A forgotten word, Biribi was synonymous with hell on earth and symbolic of the French state’s military oppression. Biribi was the generic name given to the diverse disciplinary or penitentiary institutions of the French army. These numerous structures had two common points: their localization in North Africa and their reputation as a barbarous regime. In the twentieth century Biribi became a major issue of French popular culture and social imaginary: a target for the antimilitarist movement, an exotic theme for dime novels, story papers, popular songs and newspaper reports, a sign of pride and glory in the culture of the underworld. This talk will present the organization of this forgotten system, the making of its imaginary and the social and cultural meaning of its popularity.

Kalifa’s research focuses the representations of crime and policing in modern France as well as mass culture and social control. He is the author of numerous books, including *L’Encre et le sang: Récits de crimes et société à la Belle Époque.*