

Syllabus

Title of the Course:	Conflict, Knowledge and Memory: Cases from Palestine and Syria	Course Breakdown:	28 teaching hours online
Name of the Instructor:	Dr. Ammar Kandeel and Dr. Mohamad Moustafa Alabsi	Weekly class time:	Tuesdays, 14:00 CET
Language:	English		
Hosted by:	Freie Universität Berlin	Certificate issued by:	Freie Universität Berlin (6 ECTS)
min. number of participants:	10	max. number of participants	30

Academic fields & Keywords

Middle Eastern Studies – History - Anthropology & Cultural Studies – Conflictual Studies – Memory and Narrative Studies - Decolonization – Knowledge production – Exile – Democracy & Civil Society.

Description of the course

This course proposes an inquiry into the academic and cultural experiences of writing and rewriting history in Palestine and in Syria. It combines different approaches and intellectual schools going from the epistemic question of the “decolonization” of knowledge to today’s impact of the information revolution on the cultural production and political representations.

The course emphasizes on cross-disciplinary discussions related to the nature of both conflicts and their respective features. The contribution to the national-self building is explored through the lens of statelessness in the Palestinian case and the one-party State then the civil war in the Syrian one. The course invites to reflect on dissent/subaltern narratives and on the question of the philosophical concept of Civil Society and the legal and political definition of the State. It tracks evolutions and mechanisms of knowledge production in contexts of “exile”, of “estrangement” and of “conflictual narratives”. It explores alternative forms of expression and representations with visual arts, popular culture and the thriving of personal and oral history accounts.

The sessions will be presented and discussed by both instructors with an attention to the students’ participation and the co-built and interactive progress of the course. They include discussions of visual materials: (visual arts, reviews of films and literature, documentary material) as well as experimental and class interaction experiences with OpenAI -ChatGPT.

Learning Aims:

- To obtain critical knowledge about the Middle East by studying its complexity and conflicts
- To familiarize with the modern Middle Eastern landscape through cultural and political insights.
- To familiarize with the multicultural nature of Middle Eastern societies.
- To practice active analyzing of Middle Eastern topics and conflicts.
- To get weekly involved in thinking and analyzing Middle Eastern art and literature.
- To have an insight into Middle Eastern social movements and political aspirations.

To provide a general understanding about:

- Discussing with a critical approach the stakes of exile, decolonization, and knowledge production in general as well as in the Middle Eastern modern experience.
- Analyzing the challenges of memory and history writing in conflict regions, in addition to the role of arts and literature in expressing political experiences and identities from subaltern perspectives.
- Thinking theoretical and practical differences between Majority & Democracy, Revolution & Civil War, Legality and Legitimacy.
- Thinking about the theoretical and historical differences between dictatorship, nationalism and totalitarianism.
- Assessing distinctions between Territory and Land, between Law and Nature.
- The course will be interactive, so students will be missioned to participate to as far as 32% percent of its content.

Course requirements

The **final grade** for the course will be based on the following:

- **Contribution to the Course: 14-Week Lectures**
(30 hours = 16%)
- **Two response papers:** a 500-word proposal for the final dissertation (by week 5-6) + an 800-word project of the final dissertation (by week 10)
(40 hours = 20%)
- **Material readings and class participation:** academic readings, movies, documentaries
(60 hours = 32%)
- **Oral presentations:** Students will make oral presentations of their dissertations' projects. Instructors will give feedback to help write final dissertations.
(20 hours = 12%)
- **Final dissertation:** A 3000-word final dissertation by each student
(35 hours = 20%)

Outline of the Course Schedule

Week 1		Introduction
Week 2		
Week 3		
Week 4	By the end of week 5 to 6 each student will have submitted a 500-word proposal that evolves towards the final dissertation. The theme will be inspired from General Readings and Materials assigned by instructors at the beginning of the course.	Proposal of the final dissertation
Week 5		
Week 6		
Week 7		
Week 8		
Week 9		
Week 10	By week 10, students will have submitted the final paper project (800 words). Instructors will be available to help and discuss each dissertation project.	Written projects of final dissertations
Week 11		
Week 12		
Week 13		
Week 14	Students will make oral presentations of their dissertations' projects. Instructors will give feedback to help writing final dissertations.	Oral presentations of the projects of final dissertations. Wrap-up and Conclusion

Syllabus / Reading List

Week 1: Introduction: Conflict, Knowledge and Memory: Cases from Palestine and Syria

The first session will introduce the fields covered by the course and its interdisciplinary nature. Instructors will also discuss the expectations of the students regarding the content and the proposed materials. The discussion will also cover activities and interaction tasks that students will have to achieve during the semester and at its end.

