Anth 701: The Anthropology of Political Conflict:  
Violence, Terror, Power, Order

Assistant Professor S. Lubkemann  
Semester I, 2002-03 George Washington University  
Office Hours: TBA  
Tel. 202 994-4191

Description and Objectives:
This course explores how socio-cultural anthropology can contribute to a critical understanding of the causes, characteristics, and effects of violent political conflict as a ubiquitous feature of the current global landscape. It will critically review theories and discourses purporting to explain the world’s numerous “local” violent political conflicts and the use of violence within them, addressing how a variety of global and local processes interact in their production and organization. How do transnational political and economic forces interact with culturally authored understandings of “power”, social identities, and a variety of other forms of socio-political struggle and life-projects in constituting grounds and terms for, and meanings of violent political conflict? The course will also examine how some processes are emphasized at the expense of, or in isolation from, others in the construction of conventional understandings of purportedly “local” conflicts and explore some consequences of these constructions. For example, how are “ethnic conflicts” often explained primarily with reference to highly bounded histories of economic and political interaction and essentialized cultural differences that ignore the role of larger international involvement? How do such characterizations frame conflicts as objects for particular forms of international engagement (or disengagement)?

Throughout the course key concepts such as “violence”, “order”, “resistance” and their interrelationships will also be subjected to critical scrutiny. The course will review debates over what violence is, what its purposes are, and what forms it may take—acute, structural, or symbolic—and will discuss the analytical and political consequences are of emphasizing the relatedness or the distinctiveness of these forms.

The course will also examine how social and political orders legitimize particular acts and conditions while de-legitimizing others in ways that affect how acts are or are not regarded as “violent” and/or “violating”. Particular attention will be played to the role of the state and of a hegemonic state-centered geopolitical discourse in the legitimation of violence—for example in defining what acts constitute “security” as opposed to which proliferate “terror”. It will also examine how such hegemonic definitions are contested, the social conditions of such resistance, and the “cultural groundings” from which such challenges are mounted. The course will also take a critical look at how different types of violence and conflict become characterized as “political” or “non-political” and the consequences of this dichotomy, examining this question in particular from a gendered perspective.

Finally, the course will also examine the effects of violent political conflict—particularly prolonged conflict—and of its prominent effects—such as displacement—on social organization and interaction, on culture, and on gendered and other social and political identities. It will examine how social and cultural worlds are constructed in the context of violent political environments. It will also explore the ethical and analytical consequences of different approaches and levels of social scientific attention to violent political conflict. Although the course concentrates on conflicts in Africa (such as in Rwanda/Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, and in the greater Horn of Africa) it also draws heavily on comparative material from other non-African cases such Afghanistan and Northern Ireland.

The course will expose students to multiple ethnographic accounts of political conflict. This course is appropriate for students, particularly upperclassmen, majoring in the social sciences who have had previous coursework in their disciplines and preferably already taken at least one course in anthropology that has exposed them to the basic concepts in the field.

Course Organization:
Critical Reading Review Papers: Students will produce 4 critical reading review papers approximately once every 3 weeks starting with the first one due at the beginning of class on the last day of week 4. These short 1000-1500 page papers should critically reflect on and integrate assigned reading material around a specific question and should show careful consideration of how different readings relate to each other.

Final Research paper: A final research paper of approximately 15 pages (double-spaced; approximately 4000 words) will be due on the last day of regularly scheduled classes. A one page proposal of a research topic must be presented on October 23rd for approval by the instructor before class on week 6. Four or five special guest lectures will also be scheduled for the class.
Team Class Presentation: Students will also be responsible for preparing a team presentation with their classmates once during the semester during one of the weeks in which choices of ethnographies of conflict are provided. Students will work with colleagues to prepare a 30 minute presentation that: outlines the basic history and causes of the conflict; establishes the author’s basic argument about the various levels of causation of the conflict; and pose a set of questions to be raised in class discussion.

Grading: 4 reading reaction/synthesis papers ~~~60% (15% each).
Final Paper------------------------------------------25%
Team In-Class Presentation-----------------------15%

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the Monday of the week assigned in hardcopy format, double-spaced, and stapled. No electronic submissions and no late papers will be accepted.

Required Texts:

Coursepack of readings. Note: A copy of the coursepack will be put on reserve in the library


Choose one of following two:


- or-


Choose one of following two:


- or-


Choose one of following two:


- or-

**Schedule:**

*Week 1 Introduction to Topic and Class Structure*

*Week 2: Studying Political Conflict and Violence: Theories, Approaches, and Concerns-Whither Anthropology?*


*Week 3: The Politics of “Legitimate” and “Illegitimate” Violence:*


*Week 4: What Makes violence “Political”? Engendering Political Conflict and Violence*


Weeks 5 and 6: The Social Organization of Contemporary Conflicts-Chaos and Primordialisms?


Choose between:

-or


Week 7 and 8: The “Cultural Grammar” of Political Violence: Violence as Discourse


Choose between:


-and-

**Week 9: Aspects of the Global in Local Conflicts I: “Vernacular Modernities”**


**Week 10: Aspects of the Global in Local Conflicts II: Transnational Dimensions of “Local Political-Economies of Violence” –Development**


**Week 11: Aspects of the Global in Local Conflicts II: State and Society**

Choose between:


-or-


**Week 13: Psychological Effects of Violent Conflict and Social Re-organization:**


**Week 14: Violence and Social Change: Displacement, Diaspora and Socio-Political Identity:**


**Week 15: The Anthropology of Response to Conflict: Humanitarian Action and Peace-building**


