



TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION AFTER ATROCITY

HISTORY/PEACE STUDIES 4RR3

Department of History
McMaster University

Instructor:

Dr. B. Ibhawoh

Lectures:

Thursday 6pm-8pm
(Virtual on Teams)

Course Objectives:

This course examines truth and reconciliation processes established globally to address historical atrocities and contemporary human rights abuses. In efforts to redress legacies of historical injustices, abuse, repression and human rights violations, many countries have turned to truth and reconciliation processes. Central to these processes are Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Over 40 countries have established truth commissions to investigate past human rights violations and recommend measures of redress. From South Africa's post-apartheid TRC to Canada's Residential School TRC, truth and reconciliation offers a new model of restorative justice centered on truth-finding and national reconciliation. The worldwide popularity of truth commissions represents the resurgence of memory politics and a period of increasing challenge of the nation-state's hegemony over history. As official narratives are challenged by societal demands for accurate and truthful representations of the past, truth-seeking and national reconciliation processes have become a means of constructing and deconstructing collective memories.

In this course we will examine the mandates, processes and outcomes of truth commissions as mechanism for addressing contemporary and historical abuses, bringing justice to victims and fostering national reconciliation. This course is intended to provide students with in-depth understanding truth-seeking and reconciliation processes as well as the ability to conduct independent research on these topics. At the end of the course, I expect that students will:

- Have enhanced understanding of the development and historical, political and cultural contexts of truth and reconciliation processes.
- Become well-versed in TRC language and institutions
- Gain better understanding of the varied historical, political and social contexts of TRC processes.
- Develop research methods and critical problem-solving skills, including ability to recognize bias, identify missing voices, and appreciate the limitations of sources and methods.

TEXTBOOKS & MATERIALS:

Required Books:

- Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*. Routledge, 2011.
- Klaus Neumann, and Janna Thompson, *Historical Justice and Memory*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2017.
- Berber Bevernage, *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice*, Routledge. 2013

Method of Assessment:

Description	Weight	Due Date
Seminar Presentation and Facilitation	10%	Continuous assessment
Participation/online discussion	10%	Continuous assessment
Assignment 1: Book/Article Review	20%	
Assignment 2: Truth Commission Backgrounder	30%	
Assignment 3: Research Paper	30%	

COURSE POLICIES

Seminar Presentation/Facilitation – 20% - Continuous

Each student will sign up for at least 2 seminar topics during the first two weeks of the term and will be required to make seminar presentations on the selected topic and readings. The presenters will be responsible for leading the seminar discussion focusing on the main issues or ideas covered in the readings and raising questions for class discussions. The actual presentation should take no more than 20 minutes and ample time should be left for class discussion. The presenter/facilitator will subsequently write and submit a 3-5-page reflection paper outlining their own interpretations of the assigned readings and class discussions. Reflection papers are due in class a week after the presentation. Assessment of seminar presentation will be based on both oral presentation and reflection paper following these criteria: evidence of preparation and understanding of the material, coverage of the material, clarity of thought and expression, quality of discussion/questions and time management. *Weight: 20%*

Participation – 10% - Continuous

Active and meaningful participation is expected of all students. Students are expected to do the assigned readings and come prepared for class discussions on the topic of the week. Assessment of seminar participation will be based on the frequency, quality and relevance of comments and questions both during our virtual session and on the Avenue discussion board *Weight: 20%*

Assignment 1: Book/Article Review – 20%

In this course we will engage with the key scholarly and policy debates about national truth-seeking, justice and reconciliation processes. Students will write a review of 1 book selected from the course supplemental readings this outline and find 2 related academic articles from peer-reviewed journals that address themes on truth and reconciliation. Book reviews should not simply be summaries of the author's arguments. Reviews should explore the manner in which scholars have approached and examined the subject, the different points of view or schools of thought that they have advanced, and the ways that scholars have interpreted evidence to support their arguments. Pay attention to any connections or contrasts between the reviewed books and articles. Materials already assigned for this course are not eligible for review. Book reviews should be approximately **10-15 pages** double-spaced (excluding references). Submit this assignment in MS word or PDF document in the *Book Review folder* in Avenue to Learn.

Assignment 2: Truth Commission Backgrounder – 30%

Each student will use the Truth Commission Reports (TCR) on the website of the Centre for Human Rights and Restorative Justice (CHRRJ) to write a Backgrounder on a specific truth commission.

