WAR AND MEMORY
ANTH 6391

Professor Sarah Wagner  
Room: Duques 251  
W 5:10 - 7:00

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Violent conflict, civil wars, and wars of aggression have long been the purview of historians and political scientists in attempting to understand root causes and craft preventative policies. This course approaches war differently, examining the lived experiences of violent conflict from the perspectives of perpetrators, victims, and onlookers alike, specifically through the prism of memory. Throughout the semester we will seek to answer questions about how war shapes memory and memory shapes war: How do individuals and societies remember the events and experiences of war? How do survivors articulate loss? How do mechanisms of social repair intersect with individual and collective memory? When does war end in the social memory of its survivors? What does it mean to “never forget?”

The course is divided into four general topics: war’s toll and theories of memory; witnessing genocide; diasporic memory; military, memorials, and monuments. Our discussions of each will draw on a variety of sources—from memoirs, films, and documentaries, to ethnographic, historical, and political analyses. Throughout the course, emphasis is placed on reading critically and thinking abstractly, while being attentive to the specific sociohistorical contexts of each example we encounter. The final paper provides an opportunity for students to research and analyze in greater depth a topic related to the material covered in the course.

It is funny about wars, they ought to be different but they are not.  
Gertrude Stein, Wars I Have Seen, 1945

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:
1. Exercise skills in critical reading and analytical reasoning of anthropological and historical texts relating to war, its aftermath, and the politics of memory.
2. Demonstrate a general understanding of the social theory of memory, both individual and collective.
3. Discern and analyze the specific conditions foregrounding armed conflict and the politics of memory, including nationalism, ethnic identity, and post-colonialism.
4. Communicate clearly and effectively anthropological questions and concepts about the lived experiences of war and its aftermath and the tensions between remembering and forgetting in post-conflict societies.
Course Requirements and Grading Criteria
Weekly reflections (20%)
Participation (15%)
Ethnographic exercises (25%)
Final paper (40%)

Weekly reflections: Over the course of the semester, you are to write 10 short postings to share with the class in preparation for the week’s discussion. Your comments should address the assigned reading(s) and must be posted on Blackboard by 8 pm Tuesday to receive credit. You are not required to read your classmates’ postings, but you may find it helpful and interesting. Please note: There are no weekly postings for Week 1, 11, and 14. Each posting is worth 2 pts and should be a short (~200-250 words) but coherent reflection that follows one of these two formats:

*Close reading* (title your posting “Close reading: [name of author/s]”): Identify a passage from one of the readings that either sparks your interest, or stumps and frustrates you; explain how or why it does so; and pose an open-ended question that might help move our discussion forward to follow your inspiration or address your frustration.

*Crosstalk* (title your posting “Crosstalk: [topic or theme]”): Situate the session’s readings within the context of the course as a whole. What new elements do they bring to our ethnographic exploration of war and memory? Which previous readings do they build upon, which do they diverge from? How do they speak to themes emerging in class discussion?

Participation: The class participation grade is based not only on participation in class discussions but also on attendance (15 pts total - 10 pts for participation and 5 pts for attendance). After 2 missed classes, the participation grade will be lowered a full grade with each additional absence.

Active participation is vital for a lively and engaging seminar. It comes in different shapes and forms: some people tend to speak up more often, while others listen and reflect. Push yourself to contribute to the discussion in different ways, including at times by moving out of your comfort zone. Perhaps this means that rather than seeking to answer each question posed, you try to draw out a classmate; or, if speaking in class is harder for you, come prepared with a question or a passage from the text you’d like us to examine more closely. Above all, engage with and be respectful of other people’s ideas.

Ethnographic exercises: There are three ethnographic exercises; two are tied to a specific space: (1) the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (10 pts) and (2) the Holocaust Museum (10 pts). The third is a space or site of your own choosing (5 pts). Written instructions will be provided the week before the exercise.

Final Paper: The final research paper (20-25 pages, 1.5 spacing) will be on a topic of your choosing, but it must incorporate the themes of the course readings and discussions. I encourage students to meet with me individually to develop their paper topics and potential bibliographic sources early on in the semester; there are also two related (and graded) assignments aimed at encouraging you to develop your research and writing before the end of the semester(): (1) outline, abstract, and annotated bibliography [due November 6th] (5 pts); and (2) draft of the paper [due November 27th] (5 pts). The final paper is due on December 11th (30 pts).

Grading System: Grades will be calculated according to the following range: A = 94-100; A- = 90-93; B+ = 87-89; B = 84-86; B- = 80-83; C+ = 77-79; etc.
Course policies

Turning in assignments: Extensions will not be granted on the final paper or any of the other written assignments. Students must hand in hard copies (paper copies not emailed attachments) before or at the beginning of class the day the assignment is due. Over the course of the term, students have three free days for late work. Once these days are used up, the grade will be lowered a half grade per day.

Your behavior in the classroom has to follow the rules of intellectual life as well as social life. In class, you should be available. If you choose to use your computer during class, use it for taking notes only; otherwise, you distract your classmates and instructor. Please make sure that your cellphone is either turned off or silenced. Please do not come to class late if you can avoid it; if you do arrive late, do your best to minimize disturbing the rest of the class.

Technology in the classroom: Cell phones must be silenced or turned off during the class period. The use of laptops is limited to taking notes. If you are using your laptop for any other purpose, you will be asked to shut the computer off immediately and will not be allowed to use it in the future.

