

Crusaders and Western Imperialism

Land Theft in the Name of God

Presenter: **Dr. Farah El-Sharif**, Harvard-trained historical and Islamic Studies scholar

Format: Self-paced, Asynchronous

Target Audience: Learners Aged 13 - 18

Estimated Duration: 70 - 85 minutes

Module Description: This module explores how religious narratives have historically been used to justify conquest, empire, and the seizure of land. Learners will examine the connection between medieval Crusades and later Western imperialism, including British colonialism and modern political rhetoric in the Middle East.

You will learn about:

- Historical origins and impacts of the Crusades
- How religion has been used to legitimize colonial appropriation and military campaigns
- Colonial narratives, symbolism, and political messaging
- Continuities between historical imperialism and modern political discourse
- Critical evaluation of historical and contemporary narratives

Activities include journal prompts, discussion questions, knowledge checks, interactive exercises, and reflective activities.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this module, learners will:

- Explain how Crusader and colonial narratives have historically justified conquest and land theft.
- Identify historical continuities between religious imperialism and modern occupation.
- Analyze political language that draws on religious symbolism.
- Reflect on how history is remembered, manipulated, and resisted.
- Apply critical thinking to evaluate historical and contemporary narratives.
- Accurately define key glossary terms.

Content Advisory Facilitators should be prepared for the possibility that learners may experience emotional reactions when engaging with the content. These reactions may arise from personal, family, or community experiences related to racism, discrimination, violence, or displacement.

Given the complexity and sensitivity of the topics, it is essential to create a learning environment where all participants feel safe, respected, and able to engage

thoughtfully.

The goal of discussion is not to force agreement, but to support thoughtful learning, respectful dialogue, and critical analysis of historical events.

Facilitator Guidance - Establishing a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment

Facilitators should be prepared to:

- Recognize signs of emotional distress in learners
- Pause discussions if needed to allow space for reflection or grounding
- Offer learners the option to step away briefly if they need a break
- Provide access to appropriate support resources
- Encourage respectful dialogue while prioritizing learner wellbeing

Facilitators are encouraged to:

- **Validate feelings:** Acknowledge that learners may experience a range of emotions in response to the content
- **Provide choice:** Offer multiple ways to engage, including writing, discussion, reflection, or listening
- **Encourage autonomy:** Allow learners the option to pause, step back, or observe if needed
- **Promote safety:** Establish and uphold shared agreements for respectful and inclusive dialogue
- **Maintain respect and inclusion:** Ensure all learners feel heard and respected, even when perspectives differ
- **Prioritize learning over debate:** Focus on understanding, inquiry, and reflection rather than argument or persuasion
- **Encourage curiosity:** Support thoughtful questioning and open exploration of ideas
- **Model respectful communication:** Use and reinforce language that is respectful, and inclusive
- **Separate ideas from individuals:** Remind learners to critique concepts and arguments rather than people
- **Acknowledge emotional impact:** Recognize that topics such as racism, colonization, war, and injustice may evoke strong emotional responses
- **Encourage active listening:** Support learners in listening with attention, care, and respect for differing perspectives
- **Provide varied participation options:** Allow learners to engage through discussion, writing, or reflection based on comfort level
- **Ensure equitable participation:** Structure engagement so that all learners have opportunities to contribute, and no single learner dominates, is singled out, or is overexposed

Learners should be reminded that participation in discussions or reflections can be flexible. They may choose to listen, write privately, or participate in other ways that feel comfortable.

Strategies for Managing Difficult Moments

If challenging situations arise during discussion, facilitators may consider the following strategies:

- Pause the conversation if the discussion becomes tense or emotionally charged
- Allow time for reflection or grounding
- Re-center the discussion on the learning goals of the lesson
- Encourage learners to support their ideas with historical evidence or examples from the video module

- Redirect harmful or disrespectful language by reminding learners of shared agreements
- Encourage learners to ask questions rather than make assumptions
- Offer alternative participation options, such as written reflection
- Remind learners that complex historical topics often include multiple perspectives
- If a learner becomes distressed, pause the activity and provide appropriate support or referral

Community Agreements Co-Creations

Facilitators may establish clear community agreements at the outset, such as:

- Listening actively and without interruption
- Respecting diverse perspectives and lived experiences
- Using thoughtful language
- Critiquing ideas, and not individuals
- Maintaining confidentiality if appropriate

Suggested Safe Space Activity (5-10 minutes):

Activity: Community Agreements Co-Creation

Instructions:

1. **Ask learners:** *What do you need in order to feel safe, respected, and heard in this learning space?*
2. Collect responses via discussion board, shared document, or live poll
3. Synthesize responses into a shared set of community agreements
4. Revisit these agreements throughout the module as needed

Optional Reflection Prompt:

- What does respectful dialogue look like to you when discussing complex or sensitive issues?
- How can you contribute to maintaining a constructive learning environment?

Module Structure:

Warm-Up - Word Association & Reflection

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Key Concept: Initial perceptions influence understanding; reflection reveals bias.

