



The Specter of Genocide

Dr. Shmuel Lederman, shmulikled@gmail.com

Course Description:

Genocide scholars often refer to the 20th century as “the century of genocide.” It is estimated that more than 150 million people were murdered by governments in the 20th century, 20–40 million of them in events that meet the legal definition of genocide in international law. In this course, we explore what a classic collection of essays called “the specter of genocide.” We begin by discussing the history of the term, its ambiguities, its legal definition and the controversies surrounding it. We then turn to discuss several case studies that will help us explore some key themes in Genocide Studies: Rwanda and Congo; the Armenian genocide; the extermination of the Roma and Sinti by the Nazis; the Cambodian “auto-genocide”; and the mass murder in Indonesia and East Timor.

Course Requirements:

Full attendance (with open cameras).

Weekly reading assignments: Students are required to read the assigned items for each week and to watch the assigned documentaries/films.

Response papers: Students are required to submit two response papers (three if you don't submit a final paper), each 2–3 pages. Each paper should address one of the main themes discussed in class (for example perpetrators' motivations; the politics of genocide; genocidal sexual assaults; relations between genocide and war, etc.), by analyzing the arguments of two sources from the syllabus and reflecting on their broader relevance to genocide studies. The response papers should be submitted by the end of the semester via Moodle and a copy should be sent to my email. Please use word files, not PDF.

The final grade is determined by attendance, participation in class that reflects engagement with the assigned materials (20%), and the response papers (80%).

Final paper: Students may submit a final paper: a short, referat paper or a seminar paper. Referat papers are to be submitted by the end of October 2026. Seminar papers are to be submitted by the end of March 2026. Please send me a research proposal consisting of the research question, a tentative outline of the chapters and preliminary sources you will rely on by the end of the semester. The part of the paper in the final grade will be 70%, participation 15% and response papers 15%. Please use word files, not PDF.

Reading List:

- **Introduction: What is Genocide?**

“Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” *The United Nations Human Rights Website*:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CrimeOfGenocide.aspx>

Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1973), ix–xv; 79–95.

Documentary: *Watchers of the Sky*

https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipOX1nwaZ-nszU11fWP2hoJN62IRvxh3zicxGmBHgmJ9Lcbm_Rn2a0oC0A3Z81Hf4Q/photo/AF1QipPFLPqq_QJiiAny9nMkcUj71XZtipHS5tEWRyd4?key=OExNbGVUcV9xWDh2YnVsemFUOHBrdTJLb2k4RlBn

https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipOX1nwaZ-nszU11fWP2hoJN62IRvxh3zicxGmBHgmJ9Lcbm_Rn2a0oC0A3Z81Hf4Q/photo/AF1QipPFLPqq_QJiiAny9nMkcUj71XZtipHS5tEWRyd4?key=OExNbGVUcV9xWDh2YnVsemFUOHBrdTJLb2k4RlBn

Additional reading:

Scott Strauss, “Contested Meanings and Conflicting Imperatives: A Conceptual Analysis of Genocide,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 3(3) (2001): 349–375.

A. D. Moses, “Conceptual Blockades and Definitional Dilemmas in the ‘Racial Century’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36(4) (2002): 7–36.

William A. Schabas, *Genocide in International Law: The Crime of Crimes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), 1–13; 71–81.

Scott Strauss, “‘Destroy them to Save us’: Theories of Genocide and the Logics of Political Violence,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24(4) (2012): 544–560.

2. Genocide in Rwanda, mass death in Congo

Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2006), 122–152.

Documentary: *Ghosts of Rwanda*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kYCmc6xbzI>

Documentary: *Crisis in The Congo*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLV9szEu9Ag&t=45s>

Additional reading:

Rene Lemarchand, “Ethnicity as Myth,” *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 49–68.

Lee Ann Fujii, “The Power of Local Ties: Popular Participation in the Rwandan Genocide,” *Security Studies*, 17:3 (2008): 568–597.

Omar S. McDoom, “Who Killed in Rwanda’s Genocide? Micro-Space, Social Influence and Individual Participation in Intergroup Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 50(4) (2013): 453–467.

Omar McDoom, “Rwanda’s Ordinary Killers: Interpreting Popular Participation in the Rwandan Genocide,” Crisis States Research Center

<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28153/1/wp77.pdf>

Susan Thomson, “Whispering Truth to Power: The Everyday Resistance of Rwandan Peasants to Post-Genocide Reconciliation,” *African Affairs* 110 (440) (2011): 439–456.

