



## INTLSTD 401/Hist 407

**Course Title: The Problem of Genocide**

Winter 2026

Wednesdays 4-7pm

355 Weiser Hall

**Instructor: Prof. Melanie S. Tanielian, PhD.**

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### Course Description

The twentieth century has been dubbed by some historians and politicians the “century of genocide.” And while the colonial mass killing in the Belgian Congo, the Holocaust, the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda have moved the international community into defining, prohibiting, and punishing genocide and crimes against humanity, we unfortunately cannot speak of an end to large-scale genocidal atrocities as mass killings continue to be daily news items. To understand the reasons behind genocidal moments, this course examines modern genocides through a comparative lens to determine patterns of violence and hopes to inspire students to critically think about methods of prevention. To accomplish this, the course focuses on the larger themes of ‘Modernity and Genocide’, Colonialism, Denialism, Gender, Media, Justice and Reconciliation, Prevention.

A note on the term “comparative:” the study of genocide and the possibility to compare one atrocity to another is not uncontroversial. This course by no means seeks to determine which genocide was the worse nor judge the degree of horrors based on a pornography of pain. Instead the goal is—through a variety of primary and



interdisciplinary scholarly works, literature, oral histories, court cases, film and material culture—to dive into a critical comparative analysis while at the same time preserving

the historic specificity of the various genocides. Questions we will ask are: How do genocides come about? What motivates people to partake or oppose the violence? How is genocide remembered, forgotten, and taught? And how may it be prevented?

***This is a senior seminar so you will be asked to do a good amount of reading and participate actively in class discussions.***

## Learning Goals

1. **Define genocide and explain the limitations of its legal, historical, and scholarly definitions.**
2. **Identify major historical patterns and mechanisms of genocide**, including the roles of the modern state, colonialism, racialization, and nationalism.
3. **Critically analyze multiple case studies of genocide** while recognizing both shared characteristics and the historical specificity of each event.
4. **Evaluate why ordinary individuals participate in mass violence**, and assess the social, political, and psychological factors that shape perpetrator, victim, and bystander behaviors.
5. **Interpret and assess primary sources**—including testimonies, photographs, legal documents, journalism, and memorial practices—to understand how genocides are experienced, recorded, and remembered.
6. **Explain the functions of denial** and evaluate how communities and states construct or contest narratives of genocide.
7. **Assess efforts at justice, reconciliation, and international intervention**, and evaluate the possibilities and limits of local, national, and global responses to genocide.

## Evaluation Criteria

Course grades will be based on in-class written group presentations & journal entries, engagement, three self-reflections as well as three essays. Students are required to attend all class meetings and actively participate in class discussions and projects.

### Engagement (30%):

Every student will attend all scheduled classes on-time and actively participate in their discussion groups. **You will be given a midterm engagement assessment with feedback from me and an end-of-semester engagement assessment. Each of these assessments will be 15% of your grade.** Engagement comes in many forms. Taken holistically, engagement includes (but is not limited to):

1. **Preparation:** reviewing readings before class
2. **Focus:** avoiding distractions during in-person group discussion
3. **Presence:** engaged and responsive during group discussions
4. **Asking Questions:** in class, out of class, online, offline
5. **Listening:** hearing what others say and what they are not saying
6. **Specificity:** referring to specific ideas from readings and discussions
7. **Synthesizing:** making connections between readings and discussions
8. **Civility:** engaging one another in a manner that is respectful, considerate, and understanding

### Group Presentations & Journaling (20%):

1. All assigned readings have questions posted in Canvas under “Modules”
2. At the beginning of each class, students will get into their assigned groups (that I will choose at random on the first day of class) and work together to answer all the reading discussion questions.
3. After the group discussion, I will choose a group at random to briefly present their answers to the class.
4. Students are supposed to take notes of their discussions in their journals, which will be collected as part of their midterm evaluation.



### **Self-Reflections (15%)**

There will be three (3) self-reflections throughout the semester that are worth 5% each; an introduction, a mid-semester, and a final self reflection posted in Canvas:

1. These questions encourage you to reflect carefully on your own work to focus on narrating how you've progressed over the semester
2. I will provide minor feedback on your reflections to assist you throughout the semester

### **Essays (35%)**

There will be three essays (Midterm 10% / Film Review 10% / Final Essay 15%). Each essay will be 7–8 pages in length, double-spaced, in 12-point font, not including the bibliography. Essay prompts will require you to answer a focused question about the readings, films, class discussions, and primary sources we have examined.

