



CONFERENCE

# Politics and Poetics on the Ruins of Gaza

16 December 2025

COLLÈGE  
DE FRANCE  
— 1530 —

Organisation : Didier FASSIN  
CHAIRE QUESTIONS MORALES ET ENJEUX POLITIQUES  
DANS LES SOCIÉTÉS CONTEMPORAINES

## Politique et poétique sur les ruines de Gaza

Le colloque est en anglais avec traduction simultanée  
Amphithéâtre Marguerite de Navarre

Deux ans après le début de la guerre menée par Israël contre les Palestiniens à la suite de l'attaque meurtrière du 7 octobre 2023 sur son territoire, alors qu'à Gaza la plupart des bâtiments et des infrastructures ont été détruits, les institutions d'enseignement et de soins dévastées, des dizaines de milliers de civils tués ou mutilés, et toute une population réduite à la famine, il est nécessaire de penser ce qui s'est joué au cours de cette période. Ce travail s'impose d'autant plus que la plupart des gouvernements occidentaux ont non seulement apporté leur soutien diplomatique et parfois militaire à ces représailles, mais ont aussi empêché tout débat public sur la signification de la tragédie en cours. La police du langage et de la pensée a généré censure et autocensure. Parler de l'histoire de la Palestine au cours du siècle écoulé, de l'expérience de son peuple confronté à la spoliation de ses terres et à la privation de ses droits, de la politique d'effacement de sa présence, de sa mémoire et de sa culture, en somme de tout ce qui peut aider à saisir les enjeux de la situation actuelle, était devenu suspect.

Ces spectres qui hantent donc les crimes de masse perpétrés à la face du monde, le colloque s'efforcera de les appréhender. Il le fera à partir de perspectives multiples autour d'une double lecture – politique et poétique. D'un côté, il faut prendre la mesure du bouleversement politique à l'œuvre, bien au-delà du Moyen-Orient, du fait du consentement à l'écrasement d'un territoire et au sacrifice de ses habitants. De l'autre, il faut savoir entendre la voix des Palestiniennes et des Palestiniens à travers leur poésie qui est depuis longtemps leur manière la plus créative de rendre compte de leur souffrance, de leur résistance et de leurs espoirs. « Ici, nous avons un passé et un futur », écrivait Taoufik Ziyad, lui-même à la fois politicien et poète. Comprendre le présent suppose de reconnaître le poids de ce passé et permet un regard lucide sur ce futur.

Ce colloque prolonge le cours « Les formes de la violence » donné par Didier Fassin au Collège de France au printemps 2025. Il bénéficie du soutien de la Fondation Nomis pour la recherche.

## Politics and Poetics on the Ruins of Gaza

The conference is in English with simultaneous translation  
Amphitheater Marguerite de Navarre

Two years after the beginning of the war waged by Israel against the Palestinians following the deadly 7 October 2023 attacks on its territory, as in Gaza most buildings and infrastructures have been destroyed, educational and medical institutions devastated, tens of thousands of civilians killed or maimed, and a population reduced to starvation, it is indispensable to ponder what has been at stake during this time. It is all the more important since most Western governments have not only supported the retaliatory enterprise but also prohibited public debate about the meaning of the unfolding tragedy. Policing language and thought has generated censorship and self-censorship. The history of Palestine over the past century, the experience of a people confronted with the dispossession of its land and deprivation of its rights, the politics of erasure of its presence, its memory and its culture – in short, everything that could help understand the current situation – became suspicious.

The conference will be an attempt to apprehend the specters haunting the mass crimes perpetrated in the face of the world. It will do so from multiple perspectives with two main entries – politics and poetics. On the one hand, it is necessary to take stock of the political upheaval that has been caused, far beyond the Middle East, by the consent to the obliteration of a territory and the sacrifice of its inhabitants. On the other, it is crucial to listen to the voices of Palestinians through their poetry, which has long been their most creative way of conveying their suffering, resistance and hope. “Here we have both a past and a future”, wrote Tawfik Zayyad, himself a politician and a poet. Making sense of the present supposes to recognize the weight of this past and allows for a lucid examination of this future.

This conference is an extension of the series of lectures on “Forms of violence” delivered by Didier Fassin in the Spring of 2025. It benefits from the support of the Nomis Foundation for research.

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Image : View of destruction in Rafah, Gaza Strip, January 2025 © UNRWA photo

## Program

- 09:00 Introduction: Thinking and Speaking Out on Ruins  
*Didier Fassin, Collège de France*

### Politics

CHAIR: *Leila Seurat, Centre arabe de recherches et d'études politiques de Paris*

- 09:15 Revolutionary Livability Amidst an Embodied Genocide  
*Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, University of South Africa*

- 10:00 The Most Moral Genocide in the World  
*Darryl Li, University of Chicago*

10:45 Break

- 11:00 Illiberal War: On Trauma, Intent, and Annihilation  
*Nadia Abu-El-Haj, Barnard College and Columbia University*

- 11:45 Shields and the Genocide in Gaza  
*Neve Gordon, Queen Mary University of London*

12:30 Lunch

### Poetics

CHAIR: *Marwan Rashed, Sorbonne Université*

- 14:00 Standing on the Rubble: on Ruins and the Work of Mourning  
*Isabella Hammad*

