The Politics of Armed Groups:

Rebels, State & Society

DR DAVID BRENNER

OVERVIEW

- This module takes non-state armed groups as an entry point for understanding the dynamics of contemporary violent conflict and ways to address it. Instead of working with grand and often abstract theorisations about 'wars' in general, it looks at the main protagonists of violent conflict, the ways they mobilise, organise, fight and govern in situations of protracted armed conflict and fragmented statehood.

- Structured in three parts, the module introduces students to (i) theories about the root causes and drivers of contemporary violent conflict; ii) concepts for understanding the politics of non-state armed groups and their multifarious relations to state and society, and iii) a range of policy processes and interventions that aim at ending and transforming violent conflict by engaging with armed groups.

- In doing so, the module draws on interdisciplinary debates and case studies from around the world. Importantly, students are encouraged to choose an armed group of their interest to explore how theories, concepts and policy recommendations through their own empirical research.

SYLLABUS

Part 1: Contemporary Armed Conflict

Week 1: Non-State Armed Groups

Week 2: Why People Rebel?

Week 3: War Economies

SYLLABUS

Part 2: The Politics of Armed Groups

Week 4: (Counter)Insurgency

Week 5: Rebel Governance

Week 6: -- Film Week --

Week 7: Female Combatants

Week 8: Rebel Diplomacy

SYLLABUS

Part 3: Engaging Armed Groups

Week 9: Humanitarian Disasters and Dilemmas

Week 10: Peace and Peacebuilding

Week 11: Assessment Workshop

TEACHING & LEARNING

Teaching and learning spaces:

- Classes consist of one 3 hour workshop per week

- Workshops include a lecture and a wide range of participatory work, including group work and discussions on empirical material gathered from film/documentary excerpts and other non-traditional data

Students should expect to:

