

Facts, Frictions, Fictions: Narrating the Berlin Story
2024 - 2025 Spring

Course Overview

The Land itself is a Palimpsest, marked with personal and collective memories of generations. Beyond geography, it is essential to consider the settlement, resistance and transformation of lands, with both the scientific, Positivist approach and also Narration.

Traditionally, historical research aligns with positivism—seeking objective, provable, and falsifiable truths. However, land narratives often resist such neat categorization. Records can be fragmented, biased, or incomplete. Some truths are “illusions we have forgotten are illusions.”

As Saidiya Hartman’s concept of ‘critical fabulation’ (*a methodological and narrative strategy that blends historical research with speculative storytelling to address the silences, gaps, and erasures in the archival record*) suggests, storytelling allows us to reconstruct history dynamically, imagining not only what was, but also what could have been. We are incorporating multiple archives, voices and perspectives, and instead of treating land narratives as a static record, we view it as a dynamic evolving narrative.

The project will be focusing on key land theories, such as conflict lands, colonial lands, resource extraction lands, urbanization lands, cultural erasure lands, urban renewal lands and climate erasure lands etc.

Berlin will serve as a model of the Conflict Land, and we will focus on three central motifs: Monuments and Counter-monuments; Ostalgie and the DDR; Turkish immigrants and gentrification; Squatting and street art as means of protest.

Course and Learning Objectives

Objective 1:

Develop an understanding of land narratives by conceptualizing and conducting historical, social, and cultural research. Learn how to articulate findings through medium-based storytelling that explores themes of conflict lands, colonial lands, urbanization lands, identity, displacement, and territorial conflict etc.

Objective 2:

Examine the role of Monuments, Counter-monuments, and contested memory in shaping land narratives. Engage with theoretical and artistic perspectives on how sites of memory function in public space, interrogating historical representation, trauma, and the politics of remembrance.

Objective 3:

Analyze Ostalgie and its relationship to nostalgia, memory, and cultural identity in post-socialist landscapes. Ungleiche Vereint, unequally united. Ossification is used as a metaphor to describe what has happened in East Germany since 1990. Investigate how material culture, collective memory, and shifting political narratives influence the perception of land, place, and belonging.

Objective 4:

Critically explore the intersections of gentrification, migration, and urban transformation, with a focus on Turkish migrant populations and the phenomenon of Gastarbeiter (guest workers) in Berlin. Study the spatial, social, and political dimensions of displacement, integration, and transnational identity, situating these processes within broader land narratives. Research on the grassroots street art movements, squatting and political protests.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction – Berlin as a Site of Memory and Conflict

Overview of course themes: monuments, nostalgia, migration, and urban transformation

Introduction to Berlin's historical layers: Cold War division, post-socialism, gentrification

Readings:

Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire"

Week 2: What Do Monuments Want? – The Role of Monuments in Berlin

The politics of commemoration: who gets remembered, and why?

The role of monuments in contested landscapes

Readings:

W.J.T Mitchell, "What Do Monuments Want?"

James E. Young, "The Texture of Memory" (pp. 1–15)

Week 3: Counter-Monuments and the Ethics of Remembering

The counter-monument movement in Germany

How do counter-monuments challenge historical narratives?

Readings:

James E. Young, "Memory, Countermemory, and the End of the Monument"

Quentin Stevens, Karen A. Franck, and Ruth Fazakerley, "Counter Monumental, the Anti-Monumental and the Dialogic"

Week 4: Trauma, Public Space, and the Memory of Violence

How does trauma shape public memory and space?

The role of art and design in representing historical violence

Readings:

Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery

Zadie Smith, "What Do We Want History to Do to Us?"

Week 5 : Reunification and the Borders of Identity

How did reunification reshape Berlin's social and spatial divisions?

Borders, memory, and the experience of change

Readings:

Daphne Berdahl, "Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland"

Kristen Ghodsee, Red Hangover: Legacies of Twentieth-Century Communism

Stephen Mau, Ungleich Vereint (Unequally united)

Week 6: Berlin and the Memory of the GDR – Understanding Ostalgie

Introduction to Ostalgie: nostalgia for East Germany

Commodification of socialist memory in post-reunification Berlin

Readings:

Dominic Boyer, "Ostalgie and the Politics of the Future in Eastern Germany"

Daphne Berdahl, "(N)Ostalgie for the Present"

Week 7 : Material Culture and Everyday Life in the Former East Germany

East German artifacts and their role in contemporary memory

How is nostalgia connected to physical objects and urban space?

