

## The Politics of Evil: Teaching a Political Violence Film Course

Joe P. Dunn  
*Converse College*

A CLASSMATE in the first grade asked my son what his father did. His response was, “He teaches girls about wars.” He had it right. At a women’s college, I taught courses on the Vietnam War, the Cold War, Middle East conflict, and Revolutions and Totalitarian Regimes. More than thirty years since my son’s proclamation, the number of wars has increased, and my courses address other areas of national security, terrorism, and political tyranny as well. The course discussed here had its origins in a 2008 offering specifically on genocide. Students were/are at least aware of the Nazi Holocaust, although, despite focus on the subject in recent decades in the public schools, deeper understanding remains superficial. They remain largely oblivious about the Armenian, Cambodian, Balkan, and Sudanese genocides. Over the last decade, my course grew beyond genocide to include other areas of violence as well, and films became more and more central in the pedagogy. The model outlined here is a films course. A whole course could be offered on any one of the topics covered in the films, but on the eternal issue of breadth vs. depth, I made a conscious decision for wider exposure over heavier concentration on a more limited number of topics.

I have offered the present course on different platforms—a four-week winter term, five-week and three-week summer terms, and a once-a-week thirteen-week semester. With some adjustments, the basics are the same. My course continues to evolve every time I teach it, but the example that I offer here is from an offering on a four-week platform. Faculty members can shape their model according to one's particular interests or to different platforms available. The number of choices of films and readings is almost unlimited.

### **Rationale**

I have been a college professor for forty-eight years and have well-established viewpoints. When teachers claim that they do not reveal their stance on subjects, I don't believe them. I don't think it is really possible, and it is weak pedagogy. Purported even-handed neutralism is usually a sham and it is clearly a failure of opportunity. Students should know your perspectives, viewpoints, prejudices, and purposes. If they are acute, they will discern them anyway, but honest clarity allows them to assess all that you say in light of your prejudices. I am very clear to my students about the purposes of my teaching, and I state it on my syllabi sent out to enrollees prior to the beginning of the class (see **Appendix A** for syllabus excerpts). I want them to understand up front what my objectives are. If this is not what they want, then as consumers, they have the right to walk away.

My students get more than their share of content and skill development, but I am also committed to a moral imperative, to the way that students confront important matters of humanity. Others might prefer different language, but I state it as addressing the soul as well as the mind. How this translates in the course is that the topics require one to think about one's beliefs and one's obligations. I lay my own convictions, proclivities, and prejudices on the table, but that isn't the issue. I am not an ethicist, philosopher, or theologian, so I don't attempt to delve too deeply in those realms. Although I dabble in political science, my methodology and the way that I think is as a historian. That said, I do wish to confront hard questions of moral responsibility. "Evil" is a subjective and a dangerous term; addressing it is filled with pitfalls. Nevertheless, underlying the topics in this course is always the question: When confronted with evil, what are the responsibilities of individuals, nations, and

the world community? The responses are always diverse, but the question is more important than the proposed answers.

The naiveté and lack of knowledge about the world that I witness from first-year college students through teacher-preparation graduate students is staggering. Unless one knows about atrocities, such as the ones that we confront in the course, the question of responsibilities is moot. Often, these topics are heavy ones for students in their first semester of college. On the other end of the spectrum, particularly in my summer graduate classes, I have many teachers and prospective teachers. I lay a heavy obligation on them to take what they have learned from this course into their classrooms, and I make assignments that require that preparation.

By the nature of world events that I teach—"teaching girls about wars," to quote my son—violence is a subject in many of my courses; however, this particular course that concentrates on political violence began out of a quest for a topic and format that would work well in either the three- or five-week summer session or the month-long (four credit hour) January "interim" term. Depending upon which of these platforms, class sessions could exceed three hours daily. Lecturing for that amount of time was not an option, even if I believed that was proper pedagogy. Discussion is the core of my teaching.<sup>1</sup> The heavy reading assignments in my full-semester courses would not work because one cannot get that amount of reading done in the more compact platforms.<sup>2</sup> Films were the answer.

This generation of students is very visually oriented, unduly so, and I confess some reservation to conceding to that proclivity. But I admit that seeing atrocities has a larger impact than all the reading about it that one can do. I have read scores of books on the Nazis' evils, including something as comprehensive as Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (2010), but a couple of scenes from *Schindler's List* (1993) or even the recent *The Zookeeper's Wife* (2017) have a more profound visceral impact. My final pedagogical decision was to opt for "popular" theater movies rather than documentaries. Although I still have misgivings about this decision, it was based on two reasons—to maximize the engagement of the students and, in some cases, to acquaint them with movies that they just should see. I admit shock that relatively few of the students had seen any of the movies, even ones with high popular box office appeal. Clearly, the "Hollywoodizing" of history has manifold

drawbacks, which indeed was a common topic throughout the course, but it also inspired some of the best discussions in the course.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, I believe that the films should be watched communally on the big screen, which our campus theater made possible. Of course, every movie was readily available by other means, and if I had not required that students watch the movies together, they would watch them at their leisure, often on their cellphones. Among the detriments of watching the movies on their own, students' attention may not be as intense. They do other things at the same time as they watch the films, often flipping back and forth between the movie and other apps on their mobile devices. Although the alternate options existed if a student had to miss a film, sharing the communal experience of dealing with such horrific issues is important. The mutual experience did bond the class and, I believe, enhanced the discussions.