<https://truthcommissions.humanities.mcmaster.ca/truth-commission-reports/>

The CHRRJ database will provide the key primary source. You should complement it with your own secondary sources including books and journal articles. Your emphasis should be the mandate, processes and outcomes of the Truth Commission. A backgrounder is an article that provides background information about a particular subject or event. They are usually written for media or to inform public audiences.

Guide on how to write a backgrounder

Examples of human rights backgrounders: (Ontario Human Rights Commission)

Your backgrounder should have a title and answer the following questions in essay format:

- What is the historical, social and political context in which the Truth Commission emerged?
- What was the mandate of the Truth Commission? Who are/were the key personalities involved?
- What were the outcomes and legacies of the Truth Commission?
- How have scholars and public commentators assessed the truth commission?

Be creative. Feel free to include images and audiovisual sources in your Backgrounder. You can find an example of a creative group presentation for this course. Backgrounders should be **10 -15 pages** double-spaced (excluding references).

Backgrounder Sample 1

Backgrounder Sample 2

Submit this assignment in MS word or PDF document in the *Truth Commission Backgrounder Assignment folder* in Avenue to Learn.

Assignment 3: Research Paper – 30%

This is the major writing assignment for this course. Research papers should be on a topic on any aspect of this course but must be approved by the instructor. In writing the paper, it is expected that some primary sources will be used (where available) and references drawn from the historiographical review earlier written. The research paper should be no more than **25 pages** double-spaced (excluding references). Pages within the body of the paper must be numbered. Submit this assignment in MS word or PDF document in the *Research Paper folder* in Avenue to Learn.

As you work on your final research essays, please note the following:

- Research papers should be on a topic on any aspect of this course.
 - Papers must have an explicit reference to the main themes of this course - transitional justice, truth, reconciliation, social memory, historical atrocity, memorialization etc.
 - Papers should have a central thesis and should be based on scholarly sources indicated in the references and bibliography. What research question do you aim to answer with your essay? Essays should not be generalized unfocussed discussions of a topic or a simple chronology of events.
 - Topics should be manageable and not too broad.
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COURSE OUTLINE

Topic 1 – Jan. 7

Introduction

Topic 2 – Jan. 14

History and Social Memory

- Janna Thompson, “Reparative Claims and Theories of Justice” in Klaus Neumann, and Janna Thompson, *Historical Justice and Memory*, (Chapter 2).
- Berber Bevernage, “Introduction” *History, Memory and State-Sponsored Violence* (Chapter 1).

Topic 3 – Jan. 21

Historical Justice and Reconciliation

- Jefferey Blustein, “How the Past Matters: On the Foundation of an Ethics of Remembrance,” in Klaus Neumann, and Janna Thompson, *Historical Justice and Memory* (Chapter 4).
- Barkan, Elazar. “Introduction: Historians and Historical Reconciliation.” *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 114, No. 4 (2009): 899-913.
- Florence Larocque and Anne-Marie Reynaud, Dealing with Difficult Pasts: Memory, History and Ethics: Introduction, *Les ateliers de l'éthique*, Vol. 14(2), 2019, pp. 1 - 19

Topic 4 – Jan. 28

Justifying Truth Commissions

- Brahm, Eric. “What Is a Truth Commission and Why Does It Matter.” *Peace and Conflict Review* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 1-14.
- Why Truth Commissions? - Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, chapter 3
- The 5 Strongest Truth Commissions – Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, chapter 4

Topic 5 - Feb. 4

Truth Seeking and Truth Commissions

- What is the truth? – Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, chapter 6
- Berber Bevernage, ‘La Muerte No Existe.’ The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the Resistance against the Irreversible Time of History (Chapter 2)
- Berber Bevernage, ‘We the Victims and Survivors Declare the Past to Be in the Present.’ The ‘New South Africa’ and the Legacy of Apartheid (Chapter 3)

Topic 6 – Feb. 11 - Assignment 1: Book/Article Review Due

Mandates and Processes of Truth Commission

- Berber Bevernage, ‘The Past Must Remain the Past.’ Time of History and Time of Justice in the ‘New Sierra Leone’ (Chapter 4)
- Rosemary Nagy, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Genesis and Design, *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 29(2), 2014, pp. 199-217.
- David B. MacDonald and Graham Hudson, The Genocide Question and Indian Residential Schools in Canada, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2012), pp. 427-449.