Week 2: The politics of writing history and conflictual narratives on Palestine

- Palestinian modern history: a case of conflictual narratives
- Narrative and History: Memory and Knowledge
- Historical facts and interpretations
- Conflicting history writing: the perception of the Other
- Writing history and political claims.

Reading materials:

- White, Hayden. 1975. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Roteberg, Robert I. 2006. "Building Legitimacy through Narrative." In Robert I. Roteberg, *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict*. Indiana University Press.
- Scham, Paul, Salem, Walid, Pogrud, Benjamin (Ed.). 2005. *Shared histories: a Palestinian-Israeli dialogue*. [Epub]. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
- Pappé, Ilan. 2010. "Fear, Victimhood, Self and the Other: On the Road to Reconciliation." In Ilan Pappé and Jamil Hilal, *Across the Wall*. I. B. Tauris.
- Rouhana, N. N., & Bar-Tal, D. (1998). "Psychological dynamics of intractable ethnonational conflicts: The Israeli–Palestinian case." *American Psychologist*, 53(7), 761–770. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.53.7.761>
- Rüsen, Jörn. 2005. *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation*. Berghahn Books.

Week 3: Palestinian historians in the West: testimonial and material challenges of constructing the modern history of Palestine

- Palestinian writings as subaltern narratives in Western historiographies
- History and the Nation-State: displacement, narrative, and the land
- Material challenges of exile to history writing: the archival dispossession
- Testimonial challenges of exile to the historian: credibility deficit
- Multilayered history of Palestine: a project beyond national history?

Reading materials:

- Meir Litvak. 2009. *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity*. Palgrave Mcmillan.
- Friedländer, Saul. 2000. "History, Memory, and the Historian: Dilemmas and Responsibilities." *New German Critique*, No. 80, Special Issue on the Holocaust (Spring - Summer, 2000), p. 3-15 (read p. 13-15)
- Said, Edward W. 1992. *The Question of Palestine*. New York: Vintage Books Edition.
- Miranda Fricker. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. 1st edition. Oxford/New York: Clarendon Press.
- Nur Masalha. 2012. *The Palestine Nakba. Decolonizing History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*. London: Zed Books.
- Nur Masalha. 2018. *Palestine. A Four Thousand Year History*. London: Zed Books

Week 4: National narrative under the one-party state: Baathist Syria from 1963 to the Arab Spring 2010/2011.

- Perspectives of geopolitics' spaces and of history's periodization (The Levant - The Middle East - the Arab World) – (The Cold War – The Middle East after 09/11 – The Arab Spring).
- Theory of dictatorship: features of the totalitarian state/the one-party State – life in Syria under Hafez al-Assad rule.
- Society, politics and world perception under the Baath regime in Syria.
- The landscape of Syrian Studies before the Arab Spring 2010.

Reading materials:

- Wedeen, Lisa. 1999. *Ambiguities of Domination. Politics, Rhetoric and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. University of Chicago.
- Dabashi, Hamid. 2012. *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism*. Zed Books Ltd.
- Fraenkel, Ernst. 1971. *The Dual State. A contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship*. Oxford University Press.
- Arendt, Hannah. 2017 (1951). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Penguin Classics.

Week 5: Revolution or Civil War? Syria's conflictual narratives since 2011

- What is revolution? overview of revolutionary literature and theories: social, political, and legal perspectives.
- What is "Civil War"? Political Theology and Philosophy of Law's debates.
- Militias and armed groups in Syria: competitive narratives in sovereign and non-sovereign spaces.

Reading materials:

- Pasquier, Emmanuel. 2012. *De Genève à Nuremberg: Carl Schmitt, Hans Kelsen et le droit international*. Classiques Garnier.
- Hobbes, Thomas. 1651. *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*

Week 6: Palestinian and Israeli historians: rewriting 1948

- History and Peace: the “Historians’ querelle” in the Palestinian-Israeli case
- Israeli new historians revisiting 1948
- Palestinian oral history: a response to material and testimonial challenges strategy
- Oral history of *Nakba*: the debates between Israeli (and Palestinian) historians
- Palestinians and Israeli historians: the concept of “Bridging narratives”

Reading materials:

- Abdo, Nahla, Masalha, Nur (Ed.). 2018. *An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba*. London/NY, Zed Books.
- Pappe, Ilan (Ed.). 1999. *The Israel/Palestine Question*, 1–6. New York/London: Routledge.
- Pappe, Ilan, Hilal, Jamil. 2010. *Across the Wall: Narratives of Israeli-Palestinian History*. London/New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Morris, Benny. 2004 (1987). *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem revisited*. Cambridge University Press.
- Masalha, Nur. 1991. « A Critique of Benny Morris ». *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21 (1): 90–97. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2537367>.
- Pappé, Ilan. 2001. « The Tantura Case in Israel: The Katz Research and Trial ». *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30 (3): 19–39. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2001.30.3.19>.

