

The Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies
and
The Department of English

American University of Beirut

Cordially invite you to a talk

by

Max Weiss

Princeton University

**The Slow Witness:
Syrian War Literature in Real Time**

Thursday March 23, 2107

Bldg. 37, 5:30 PM

Abstract A specter is stalking the Syrian civil war: a stumbling, slow-moving witness. In this war and the global catastrophe thrashing all around it, speed is of the essence. Up-to-the-minute news, realistic images and real-time streaming video have a marked influence on the global struggle for and over Syria. In this context, as participants on all sides of the conflict seek establish their version of the truth as quickly as possible, new enemies appear, including doubt, ambiguity or nuance. Syrian fiction writers are not immune from these political and cultural practices, under the influence of an imperative to document the latest developments, to be ahead of the curve, somehow outside and inside the moment simultaneously, to contribute drafts of Syrian history-in-the-making. This talk explores reflections of such an ethics of immediacy in Syrian literature through the concept of the “slow witness,” a figure that is both represented in specific literary texts but also embodied by the practice of writing and reading fiction itself in a time of extreme human suffering and dislocation.

Bio Max Weiss is Associate Professor of History and Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. He is the author of *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shi`ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Harvard UP, 2010), co-editor (with Jens Hanssen) of *Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Cambridge UP, 2016), and translator, most recently, of Mamdouh Azzam, *Ascension to Death* (London, 2017). He earned a Ph.D. in Modern Middle East History from Stanford University, held postdoctoral fellowships at Princeton University and the Harvard Society of Fellows, and his research has been supported by the Fulbright-Hays Commission, the Social Science Research Council, and the Carnegie Corporation. Currently he is writing about the intellectual and cultural history of modern Syria, and translating several works of modern and contemporary Arabic literature.