Feb 18 - MID-TERM RECESS

Topic 7 - Feb. 25

Historical Justice through Truth Commissions

- Onur Barkiner, “Promoting Historical Justice through Truth Commissions: An Uneasy Relationship,” in Klaus Neumann, and Janna Thompson, *Historical Justice and Memory*, (Chapter 8).

- Healing and Re-traumatization – Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, chapter 11
- Rosemary Nagy, Truth, Reconciliation and Settler Denial: Specifying the Canada–South Africa Analogy, *Human Rights Review*, 13 (2012) 349-367.

Topic 8 – March 4

Victims and Perpetrators

- The Truth about Men and Women – Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, chapter 5
- Dealing with Perpetrators - Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, chapter 10
- Daniel Butt, “Historical Justice in Post-colonial Contexts: Repairing Historical Wrongs and the End of Empire,” in Klaus Neumann, and Janna Thompson, *Historical Justice and Memory* (Chapter 9).

Topic 9 - March 11 - Assignment 2: Truth Commission Backgrounder

Truth and Reparations

- Truth and Reparations – Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, chapter 12
- John Torpey “The Political Field of Reparations,” in Klaus Neumann, and Janna Thompson, *Historical Justice and Memory*, (Chapter 3).
- Margaret Walker, “How can Truth Telling count as Reparations?” in Klaus Neumann, and Janna Thompson, *Historical Justice and Memory* (Chapter 7).
- Onur Bakiner, “One truth among others? Truth commissions’ struggle for truth and memory, *Memory Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3: 345-360.

Topic 10 – March 18

Amnesty and Trials

- Truth and Justice - Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, chapter 8
- Mahmood Mamdani, “Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC),” *Diacritics* 32, no. 3 (2005).
- Elazar Barkan and Belma Becirbasic, “The Politics of Memory, Victimization and Activism in Post conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina” in Klaus Neumann, and Janna Thompson, *Historical Justice and Memory* (Chapter 5).

Topic 11 - March 25

Narratives of Victimization

- Healing from the Past – Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, chapter. 11
- Nthabiseng Motsemme, “The Mute Always Speak: On Women’s Silences at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” *Current Sociology* 52, no. 5 (2004): 909–32.
- Briony Jones and Ingrid Oliveira. “Truth Commission Archives as ‘New Democratic Spaces.’” *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 8, (2016): 6-24.

Topic 12 - April 1

Reconciliation and Reform

- Reconciliation and Reform – Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, chapter 13
- Elazar Barkan, “Historical Dialogue: Beyond Transitional Justice and Conflict Resolution,” in Klaus Neumann, and Janna Thompson, *Historical Justice and Memory*, (Chapter 10)
- Mark Pendleton “Memory, Justice and Post terror Futures,” in Klaus Neumann, and Janna Thompson, *Historical Justice and Memory*, (Chapter 11).
- David Androff, “To not hate”: reconciliation among victims of violence and participants of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” *Contemporary Justice Review*, Volume 13, 3, 2010

Topic 13 – April 8

- **Conclusion / Revision**

April 15 - Assignment 3: Research Paper Due

BOOK REVIEW TEXTS AND ARTICLES

Secondary Sources - Books

- Abena Ampofoa Asare, *Truth Without Reconciliation: A Human Rights History of Ghana* (2018)
- Annalise E. Acorn, *Compulsory Compassion: A Critique of Restorative Justice* (2004)
- Berber Bevernage, *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice* (2013)
- David Webster, *Flowers in the Wall: Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Indonesia, and Melanesia* (2017).
- Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (1999).
- Gabrielle Lynch, *Performances of Injustice: The Politics of Truth, Justice and Reconciliation in Kenya* (2018).
- Hazan, Pierre. *Judging War, Judging History: Behind Truth and Reconciliation* (Stanford University Press, 2010).
- Kenneth Christie. *The South African Truth Commission* (2000)
- Klaus Neumann and Janna Thompson eds., *Historical Justice and Memory* (2015)
- Leigh Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence* (2008)
- Lyn S. Graybill, *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Miracle or Model?*
- Mark Ensalaco, *Chile Under Pinochet: Recovering the Truth* (2000)
- Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (1998).
- Mary Ingouville Burton, *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission [South Africa]* (2017)
- Onur Bakiner, *Truth Commissions: Memory, Power, and Legitimacy* (2016)
- Philip Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory* (2010)
- Pierre Hazan, *Judging War, Judging History: Behind Truth and Reconciliation* (2010)
- Rebekka Friedman, *Competing Memories: Truth and Reconciliation in Sierra Leone and Peru* (2017).
- Richard Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (, 2001)
- Robert Rotberg and Dennis Thompson eds., *Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions* (2010).
- Roberta Villalón, *Memory, Truth, and Justice in Contemporary Latin America* (2017).
- Ronald Niezen, *Truth and Indignation: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools* (2017).
- Ruti Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (2000).
- Spoma Jovanovic, *Democracy, Dialogue, and Community Action: Truth and Reconciliation in Greensboro*
- Teresa Godwin Phelps, *Shattered Voices: Language, Violence, and the Work of Truth Commissions* (2006).
- Timothy Longman, *Memory and Justice in Post-Genocide Rwanda* (2017)
- Véronique Tadjo, *The Culture of Dissenting Memory: Truth Commissions in the Global South* (2019)

