

“TERRORISM” ANTH 45870 Spring 2006

Professor Cynthia Mahmood
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Looking at terrorism through the anthropological lens means studying violent actors close up and face to face. It also means exploring the culture of counter-terrorism, with its own discourse, belief system and rituals. In this seminar we question basic assumptions of the “war on terror,” using ethnographic literature to challenge conceptions and policies on terrorism today. Is “terrorism” in fact a definable term? How can we use the experience-near methods of anthropology to study people cognitively and politically placed as irretrievably distant?

(This is an upper-level anthropology course, cross-listed to peace studies and American studies. It serves as a methods course for anthropology majors.)

Readings:

Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror And Healing*
Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Faces and Fables of Terrorism*
Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants*
Deborah Scroggins, *Emma’s War: Love, Betrayal and Death in Sudan*
Eamon Collins, *Killing Rage*
Emran Qureshi and Michael Sells, *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*
Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*
[additional articles as assigned]

Evaluation:

The seminar depends on avid participation. There will be frequent response papers and short essays assigned as together we search for the right questions to ask in this troubled time. Expect a major essay “final” worth 30% of grade, oral contributions 30%, and other written responses (every two weeks or so) to total 40%.

Basic Schedule of Classes

Wed, Jan 18th Introduction: The Problem with “Terrorism”

Mon, Jan 23rd Initial Conversation: Should We Talk to Bin Laden?

Readings: "Anthropological Compulsions in a World in Crisis"

(*Anthropology Today* 2002:18:3), "Why I Believe We Need To Talk To Extremists" (*London Times* 2002: 12 July), "Agenda for

an Anthropology of Peace" (*Anthropology News* 2003: May) – all by instructor

Wed, Jan 25th Questions to Ask from Durkheim to the Present.

Readings: "Fundamentals of Extremism" from History Beyond The Headlines (2003) – Mahmood. Social cohesion and defining extremism, webs of group affiliation.

Mon, Jan 30th Domination, Resistance, and Fieldwork in Arenas of Violence

-slides on instructor's fieldwork with the Forest Peoples' Freedom Movement in Jharkhand, India; lecture on indigenous peoples and anthropology. When the "extremists" are the people we study, where does that place anthropology?

Wed, Feb 1st **Michael Taussig – *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man***

First part: terror. The roots of New World civilization in a tripartite European, African, and Indigenous mosaic, held together by terror. Placing terror within rather than without: projection and mimesis. Violence of power and of resistance.

[See "The Terrorist" as part of Asian Film Festival – showings Saturday and Sunday. The film fictionalizes the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India by a female Tamil Tiger, by suicide bomb. At what human cost does one complete such a mission? Panel discussion follows.]

Mon, Feb 6th Taussig continued . . . Second part: healing. Until we know ourselves, we are terrorized from within as well as from without. Taussig's view puts the entire "war on terror" on a different footing . . .

Wed, Feb 8th **Zulaika and Douglass – *Terror and Taboo***

They use ethnographic narrative on the Basque group ETA to question whether the word "terrorism" is necessary after all. Is the concept enlightening or distorting? A tool of the academy or of the polity? They extend Taussig's perception of terrorism as a form of ritual or performance, belonging as much to the realm of myth as to the realm of rational politics.

Mon, Feb 13th RESPONSE PAPER/SHORT ESSAY 1

Topic: Draw on the Taussig and Zulaika & Douglass volumes to examine the notion of terrorism as myth, terrorism as ritual. How does this approach complement more common political and military understandings of terrorism? Would the "war on terror" be conducted differently were the mythic and ritual aspects of terrorism recognized more explicitly? (5-10 pages please)

Wed, Feb 15th A Theology of Truth and Justice

-slides on instructor's fieldwork with the Sikhs, who use violence both expressively and instrumentally. Ethnographic methods and face-to-face encounters in the study of violence: ethical and legal issues.

Mon, Feb 20th **Cynthia Mahmood – *Fighting for Faith and Nation***

Writing about violence, crafting coherent narrative from arenas of incoherence . . . distortions we introduce as we translate from one cultural and religious reality to another. Does understanding violence mean condoning it? Can one write respectfully without becoming a partisan?

Wed, Feb 22nd Mahmood continued . . . preparation for field trip to Sikh temple.

[Half of class on ethnographic field trip to Sikh temple in Kalamazoo Sunday; meet at 10:00 a.m. in front of Kroc Institute. Further instructions attached.]

Mon, Feb 27th Mahmood continued . . . How is the text constructed? Who holds editorial authority? Who sets up the definitions? How are voices expressed? Alternative approaches, experimental media.

Wed, Mar 1st Engaged anthropology – how can the ethnographic study of Sikh separatism play a role in formulation of policy? Anthropologists as “experts.”

[Other half of class on ethnographic field trip to Sikh temple in Kalamazoo Sunday; meet at 10:00 a.m. in front of Kroc Institute. Further instructions attached.]