### **Grading Policies on of UNGRADING**

This course will focus on qualitative not quantitative assessment, something we'll discuss during the class, both with reference to your own work and the works we're studying. While you will get a final grade at the end of the term, I will not be grading individual assignments, but rather asking questions and making comments that engage your work rather than simply evaluate it. You will also be reflecting carefully on your own work and the work of your peers. The intention here is to help you focus on working in a more organic way, as opposed to working as you think you're expected to. If this process causes more anxiety than it alleviates, see me at any point to confer about your progress in the course to date. If you are worried about your grade, your best strategy should be to join the discussions, do the reading, and complete the assignments.

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>% Total</b>
Essays (3)	Credit/No credit	35%



Group Presentations	credit/No credit	20%
Engagement (2)	Credit /No credit	30%
Self-Reflections (3)	Credit/No Credit	15%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>LETTER</b>	<b>100%</b>

I will hand out exact guidelines with each assignment as to what constitutes a Credit/no Credit

## Readings

### Books to Purchase in PAPER form !!!!

1. Primo Levi, *If this is a Man*
2. Adam Jones, *A Comprehensive Introduction to Genocide*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition
3. Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-95*

***All other required materials will be available on Canvas***

The course addresses some historical details of each of our case studies, but it will be limited as we are focusing on themes. To supplement the cursory nature of the historical discussion a good resource is the Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence:

<http://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/homepage>

## Course Policies

### Classroom Conduct Policy

- It is okay for us to disagree in class discussion, but please do so with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions to keep the conversation as inclusive for everyone as possible



- To facilitate this, please learn your classmates' names, pronounce them correctly, and refer to them by the pronouns they prefer
- If you feel our classroom is not meeting your needs in these regards or you are unsure how to conduct yourself, please ask me for guidance and/or clarification

### **Late Assignment Policy**

- Due dates are clearly indicated on the assignment instructions, the course outline posted in Canvas, and under "Assignments" in Canvas
- If you anticipate not being able to complete your assignment on time communicate with me ahead of the assignment deadline to work out an alternative submission timeline

### **Technology Policy**

I see our time together as an opportunity to be tech free. It is good to be able to disconnect from the distractions of the screens and focus on those tasks and people around us. As a best practice for the course we will try and be present as much as we can, which means that we will make the following commitments:

- Laptops and tablets are permitted **only** for coursework
- Phones are **not** permitted unless with special permission
- Students may not record or distribute any lectures or class activity without explicit permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities
- Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use
- There will be no recordings for this course

### **AI Policy**

The use **any AI** to generate or rephrase ideas or content or to alter and/or produce any other material is **prohibited** in this course and will be considered plagiarism. This policy exists for several reasons:

- University education is about improving your writing skills and if you are not writing, you are not improving
- Using AI opens up academic honesty issues because these tools rely on taking uncredited material from scholars and writers
- Using AI does not produce reliably accurate results
- AI involves serious negative environmental impacts and involves the exploitation of labor in the Global South



- **Written work that has been produced with any AI will result in a “no pass” for that assignment.**

### **Syllabus Policy**

- The instructor reserves the right to change the contents of this syllabus due to unforeseen circumstances
- Students will be given notice of relevant changes in class, through a Canvas announcement, or through U-M email
- To ensure you are aware of any changes, attend class regularly, and check your email and syllabus in Canvas regularly

### **Email Policy**

- U-M faculty and students are required to use U-M email accounts to communicate
- You must regularly check your U-M email address, as important updates will be sent that way
- I will respond to emails within 24 hours and **I do not respond** to emails on the weekends
- When writing an email please follow this format for the subject line: “Hist 407/INTLSTD 401 – First Name, Last Name” so I know the class and student name

### **Absence Policy**

- Absences due to unexpected illness, family emergencies, or other unforeseen events shall be excused
- Absences due to their commitment to officially represent the University (performing arts, scientific or artistic endeavors, or intercollegiate athletics) shall be excused
- Absences due to religious observance shall be excused

Students must provide reasonable notice of dates of anticipated absences and submit this notice in writing via email including the date, the time, and the reason for the absence. For unforeseen circumstances, students must communicate with me as soon as possible about their situation. Absence from classes for any of the above reasons does not relieve students from responsibility for any part of the course material that is missed during the period of absence.



## **Student Support Resources**

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Students who are experiencing a disability-related barrier should contact [Services for Students with Disabilities](#) (SSD). For further conversation with SSD, instructors, and the student may be warranted to ensure an accessible course experience.

### **Writing Assistance**

Students who are having difficulty writing for an assignment in their class should contact [Sweetland Center for Writing](#) for assistance with a writing tutor.