Readings:

Jonathan Bach, "The Things They Carried (and Kept)"

Daphne Berdahl, "On the Social Life of Postsocialism"

Week 8: Turkish Immigration to Germany

Turkish workers were invited to Germany to help rebuild post-war Germany. Turkey was the fourth country to sign such a deal, allowing its young, single male workers to stay in Germany for up to two years. The recruitment agreement between the federal republic of Germany and Turkey was signed on 30 Oct, 1961—the so-called Gastarbeiter, (guest workers).

Readings:

Ruth Mandel. Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany (2008)

Sarah Thomsen Vierra. Turkish Germans in the Federal Republic of Germany: Immigration, Space, and Belonging, 1961–1990.

Leslie A. Adelson. The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical.

Karin Hunn. Nichts als 'Gastarbeiter'?: Die Anwerbung türkischer Arbeitskräfte in der Bundesrepublik 1961-1973 (2005)

Rita Chin. The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany.

Week 9: Turkish Communities - Space, Belonging, and Exclusion

Urban spaces of Turkish communities in Berlin

Readings:

Sarah Thomsen Vierra, "Turkish Germans in the Federal Republic of Germany:

Immigration, Space, and Belonging, 1961–1990"

Annika Marlen Hinze, "Turkish Berlin: Integration Policy and Urban Space"

Week 10 : Gentrification and the Transformation of Berlin's Urban Spaces

The impact of gentrification in Berlin on historical and immigrant neighborhoods

Who benefits from urban renewal?

Readings:

Ilse Helbrecht and Hedwig Braun, "Now the German Comes: The Ethnic Effect of

Gentrification in Berlin"

Ayşe Caglar and Nina Glick Schiller, "Housing Experiences of Turkish (Im)migrants in

Berlin and Istanbul"

Holm, A. (2013). "Berlin's Gentrification Mainstream." In: Bernt, M., Grell, B., & Holm, A. (Eds.), The Berlin Reader: A Compendium on Urban Change and Activism. Transcript Verlag.

Kalandides, A., & Vaiou, D. (2012). "'Ethnic' neighborhoods and gentrification in Athens and Berlin." In: Porter, L., & Shaw, K. (Eds.), *Whose Urban Renaissance? An international comparison of urban regeneration strategies*. Routledge.

Füller, H., & Michel, B. (2014). "Stop Being a Tourist! New Dynamics of Urban Tourism in Berlin-Kreuzberg." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38(4), 1304-1318.

Huning, S., & Schuster, N. (2015). "Social mixing or gentrification? Contradictory perspectives on urban change in the Berlin district of Neukölln." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 39(4), 738-755.

Week 11: Migration and Transnational Belonging

How does migration reshape urban landscapes?

The transnational identity of Turkish Germans

Readings:

Ayşe Duman, "A Case Study on Neighborhood Use of Young Turkish Newcomers in Berlin"

Şeyla Benhabib and Peter C. Meilaender (eds.), *Turks in Europe: From Guest Worker to Transnational Citizen*

Lang, B. (1998). "Mythos Kreuzberg: Ethnicity, Culture, Politics in West Berlin 1961-1987." PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan.

Häußermann, H., & Kapphahn, A. (2002). "Berlin: Von der geteilten zur gespaltenen Stadt? Sozialräumlicher Wandel seit 1990." Leske + Budrich.

Lees, L. (2016). "Gentrification, Race, and Ethnicity: Towards a Global Research Agenda?" City & Community, 15(3), 208-214.

Bernt, M. (2012). "The 'Double Movements' of Neighbourhood Change: Gentrification and Public Policy in Harlem and Prenzlauer Berg." Urban Studies, 49(14), 3045-3062.

Week 12: Memory, Displacement, and Protest in Berlin's Public Space

The intersection of migration, memory, and activism

How do protests shape the identity of Berlin's urban spaces?

Readings:

Case studies of urban protests in Berlin

Berlin's Alternative Monument for Migration to Launch, Blending Art and Digital Spaces

Migrantas: Pictograms of Migration in Public Spaces

Visibilities and the Politics of Space: Refugee Activism in Berlin

Novy, J., & Colomb, C. (2013). "Struggling for the Right to the (Creative) City in Berlin and Hamburg: New Urban Social Movements, New 'Spaces of Hope'?" International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 37(5), 1816-1838.

Week 13: Final Project – Storytelling and Land Narratives

Workshop session: developing a project that examines Berlin's conflict lands through memory, space, and identity

Integrating research, fieldwork, and creative practice.