THE MORAL LIFE DURING WAR

Government 94KM
Kristen Renwick Monroe
Tuesday 16:00-17:59
Place: CGIS Knafel K401 (FAS)

Office hours: Tuesday 3-4, 6-7, & by appointment

Course Description
In an age of global unrest, with the threat of terrorist attacks and incidents of ethnic violence and genocide a constant backdrop for much of humanity, it is important to consider the human response to political unrest and psychological suffering. How do individual human beings deal with the trauma of political disturbances? What moral dilemmas confront them and what ethical resources do they bring to bear on the moral choices in such situations? Does it even make sense to speak of a moral life when, as the saying goes, “all’s fair in love and war”? These questions, at the intersection of ethics, political psychology and international relations, form the foundation of our discussions. We focus not on battles, causes or the geo-politics of wars, ethnic violence or genocides but rather on the human reaction to war and the consequences of war for the people who lived through them.

We begin with a series of questions. Can people keep their humanity during war? Indeed, what does the term humanity signify during political upheavals when simply surviving may require acts of faith, courage and desperation? Some find it meaningless to speak in terms of morality/ethics when dealing with wars and genocides, such as the Holocaust. Is this an appropriate response? In the face of wartime brutality must we abrogate our morality? What does it mean to compose a moral life during war?

How can we best gain insight into these questions and the way in which people construct diverse narrative to help them negotiate the moral quicksand during war? Readings focus on how the stories people tell about their lives during war both help us understand how people think about such topics and reveal how the construction of particular narratives shapes and leads us to different moral outcomes, from acts of moral courage to quiet resistance or complicity and bystander behavior. In particular, we inquire about the wide range of wartime responses in which ordinary people try to (1) compose a meaningful moral life in the midst of wartime atrocity, cruelty and savagery, (2) keep or later to reclaim their own humanity and (3) encourage it in others.

Course Organization
We will meet once a week to discuss the personal and literary narratives, biographies, documentaries, and films capturing the experiences of those who have lived through some of the major wars of the 20th century: World Wars I and II, Vietnam, and incidents of ethnic cleansing in Rwanda-Burundi and the Balkans. The last two weeks of the term students will (1) conduct an interview with someone who lived through a war to ask about their own acts of moral courage
and (2) analyze interviews with refugees from the on-going Syrian refugee crisis.

Office hours for Professor Monroe will be the afternoon before class, immediately after class and by appointment at the student’s convenience and by appointment.

Grading Requirement: Examinations and Papers

It is difficult to provide precise measures for grading but final grades will be based on some combination of the following:

- The writing assignments. (You must do five (5) of the nine possible assignments.
- Completion of interview, transcription and analysis of interview with someone who lived through a war and/or genocide; presentation of that analysis in class. Final presentation of transcript plus your analysis of this and what the interview taught you will be presented Weeks 11-12.
- Class participation, including any pop-quizzes. You are responsible for attending class and for completing ALL the required reading assignment by the time they are discussed in class.

REQUIRED BOOKS (ordered and in Bookstore. Also placed on library reserve.)

The following books contain most of the assigned readings and are available for purchase in the University Bookstore:

1. Bielenburg, Christabel. *When I was a German, 1934-1945: An Englishwoman in Nazi Germany.* (Also issued as *Christabel.*) This fascinating glimpse of Nazi Germany is provided by an Englishwoman who was fluent in German and at home in German society, yet not entirely of it. Christabel Bielenberg moved from passive to active resistance as Hitler seized power and the Nazi dictatorship clamped down. Inside view of the July 20th plot to kill Hitler.


3. Galloway, Steven. *The Cellist of Sarajevo.* Riverhead ISBN-1- 1594489866 or ISBN 978 1594489860. A novel based on a real incident, in which a cellist wishes to celebrate the people killed in the shelling of the market in Belgrade and does so by playing each day in the market, one day for every person killed. Both sides focus on him, with some snipers trying to kill him while others are assigned to protect him. Ironically the real cellist supposedly disliked the book and now lives outside Serbia.

5. Monroe, Kristen Renwick, Chloe Lampros-Monroe and Jonah Robnett Pellecchia. 2015. *A Darkling Plain: Stories of Conflict and Humanity during War*. Cambridge University Press. Book began as a class project, based on interviews similar to the ones you will be asked to do this course.


7. Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*. 2016. Harvard U Press, ISBN: 978-0674660342. Viet Thanh Nguyen: “I wrote this book for people who are haunted by war, or who want to understand why we keep going to war even if we know its terrible costs. I was raised by and among Vietnamese people who war had shaped indelibly, and for whom loss, melancholy, and sorrow were enduring emotions. In order to make sense of what had happened to them, and to the Americans they now lived among, I delved into memories and stories of the Vietnam War. Those memories and stories contained the universal patterns that allowed me to think through what it means to remember and forget, to forgive and reconcile, to be human and inhuman. I came to believe that embracing our humanity is not enough to prevent war and achieve peace. We can only achieve those goals if we also confront our inhumanity and understand that it is latent in all of us.”


**RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND FILMS**

**Books**

1. Romeo Dallaire. *Shake hands with the devil: The failure of humanity in Rwanda*. Autobiographical account by UN commander at the time, who later tried to commit suicide and eventually moved to Rwanda to help people there. 584 pages ISBN-10: 0786715103 ASIN: B000BZ99WY

2. Lawrence Langer. *Holocaust Testimonies*. Yale U Press. Argues that it is meaningless to speak about humanity and morality during events such as the Holocaust.
3. Kati Marton. *Enemies of the People: My family’s journey to America*. Simon & Schuster; Reprint edition (October 19, 2010). Describes the arrest of her parents – journalists for AP and UPI during the Cold war in Eastern Europe – as spies. Shows the costs of political resistance, for themselves and for their children.


**Films**

Time permitting, some but not all of the following movies will be shown during class and will be included in exams. Exams will include questions only on the movies shown in class.

On East German totalitarianism and life in a secret police state. *The Lives of Others*. Shows how human decency can exist even in the midst of totalitarianism.


On World War II. *Into the Arms of Strangers*. Academy-award-winning documentary on the kindertransports in the Third Reich. Raises the uncomfortable question as to why similar proposals for Syrian refugees have been voted down today.


**ORIGINAL FILMED INTERVIEWS**. (Time permitting, some but not all interviews, or parts of these interviews, will be shown in class.)
- Laura Hillman, #247 on Schindler’s List
- John Weidner, The Gestapo’s Most Wanted List
- Margot, Tony, Otto, and Knud (Rescuers of Jews and members of Resistance)
- Beatrix, Bystander
- Florentine, Top Dutch Nazi, Unrepentant

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING**: The grade for the course will be based on five of nine possible writing assignments, plus the final written paper, and class participation.
**Written assignments.** There are 9 possible written assignments; each student must complete 5 plus the final written assignment, which all students must complete. These written assignments should be turned in at the beginning of class the day they are due. Be prepared to discuss or read your assignment in class. Each of these writing assignments should run 3-5 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12-point font. A final paper will consist of an oral history you complete with someone you admire who has lived through a war/ethnic cleansing/genocide. We will ask you to transcribe the interview and then analyze it for what it taught you about ethics. Papers should be handed in the last day of class.

**Class participation and reading assignments.** Please complete all reading and writing assignments by the date on which they are assigned. Since the course will be run as a seminar, students will be graded on their participation in class.

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**SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND READINGS**

**Part 1. INTRODUCTION: WORLD WAR I**

**Week 1.** Introduction and overview of course.

**Topic.** There is no moral life during war. Counter arguments: *The Last Days of Vietnam* (film) Reading discussed but not required. Lawrence Langer. *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory.* Yale U Press, 1991. Argues that when events such as the Holocaust occur we no longer should or even can apply the traditional rules/arguments/logics of morality. *The Last Days of Vietnam* offers a real-life counter-argument, in which we find ordinary people finding themselves compelled to take a moral stand to help others, even going around their superiors to do so. Documents both the moral paucity of official policy and the moral ingenuity of ordinary soldiers and love of friends and family.

**Writing assignment #1:** Do you think we can discuss morality during war? Don’t most people just do everything they can to survive, and isn’t that natural? Is it fair to condemn – or even to judge favorably – people for what they do during war? What would you do in a situation such as the one portrayed in *The Last Days of Vietnam*? This is the first day of class so please hand in written assignment at week 2. **Please remember that unless otherwise specified, all writing assignments should be 3-5 pages, Times New Roman 12-point.**

**Week 2.** The First World War (dubbed at the time “the war to end all wars” and “the great war”). 100+ years after it began, why did it happen and what did it look like through the eyes of participants? Discuss its significance for us today. Can we attribute the current war on terror to the Versailles Treaty ending the WWI? What about problems in the Middle East, Africa and much of Asia as many of these issues arose from post-colonialism and the partition of countries losing land in WWI?

**Required Reading:** Englund’s *The Sorrow and the Beauty*. Skim.

Class Assignment. Pick two people in the book and follow them as the war progresses. Week 2 you will be asked to make a presentation about these two people. (Simply tell what happened to the person whose life you follow. The focus will be on WWI but also do a bit of digging to discover what happened to them later.) Please hand in a two-page assignment, documenting what happened to your person plus one page on what you learned about war from reading about this person. What would you have done in that person’s situation? These will be discussed in class Week 2.