### **Student Mental Health and Wellbeing**

University Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressures and challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, etc. If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. If the source of your stressors is academic, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. For personal concerns, U-M offers a variety of resources, many which are listed on the [Resources for Student Well-being](#) webpage.

### **LSA Technology Support Services**

If you have any difficulties with accessing the campus network or on campus computers, and classroom technologies please contact the helpdesk: 734-615-0100, prompt 1 or get in touch with [LSA Technology Support Services](#).

### **Academic Misconduct**

LSA promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity, and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct. All cases of academic misconduct will be referred to the LSA Office of the Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education. Being found responsible for academic misconduct will usually result in a grade sanction, in addition to any sanction from the college. For more information, including examples of behaviors that are considered academic misconduct and potential sanctions, please see [the LSA Academic Integrity Guidelines](#).



Academic misconduct includes:

- Altering attendance records. E.g. Signing in another student who is absent
- Using, or attempting to use, unauthorized notes, or study aids, or information from another student or student's paper on an examination
- Communicating answers with another person during an exam
- Using electronic devices (e.g., phones, watches, calculators) that provide answers or other unauthorized information for exams
- Taking an exam for another person or having someone take an exam for you
- Using AI to complete your assignments

## **Classroom Culture of Care**

LSA is committed to delivering our mission while aiming to protect the health and safety of the community. Our entire LSA community is responsible for protecting the collective health of all members by being mindful and respectful in carrying out the guidelines laid out on the [University's Health Response page](#). In our classrooms all students are expected to adhere to the required safety measures and guidelines of the State of Michigan and the University of Michigan, such as not coming to class when ill or in quarantine. It is important to also be thoughtful about group gatherings as well as about classroom activities and exercises that require collaboration. Any student who is not able and willing to comply with campus safety measures for this course should contact the course instructor or their academic advisor to discuss alternate participation or course options. For additional information refer to the [University of Michigan's Health Response website](#) and the OSCR Addendum to the Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities on the [OSCR website](#).

## **Sexual Misconduct Policy**

Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes sexual misconduct — including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. We understand that sexual violence can undermine students' academic success and we encourage anyone dealing with sexual misconduct to talk to someone about their experience, so they can get the support they need. Confidential support and academic advocacy can be found with the [Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center](#) (SAPAC) on their 24-hour crisis line, 734.936.3333. Alleged violations can be non-confidentially reported to the Equity, Civil Rights, and Title IX Office (ECRT) at [institutional.equity@umich.edu](mailto:institutional.equity@umich.edu)



## **Course Materials Copyright & Usage Policy**

The materials provided by the instructor in this course are copyrighted. Students are not permitted to record, reproduce, distribute, or publicly post their course materials without express faculty permission. [Copyright Basics](#) provides information about your rights and obligations under copyright law.

## **Schedule of Meetings and Readings**

*Please Note that the schedule might be subject to change based on the progress of our discussion.*

### **PART I: Theories of Genocide**

#### **Week 1 (WED JAN. 7): A New Crime?**

1. Syllabus/Course Policies
2. Getting to Know your colleagues
3. What is Genocide? And Why Study it?
4. UN Definition of Genocide

#### **Week 2 (WED JAN 14): What's in a Name?**

1. Reading (Before Class)
  - a. Jones, A Comprehensive Introduction (ACI), pages xxiv to xxvii
  - b. Jones, ACI, pages 17- 38

Discussion of Rafael Lemkin's framing of Genocide/ Drafting of the UN Declaration

#### **Week 3 (WED JAN 21): What is Destroyed in Genocide ? & When to Call Genocide**

1. Reading (Before Class)
  - a. Jones, ACI, pages 38-83
  - b. <https://time.com/6322574/cultural-genocide-armenia-nagorno-karabakh-essay/>
  - c. <https://caucasusheritage.cornell.edu/>

In-Class: Presentation by CHW member  
Discussion of Contested Cases of Genocide



### **Week 4 (WED JAN 28): The Four Horse Men: State and Empire/ War and Revolution**

1. Reading (Before Class)
  - a. Jones, ACI, Chapter 2 (Read pages: 84-87;90-92, 107-116)
  - b. Jones, ACI, Chapter 11 (Read pages 501-512)
  - c. Bauman, Introduction to Modernity and the Holocaust