- Participate actively in class

- Contribute a presentation associated with the topic for any one week
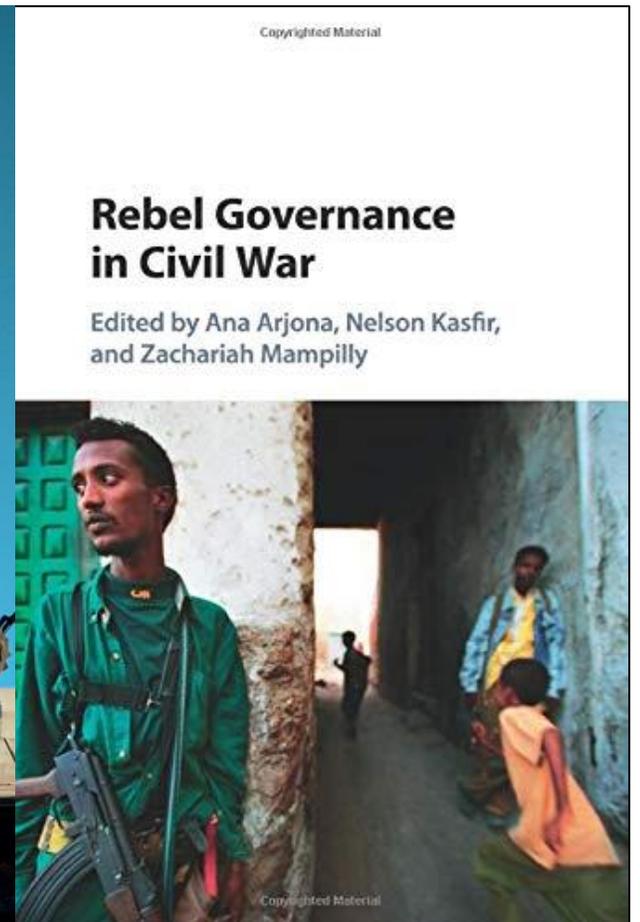
- Prepare for the workshops including by reading and watching weekly preparation material
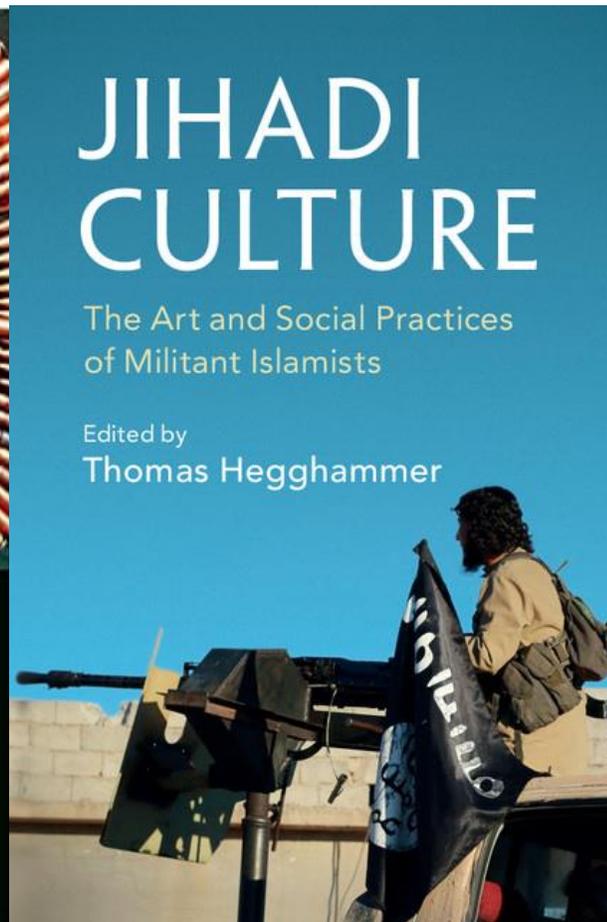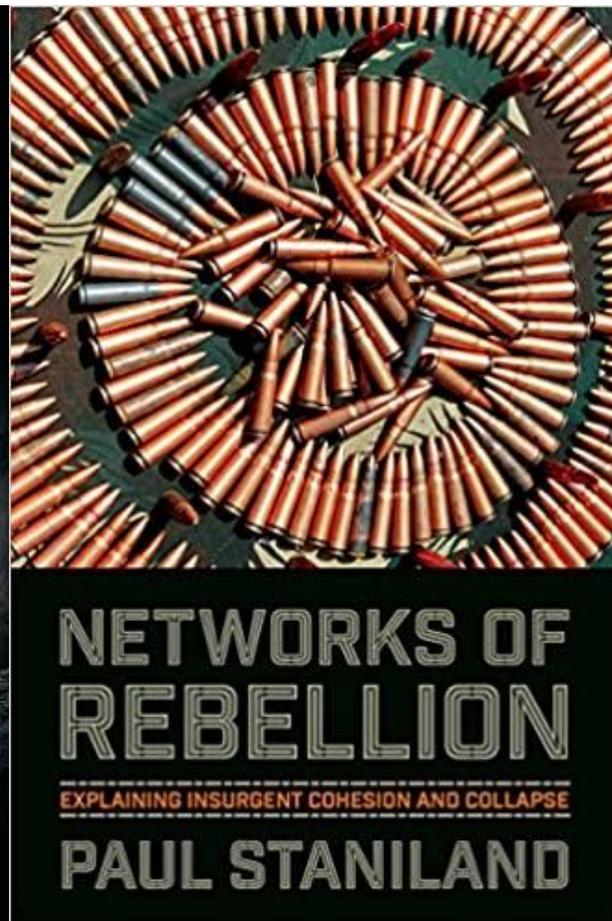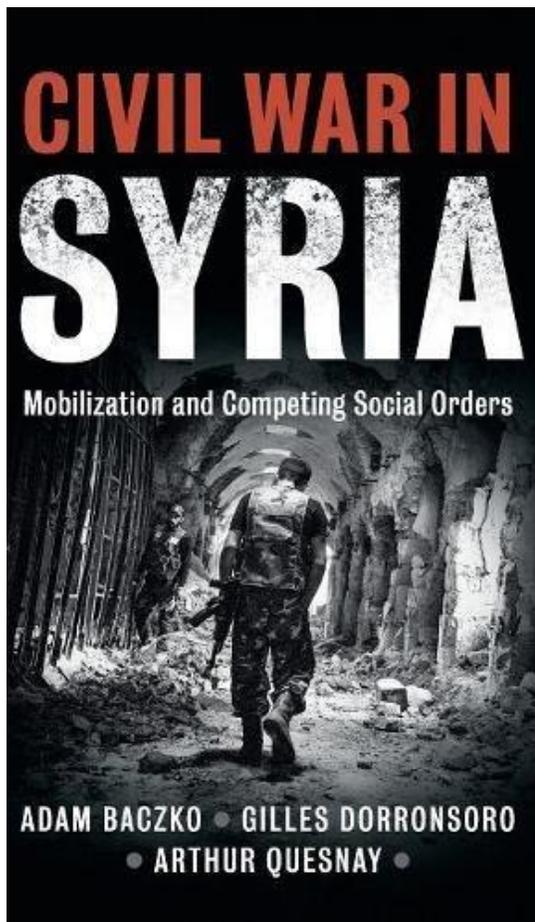
ASSESSMENT

1. 15 min group presentation (10%)
2. 1,000 word policy brief (20%)
3. 3,500 word research essay (70%)

- You will receive guidance for your assignments but you are essentially free to research an armed group and armed conflict of your interest

- Students in previous years have chosen to write about a wide range of groups, including Kata'ib Hezbollah in Iraq, the FARC in Colombia, Boko Haram in Nigeria or the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka

- For the policy brief students in previous years have for instance chosen to brief
  - … a conflict mediation organisation that pushes for/supports peace negotiations.
  - … a humanitarian agency that seeks access to civilians in areas under the armed group's control.

INDICATIVE READINGS

MODULE CONVENOR

- My name is David Brenner. I am an Associate Professor in IR and have been researching the politics of armed groups for more than twelve years. I published widely on the subject including on issues of political economy, internal organisation, mobilisation and rebel governance.

- I am interested in a wide range of contexts. My own fieldwork has mostly been in one of the world's longest ongoing but least researched civil wars: the ethnic armed conflict in Myanmar. As part of this, I lived with two of the country's strongest rebel groups, an experience that informed my book Rebel Politics.

- I am actively engaged with the policymakers, practitioners, and conflict-affected communities. I have for instance advised the British Government on conflict in Myanmar, trained United Nations staff on engaging with armed groups, and engaged in capacity building for civil society researchers in Asia.

- If you have questions about the module, please get in touch: d.brenner@sussex.ac.uk