### **Course Mechanics**

The normative procedure was watching a film four days a week (Monday through Thursday preferred) and holding a three-hour discussion period for the other day (typically Friday). With all film lead-ins and credits excised to save time, most of the films featured typically ran from two hours and ten minutes to two hours and twenty minutes. I like to use the first twenty minutes of class to set the movie in historical context. Although not necessary for all the films, for some, it was quite important since students would not gain the most from the film without some background.

Discussions days, which addressed both the films and the readings for the week, are the highlight, and they are almost universally lively and exceedingly valuable. Course evaluations emphasize that the students like to hear from their peers and they like to speak their own mind on the issues as well.

These issues are introduced through several readings, including the core book, Samantha Power's Pulitzer Prize-winning *"A Problem from Hell": America and the Age of Genocide* (2003), which begins with the story of Raphael Lemkin's campaign for the recognition of the term and concept of "genocide." Chapters then address the genocides that we cover in the course. It is a remarkable work from a career human rights advocate who served in significant positions in several presidential administrations, including the National Security Council

and the State Department, before capping her career as Ambassador to the United Nations in the Obama administration. The number of other books employed depends upon the length of the course. Norman M. Naimark's *Genocide: A World History* (2017) is especially useful as a short book that gives background for many of the films presented in the course. I have used different books at different times, but three that I particularly like are Haing S. Ngor's *Survival in the Killing Fields* (1988) on the Khmer Rouge; Brian Steidle's *The Devil Came on Horseback: Bearing Witness to the Genocide in Darfur* (2007) on Darfur; and Blaine Harden's *Escape from Camp 14* (2012) on the prison camps of North Korea. I will discuss these readings more as they pertain to movies (see **Appendix B** for film and book sources).

Following the class discussions, students write a two-page, single-spaced paper on what they learned from the discussion, including things that they had not thought about, new insights or perspectives gained, and assessments of the sources for understanding the themes of the course. These papers are enlightening and one of the most valuable aspects of the course. We sometimes distribute the papers with all members of the class, which adds another learning dimension (see **Appendix C** for sample student papers).

Dozens of possible films could be employed. To some degree, my choices are simply my preferences, although at the end of the course, the students assess each film with a recommendation to keep, replace, or substitute. I make some changes each term, but the following are the ones from the last iteration (which are representative of most terms). The films are grouped to an extent by the themes for the discussions, but as much as possible, the course proceeds chronologically.

## Week 1

### *Monday*

We begin with the one of the three documentaries in the course, *The Armenian Genocide* (2006). Few students have heard of the Armenian massacre, which was an example for Hitler's larger ethnic cleansing, and the atrocity played prominently in Lemkin's development of the concept of genocide. The one-hour narrative allows for the necessary first-day course activities, and it is the only

film that we discuss immediately following the showing. I have found that students need time to process the horrors depicted in these films and they are not prepared to leap immediately into discussion after the films. One student said it best: “After each of these films, I need a few hours to decompress, reset my mind from the sadness and horror that I have just witnessed, and start the process from responding emotionally to a more academic discussion.” However, in the case of this first film in the course, the discussion on the same day allows us to start the process of how to deal with the subject in our collective treatment.

The film addresses the question that will run through much of the course: “Was this genocide or something else—civil war, repression, vigilante criminal actions, or the regrettable vicissitudes of war?” Turkey’s total denial that what happened to the Armenians was genocide is central in the documentary. In a summer course, I had a young Turkish student, a product of the Turkish educational system that continues to this day to deny the charge of genocide and describes what transpired as war-time security measures against Armenian collaborators with the enemy. The student defended Turkey vehemently and afforded the class a striking example of Turkey’s argument that they had just heard in the documentary. This debate established early in the course the complication of defining the nature of atrocities and what constitutes genocide.

### *Tuesday and Wednesday*

Our first feature movie, *Schindler’s List* (1993), is about the Nazi Holocaust and provides the epitome of genocide. The choice of exceptional films that could be employed on the subject is huge. I could fill pages with the pros and cons of alternatives, but about my selection of *Schindler’s List*, I say simply that this is one of those monumental classic movies that every person should see. Each time that I have taught the course, a significant portion have seen the movie, many of them in high school during focus on the Holocaust. But with this movie, as with all the others in the course, watching it in a different context reveals new insights. This is like a classic novel that one gains something different and deeper each time one reads it. I have watched this movie many times and I gain something new each time. The class discussions then open up whole other realms.

As one student stated, she had seen the movie twice before, but after the class discussion, she needed to see it yet another time to think about all the issues that her peers raised.<sup>4</sup>

With *Schindler's List*, shot in black-and-white, we also begin to address issues of cinematography. I have no background in this area of inquiry, and certainly it is not one of my purposes in the course, but I have had students who are well versed in this study and bring very interesting and appreciated insights into the discussions. When I have had a few students who were products of a local cinematography course, I sometimes have to remind that this is not a course on film, but a course that employs films to teach history.

We return to issues that arise from *Schindler's List* many times in the course, but the core question is why and how this atrocity could have occurred—a question applied to all the other outrages that we address in the following weeks.