Journal Articles

- Alejandro Castillejo-Cuéllar, "Knowledge, Experience, and South Africa's Scenarios of Forgiveness," *Radical History Review* 97, 2007, 11–42.
- Eric Brahm, "Uncovering the Truth: Examining Truth Commission Success and Impact," *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 8, 1, 2007, pp. 16–35.
- Eric Wiebelhaus-Brahm, What is a Truth Commission and Why Does it Matter? *Peace and Conflict Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2009, pp. 1-14,
- Geoff Dancy, Hunjoon Kim & Eric Wiebelhaus-Brahm, "The Turn to Truth: Trends in Truth Commission Experimentation," *Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 9, 1, 2010, pp. 45-64
- John Milloy, Doing Public History in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *The Public Historian*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (November 2013), pp. 10-19.
- Kimberly Lanegran, "Truth Commissions, Human Rights Trials, and the Politics of Memory," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 25, no. 1 (2005): 111–21.
- Nenad Dimitrijević, Justice beyond Blame: Moral Justification of (the Idea of) a Truth Commission, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 2006.
- Nigel Eltringham, "We are not a Truth Commission": fragmented narratives and the historical record at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 11, 1, 2009, 55-79.

- Nneoma Nwogu, "When and Why It Started: Deconstructing Victim-Centered Truth Commissions in the Context of Ethnicity-Based Conflict." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4 (2010): 275–89.
- Onur Bakiner, "Truth Commission Impact: An Assessment of How Commissions Influence Politics and Society," *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 8, 1, 2014, pp. 6–30.
- Rafael Verbuyst, "History, Historians and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *New Contree* 66 (2013).
- Rosalind Shaw, "Memory Frictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone," *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (2007).

Primary Sources – Truth Commission Reports

- Confronting Atrocity Project - Truth Commission Report Database (McMaster University). <https://truthcommissions.humanities.mcmaster.ca/truth-commission-reports/>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the Final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Ottawa: TRC, 2015), available online at <https://nctr.ca/reports2.php>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (Ottawa: TRC, 2015), also available at <https://nctr.ca/reports2.php>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *The Survivors Speak: A Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Ottawa: TRC, 2015), also available at <https://nctr.ca/reports2.php>.

Web Resources

- Confronting Atrocity Project (McMaster University) <https://truthcommissions.humanities.mcmaster.ca/>
- Truth & Reconciliation in Timor-Leste, Indonesia & Melanesia <http://reconciliationtim.ca/history/truth-and-reconciliation-in-28-countries-latest-edition-of-student-authored-textbook/>
- Truth Commission Digital Collection (United States Institute for Peace) <https://www.usip.org/publications/2011/03/truth-commission-digital-collection>
- South African Truth Commission, Video Tape Collections (Yale University) <http://trc.law.yale.edu/index.htm>
- Joshua Inwood, "Dealing with hate: Can America's truth and reconciliation commissions help?" <https://theconversation.com/dealing-with-hate-can-americas-truth-and-reconciliation-commissions-help-73170>
- Sarah Malotane Henkeman, "Why a narrow view of restorative justice blunts its impact." <https://theconversation.com/why-a-narrow-view-of-restorative-justice-blunts-its-impact-67258>
- Bonny Ibhawoh, "Do truth and reconciliation commissions heal divided nations?" <https://theconversation.com/do-truth-and-reconciliation-commissions-heal-divided-nations-109925>