

“Images of war, war of images”

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Syllabus

War is an expression of organized violence that civilian populations can rarely escape. The extensive killing of civilians in wars is prohibited by the traditional “just war ethics” and by international humanitarian law. However, this controversial issue remains often theoretical. It becomes less abstract when based on images, photos, and documentaries that are widely disseminated in all contemporary wars. This 10-session course is precisely based on the assumption that visual emotions are necessary to realize the fundamental immorality of violent acts targeting civilians during war. The sessions are based on the collective watching (students and the professor in class) of documentaries about major contemporary wars: Vietnam, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, and Gaza. Each case study is first introduced by the professor in order to provide its geopolitical context. Afterwards, the viewing of the documentary is followed by a debate led by the professor over the arguments of just war theory and international humanitarian law.

1. Introduction : the theoretical debate over the “just war ethics”

2. The Vietnam war: the spillover (1964-1968)

Documentary: *The Vietnam War* directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick (2017)
Discussion and commentary

3. The Vietnam war: the end (1973-1975)

Documentary: *The Vietnam War* directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick (2017)
Discussion and commentary

4. Bosnia (1992-95)

Documentary: *Warriors* by Peter Kosminsky (1999)
Discussion and commentary

5. The Iraq wars (1991 and 2003)

Documentary: *Once Upon a Time in Iraq* by James Bluemel (2020)
Discussion and commentary

6. The international intervention in Afghanistan (2001-2021)

Documentary: *Obama's War* by Martin Smith and Marcela Gaviria
Discussion and commentary

7. The war in Syria (2011-2020)

Documentary: *For Sama* by Waad al-Kateab and Edward Watts
Discussion and commentary

8. The war in Ukraine (since February 2022)

Documentary: *20 days in Mariupol* by Mstyslav Chernov (2023)
Discussion and commentary

9. The war in Gaza (since October 2023)

Documentary: *This is Gaza: witnessing the Israel Hamas War* by Yousef Hammash (2025)
Discussion and commentary

10. Final Debriefing: the “just war ethics” revisited

Assessment: Students are evaluated in a final written exam (1.5 hours) in January.