- 14:45 Our Oracle-Ruin: The Arabic Poetic Tradition in Light of Gaza  
*Huda Fakhreddine, University of Pennsylvania*

15:30 Break

- 15:45 'The Tent Has No Door': Palestinian poetry in and out of place  
*Diana Allan, McGill University*

- 16:30 Words Under Siege: A Personal Journey with Language as Resistance and Repair  
*Mahmoud Alshaer, Al Ghussein Cultural House in Gaza*

- 17:45 Conclusion  
*Didier Fassin*

## Biographies

An anthropologist and Middle East Studies scholar, **Nadia Abu El-Haj** is Anne Olin Whitney Professor at Barnard College and Columbia University, and Co-Director of the Center for Palestine Studies at Columbia. Her publications include *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (2001); *The Genealogical Science: The Search for Jewish Origins and the Politics of Epistemology* (2012); and *Combat Trauma: Imaginaries of War and Citizenship in Post-9/11 America* (Verso, 2022). Her current project is a set of essays that grapple with the last two years of genocide and total war in Gaza.

An anthropologist and filmmaker, **Diana Allan** is associate professor at McGill University, where she co-directs the Critical Media Lab. Her publications and films explore Palestinian displacement in Lebanon. She is the author of *Refugees of the Revolution: Experience of Palestinian Exile* (2014), and *Voices of the Nakba: A Living History of Palestine* (2021). Her film *Partition* (2025) premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam. She is the co-founder of the Nakba Archive and a Canada Research Chair in the Anthropology of Living Archives.

A poet, writer, and cultural curator, **Mahmoud Alshaer** is based in Gaza. He is the Executive Director and Editor-in-Chief of *28 Magazine*, an independent literary and cultural platform he co-founded in 2014 to amplify emerging Palestinian voices. His work explores the intersections of poetry, political erasure, cultural survival, and collective memory under siege. He has participated in international programs such as the New Alphabet School and the Berlin Biennale. He authored *Letters from Gaza* (2025) and *A Year on the Abyss of Genocide* (2025).

A writer and translator, **Huda J. Fakhreddine** is associate professor of Arabic literature at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of *The Arabic Prose Poem: Poetic Theory and Practice* (2021), and the co-editor of *The Routledge Handbook of Arabic Poetry* (2023). Her writings include a creative non-fiction titled *Zaman saghīr taht shams thāniya* [A Brief Time under a Different Sun] (2019). She is co-editor of *Middle Eastern Literatures* and section editor of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

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After teaching for seventeen years at Ben-Gurion University in Israel, **Neve Gordon** joined the School of Law at Queen Mary University of London, where he is professor of international humanitarian law and human rights. His research focuses on attacks on healthcare and the ethics of violence in Israel-Palestine. He authored *Israel's Occupation* (2008) and co-authored *Human Shields: A History of People in the Line of Fire* (2020). A Fellow of the British Academy of Social Sciences, he writes regularly for the popular press.

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A writer, **Isabella Hammad** is the author most recently of *Recognizing the Stranger: On Palestine and Narrative* (2024) and of the novel *Enter Ghost* (2023), which received the Aspen Prize, the Clark Prize, and the Encore Award. Her work has been supported by the Lannan Foundation and the Institute for Ideas and Imagination. She was the 2024-2025 Mary Ellen von der Heyden Fellow at the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library.

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An anthropologist, legal scholar, and attorney, **Darryl Li** is associate professor at the University of Chicago as well as a member of the bar in New York and Illinois. He has conducted research on war, migration, empire and racialization in the Middle East, South Asia and the Balkans. He is the author of *The Universal Enemy: Jihad, Empire, and the Challenge of Solidarity* (2020). Prior to his academic career, he lived and worked in the Gaza Strip for the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, and B'Tselem.

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After teaching classical philology at the École Normale Supérieure, **Marwan Rashed** became professor of Greek philosophy at the Sorbonne, where he also created a course on the history of Arabic philosophy. He has published extensively on the history of Greek philosophy, from the Presocratics to the Byzantine period, discovering several unknown texts in both Greek and Arabic. He co-authored *Alexander of Aphrodisias: On the Conversion of Propositions* (2024) and authored *L'Enquête Rembrandt* (2025).

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A researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Paris, **Leila Seurat** has taught the political sociology of Arab countries at Sciences Po, as well as the history of the contemporary Middle East at INALCO, the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales. She is the author of *The Foreign Policy of Hamas. Ideology, Decision Making and Political Supremacy* (2022) and the co-editor of *Écrits politiques arabes*, an anthology of Arab political thought (2022).

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A Palestinian Jerusalemite feminist, **Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian** works on the settler colonial state's brutality and unchilding, securitized and sacralized politics, state crime, global feminist politics and epistemic violence. She is a Professor Extraordinarius at the University of South Africa, the Global Chair in Law at Queen Mary University of London and Professor Emerita at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She authored, among other books, *Militarization and Violence Against Women in Conflict Zones in the Middle East: The Palestinian Case Study* (2010) and *Incarcerated Childhood and the Politics of Unchilding* (2019), and co-edited *Abolitionism, Settler Colonialism and State Crime* (2024).

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sur les ruines de Gaza

16 December 2025

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