### Thursday

If students are familiar with the Nazi Holocaust, few know much about the deaths of up to two million people from 1975 through early 1979 under Pol Pot's evil dystopia in Cambodia. This is a situation when an all-too-brief introductory lecture, handouts that I have prepared from my own writings on this subject, and some post-film commentary to bring the story up to the present are necessary.

Despite its several inadequacies, I use *The Killing Fields* (1984) as the film. Many years ago, I employed this movie in another course on the wars in Indochina. However, in the 1990s, students panned the movie so much that I quit using it. They complained that it was “too Hollywood,” the soundtrack was overdramatized and “so 1970s,” and they could not understand the Khmer Rouge. The charges are valid. But since I brought the movie back for this course, it has received very positive reviews.<sup>5</sup> The introductory material helps, and I use Haing Ngor's aforementioned book, *Survival in the Killing Fields*, as a companion piece. Reading about the survival experiences of Cambodian doctor Haing Ngor, who played the role of *The Killing Fields* protagonist Dith Pran, has a decided impact on the students.

The central question—Was the Khmer Rouge atrocity a genocide?—led us to deeper discussion about definition of the concept under international law and convention, an issue we would



return to in other instances. Other recurring themes included how something of this nature could happen—the legacy of colonialism, the outcome of war, the role of miscreant utopian visions, totalitarian behavior, the national and international community responsibilities for intervention, the machinations of great power involvements, and the aftermath of post-genocidal occurrences. The Khmer Rouge Holocaust provides a rich environment for significant discussion.

## Week 2

### *Monday*

The 1990s was a hard decade of political violence and genocide. The 100 days of slaughter in Rwanda in the spring of 1994 raises another set of questions about genocide. Was the massacre of Tutsi by the majority Hutu, a number generally listed at 800,000 deaths, genocide or something else? Rwanda provides one of the best examples of addressing the moral responsibility of action that comes with invoking the “g-word” term. The United States and the international community tiptoed around the term and the parsing of language was ludicrous. Our discussions on the responsibility, right, legality, and pros and cons of intervention with military force are always rich with varied perspectives.

Several good films on Rwanda exist. When I began teaching the course, I employed two films, *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and *Sometimes in April* (2005). Both have much to contribute, but as the topics covered in the course grew, I had to make a decision to limit to only one film. That decision, supported virtually unanimously by the votes of students who saw both films over the years, was easy. *Hotel Rwanda* is the successful blockbuster with mass audience and multiple awards. It brought the events to the consciousness of millions who would not have confronted the atrocity otherwise. It is slick, Hollywood, emotionally rendering, and clearly focuses on the default of international responsibility. However, the HBO movie *Sometimes in April* is far superior. Its introduction provides a brief and useful background to the origins of the events, it depicts a somewhat more representative example of the tragedy for Rwandans, and the inspirational ending forecasts, if a bit sanguinely, the post-holocaust future for the tiny African nation.<sup>6</sup>



*Tuesday*

Happening simultaneously with Rwanda, the Balkan Wars after the collapse of Yugoslavia, which dominated the entire 1990s decade, constitute the most difficult topic in the course to explain. My effort some years ago to teach a course on the ethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia was not particularly successful. I was beyond my areas of expertise, and grasping Serbo-Croatian names, multiple successive conflicts, and the extensive complexity was difficult. The films that address this violence are dark and not particularly engaging. For this film course, I considered *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (2011) and even the soap opera action thriller *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001). But I opted for a quite different type of movie, one of my all-time favorites, *No Man's Land* (2001), a dark parody on the civil war in Bosnia. This award-winning film by a Bosnian director captures the irrationality of hatred between Bosnia Serbs and the Bosniaks (Croatian and Muslim), who had lived together in relative acceptance for centuries, as well as the fecklessness of the international community and the boundless naiveté of everyone involved. The work is a powerful anti-war testament worthy of its considerable international acclaim. Besides the contribution to questions of the sociology of violence and the fact that the film ends with heart-rending tragedy and pathos, the movie serves as a brief respite from the wide-ranging horrors that have been the daily fare of the course.

Power's coverage in "*A Problem from Hell*" of the various stages of the Balkan conflicts and the genocidal ethnic cleansing of which the Serbs were the chief (but not exclusive) villains provides good background and focuses on the issue of international responsibility to stop genocide.<sup>7</sup>

*Wednesday*

Darfur was the news of the day on college campuses that, along with seeing the documentary *The Devil Came on Horseback* (2007) inspired me to teach a course on genocide. The horrors of rape, burning women and children, and unspeakable evil depicted in the film touched me deeply. However, the tipping point was when I asked a young student who was selling "Stop Genocide in Darfur" T-shirts what she knew about Darfur, and she admitted that she had

no idea where or what it was, but she knew that “it is important for students to be involved.” That kind of unreflective response touched a raw nerve from my days on the college campus during the Vietnam War, when many students passionately knew the rightness of their position even though they could not find Vietnam on a map or relate anything about the history of our engagement there.<sup>8</sup>

Of the many available films on Darfur, I use two documentaries, both reasonably short—*Sand and Sorrow* (2007) and *The Devil Came on Horseback* (2007). The first provides good historical background and the latter adds a powerful personal involvement experience. I also generally employ Brian Steidle’s book, also titled *The Devil Came on Horseback* (2007), which provides an opportunity to discuss the comparisons between book and film. Although refugees are inevitable products of war and political violence, and we could address them with any of the earlier topics, this is the primary point in the course where I give considerable attention to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP). *Sand and Sorrow* focuses on this issue.