## **PART II: Case Studies & Themes**

### **Week 5 (WED FEB 4): Genocides of Indigenous People/ Intent**

1. Reading (Before Class)
  - a. Jones, ACI, Chapter 3
  - b. <https://www.blackagendareport.com/testimony-how-hereros-were-exterminated-1918>
  - c. Birthe Kundrus, From the Herero to the Holocaust
  - d. Press Statement
  - e. NPR, Germany Officially Recognized the Genocide in Present-day Namibia
2. Additional Readings (optional):
  - a. Hull, Isabel V. Absolute Destruction: Military Culture And the Practices of War In Imperial Germany. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005. Ch. 1 & 2
  - b. Lieven, Michael, "'Butchering the Brutes All Over the Place': Total War and Massacre in Zululand, 1879", *History* 84:276 (1999), 614–33
  - c. Jurgen Zimmerer: Colonial Genocide: The Herero and the Nama War (1904-1908) In German South West Africa and Its Significance
  - d. Tony Barta: Decent Disposal: Australian Historians and the Recovery of Genocide

### **Week 6 (WED FEB 11): The Ottoman Destruction of Christian Minorities/ Denial**

1. Reading (Before Class)
  - a. Jones, ACI, Chapter 4, pages 175-197; 201-207
  - b. Film: Aurora's Sunrise
2. Additional Readings (Optional)
  - a. Suny, Ronald Grigor *"They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide*. Fourth printing, and First paperback printing. Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity ; 23. Princeton University Press, 2015.
  - b. Taner Akcam, "The Homogenization of Anatolia," in *From Empire to Republic*



- c. Stephan Astourian, "Silence of the Land: Agrarian Relations, Ethnicity and Power," in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* Ronald Suny and Fatma Muge Gocek.

**Week 7 (WED FEB 18): Stalin & Mao: Famine/ Genocide by Attrition.**

**Guest: Prof. Ronald G. Suny**

1. Reading (Before Class)
  - a. Jones, ACI Chapter 5
  - b. Helen Fein, *Genocide by Attrition*
  - c. Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (first half)

**Week 8 (WED FEB 27): Holocaust: Camps and the Banality of Evil**

1. Reading (Before Class)
  - a. Jones, ACI, Chapter 6
  - b. Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (second half)
  - c. Film: *Zone of Interest*

**Week 9: Springbreak (Begin Reading Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Goražde*)**

**Week 10 (WED MAR 11): Ordinary Killers**

1. Reading (Before Class)
  - a. James Waller, *Becoming Evil*
  - b. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men* Ch. 7 and 18
  - c. Milgram and the Stanford Prison Experiment

**Week 11 (WED MAR 18): Kosovo/Bosnia: A Gendered Genocide**

1. Reading (Before Class)
  - a. Jones, ACI, Chapter 8
  - b. Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Goražde*
  - c. *Film We Came to Witness*

**Optional Readings**

- a. Adam Jones, "Why gendercide? Why root-and-branch? A comparison of the Vende'e uprising of 1793–94 and the Bosnian war of the 1990s in *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 8 (2006), pp. 9-25.
- b. Katherine Derderian, "Common Fate, Different Experience: Gender-Specific Aspects of the Armenian Genocide," in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 19 (2005): 1-25.



- c. Sarah Brown, "Female Perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide," in *International Feminist Journal of Politics* Vol. 16 (2014).

### **Week 12 (WED MAR 25): Rwanda: The Media**

1. Reading (Before Class)
  - a. Jones, ACI, Chapter 9
  - b. Mahmud Mamdani, "The Racialization of the Hutu/Tutsi Difference under Colonialism" in *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, And the Genocide In Rwanda* by Mamdani, Mahmood. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001.
  - c. Sections from "We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed," Philip Gourevitch
  - d. Film: Sometimes in April

## **PART III: The Aftermath**

### **Week 13 (APR 1): International and Local Justice: What kind should it be?**

1. Reading (Before Class)
  - a. Donald Bloxham & Devin Pendas: Punishment as Prevention
  - b. Phil Clark: The Gacaca Journey

### **Week 14 (APR 8): Prevention**

1. Readings (Required): Skim the following
  - a. Report of the U.S. Genocide Prevention task force  
<http://www.usip.org/publications/genocide-prevention-task-force>

In-Class Activity: Group activity in which students are asked to create their own organization for the prevention of genocide and pitch it to UN representatives for unlimited funding.

### **Week 15 (APR 15): Catch up Session**



**Due Dates:**

1. Self-Reflection #1 Due January 11 @ 11:59 pm
2. Short Paper # 1 Due February 15 @ 11: pm
3. Self -Reflection #2 (Midterm) February 22 @ 11:59 pm
4. Engagement Feedback will be posted February 27
5. Short Paper # 2 (Film Review) Due March 29 @ 11:59 pm
6. Short Paper # 3 (Final) Due April 18 @ 11:59 pm
7. Self- Reflection # 3 April 21 @ 11;59 pm
8. Grade Conference April 23, between 4-7 pm