

Syllabus/Programme

Memory of the Syrian War

Mari Shammass		
When & Where:	Saturdays at 10:00 CET (check the dates in the table)	Off University Moodle
Hosted by:	Bremen University with 6 ECTS Certification*	
Department:	The Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Studies at Bremen University	

*How to count your Off university course towards credit?

Successful completion of a course at Off University is certified by the host university. This means that you are able to use these credits at any university in the EHEA in a programme you are enrolled in, or you may count this as previous knowledge in a future study programme. In order to be sure that you can transfer the credits, we suggest you get written confirmation by your home university's students' office. And if you are not enrolled in any university programme: You are very welcome to join! All our courses are free of charge and open to anyone: students, scholars, activists.

Description:

The Memory of the Syrian War is an interdisciplinary online research laboratory exploring how the Syrian war is remembered, documented, and contested across personal, spatial, cultural, and digital contexts. Integrating memory studies, oral history, heritage studies, and conflict research, it examines how displacement, destruction, and reconstruction shape collective and gendered memory.

The course analyzes the destruction of homes, cities, and heritage sites as violence against memory, while engaging with testimony, ruins, diaspora narratives, and grassroots documentation. Gendered experiences and marginalized voices remain central.

Through oral history and participatory spatial documentation, participants contribute to the documentation and analysis of Syrian war memory while developing advanced interdisciplinary research skills.

Digital Self Defense

Our platform is dedicated to spread knowledge threatened by authoritarian and right-wing populist regimes and to put measures in place that enable people to practice digital self-defense.

We encourage all users to sign up for the platform anonymously and respect others' preferences for staying anonymous. **Please do not force anyone to share personal information or take screenshots of others without their knowledge.**

The courses take place on Off University's Moodle. The platform includes an encrypted video-call option, a cloud storage, as well as a messaging system. We would like to remind all users that communication with other users outside of the platform (i.e. e-mail, Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp or other video conferencing tools) may put them at risk.

Timeline of the Course Schedule

Blocks & Sessions			Objective
Info session 13/10/2026			Orientation session
Block 1 17/10/2026	Session 1	Memory and Reconstruction: Concepts and Frameworks	Basic concepts and frameworks
	Session 2	Gender and Memory in Conflict: Feminist Frameworks	
		Reading materials	
Block 2 21/11/2026	Session 3	Ethics and Politics of Researching War Memory	Building the capacity to initiate a research protocol and conduct an interview
	Session 4	Co-Constructing the Research Protocol	
		Reading materials	
Block 3 05/12/2026	Session 5	Humanitarian Architecture: Shelter as a Space of Memory	Mapping displacement and capturing spatial narratives through oral history
	Session 6	Oral History Skills and Spatial Memory Documentation	

Block 4 12/12/2023	Session 7	Memory of Destruction and Ruins: Heritage Loss and Symbolic Violence	Building the capacity to analyze a spatial memory map
	Session 8	Digital Memory and Documentation: BIM, Archives, Participatory Mapping	
		Reading materials	
Block 5 09/01/2027	Session 9	Ethics of Representation and Archival Preparation	Ethical memory documentation and collective writing
	Session 10	Research Workshop and Collective Writing	
		Working on the assignment	
Block 6 16/01/2027	Session 11	Archival Power and Transnational Memory: Institutions, Actors, and Audiences	The power of archiving
	Session 12	Grassroots Memory Work: Activism and Community Archives	
		Working on the assignment	
Block 7 23/01/2027	Session 13	Women as Memory Keepers and Women's Leadership in Humanitarian Response	Highlighting the role of women
		Working on the assignment	
Block 8 30/01/2027	Session 14	Final Presentations	Final presentations and Reflection
	Session 15	Comparative Case Studies & Reflection	

Aimed Outcomes:

A general understanding of:

- Core Memory Studies Frameworks
- The Built Environment as a Medium of Memory
- Gendered Dimensions of Memory Production
- Ethical and Political Dimensions of Documentation
- Transnational Memory Politics
- Better understanding for the Syrian War Memory.

The skills to be gained upon active participation:

- Analytical Skills in Memory Studies
- Spatial Interpretation Skills
- Oral History and Interviewing Skills
- Participatory Documentation Skills
- Ethical Research and Archival Skills
- Synthesize findings across testimonies, spatial maps, and archival materials.
- Production of Primary Research Materials (interviews, transcripts, spatial memory maps, and thematic analysis).

Course components

The methodology includes:

- Lectures
- Readings
- Project (primary research materials: interviews, transcripts, spatial memory maps, and thematic analysis)

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

- Assignment: preparing one primary research product: interviews, transcripts, spatial memory maps, or thematic analysis. During the course we will explore the different types of archiving memories, and the participant will choose one of them to do the assignment.
- Active participation.
- Weekly Reflection Responses on the readings.

All written work must be original, properly referenced, and comply with academic integrity standards.

Organization of the course

Focus/Topic of the week & Reading List

Block 1:

Session 1: Memory and Reconstruction: Concepts and Frameworks

- Introduction to Memory Studies and Conflict Memory.
- Collective and cultural memory theory.
- Communicative vs. cultural memory.
- Multidirectional Memory.
- Memory and Identity in Post-Conflict Societies.
- The relationship between Memory and Reconstruction.
- Integrating Memory into Reconstruction Frameworks.
- Framing Syrian War Memory as a Field of Study.