This final topic is the most controversial one, on the question of branding the Sudanese atrocities specifically as genocide. Despite the common use of the term in regard to Darfur, serious questions exist on whether or not it qualifies. It is much more than merely academic exercise whether this unspeakable violence constituted genocide of designated African tribes or “merely” brutal Sudanese repression in a civil uprising or war. The evil may be the same, but the distinction of definition remains important in international politics. And once again, despite much attention, the U.S. and the world community chose to avoid Darfur as they had earlier with Rwanda.

### Thursday

The final film of Week 2 is not about genocide, but another form of brutal political violence. *Osama* (2003) is about life under the Taliban in Afghanistan. Afghans are legendary filmmakers, and this was the first film by an Afghan director following the initial toppling of the Taliban regime in 2002. Briefly, the story is about a 12-year-old girl who of necessity attempted to pass as a boy. All the men in the family had died in the previous Afghan wars and the mother and grandmother could not leave the house without male escort. To

survive, they undertook this desperate act. Eventually and inevitably discovered, the young girl's tragedy is unveiled at the film's end when she is "mercifully" spared death, but married off to an old man who already has a harem. The brilliantly done movie is heart-wrenching, and it leads to discussion about the violence to women and girls in repressive regimes around the world. Unfortunately, the tragedy of young girls forced to attempt to pass as boys was not a unique experience at that time in Afghanistan.

### Week 3

#### *Monday*

This week, we broaden the scope with various vignettes of violence. The first movie drops back in chronology and is quite different than others in the course. I have questioned several times whether *Munich* (2005) belongs in this course, and it is one of the most difficult to adequately provide the necessary background in a brief lecture, but it addresses one of the most continuing violent confrontations on the globe. Few topics have generated longer ongoing violence than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The movie is the story of the Israeli campaign to find and kill the perpetrators of the Palestinian Black September terrorist attack on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. The moral issue of the film is the question of the rightness and efficacy of revenge and what it does to those who engage in it. Steven Spielberg's movie is controversial over whether it favors Israel's response to violence or humanizes Palestinians who employed violence. Whatever the problems inherent in using the movie, it is, in my view, a classic that all people should see.

#### *Tuesday*

*Blood Diamond* (2006) is another outlier and questions again exist about whether it deserves one of the limited slots in the course. The movie is clearly Hollywood and in many respects is a love story—both of love between a father and young son and love between adults. But it brings attention to the brutal wars in West Africa and calls attention to one the world's great tragedies—child soldiers. When I consider taking the movie out of the course, students object.

### *Wednesday*

*Incendies* (2010) is the most improbable film in the course. An award-winning international film in French and Arabic with English subtitles, it is an intriguing mystery that depicts the civil war between Christian rightwing forces and Muslims in southern Lebanon in the 1970s. The film purposefully fictionalizes and obscures dates, places, peoples, and events to project larger universal meaning beyond a conflict at a particular time and place. The movie is an ultimate expression of violence, including religious hatred, honor killing, mindless civil war, child soldiers, torture, rape, and incest; and yet the final message is the triumph of will, humanity, and even love over all of this. It is a remarkable film that everyone should see.

### *Thursday*

Violence against women, including rape, repression, enslavement, and more, runs through the course. *Incendies* touches on one of the greatest violent evils of the world—honor killings—but *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (2008), the most gruesome film in the course, raises this heinous crime to an even higher level. Although based on a real event that occurred in Iran shortly after the Khomeini regime came to power in 1979, the film transcends place and time. It is about issues of greed, avarice, cowardliness, and inhumanity, and it calls attention to violence against women in many cultures and places of the world. The film is one that cannot be forgotten and it vivifies a subject that must be understood by this and every generation.

## **Week 4**

### *Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday*

The topic of war runs throughout the course, and in the final week (in the four-week platform), we address important questions of violence in war. The list of potential films literally is unlimited. I decided to employ some recent popular movies on the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the possibilities remained vast. My recent selections were two blockbuster war films, *The Hurt Locker* (2008) and *American Sniper* (2014), as well as *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) on the search for and killing of Osama bin Laden. By definition, war is

about violence, but the themes we employed were about American “exceptionalism” in war, the morality of war, what violence does to the individual, and the aftermath of war. *Zero Dark Thirty* offers good comparison to *Munich* as stories of national revenge.

### *Thursday*

The final topic is a discussion of one of the world’s most closed and repressive regimes, North Korea. Although several documentaries exist on life under the three successive dictators of the Kim Dynasty, who have ruled with an iron fist since World War II, I do not use a film for this topic. Among the books on North Korea is a virtual cottage industry of escape narratives from those who fled the tyranny. I have employed in the past Blaine Harden’s *Escape from Camp 14* (2012), the saga of Shin Dong-hyuk, born and raised in the notorious prison camps of North Korea. A student may well have said it best, “After all the evil that we were exposed to throughout the course, somehow you saved the very worst for the very end.” The comment may be salient, but the reason that the volume is at the end is that students need time to read it. The book is most fitting for a discussion on the categorizing of evil.