- Learning Activities:**
- **Word Association Prompt:** What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you hear the word “Crusades”?
 - **Optional Activity:**
 - ✕ Facilitators may create a word cloud using learner responses to visualize common themes, patterns, or differences in perceptions. This activity can be revisited at the end of the module to reflect on how learners’ understanding may have evolved.

Part 1: The Crusades (1099 CE)

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Key Concept: Historical narratives and myths were used to justify violence and conquest

Learning Activities:

- **Content Overview:**
 - ✧ Introduces the historical context of the Crusades
 - ✧ Examines how religious narratives justified violence and conquest
 - ✧ Encourages analysis of myths and historical framing
- **Journal Prompt:** What does “Crusade” mean to you? How have media portrayals contributed to this?
- **Sentence Starter:**
 - ✧ Share your initial impressions of “Crusade”
 - ✧ One way myths or religious narratives can influence how wars are understood is...
 - ✧ Looking at current events, one example of history being used to shape political perspectives is...
- **Short Response:** What myths were used to justify Crusader violence?
- **Knowledge Check:**
 - ✧ Define the Crusaders and explain why the Crusades were framed as “holy wars”
 - ✧ True/False: All Europeans supported the Crusades. *Answer: False*
 - ✧ Who declared “the wars of the Crusades are now complete” *Answer: Edmund Allenby*

Part 2: British Colonialism & the Balfour Declaration (1917)

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Key Concept: Colonial powers used symbolism and historical references to legitimize modern control.

Learning Activities:

- **Content Overview:**
 - ✧ Explores British colonial influence in Palestine
 - ✧ Examines how symbolism and historical narratives supported imperial authority
 - ✧ Introduces the significance of the Balfour Declaration
- **Journal Prompts:** Why does symbolism matter in colonial narratives?
- **Sentence Starter:**
 - ✧ During colonization, European powers often framed their actions as justified by religion through...
 - ✧ When compared to modern conflicts, similar patterns in framing can be seen in...
- **Short Response:** How did British symbolism during occupation reinforce imperial power?
- **Knowledge Check:**
 - ✧ What was the Balfour Declaration? *Answer: A British promise to give a Jewish homeland in Palestine*

Part 3: Israeli colonization

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Key Concept: Religious and historical rhetoric is used in modern politics to shape public perception.

Learning Activities:

- **Content Overview:**
 - ✧ Analyzes how historical and religious narratives appear in modern

- politics
 - ✧ Encourages critical evaluation of political language and symbolism
- **Journal Prompt:** How does religious symbolism shape public perception and policy?
- **Sentence Starter:**
 - ✧ Political leaders may invoke religious history in modern campaigns to...
- **Short Response:**
 - ✧ How did British symbolism during occupation reinforce imperial power?
 - ✧ Why do political leaders invoke religious history in modern campaigns?
 - ✧ Can historical references be separated from modern language?
 - ✧ How does modern political language reflect historical imperial ideologies
- **Knowledge Check:**
 - ✧ Religious symbolism has no impact on modern public perception.
(False)

Part 5: Honouring the Land – Reflection Activity

Estimated Time: 10 - 15 minutes

Key Concept: Understanding our relationship to the land can deepen awareness of historical and ongoing displacement.

- Learning Activities:**
1. Use a resource like Native Land Digital to explore the Indigenous territories where you live.
 2. Research local Indigenous communities, their histories, and present-day stewardship efforts.
 3. Reflect on how land and water are protected and managed by Indigenous peoples.
- **Journal Prompt**
 - ✧ “What is your relationship to the land and waters where you live?”
 - ✧ “What meaningful actions can you take to support their care and preservation?”
 - ✧ “How will you commit to these actions moving forward?”
 - **Sentence Starter:**
 - ✧ Social movements that acknowledge Indigenous histories and stewardship may be more effective because...
 - ✧ Honoring land may help guide actions for justice and solidarity by...

Part 6: Exit Reflection

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Learning Activities: Students may choose any one of the following formats:

- **Anonymous digital submission** (e.g., Google Form with no name required)
- **Paper reflection slip submitted in a collection box** (no names required if anonymity is preferred)
- **Private journal entry** kept in a notebook or personal document
- **Verbal reflection shared** (if comfortable)
- **Journal Prompt**

- ✕ One thing I learned
- ✕ One question I still have
- ✕ One impactful quote or idea that stuck with me

- **Sentence Starter:** *A common thread between historical and modern imperial narratives is...*

Facilitators should clearly communicate that **learners are not required to identify themselves** unless they choose to do so.

Optional Extension Activities:

- **Mini Essay Prompt:** “The past never really passes.” How is history used to justify present-day power in Palestine?
- **Source Analysis:** Choose a historical or political quote and analyze context, meaning, and implications.
- **Research Task:** Investigate the role of a religious myth in a modern political or military conflict.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Crusades:** Religious wars initiated by European Christians in the medieval period
- **Balfour Declaration:** A British promise in 1917 to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine
- **Religious imperialism:** Using religion to justify political or military power
- **Colonial narratives:** Historical accounts shaped to justify colonization
- **Media Literacy:** Skills to critically evaluate information and rhetoric