Session 2: Gender and Memory in Conflict: Feminist Frameworks

- Introduction to Gender.
- Feminist Memory Studies.
- Gendered Silences in Archives and Institutions.
- Women's Testimony as Counter-Archive.
- Syrian Women's Narratives in Existing Literature.
- Feminist Frameworks for Understanding Gendered Memory in Syria.
- Implications for Reconstruction and Transitional Justice.

Reading materials:

- Assmann, Jan & Czaplicka, John – *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*
- Larkin, Craig & Rudolf, Inna – *Memory, Violence and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Rebuilding and Reimagining Mosul*.
- Alhayek, Katty – *Untold Stories of Syrian Women Surviving War*.
- Bunn, Mary; Samuels, Gina & Higson-Smith, Craig – *Ambiguous Loss of Home: Syrian Refugees and the Process of Losing and Remaking Home*.

Block 2:

Session 3: Ethics and Politics of Researching War Memory

- Power in testimonial research.
- Trauma-informed and feminist ethics of care.
- Politics of representation in Syrian studies.

- SGBV-sensitive research: specific dilemmas.
- Oral History Ethics: Principles and Best Practices.
- Integrating Ethics into Research Design.

Session 4: Co-Constructing the Research Protocol

- Collaborative research design in practice
- Building and piloting the interview protocol
- GDPR, data security, and encryption basics

Reading materials:

- Kahale, Salma – *Oral History as a Method of Promoting Inclusive and Gender-Sensitive Justice*.

Block 3:

Session 5: Humanitarian Architecture: Shelter as a Space of Memory

- Introduction to shelter.
- Refugee camps and collective shelters as mnemonic environments
- Privacy, safety, and cultural norms in Syrian displacement
- Gendered shelter design: power encoded in space
- Syrian camp contexts and informal settlements

Session 6: Oral History Skills and Spatial Memory Documentation

- Semi-structured interviewing: design and conduct
- Trauma-sensitive and feminist interviewing techniques
- Participatory mapping as memory practice
- Conceptual BIM and cultural value frameworks for spatial documentation
- Spatializing Oral History
- Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Block 4:

Session 7: Memory of Destruction and Ruins: Heritage Loss and Symbolic Violence

- Why is the destruction of heritage considered a war on memory?
- Targeted destruction of Syrian built heritage as a war on memory
- Damages of UNESCO World Heritage sites (Aleppo, Palmyra,...)
- Ruins as mnemonic objects: mourning and resistance
- Symbolic violence, cultural cleansing, and identity erasure

Session 8: Digital Memory and Documentation: BIM, Archives, Participatory Mapping

- Digital memory archives in conflict contexts
- BIM and cultural value documentation as memory preservation
- Syrian digital archives (Syrian Archive and Mnemonic)
- Participatory mapping as community memory and advocacy practice
- Preservation Challenges: Digital Fragility and Platform Dependence

Reading materials:

- Cochrane, Logan & Corbett, Jon – *Participatory Mapping (Chapter)*.
- Munawar, Nour A. – *Reconstructing Narratives: The Politics of Heritage in Contemporary Syria*.
- Saber, Dima & al-Jaloud, Abdul Rahman – *The Syrian Archive Digital Memory Project: Archiving as Testimony, Evidence, and Creative Practice*.

Block 5:

Session 9: Ethics of Representation and Archival Preparation

- Who speaks? Whose knowledge counts? Ethics of representation in Syrian war memory
- Finalising consent, anonymisation, and metadata
- Equitable methodologies: knowledge production and the researcher's responsibility
- Preparing materials for open-access deposit

Session 10: Research Workshop and Collective Writing

- Synthesising findings across testimonies and spatial maps
- Co-authorship, credit, and collaborative publication ethics
- Reflections on methodology, positionality, and the research process
- Collective contribution to Syrian war memory scholarship

Working on the assignment.

Block 6:

Session 11: Archival Power and Transnational Memory: Institutions, Actors, and Audiences in the Syrian Case:

- Transnational Memory Politics
- Diaspora Memory: Homeland, Longing, and Transnational Identity
- The Political Economy of Syrian Memory: Funding, Gatekeeping, and Access

- Archival Power and Epistemic Inequality: Whose Voices Are Preserved?
- Digital Memory and Platform Politics
- Transnational Memory Institutions: Who Archives Syrian Memory and for Whom?

Session 12: Grassroots Memory Work: Activism and Community Archives

- Community-led documentation in Syria and diaspora
- Activist archives as resistance and counter-memory
- Syrian women's grassroots memory organizations
- Collaborative thematic analysis of collected testimonies

Working on the assignment.

Block 7:

Session 13: Women as Memory Keepers and Women's Leadership in Humanitarian Response

- Women's oral histories and everyday practices as active memory work
- Domestic objects, food, textiles, and ritual as memory carriers
- Oral tradition and intergenerational transmission of Syrian cultural memory
- Women as custodians of heritage: Syrian case examples
- Syrian women as humanitarian decision-makers and community leaders
- Leadership under conditions of displacement and statelessness
- Syrian women's civil society organizations: networks and initiatives
- Intersectionality: gender, class, ethnicity, and displacement in Syria
- Policy and Practice Recommendations (advocacy for women, AGDM approach).

Block 8:

Session 14: Comparative Case Studies

- Syrian war memory in comparative perspective.

Session 15: Final Presentations & Reflection

- Participants' presentations.
- Final reflection.
- Course evaluation.