The original publication of the book was in 2012, but in 2015, Shin Dong-hyuk admitted that he manipulated some facts of his story, and everything was not necessarily as he presented it. Since he had become the international face of human rights atrocities in North Korea, any lessening of his credibility hurt activist groups. Harden added a new introduction to the 2015 printing of the book to address the changes that Shin made, and to discuss the pitfalls inherent in presenting a memoir that cannot be verified. Suspicions have been raised about other North Korean escape accounts as well. This does invite another line of discussion about how to deal with tainted accounts that address clear and verifiable atrocities. We accept that movies based on actual events, for many reasons, play quite loose with the factual realities. *Zero Dark Thirty* above is a good, even egregious, example. But purported non-fiction narratives rightly are held to a higher standard. The issue of tainted sources is a serious one. After learning about the discrepancies with the original publication, I struggled with the decision to use the book, but I decided that the positives outweighed the negatives, and Harden’s new introduction puts the issue in perspective.<sup>9</sup>

## Friday

Wrap-up and discussion of entire course.

## Conclusion

The course barely scratches the surface of the myriad possible examples of political violence.<sup>10</sup> With all its possible inadequacies, the course and the subject are important, and I can attest to the impact on students. Concerns do exist. Exposure to so much evil in a concentrated period of time has dilatory affects. It can desensitize and even encourage cynicism. Obviously, this material is not for everyone. I speak from real experience that many students cannot handle it. A strong trigger warning on the syllabus and at the first session is imperative. However, from my nearly ten years teaching this material in various fashions, I believe that the merits are overwhelming, as exemplified in the words of a student: “This course changed my heart, my soul, my life, and my future. Never stop teaching it.”

## Notes

1. I have written previously in “Reflections of a Recovering Lectureholic,” *The National Teaching and Learning Forum* 3, no. 6 (October 1994): 1-3; “Peer Role Modeling: A Signature ‘Way’ for Excellence,” *The Department Chair* 21, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 21-22; and “Circle the Chairs: Some Thoughts on Classroom Architectural Pedagogy,” *The Department Chair* 17, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 15-16.

2. One of my signature courses, “Women’s Lives in Asian and African Cultures,” which has fourteen assigned books, is one of the most popular options on campus, with large enrollment.

3. Based on the success of my course, a colleague has begun a course on the epic films of imperialism, with the rationale that every student should see *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Passage to India*, *Gandhi*, and other such classics.

4. The length of *Schindler’s List*—at three hours and forty-five minutes, with an added intermission—makes it a two-day event.

5. I confess that I have watched *The Killing Fields* at least a dozen times or more, and although many of my students proclaim it “cheesy,” John Lennon’s “Imagine” in the final scene still brings a tear to my eye every time. Whether that is generational or personal, I cannot say.

6. The list of movies and documentaries on Rwanda is quite long. Among them, *Kinyarwanda* (2011), which focuses on religious cooperation and reconciliation and brings the Rwandan Muslim community into the story, is one of the best.

7. The genesis of the book "*A Problem from Hell*" came from a law school paper on the subject of ethnic cleansing and the international community's responsibility to confront human rights violations based on Power's time as a war correspondent in the former Yugoslavia from 1993-1996.

8. My Vietnam War experience probably best explains my passion for students truly understanding the issues with which they are engaged. I taught on a university campus immediately before and immediately upon return from Vietnam. Although I shared much of the student opposition to the war, albeit in my case as mistaken policy rather than the radical condemnation of America from the extreme end of the anti-war movement, my real frustration was lack of any significant knowledge about the issues by partisans of whatever stripe. Passion is good; uninformed passion is not. I have written extensively on the teaching of the Vietnam War.

9. Two other books that I had employed in preceding classes on sexual violence have been discovered to be in part or wholly fabricated. Two bestsellers about honor killing, *Burned Alive* (2003) by a Palestinian woman identified as Souad, and Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love* (2003)—which I have not used—were discovered to be fraudulent, the latter a total fake. Somaly Mam's acclaimed *The Road of Lost Innocence* (2005 in French, 2008 in English), on young girls sold into the sex trade business in Cambodia, propelled her into an international voice on the subject, and she began her own foundation. While the issue that she highlighted is far too real, her personal story was falsified, as were other accounts of young girls' plights. With her public disgrace, a powerful voice on this important crime was lost, although she has attempted to re-engage the issue with a new foundation. When I employed this book, the students almost universally assessed it as the most moving one in the course. Many other such books have been found to be tainted. The most famous fall from grace is the sad case of Greg Mortenson, whose mega-bestseller *Three Cups of Tea* (2006), a book that I used in one of my courses, made him the most sought after speaker in the country and launched a multi-million dollar international foundation empire. The money raised and the good works initiated were considerable, and Mortenson gained virtual sainthood standing. His exposure for faking important parts of his story and the improper handling and questionable use of the flood of money pouring into his foundation led to his tragic downfall.

