, Mamadou, Bernard C. Lategan, and Jörn Rüsen (2010) *Historical Memory in Africa: Dealing With the Past, Reaching for the Future in an Intercultural Context*. Berghahn Books.

Fanon, Frantz (1963), *The Wretched of the Earth*. Original French: (1961) *Les damnées de la terre.*

Kalyvas, S. N. (2006), *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge: CUP

LaCapra, Dominick (2014), *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. JHU Press.

Mbembe, Achille (2001), *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Minow, Martha (1998), *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness : Facing History After Genocide and Mass Violence.* Boston: Beacon Press

Olick, Jeffrey K., Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy, eds. (2011), *The Collective Memory Reader*, OUP

Reid, Richard (2012), *Warfare in African History*, Cambridge: CUP

Reno, Will (2012), *Warfare in Independent Africa*, Cambridge: CUP

Soyinka, Wole (1998), *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*. Oxford University Press.

Teitel, Ruti G. (2001), *Transitional Justice.* New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press

Tutu, Desmond (1999), *No Future without Forgiveness*, London: Rider

Werbner, Richard, ed., (1998), *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*, London: Zed Books.

Class Schedule:

Part I: Theories and Concepts

1. Introduction

In the first week we will review the course content and requirements, while taking the time to think about what it means to study the history of violence. How does violence differ from conflict? What are the ethical and methodological challenges of taking such a lens on history? How can or should we write about the traumatic experiences of others? And what place does history take between justice and memory?

2. Histories of Violence

The first substantive session will be a structured discussion around an overview talk, outlining the various theories that have been raised to answer one of the fundamental questions of the course: how can we explain, talk and write about violence in Africa? The models of economists, political scientists, anthropologists and philosophers will be sketched, along with the problems and potential of historical address to these experiences, providing students with a framework of the competing interpretations that we will test in the subsequent case studies.

3. Time and Memory

The theoretical and conceptual discussion continues with an exploration of one of the most significant post-conflict issues, the question of memory. Violence has a profound effect on private and public memory, and therefore on the functioning of the surviving society for many years after the experience of violence. How is ‘collective memory’ formed, and how does it differ or interact with other forms of memory? Speaking across experiences of the world and experiences of violence, ought we to problematize the concept of ‘time’ as much as our understanding of memory? What role can historians play in societies still dominated by these intricate contests of recall, and what dangers must they avoid? Sometimes, must a society forget its past if it is to escape from it? Or does this simply doom the community to repeat its own violent destruction?

4. **Justice and History**

The final preparatory discussion looks at the various processes that have been instituted as a means of putting an end to violence through the establishment of truth and justice. From historical preferences for amnesty or inactivity, to a panoply of national and international tribunals, supposedly 'traditional' courts, and institutionalized truth commissions, the field of 'transitional justice' has expanded considerably in recent years. In its wake have come increasing demands for historical justice, for claims that go beyond a self-conscious moment of 'transition'. But are the means and goals of such processes necessarily compatible, feasible or even desirable? Can they ever be anything other than 'victor's justice'? How can justice be done for victims of crimes committed decades, or even centuries, in the past? And is it possible to resolve the moral tension between the 'time of history' and the 'time of justice'?

Part II: Legislating (for) the Past

5. **Truth and Reconciliation? South Africa**

Our case studies begin with a series of touchstone moments in the early 1990s, when three countries in transition produced remarkable experiments in dealing with the past as forms of social reconciliation, nation-building and political legitimation. We begin with the most influential of all processes of transitional justice, in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the previous decades of life under formal apartheid laws it sought to address. We will consider the particular dynamics of violence under this system and the forms and expressions of memory to which they gave rise, the promise of truth as a means of liberation and redemption along with those who seemed excluded from it, the moral tensions of reconciliation, forgiveness, amnesty and reparation, and the hopes and frustrations of inventing the 'Rainbow Nation'.

6. **Intimacy and Power: Rwanda**

Scarcely less emblematic than South Africa in the standard narratives of transitional justice, yet commonly framed in even greater polemical extremes, Rwanda's genocide in 1994 and the strategies taken to rebuild and secure the country afterwards remain vitally significant for understanding the complex potentialities that lie between violence, history, justice and power. Looking to go beyond the clichés and polemics, here we will interrogate the relationship between forms of violence, history and sociality, consider the disjunctions and opportunities between this memory and the assemblage of 'traditional', national and international legal processes invented to address it, and discuss the place for truth between politics and social life.

7. **Retribution and Regularity: Ethiopia**

While the different paths of South Africa and Rwanda tend to dominate most discussions of the experiments in transitional justice that unfolded through the 1990s, Ethiopia's transition from military rule in the same period suggested a rarely-discussed alternative: regular courts, administering 'normal', retributive justice to officers of the former regime, and seeking truth in the legal process, not through exceptional circumstances of public confession. Here, therefore, we discuss the nature and memory of the 'Red Terror' of 1976 and 1977 (the moment of ideological, revolutionary violence that would become most closely identified with the later trials), assess the political and moral arguments for the regularity of justice in addressing the crimes of the past, and take the opportunity to interrogate the connections and disconnections between the search for truth in the courtroom and alternative projects and strategies for institutionalising historical memory around it.