**Writing assignment #2. Due in class, Week 2.** Choose two people from *The Sorrow and the Beauty* and follow them during WWII, reporting on them to the class (see above).

Student presentations.
Lecture: Historical Background. WWI, Versailles and WWII.

**Week 3.**
One response to war: Working with the powers that be to save innocents.

**Film. Into the Arms of Strangers.** Academy award winning documentary on the kinder (children) transports, which took Jewish children from the Third Reich to safety in England.

**Writing Assignment #3.** Pick one of the children featured in the documentary. Find out what happened to them later. What happened to the organizer of the kinder transport? What thoughts does viewing the movie prompt in you, as you think about the moral life? About the American response to Jewish refugees in the 1930s? About the American response to Syrian refugees today? Due in class Week 4.

**Week 4-5.**
The Holocaust and another response to war: Moral choice and moral courage in the cauldron. Subterfuge.


Discussion: What makes bystanders different from rescuers and perpetrators? Discussion of bystander behavior and of perpetrator behavior.


**Writing Assignment #4:** Pick one person from this book. Describe what they did, what it cost them, what drove their moral choice. What would you have done in their place? Why?

**Week 6.**
Response to war: Quiet, personal resistance.
Reading: (Read one of the following. Both are extremely short novels.) *The Silence of the Sea (Le Silence de la Mer)*. Anonymous. Edited by James w. Brown and Lawrence D. Stokes. NY and Oxford. Berg. Distributed by St. Martin’s Press.


Both books were published originally and anonymously in occupied France.

**Writing Assignment #5.** Both of these books illustrate how stories and narrative can become political tools. Discuss this topic in the contemporary political climate. What kind of alternative narratives do we find, and where?

**Week 7-8.**

Vietnam, from a variety of perspectives. Time permitting, we will see one or perhaps more of the following films. A good reminder of the extent to which the USA has been torn apart by cultural and moral conflicts before the present era.

*Film: Winter Soldier*. 1972. This landmark documentary chronicles a 1971 meeting during which more than 100 American veterans spoke publicly at a Detroit motel about the inhumanity and brutality of the Vietnam War. Attempting to add context to the recently uncovered My Lai Massacre of 1968, the soldiers, a group that includes future Senator and presidential candidate John Kerry, recall witnessing atrocities committed against Vietnamese soldiers, unarmed civilians, children and prisoners of war. Note release date: during war.

*Film: Regret to Inform.* At the age of 24, American director Barbara Sonneborn lost her husband in the Vietnam War. Twenty years after his death, Sonneborn sets out to interview other American and Vietnamese women whose spouses died in the conflict. Along the way she meets a Vietnamese woman who was forced into prostitution during the war, an American woman whose husband died of chemical poisoning years after the conflict ended and a woman who worked as a North Vietnamese spy.

*Film: Hearts and Minds*. 1974. Academy award winning documentary and anti-war film. Many times during his presidency, Lyndon B. Johnson said that ultimate victory in the Vietnam War depended upon the U.S. military winning the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people. Filmmaker Peter Davis uses Johnson's phrase in an ironic context in this anti-war documentary, filmed and released while the Vietnam War was still under way, juxtaposing interviews with military figures like U.S. Army Chief of Staff William C. Westmoreland with shocking scenes of violence and brutality. Note release date: during war.
Film: The Most Dangerous Man in America. This acclaimed documentary provides insight into the actions of Daniel Ellsberg, a leading American military strategist who leaked the Pentagon Papers, a massive top-secret document that pointed to government deception about the Vietnam War. The film looks at Ellsberg himself and at the repercussions of his surprising revelations, which led to a media circus and ultimately contributed to end of both the Vietnam conflict and the presidency of Richard Nixon. Documents an act of personal whistle-blowing that many considered treasonable.


Writing Assignment #6. Find someone you know who has fled, fought in or lived through the Vietnam war How does this person’s experience contrast with that of Viet Thanh Nguyen? With Viet Thanh Nguyen’s thoughts on war? With the experience of the South Vietnamese soldier featured in A Darkling Plain?

GENOCIDE AND ETHNIC CLEANSING.

Week 8-9.

Ethnic Cleansing in the former Yugoslavia

Ethnic cleansing. Personal and international response to it.
What is it? How extensive is it? Can one recover from it? If so, how? What works best for the country – and for the individuals involved – after ethnic cleansing? Historical Background on ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Rwanda-Burundi.

Lecture. History of conflict. Includes personal photos of Bosnia today and discussion of the ethnic cleansing’s aftermath.


Film: Hunt for Justice: The Louise Arbour Story. Film about a controversial prosecutor/judge in the trials of war criminals in the former Yugoslavia. Documents the personal costs of pursuing war criminals. Reveals what international organizations can, cannot and often will not do in such crises.