10. A few other lesser-known murderous regimes that I would wish to bring to student attention include the recent military dictatorship of Burma and genocidal actions against Muslim minorities, the largely unknown bloody slaughter of Bengalis in Bangladesh, Idi Amin's regime in the Congo, and the hideous dictatorships of Saddam Hussein, Muammar Qaddafi, or the Assads of Syria, and, of course, ISIS. The list is endless. In the past, I included the apartheid regime of South Africa and used at different times the films *Cry Freedom* (1987) and *Biko* (1986). At the moment, this worthy subject has fallen out of the rotation. Simply put, the potential subject matter for a course on political violence has no end.



## Appendix A

### Political Violence and Genocide Syllabus (Excerpts)

#### Description

This is a course on political violence and genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as depicted in film. *This course focuses on very disturbing material, including institutional, personal, sexual, and other forms of violence. Obviously, it is not for those who cannot handle or simply do not wish to be subjected to this level of excessive violence.*

#### Learning Objectives/Outcomes

- Introduction to a sample of historical events of extreme violence as portrayed in film.
- Analytical comparison of the different situations, incidents, employment, and results of violence for political purposes.
- Understanding of the distinctions between various natures of political violence—genocide, war, insurrection, political repression, etc.
- Discussion of the question of evil in political affairs.

#### Developmental/Skill Objectives

- Assessment of sources, written and in film.
- Improvement of critical and analytical reading, writing, speaking, film criticism, and discussion skills.

#### Course Requirements

- Watch films and discuss the films on the designated days.
- Following class discussion, you will write an approximately two-page to three-page commentary on the discussion, emphasizing what you learned from the discussion that you may not have thought about previously. Due each Monday morning at the beginning of class.
- Write a final exam summative essay.

#### Grade Calculation

The grade in the course will be heavily weighted to class discussion, constituting 60% of the course grade. You will receive a discussion grade each discussion session. If you do not plan to discuss, do not take this course. The other portion of the grade will be from the discussion papers and papers on reading (30%) and a final summative essay (10%).

#### Evaluation Criteria for Course Grade

- A: Consistent excellent performance in the class discussions, which includes active participation in each class session, and incisive papers, all of which are turned in on time.
- B: Consistent superior performance or a combination of excellent and superior work on the above.

- C: Fulfillment of all requirements with adequate/good, but less than distinguished performance.
- D: Inadequate performance or failure to complete all the requirements of the course.
- F: Unsatisfactory performance or failure to complete any significant portion of the assigned work.

## Appendix B

### Political Violence and Genocide Sources

#### Films

Barmak, Siddiq, dir. ***Osama***. 2003; Beverly Hills, CA: United Artists/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2004. DVD. [*Also available via online streaming.*]

Bigelow, Kathryn, dir. ***The Hurt Locker***. 2008; Universal City, CA: Summit Entertainment, 2010. Blu-ray Disc and DVD. [*Also available via online streaming.*]

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## Appendix C

### Sample Student Discussion Papers

#### Student Discussion Paper

**Film:** *The Stoning of Soraya M.*

After receiving the warning about this film, I did my best to prepare. I read and read about the film, taking away any surprise at what I would witness. I prepared myself to watch every scene, to be a witness to the horror that many women still experience throughout the Arab world. In the end, I am glad I prepared, and I am also glad that I saw this film. Violence against women must be stopped, but first, we must truly know what is happening.

The thing that struck me most about the film was the sheer beauty of it, the care taken in the scenes, the innocence of Soraya's appearance, even the way she carried herself. The stark white dress that she was stoned in, a picture of innocence and purity, stained, in the end, red with blood definitely alludes to martyrdom, to sacrifice. But the symbol that stuck with me most was the birds. In the field with her daughters, the birds fly overhead—she points to them and laughs. They are free, the way she and her daughters will never be. Right before the men bring the charges against Soraya, Zahra is seen with a bird in a cage. Symbolism, again, for Soraya's future and the reality of these women. As she is being stone[d], we see a beautiful field again, with the bright sun and Soraya walking free, in her white, spotless gown, birds flying overhead. Finally, she is free of this cruel world run by selfish men.

In reading about the film, I heard that it was banned in Iran. The nation still does not want the truth of what has occurred, what still occurs, to be known. But boot-legged copies are being passed around the country. The women know, and they are fighting back in any way they can. The director also spoke of the difficulty of making the film, of how it took 6 days to do that scene, and of how disturbed the actors and actresses were. One has to wonder at the depth of fanaticism that would incite a whole town to kill one they know in such a brutal way. One has to wonder what Ali had said to his sons in order for them to, albeit begrudgingly, participate in the murder of their mother. Religion has so much power. So much potential for good, and an equal an opposite potential for evil in the face of power-hungry and greedy men. For someone to forsake his wife of 20 years out of lust, to go so far as to conspire for her death, to blackmail and scheme, that kind of evil is deep, so totally depraved. And yet, the town sees him as a hero. Only in the end, after, I believe, trying to force himself to see that he is doing the right thing, does Ebrahim realize it was all a farce. A threat. But nothing is done to Ali. There is no punishment for the man who committed murder. And Ali doesn't get his young bride. No one wins in the end.