Mon, Mar 6th Debriefing – experience of meeting Sikhs. “Ethnographic seduction” . . . What are the dangers of slipping into the arms of one's interlocutors (“going native”)?

Wed, Mar 8th **Deborah Scroggins – *Emma's War***

Can we see ourselves in Emma or not? The aid worker who crossed the line, married a guerilla commander and “went native” – is her story just a good read or can it instruct?

SPRING BREAK –

Mon, Mar 20th RESPONSE PAPER/SHORT ESSAY 2

Topic: “I am Emma.” Adopting the voice of Emma herself, write 3-5 pages explaining why you choose political activism over humanitarian aid, Africa over Europe, and risk of life and limb over comfort and security.

Wed, Mar 22nd (heart to heart) discussion: how far will we go? Just what are you willing to do for your principles? You can take this course “from a distance,” but it may also challenge you personally if you want it to.

Mon, Mar 27th **Eamon Collins – *Killing Rage***

This best-selling autobiography of an IRA operative shows the disillusioning effects of day-to-day political violence. Clearly it is possible to accommodate to violence, to “get used to it.”

For Eamon Collins the shine comes off the revolution and he sees just criminals left. The militant imagined as hero, or as simply thug.

Wed, Mar 29th evening film “Michael Collins”

[The film illustrates the life of the founder of the Irish Republican Army, including the critical moment when the decision is made to take up arms without the authority of any state. When to make a political compromise, when to keep on fighting? This is among the questions that haunt the film.]

Mon, Apr 3rd Collins continued . . . is there any *legal* truth to the old dictum that one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter? We look at U.S. criteria for assessing the difference between “a soldier” and “a murderer.”

Wed, Apr 5th RESPONSE PAPER/SHORT ESSAY 3

Topic: the political offense exception (“the IRA loophole”) How does international law distinguish between political and criminal violence? Does this help us clarify who is a terrorist and who is a revolutionary? (about 5 pages)

Mon, Apr 10th “The Clash of Definitions” by Edward Said (**Qureshi & Sells, pp. 68-87**), “The Clash of Civilizations: Samuel P. Huntington, Bernard Lewis, and the Remaking of the Post-Cold War World Order,” by John Trumbour (**Qureshi & Sells, pp. 88-130**)
Student-led discussion.

Wed, Apr 12th “The Clash of Civilizations: An Islamicists’ Critique,” by Roy P. Mottahedeh (**Qureshi & Sells, pp. 131-151**), “Islamic and Western Worlds: The End of History or Clash of Civilizations,” by Mujeeb R. Khan (**Qureshi & Sells, pp. 170-204**) Student-led discussion.

EASTER BREAK—

Wed, Apr 19th “Europe and the Muslims: The Permanent Crusade?” by Tomaz Mastnak (**Qureshi and Sells, pp. 205-248**), “The Myth of Westernness in Medieval Literary Historiography,” by Maria Rosa Menocal (**Qureshi & Sells, pp. 249-287**)

Student-led discussion.

Mon, Apr 24th RESPONSE PAPER/SHORT ESSAY 4

Topic: Is there a clash of civilizations? Or more to the point, how has the “clash” framework shaped U.S. and Western understanding of the post-9/11 world in which we live? (5-7 pages please)

Wed, Apr 26th **Mahmood Mamdani – *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim***

The Islamic Renaissance looks quite different from within; is “fundamentalism” the best term to describe Islamic revival? How does globalization affect the trajectory of political Islam today?

Mon, May 1st Mamdani continued . . . America, the Cold War and the War on Terror. The insistent question, “Why do they hate us?” Mamdani finds not so hard to answer.

Wed, May 3rd Reflections on peace in a violent world

Fri, May 12th FINAL ESSAY

Draw on materials and discussions from the entire semester to frame the “winning the war on terror” question from a different angle:

How might the United States and its allies seek to win the peace, in the post 9/11 environment?

We’re not looking for detailed political and military strategy here, obviously, but for you to use this as an entry point to reflection on the topics we’ve dealt with in the course. How does an understanding of the mythic quality of the terrorism concept aid us in peacebuilding? How does ethnographic or face-to-face encounters, such as those we had with the Sikhs, work towards peace? What about legal notions of justifiable and unjustifiable use of force? Do certain historiographies of civilizations constrain or enhance coexistence and mutual benefit? And in general – what can we study in a course on “terrorism” to help us work towards peace instead of making us ever more insistently warlike? Have these readings and conversations changed in any way what you think the future holds?

The essay is due by 5:00, hard copy, in my office at Flanner Hall on Friday May 12th (no extensions or incompletes for undergraduates are allowed). Approximately 10-15 pages, double-spaced, are expected. You need not do outside research but please do use formal academic citation style appropriate to your disciplinary major where you refer to books, articles, and other sources.