Filip Reyntjens and Rene Lemarchand, “Mass Murder in Eastern Congo, 1996–1997,” in *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory*, ed. René Lemarchand (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

3. The Armenian Genocide

Ronald G. Suny, "Explaining Genocide: The Fate of the Armenians in the Late Ottoman Empire," in *Removing Peoples: Forced Removal in the Modern World*, ed. Richard Bessel and Claudia B. Haake (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Documentary: *Aghet* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ld78K6mz1cc>

Additional reading:

Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 69–96.

Taner Akcam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 118–148.

Richard G. Hovannisian, "Denial of the Armenian Genocide in Comparison with Holocaust Denial," in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 201–231.

4. The Extermination of the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies)

Michael Zimmerman, "The National Socialist 'Solution of the Gypsy Question,'" in *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies*, ed. Ulrich Herbert (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004).

Martin Holler, "Like Jews? The Nazi Persecution and Extermination of Soviet Roma Under the German Military Administration: A New Interpretation, Based on Soviet Sources," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust*, 24:1 (2010): 137–176.

Lecture: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiP-O_-JBFQ&t=4s

Additional reading:

Gilad Margalit, "The Uniqueness of the Nazi Persecution of the Gypsy," *Romani Studies* 10 (2) (2000): 185–210.

Michael Zimmerman, "Intent, Failure of Plans, and Escalation: Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies in Germany and Austria, 1933–1942," *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Symposium 2002*: 9–21.

Michael Zimmerman, "The Wehrmacht and the National Socialist Persecution of the Gypsies," *Romani Studies* 5, 11 (2) (2001): 111–135.

5. Auto-genocide in Cambodia?

Alex L. Hinton, *Why did they Kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2005), 126–169.

Documentary: *Cambodia Year Zero*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTmEy2GEVL8>

Additional reading:

Ben Kiernan, "The Cambodian Genocide – 1975–1979," in *Century of Genocide: Critical Essays and Eyewitness Accounts*, eds. Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons and Israel W. Charny (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 339–359.

Ben Kiernan, "The Inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in the Cambodian Peace Process: Causes and Consequences," in *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia: The Khmer Rouge, the United Nations and the International Community*, ed. Ben Kiernan (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1993).

Simon Springer, "Culture of Violence or Violent Orientalism? Neoliberalisation and Imagining the 'Savage Other' in Post-Transitional Cambodia," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, 34(3) (2009): 305–319.

James A. Tyner, "Memory and the Everyday Landscape of Violence in Post-Genocide Cambodia," *Social and Cultural Geography* 13(8): 853–871.

6. Forgotten Genocides in Indonesia and East Timor

John G. Taylor, "'Encirclement and Annihilation': The Indonesian Occupation of East Timor," in *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, eds. Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
Geoffrey Robinson, *'If You Leave Us Here, We Will Die': How Genocide was Stopped in East Timor* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 40–65.
Documentary: *The Act of Killing*
Part 1 – <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2jsxle>
Part 2 – <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2jsxk2>

Additional reading:

Brad Simpson, "Solidarity in an Age of Globalization: The Transnational Movement for East Timor and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Peace and Change* 29(3&4) (2004): 453–482.

7. New Directions in Genocide Research

Alex L. Hinton, "Critical Genocide Studies," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7(1) (2012).

Additional reading:

Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 2004), 1–29.
Adam Jones, "Genocide and Structural Violence: Charting the Terrain," in *New Directions in Genocide Research*, ed. Adam Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 132–148.

Instructions for Papers

Response papers: roughly half of the paper should be a summary of the main arguments of the texts, and the other half should reflect on the broader implications of these arguments for genocide studies, for example: what do they teach us about the dynamic of genocide; do they have implications for the prevention of genocide; do they question popular conceptions of how genocides occur; etc.

Referat papers: 10 pages, 1.5 space, integration of at least 6 sources to examine a specific theme in genocide studies, taking one or two genocides as case studies and presenting a clear research question, for example: what were the motivations of "ordinary" perpetrators in the Rwandan genocide? Can the Saudi coalition's strategy in the war in Yemen be considered a genocide? Why were the Communists exterminated in Indonesia in 1965–1966? What was the role of the US in enabling the genocide in East Timor? What were the aims of French policy during the Rwandan genocide? What role did mass rape in the Congo play during the "African World War"? etc. While no original contribution is expected, students should still make clear their own "voice" in the discussion.

Seminar papers: 25 pages examining a research question similar to the examples in "referat papers" above, using at least 15 sources, including primary documents if possible. An original contribution by the student is expected.