One has to admire, also, the courage of Zahra. To stand for her niece in the face of it all, to confront the Mullah, Ali, and the mayor Ebrahim, to talk to the journalist a day after Soraya was killed. To rescue the tape, to stand in between the guns and the journalist—to offer to be stoned in Soraya’s place. Among all of the hate, here, in Zahra we have love. And thankfully, the real life Zahra told a journalist, the story has made it out. The world is beginning to know of Soraya’s innocence, and Zahra, through her bravery has become an advocate for woman around the world. And this film was a powerful, powerful piece in the puzzle by showing the true horror, cruelty, and barbarism that is displayed in this heinous act.

### **Student Discussion Paper**

#### **Film:** *The Hurt Locker*

*The Hurt Locker* was an incredibly well-done film that explores not only the violence of war, but also the drug-like quality of the battlefield. The main character, Will, joins a team of two other soldiers in a bomb disposal unit. The three men represent three different types of soldiers and their response to war. Will is first seen as reckless and careless, and he is the main character, the one who is addicted to war. Sanborn is a more level headed soldier. He isn’t afraid to do his job, doesn’t shrink from his duty, but has a cautious approach. He just wants to get out alive. Eldridge, on the other hand, struggles with the reality of war, the fear of death, and is near the breaking point in many of the film’s scenes. In an emotional moment, his Army psychiatrist heads out with them into the war zone and dies due to his inexperience. This rocks Eldridge’s world. Finally, Eldridge is shot when Will decides to pursue the people who set off a huge bomb. When he is being [taken] away, he yells at Will for his stupidity, claiming he put him at risk in order to get his high.

In this way, the film asks a lot of important questions about war. It does not shy away from the difficulties, the tough decisions, and the psychological realities of war. In one scene, when Sanborn and Eldridge are just getting to know Will, Sanborn proposes killing him. He feels Will is putting their lives in danger. Eventually, Sanborn begins to understand how Will operates, but still can’t figure out how he remains so calm and collected in the face of death. For Will, it is a high, but he also has the mind of a warrior. He is taking risks, but those risks have reasons, have faces behind them, and he thinks it is worth it. His ability to stay calm also allows him to be incredibly successful in his job, which is normally under quite deadly time constraints.

At the end of the film, everyone gets to go home. The viewer can tell that Will is having a hard time adjusting to civilian life. The grocery stores, the abundance, the monotony. It’s boring to him. He loves his wife and his son, but he begins to realize that his one true love is the battlefield. And so he deploys again.

What makes this film so powerful is the fact that the characters are more dynamic than usual war films. It really deals with their psyche and what they

are going through and does give different pictures of the war. I also found Will to be incredibly relatable in a way. He even looks like your average guy. He doesn't act like some crazy macho warrior, he just does his job, but in a way many couldn't. It really makes you think about the ordinary men and women who are taking these risks every day. The only time Will broke, even for a minute, was when Eldridge got shot. Will didn't want anyone else getting hurt for the risks he took. I think Eldridge's fate shook him a bit, but again, nothing could pull him away from the adrenaline rush of being at the edge of death, the feeling that at that moment, one is fully alive.

I appreciate *The Hurt Locker* because instead of following a certain story line of a battle or a war or of a specific mission, it covers the everyday day in and day out of war and of the emotions and reactions that the troops experience. There is something unique about men like Will, the ability to stay calm under pressure, the ability to operate with such precision, but it also comes with a curse—they find it almost impossible to stay away.

### **Student Discussion Paper**

#### **Film: *Incendies***

*Incendies* was one of my favorite films that we have watched to date. The story line was gripping, showing the effects of violence on a family and how its claws reach into the next generation. I really enjoyed how the [notary] had such a pivotal role in the story. [His] job is to be a kind of gateway between life and death, a holder of the truth that often comes out at the end of life. In many ways, the notary's statement that death is never the end of the story is the theme of the film. Violence does not end when the act is finished, when the war is completed, or the people are arrested. The things people have seen, the consequences of what was done to them stay with them the rest of their lives.

In *Incendies* we didn't learn much about the warring sides. We knew there was a radical right, mostly Christians, attacking Muslims and seeking to overthrow the government. But we also knew that Nawal, and others, who were Christians, opposed them. The university was overrun, orphanages and refugee camps slaughtered and razed to the ground. The point the film makers want to make is that violence is absolute, that it corrupts all. They did not want the viewer to be distracted by the politics or trying to take sides. This was about the effect of violence on the next generation.

Eventually, we learn Nawal's story—how she attempted to assassinate the nationalist leader and was sentenced to 15 years in a political prison, that she was "The Woman who Sings," never broken by her torturers. Prior to her release, they brought in a specialist who brutally raped her again and again. He got her pregnant, and the twins she gave birth to are the twins who are finding out that everything they knew about their life to this point was wrong. Their father raped their mother. And he is also their brother.

This story also is one of forgiveness in a sense, or, if not forgiveness, perhaps negative capability? The ability to hold to opposing truths in each hand and live in the paradox. For Nawal, at the pool that day, she saw the tattoo. The son she had spent her whole life looking for, and then she saw the face of her torturer and the father of her twins. He did not recognize her. Showing how little he must have thought of his victim. But from that moment, Nawal had a difficult choice. She wrote two letters. To the father, nothing but hate. To the son, love, still, in spite of all. In the end, she feels she can rest in peace, her promise to her son kept. Her children, forced to live on with recognition that they were born in a prison, the apex of their mother's torture, of an incestuous relationship.