Academic Integrity
All students must practice academic integrity. This means doing your own work, and when you use the words and ideas of others in any written work, you must: 1) identify direct quotations with quotation marks; and 2) indicate the source of ideas that are not your own by using social sciences notation form. If you have any questions at all about what this means, you should speak to the instructor. Plagiarism, and all breaches of academic integrity, will be severely dealt with in accordance with the University's policies and procedures. For more information on The George Washington University's policies on academic integrity, consult: http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html

The policy on academic integrity in this course is that if you commit a breach of academic integrity in any assignment or exam, you will receive a zero for that assignment or exam. This infraction will be reported to the University's Academic Integrity Council. You will be clearly notified by the instructor in person OR by email before the Council is informed.

Special Needs
Please let me know right away if you have any special needs with respect to how this course will be conducted. Information and resources on specials needs are available at Disability Support Services (DSS) [http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/].

Required Texts

All other assigned reading material are found on Blackboard in the designated weekly folder.
Course Design

Part I. War’s toll: death, loss, and theories of memory

What has happened is that time has passed. Forgetfulness, by rolling my memories along in its tide, has done more than merely wear them down or consign them to oblivion. . . . One order has been replaced by another. Between these two cliffs, which preserve the distance between my gaze and its object, time, the destroyer, has begun to pile up rubble. Sharp edges have been blunted and whole sections have been collapsed: periods and places collide, are juxtaposed or are inverted, like strata displaced by tremors on the crust of an aging planet.” Claude Levi-Strauss, “The Quest for Power,” Tristes Tropiques

In the first segment of the course, we will explore the social meaning of war, drawing on examples from conflicts have have shaped US sensibilities toward violent conflict, including the Civil War, the Vietnam War, and the September 11, 2001 attacks. While we will not be able to study in-depth the historical context or events of each, we will try to discern parallels and differences among the experiences of those who fought in these conflicts, as well as those who cared for the sick, injured, and dying. On a more theoretical level, we will begin our semester-long consideration of memory, reading social theory that seeks to understand how memory works on an individual and social or collective level.

Week 1
W (8/28) - Introduction

Week 2
W (9/4) - How Does Memory Work? - Theory on individual and collective memory

Week 3
W (9/11) - September 11, 2001
In-class viewing: 11'09''11 September 11 shorts
Week 4-6

W (9/18) - The Vietnam War
Tim O’Brien, The Things They Carried.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial - ethnographic exercise (begin)

W (9/25) - The “American War in Vietnam”
Heonik Kwon, After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai.
Discussion of the film, Hearts and Minds [Note: you are to watch the film outside of class.]

Vietnam Veterans Memorial - ethnographic exercise (continue)

W (10/2) - The Vietnam War cont. - guest lecturer Dr. Sarah Daynes

Vietnam Veterans Memorial - ethnographic component (due in class)

Part II. Witnessing Genocide: “Never Again,” “Never Forget”

I have learnt that I am Häftling. My number is 174517; we have been baptized, we will carry the tattoo on our left arm until we die.
Primo Levi, Survival in Auschwitz

Across time and space, societies have established parameters of acceptable forms of combat (e.g., who can fight; who and what are appropriate targets for violence; how to punish transgressors). In the twentieth century, driven in large part by the horror of the Holocaust, states adopted an international code prohibiting certain acts of state-sponsored violence, among them genocide. In this segment of the course, we examine the singular crime of genocide, its legacies of harm, the act of witnessing, and the insistence on remembering (or at least not forgetting) its annihilating effects.

Week 7-8

W (10/9) - The Holocaust
* Trip to the Holocaust Museum

Holocaust Museum - ethnographic exercise

W (10/16) - Its reckoning
In-class viewing of Obedience

Holocaust Museum - ethnographic exercise due
Week 9
W (10/23) - Former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia


Part III. When wars travel: the politics and practice of diasporic memory

“The diaspora is a society in which the absent are a constant incitement to discourse about things moving.” - Engseng Ho, The Graves of Tarim

Week 10
W (10/30) Forced migration and diasporic memory


Week 11
W (11/6) Ethnonationalism recalled, maintained, and re-presented

- Liisa Malkki, Purity and Exile cont.
- In-class viewing of Lost Boys in Sudan

Abstract, outline, and annotated bibliography due for final paper

Part IV. The “work of remembering”: Military, memorials, and monuments of war

Only the mourning and the mourned recall
The wars we lose, the wars we win;
And the world is—what it has been.

Randall Jarrell, “The Range in the Desert”

Making sense of violent conflict, of wars and their consequences, is an anthropological endeavor: it takes place at the intersection of individual and social identity, through communal and individual acts of what historian Jay Winter has called the “work of remembrance.” Often that work centers on those who carried out violence and experienced violence, including and especially members of the military. We consider the military as both an object and site of national remembering. We will explore the politics of memory in postwar societies by looking to Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, DC and through an individual ethnographic exercise.

Week 12
W (11/13) - The military as object of study


Recommended film: The Lives of Others
Week 13
W (11/20) - The “work of remembrance”


Final ethnographic exercise

Week 14
W(11/27)
No class (Thanksgiving)

Draft of final paper due: hard copy dropped off in my mailbox (HAH main office)

Week 15
W (12/4) - Virtual and prosthetic memory


In-class viewing of Section 60: Arlington National Cemetery (2008, 53 min.)

Final ethnographic exercise due

Final papers are due on December 11, 2013. Please note that you are required to turn in both a hard copy and an electronic copy through Safe Assign.