Week 7: Legitimacy, state theory and the future of social and political Syria

- Legitimacy, legality and politics: Islamic traditional sources and literature.
- The struggle of Islamism(s) and the challenges of secularism in Syria and the Middle East.
- Reminder of the “Kurdish question in Syria” and the state repression of the Kurdish identity.
- Democracy, the modern state and the concept of constituent power.

Reading materials:

- Abbes, Makram. 2009. *Islam et Politique à l’âge classique*. PUF.
- Boyd-Barrett, Oliver. 2022. *Conflict Propaganda in Syria. Narrative Battles*. Routledge.
- Thompson F., Elizabeth. 2022. *How the West Stole Democracy From the Arabs: The Syria Arab Congress and the Destruction of its Liberal-Islamic Alliance*. Atlantic Monthly Press.

Week 8: Visual writing of Palestinian history in films and photography

- Palestinian cinema, trauma, and history: a theoretical overview
- Art as politics of writing history: Palestinian artistic initiatives in the 1970s.
- Palestinian militant cinema and Western publics
- Film as a media to write history: Restoring the archive through filmic images
- Relation between photographic images, history, and identity construction
- Decolonizing the photography of Palestine: criticized and (re-)constructed images
- Constructing exilic imagination of Palestine through photography

Reading materials:

- Ferro, Marc. 1988. *Cinema and History* (translated by Naomi Greene). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Gertz, Nurith and Khleifi, George. 2008. *Palestinian cinema. Landscape, Trauma, and Memory*. (p. 1-8)
- Yaqub, Nadia. 2018. *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Zananiri, Sari. 2021. "Imaging and Imagining Palestine: An Introduction." In *Imaging and imagining Palestine. Photography, Modernity, and the Biblical Lens, 1918-1948*. Brill: 1-28.
- Sheehi, Stephen. 2021. "Decolonising the Photography of Palestine: Searching for a Method in a Plate of Hummus." In *Imaging and imagining Palestine. Photography, Modernity, and the Biblical Lens, 1918-1948*. Brill: 340-358.
- Khalidi, Walid. 1984. *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876-1948*. Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies.
- Said, Edward W. 1986. *After the Last Sky. Palestinian Lives*. Faber & Faber.
- Nasser, Issam. 2021. "Bearers of Memory. Photo Albums as Sources of Historical Study in Palestine." In *Imaging and imagining Palestine. Photography, Modernity, and the Biblical Lens, 1918-1948*. Brill: 157-182.
- Calafato, Özge and Aylin de Tapia, Aude. 2021. "Epilogue." In *Imaging and imagining Palestine. Photography, Modernity, and the Biblical Lens, 1918-1948*. Brill: 390-397.
- Bowman, Glenn. 1999. "The Exilic imagination: The construction of the Landscape of Palestine from its outside." In *The Landscape of Palestine. Equivocal Poetry*. Birzeit University Publications: 53-78.

- Filmography:

- Hawal, Kassem. 1982. *Return to Haifa*. Fiction. Color. 74 minutes. Land Institute for Cinema Production.
- Sela, Rona. 2017. *Looted and hidden. Palestinian archives in Israel*. Documentary. Color. 46 minutes. Rona Sela.

Week 9: The Syrian conflict and the literature of Mass Violence Studies

- Genres and disciplines engaged in studying mass violence in the Syrian conflict: journalistic investigations, Open Source Intelligence, ethnography & Self-ethnography, oral history, prison literature and universal jurisdiction.

- ‘Brutalization’, ‘Gulag’, ‘Ordinary men’: Mass Violence research literature applied to the Syrian conflict.
- Comparative perspectives for more studying and understanding of the Syrian conflict.

Reading materials:

- Baker & Ümit Üngör, 2023. *The Syrian Gulag: Inside Assad’s Prison System*. I.B. Tauris.
- Munif, Yasser. 2020. *The Syrian Revolution: Between the Politics of Life and the Geopolitics of Death*. Pluto Press.
- Ismail, Salwa. 2018. *The Rule of Violence. Subjectivity, Memory and Government in Syria*. Cambridge University Press.
- N. Kalyvas, Stanislas. 2006. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press.
- Browning, Christopher. 1992. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. HarperCollins.
- Bergholz, Max. 2016. *Violence as a Generative Force*. Cornell University Press.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. 2002. *When Victims become Killers*. Princeton University Press.