Again, violence has left its trace on this family, down to their very genes. And it is not something that they will easily shake. Rape, cruelty, torture, genocide, war—they are never truly gone from this world. As Susan Dickman said in her poem, "Skin," "...perhaps, / somehow, the earth remembers."

### **Student Discussion Paper**

**Film:** *No Man's Land*

This movie was a very interesting watch. The title "No Man's Land" is a direct reference to the liminal space the [persons] in the film occupy. It is a territory that remains unclaimed by disputing forces, the most dangerous kind of middle ground. The space is filled with tension, in a way it acts as a container. The opposing forces will continue to press inwards making the container smaller and smaller until it either bursts from pressure, leaving one side the victor to claim the land, or an agreement for peace is reached. What I find important about this film is that neither of these outcomes occur for us to witness in the film. The movie ends in a state of tension as it had at the start. The war continues with it still being no man's land.

Bosnian Serbs make up a majority of the population and are spread all over the territory. The land they live on they see as sacred, the territory of their ancestors. Bosniaks on the other hand are a Muslim faction and follow the rules of Islam. Their goal was to gain independence and create their own nation separate from the Bosnian Serbs.

This film also helps to emphasize the very important role of the media and press in large scale conflicts. Three men are trapped in the trenches with a live landmine. There is no attempt to remove the men from this situation until the press becomes involved and leaks the story to the public. Pressure from the public fueled by the evidence of the media is what leads to interference. This ties directly into our conversations about awareness and the moral obligation to act. This issue was easier to tolerate and control when it was ignorable. When it can no longer be ignored action must be taken.

In this film the media is also used as a weapon. The landmine is unable to be deactivated so even though they are able to evacuate two of the men, the one on



the landmine is abandoned. Rather than admit their failure to the public they say that all three men have been rescued. Then in order to destroy the evidence of their lie they encourage both sides to engage one another in a full artillery barrage by spreading rumors that they would be attempting to reoccupy the trenches. This full onslaught of weaponry would then detonate the landmine and eliminate the evidence, effectively covering up the lie. This robs the man's family of closure. I realize that little could have been done for the man because the landmine was unable to be deactivated, but they should not have lied. If nothing truly could have been done then there is no shame in that and it could be the man accepted his death as it was. However, they lied.

This movie is never about two unlikely friends who bond in the heat of the moment. It is about a never ending struggle that continuously recycles, appearing across all borders and between all kinds of people. Violence is an epidemic. In my opinion it is the over attention to labels within society that leads to these conflicts. We separate ourselves into these highly specific and exclusive groups. We get so caught up in our multifaceted identities that we neglect the identity we all share. We are all human, and we must learn to coexist.

### **Student Discussion Paper**

**Film:** *No Man's Land*

When I heard that this film was to be the comic relief for the class, I breathed a sigh of relief. It is nice to leave for the weekend on a much lighter note. However, while the film was comedic, the ending is just as dark as some of the others and leaves viewers with a frustrated emptiness as we watch the man on the mine sit alone, preparing to die. The UN incompetency and the leadership's underhanded means of covering their tracks was appalling to witness.

While I don't think this film adequately illustrated the why's of the war, or the horror of it, it did deal with the unique situation the UN is in and the ways that they tend to fail those that need their help. The film also profiled two unlikely relationships, which were fascinating to watch unfold. The first, of course, was between the two soldiers of opposing sides. The second, between the French UN captain and the British journalist.

In the case of the two men, they were in quite the precarious situation. Both were stranded, and both coming under fire from either side. I was hoping that they would talk more, find a better way to bridge the gap and come to peace, but real life is far from Hollywood. They did spend time helping each other, and I don't think either had the intention of killing the other; however, their power struggle continued throughout the film and ended in their deaths. What put the Bosnian over the edge, I believe, was the realization that his friend would not make it. He then took revenge on the Serb, who had helped to plant the mine. They both wound up dead. The mine was impossible to discharge. The UN then *lied* to the reporters, left the man to die alone, and planted false information to cause a battle to erupt to cover their tracks and save face. They could not be

embarrassed by failure, and this is why the head UN guy never wanted to help in the first place. It is hard to argue with him, as it only got worse, but do people not have a moral obligation to try to save someone, even when the mission is unsuccessful? That, I believe is the question that the film is seeking to address, a question that ties all of the movies we have seen together and is the connective thread running through them all.

The second unlikely relationship was between the French UN captain who *wanted* to help and the BBC reporter. He and the reporter team up, with her putting pressure on the UN to act. In the end, he appears to want to tell the reporter the truth—that the man is still out there, that they failed him, and that they were about to cause a battle to break out, though their mission was peace. His superior questions what it would change. The fate would be the same. Here, in this relationship, the film deals with the question of truth. Does truth have an inherent value? Even if nothing changed, wouldn't the international community prefer truth? Here, we see the juxtaposition of politics and transparency, of truth and saving face. And the poor Frenchman is caught in the middle. Ultimately, he walks away. And we are left wondering how long it took the man to succumb to his fate. Did he choose to roll off? Did the attack come later? What ever happened to the revolution, the conflict? These stories aren't the essential ones. The question is, in the face of saving lives, what should we do? What is the moral responsibility? What is the weight of truth? In this regard, the film did an excellent job in raising the questions, and prompting the viewer to search herself for an answer.