Part III: Beyond Transition

8. **Deep Memories and Late Apologies: Namibia**

With three standout examples of violence, memory and justice in political 'transition' in mind, we switch here to take a different tack, and look to how the same problems play out on different scales of historical experience. The first genocide of the twentieth century, conducted against the Herero and Nama peoples of what is now Namibia, pushes this question most forcefully, as we bridge nearly a hundred years between one of the most terrible moments of colonial violence and latter day attempts to bring it to light in historical education, national identity and international relations between the former colonised and former coloniser. While justice seemed to lie beyond reach in the long years between, we will examine the remarkable means of expressing memory in song and dress that were deployed as strategies of social reconstruction long before any formal processes could be imagined, and tackle the moral and political questions of historical reparations that the descendants of victims of genocide now press today.

9. **Silence, Record and Revelation: Kenya**

Decolonisation violence profoundly shaped the new nations that emerged from it, yet in most cases these wars were swiftly subjected to complex if divergent terms of mythologisation, denial and amnesia from both the departing colonial power and the new postcolonial nation builders. But the case of the 'Mau Mau Emergency' in Kenya presents an unexpected horizon to such moments of dramatic change, when new surprises bring people and nations back together to confront things long (apparently) confined to the past. Fifty years after the end of the war, community movements and new historical research within shifting political circumstances forced the revelation of thousands of boxes of archival records from across the world, retained and hidden by the British government at the end of empire. Raising difficult questions of collaboration, loyalism and betrayal among African actors during the War, while laying bare the extensive and systematic use of torture by the British, the new histories and old memories brought forward by these revelations provoked powerful questions of responsibility and compensation, apologies and regrets, and exposed the problematic yet uncomfortably productive relationship that can exist between historians and the law.

Part IV: Speaking Otherwise

10. **Speaking and Healing: Mozambique**

With our next two cases, we look to how experiences and memories of violence shape and find voice in forms of social, cultural and spiritual expression that far exceed the familiar terms either of transitional justice or of conventional history-writing. Emerging almost directly from a brutal independence conflict into a protracted civil war that was exacerbated by entanglement with transnational struggles, covert interventions and Cold War alliances, Mozambique's difficult history pushes us to shift the terms of our conversations from formal processes and the apparently clear disjunctions of a transition from violence to peace, and move towards the far more prevalent reality of messiness, uncertainty and unpredictability. Within this ambivalence, different forms of speech, processes of healing and means of social reconstruction may be seen, punctuated by the spirit voices of the dead and the recurring figure of the traitor, the deployment of memory as the language of national politics and the reconfiguration of gender relations within the home.

11. **Writing and Representing: Nigeria**

When Nigeria fell apart a few years after independence and the federal government fought an extraordinarily bitter war with the secessionist republic of Biafra, the conflict not only inflicted immense suffering and attracted international attention, but also gave rise to some of the most abundant,

powerful, and controversial means of speaking about violence at home and abroad. While pursuing an immediate policy of silence after the war, a 'No victims no vanquished' policy that hoped reconciliation could take place by osmosis if grievances could not be spoken, Nigerians would nevertheless go on to develop powerful means of expressing and contesting their memories and histories through multiple genres of writing, from the dubious memoirs of politicians to the searing inventions of poets, playwrights and novelists. At the same time, the critical role that the Biafra war assumed in international humanitarian mythology places it at the centre of a quite different means of talking about violence: in the 'speaking for' of humanitarian advocacy and war reporting. Together raising thorny problems of truth, fiction, the ethics of witnessing and invention, the right to speak of others' pain and of past violence, these divergent means of writing the war bring it right to the centre of our questions.

Part V: The Presence of the Past

12. **The Court of Those-Who-Remember: Burundi**

In our final pair of cases and concepts, we turn at last to the problem of the persistent presence of the past in the decades and even centuries after violence. With the history of Burundi, we see how a most particular experience of genocide in 1972 lived on in structural oppression and social taboo, memories bifurcating into militant mythology and imperious denial, personal and communal scars explored within uncomfortable spaces of euphemistic acknowledgement. Punctuating political change and underscoring, exacerbating and dissuading subsequent violence, the persistence of this one moment of catastrophe into the present now sees it addressed by a controversial Truth and Reconciliation Commission that is empowered to examine more than a century of acts of violence and injustice, challenging any assumptions we may have that the relentless march of time progressively leaves such moments behind in an absent past.

13. **Presence, Pain and Persistence: Congo**

Finally, we take an ultimate step away from singular violent 'events' in national histories, and consider the entanglements that bring together moments, images and acts across vast territories of time and space. If the Democratic Republic of Congo has been marked in international consciousness as a static place of 'horror' since its delineation in 1885, through its sensational Cold War crisis in the 1960s to cataclysmic continental war in the 1990s, it has nevertheless also been the home of millions who have lived through, remembered, hoped and created throughout these concatenating moments of violation, exploitation and rebellion. In this final session we will look to some of the most challenging explorations of these complex entanglements, from the sounds that bring the violence of the 1890s together with that of the 1990s, the problems of image-making and the gaze of others, to the bodily scars that maintain and reproduce memories of violence over the course of decades, and the question of what opportunity and hope there may be in writing memory from within such a space of experience.

14. **Review**

Our final session is a relaxed and informal opportunity to think back through our cases, theories and debates, ask any questions that remain to be asked.