Week 10: Visibilizing Palestinians through comic books and graphic novels

- Comics books/graphic novels on Palestine as alternative media
- Transnational production of comics: artistic and political positionalities
- Comics’ approaches to produce historical knowledge

Reading materials:

- Chute. Hillary. 2016. *Disaster Drawn. Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*. Harvard University Press.
- Layoun, Mary. 2005. “Telling Stories in Palestine: Comix Understanding and Narratives of Palestine-Israel.” In *Palestine, Israel, and the politics of popular culture*, 313-337.
- Massad, Joseph. 2007. “Permission to paint: Palestinian Art and the Colonial Encounter”. *Art Journal*, 66, 3: 126-33.
- Mickwitz, Nina, Ian Horton & Ian Hague. (Ed.) 2020. *Representing acts of violence in comics*. Routledge.
- Sacco, Joe. 2007. *Palestine: The Special Edition*. Fantagraphics Books.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. 2023. “To See in the Dark: The Nakba and the Landswept Way of Seeing.” *Social Text* 156 (41: 3): 59-75.
- Nabizadeh. Golner. 2020. *Representation and Memory in Graphic Novels*. NY/London: Routledge.

Week 11: Cases of justice and courting of Syrian war crimes

- Universal Jurisdictions, International Justice and the crimes of the Syrian regime.
- The Accountability of the Syrian regime: the lingual and geographical dispersion of Syrian collective memories and stories.
- Revenge and hate speech in Syrian official and opposition media.
- Limits and paradoxes of territorial justice: the extralegal/non-status of ISIS families' prisons and detention camps in Syria.

Reading materials:

- Wieviorka, Annette. 2006 (1998). *The Era of the Witness*. Cornell University Press.
- Gray, Matthew. 2020. "Conspiracy Theories in The Middle East" In *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories*. Routledge University Press.
- Podcasts:
- 75 Podcasts. 2022. The Syria Trials. <https://75podcasts.org/episode/1/84/>
- BBC Sounds. 2022. The Shamima Begum Story. In *I'm Not a Monster*. BBC Sounds. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/brand/po8yblkf>

Week 12: New media and the visibilization of Palestinian refugees: Netflix as example

- Introduction to Netflix and the politics of visibilizing subaltern voices
- Producing Palestinian content for transnational audiences
- Representing the experiences of refugees by Netflix stand-up comedy specials

Reading materials:

- Brownlie, Siobhan, Abouddahab, Rédouane (Ed.). 2022. *Figures of the Migrant. The roles of Literature and the Arts in Representing the Migrant and Migration*. New York: Routledge.
- Limov, Brad. 2020. « Click It, Binge It, Get Hooked: Netflix and the Growing U.S. Audience for Foreign Content », *International Journal of Communication*, 14.
- Lotz, Amanda D. 2020. « In between the global and the local: Mapping the geographies of Netflix as a multinational service », *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 24(2).
- Micu, Andrea. *Humor Alert: Muslim and Arab Stand-up Comedy in Post-9/11 United States*. P. 23-27.
- Brodie, Ian. *A vulgar art: A new approach to stand-up comedy*. P. 67-72.
- Audiovisual content:
- Amer, Mohammed, Moss, Bryant, Usman, Azhar. 2008. *Allah Made Me Funny: Live in Concert*. Color. Comedy. Unity Productions. 1 h 23.
- Amer, Mohammed. 2018. *The Vagabond*. Color. Comedy. Netflix Productions. 59 minutes.

Week 13: The Westernizing of Syrian Studies and the digitalizing of Syrian narratives: the challenges of informing the Syrian public in Arabic

- Mapping of Syrian platforms and clusters of studies since 2011: Web, Social Media and academic research projects.
- Social media and sentiments analysis studies: narrative production from within Syrian conflict Studies, Arab Media and Syrian opposition media.
- Communication channels between Western-based Syrian Studies and the Syrian wider public.

Reading materials:

- Al Ghazzi, Omar. 2014. « “Citizen Journalism” in the Syrian uprising: problematizing western narratives in a local context », *Communication Theory*, n°24, p. 435-454
- Boëx, Cécile. 2021, « Les images de la révolte. Exactions et guerre médiatique en Syrie ». Available at: <https://laviedesidees.fr/Les-images-de-la-revolte.html>
- Jones, Marc Owen. 2022. *Digital Authoritarianism in the Middle East*. Oxford University Press.

Week 14: Presentations & discussions of students' final papers