Writing assignment #7. What would you have done had you been in Arbour’s position? For those of you interested in going into law or humanitarian work, how will you deal with the bureaucratic considerations Arbour encountered? The geopolitical reality? What if you have parents who do such work? What is the role of children in this situation? (See Kati Marton’s description of her parents’ lives in communist Hungary for a child’s take on this. Kati Marton. Enemies of the People: My family’s journey to America. Simon & Schuster; Reprint edition October 19, 2010)
Week 9.
The failure of the international community and the ingenuity of one man. Genocide and ethnic cleansing in Rwanda-Burundi

Film: *Hotel Rwanda.*

Recommended Book: Romeo Dallaire. *Shake hands with the devil: The failure of humanity in Rwanda.* Autobiographical account by UN commander at the time, who later tried to commit suicide and eventually moved to Rwanda to help people there. 584 pages ISBN-10: 0786715103 ASIN: B000BZ99WY

**Writing Assignment #8.** What happened to Paul Rusesabagina after the genocide? To Romeo Dallaire? Discuss their actions and their later lives in light of the words of a Holocaust rescuer (Marion Pritchard): “We all have memories of times when we should have done something, and we didn’t. And it gets in the way during the rest of your life.” Have you experienced such an event? Discuss

PART 4. SURVIVING WITH HUMANITY INTACT OR RESTORED

Week 10.

Surviving wars and genocides with humanity intact. How do people compose a meaningful life after such trauma?

Reading: *A Darkling Plain: Studies of Conflict and Humanity during War.* Kristen Monroe, Chloe Lampros-Monroe, and Jonah Robnett Pellechia. Cambridge U Press. 2015

**Writing Assignment #9.** Contrast two people featured in this book. After a brief description of what happened to them, note what strikes you most about them. What factors helped them survive with their humanity intact, or did they manage to maintain their humanity? Do you see critical similarities between the two individuals, or are the contrasts most striking?

Week 11.

Surviving totalitarianism/authoritarian regimes.

Film: *The Lives of Others.* How two men find integrity despite an all-oppressive and inhumane political regime. Beautifully-filmed, exquisite depiction of the last days of Eastern Germany. Academy award winner.

Week 12-13.

**FINAL PROJECT ASSIGNMENT (10-20 PAGES):** Interview someone affected by war, genocide or terrorism. For examples, see any of the interviews in *A Darkling Plain: Stories of Conflict and Humanity during War*, such as chapters on Japanese interned during World War II, US soldier from a recent American war, a political refugee from a war – civil or otherwise, etc.
Do a 1-2 hour taped and/or filmed interview with them, asking about their experiences and what moral lessons—if any—they drew from their experience. Using your cell phone to conduct the interview is fine. If you need someone to interview, please see the professor. We have people from the VA Hospital in Long Beach, a young woman who was a Major who did two tours of duty in Iraq, and others. Students who submit a film clip of highlights from the interview will receive extra credit in their final grade for this project.

REGARDLESS OF THE FORMAT UTILIZED, PLEASE INCLUDE:

(A) The signed consent form—which will be distributed to you during class—saying they understand and give approval to you to conduct the interview, analyze it and show it to others. If they give their consent, their interview also will be placed in an archive at the UCI Ethics Center so that others may view their interview. These interviews are for pedagogical purposes, not for research, so no IRB approval is required.

(B) A transcript of the interview, which must be at least 10 pages in length, double spaced 12-point type Times New Roman, and

(C) A 3-5-page analysis of your own on what the interview taught you about how people deal with the trauma of war or genocide. (Again, 12 point, Times New Roman, double spaced)

PROJECTS WILL BE PRESENTED IN CLASS THE LAST TWO WEEKS OF THE TERM. FINAL PAPERS DUE THE LAST DAY OF CLASS.

Please ask your interviewee if they are willing to have their interview approved for public viewing, in which case it will be shown/discussed in class and stored in the Ethics Center Archives, where it will be made available to any scholar wishing to use it for scholarly analysis. If the person you interview wants their interview to be private—that is, shared only with you and me—that is also fine. Just please note that on the consent form and on your final paper. If not otherwise noted on the signed consent form, we will assume they give their consent to have their interview discussed by you in class and analyzed by you, for pedagogical purposes, in your final paper. Please email the final paper, including the transcribed and/or filmed interview to Professor Monroe at KRMonroe@UCI.Edu. Please hand in a hard copy the last day of class. PLEASE BE RESPECTFUL OF THE PRIVACY AND FEELINGS OF THE PERSON YOU ARE INTERVIEWING AND ABOVE ALL, HAVE FUN!