

BRI0002 - Major Themes in Contemporary Middle East
IRI – USP 2019

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Tuesdays, 19:30 – 22:30
IRI - Lecture Hall C

Overview

This course introduces the major themes, key actors, prevalent developments and pressing issues facing the states and societies of the modern Middle East. The historical scope of the course spans from the decline and collapse of the Ottoman Empire during the long 19th century to our turbulent 21st century. With the exception of the first two lectures, which provide a general historical background, the course is organised thematically rather than chronologically. The course takes a multi-disciplinary approach, investigating linkages between history, sociology, politics, international relations, economics and anthropology. The lectures cover topics such as the legacies of empire and colonialism; nation-building and nationalism; political Islam; geopolitics of energy; environment, urbanisation and migration; workers', women's and LGBT struggles; democracy and authoritarianism; the failure of the "Arab Spring"; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Kurdish question.

Objectives

The large and culturally, politically and historically diverse region referred to as the Middle East has long been an object of curiosity for the outsider. During late modernity, the region evoked in the western mind a highly exaggerated and imagined sense of exoticism and mysticism, captured in the Orientalist depictions of the *harem*, the mysterious section of the Muslim household reserved for wives, concubines and female servants. Since the 20th century, the region has drawn international attention for its seemingly unending ethnic and religious conflicts, political upheavals and humanitarian crises. Yet popular explanations for these have often focused excessively on factors such as the role of Islam or the prevalence of oil.

The aim of this course is to give students a lucid yet nuanced and critical understanding of the region's complexities without resorting to over-simplifications and cultural clichés. Students will be introduced to diverse perspectives, sources and accounts on the evolution of nation-states, societies and non-state actors in the region. At the same time, by employing a comparative approach and exploring common themes such as urbanization, climate change, socio-economic inequality or democracy, the course aims to dispel the idea that the Middle East is a foreign "other", operating in fundamentally different ways than the rest of the world.

Course Textbook

Louise Fawcett (ed.) *International Relations of the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, 2016 (4th edition).

Selected chapters, additional reading and other material will be uploaded to Moodle.

Assessment

Assessment is based on three parts:

Attendance (10%): Students are expected to attend all lectures, having done the assigned readings in advance.

Reading Responses (10%): For each lecture, students will pick a question at the end of the Fawcett reading for that week, and write a one-paragraph (or up to half a Word page) response. These will be emailed to José Antonio Lima *before class*.

- The answers will not be graded, but we will check for authenticity and plagiarism.
- 10 responses (out of 11) will receive full 10 points. 9 points for 9 responses, 8 for 8...
- 5 responses or less receive 0 points.
- For weeks without Fawcett reading, questions will be uploaded on Moodle.

Two Exams (40% each): In-class written mid-term and final exams consisting of three parts (Multiple Choice, Short Answers, Essay Question).

Course Outline

Week 1. Historical Background: Empire, Colonialism and Nationalism (*26 February*)

- Fawcett, Chp. 2
- Documentary Screening:
 - o [Bernard Lewis vs. Edward Said](#) (MESA Debate, 1986)
 - o [The Birth of Nations – Middle East](#) (BBC Four, 2011)

Week 2. Middle East during the Cold War (*12 March*)

- Fawcett, Chp. 3
- “Chp 4: Cold War: global conflict, regional upheavals” in Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Declassified CIA Document: “[Conference of M.E. Chiefs of Mission, 1951](#)”
- Documentary Screening:
 - o [Good Guys Bad Guys – Cold War 17/24](#) (CNN, 1998)

Week 3. Political Islam (*19 March*)

- Fawcett, Chp. 8
- Olivier Roy “[Political Islam After the Arab Spring](#)”, *Foreign Affairs*, December 2017
- Sami Zubaida “[Islamic Reformism?](#)”, *Open Democracy*, 5 January 2016.

Week 4. Geopolitics of Energy (26 March)

- Fawcett, Chp. 5

Week 5. Socio-Economic Transformations: Environment, Urbanisation & Migration (2 April)

- Phillip Connor, "[Middle East's Migrant Population More than Doubles Since 2005](#)", *Pew Research Center*, 18 October 2016
- Caitlin E. Werrell & Francesco Femia (eds) "[The Arab Spring and Climate Change](#)", *Center for American Progress*, February 2013
- Jessica Barnes, "[Overstating Climate Change in Egypt's Uprising](#)", *Middle East Report Online*, 1 October 2018.
- Scott Waldman, "[Climate Change May Have Helped Spark Iran's Protests](#)", *Scientific American*, 8 January 2018.
- Film Screening:
 - o [Ecumenopolis: The City Without Limits](#) (2012)

Week 6. The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (23 April)

- Fawcett, Chp. 12 + 13

Week 7. Mid-term Exam (30 April)

Week 8. The Kurdish Question (7 May)

- Mesut Yegen, "Turkish nationalism and the Kurdish question", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30:1, 2007, pp. 119-151
- Michiel Leezenberg, "[The ambiguities of democratic autonomy: the Kurdish movement in Turkey and Rojava](#)", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16: 4, 2016, pp. 671 – 690.
- Martin van Bruinessen, "[Kurdish identities and Kurdish nationalisms in the early twenty-first century](#)", in: Elçin Aktoprak & A. Celil Kaya (eds) *21. Yüzyılda Milliyetçilik: Teori ve Siyaset*, Istanbul: İletişim, 2016, pp. 349 - 373.
- BBC Backgrounder: "[Who are the Kurds?](#)"

Week 9. Politics of the Persian Gulf (14 May)

- Fawcett, Chp. 14
- F. Gregory Gause III, "Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War", *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper*, Number 11, July 2014
- David B. Roberts, "Reflecting On Qatar's "Islamist" Soft Power", *Berkley Center Foreign Policy Brief*, April 2019.
- Turki Al Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, "Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XX, No. 4, Winter 2013
- Mohammad Javad Zarif, "What Iran Really Wants: Iranian Foreign Policy in the Rouhani Era", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3, 2014, pp. 49-59.

Week 10. Struggles for Social Justice (I): From the Arab Spring to the Arab Winter (21 May)

- Fawcett, Chps. 6 + 15
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- Karabekir Akkoyunlu, "[The Middle East on the brink: an urgent appeal for common sense](#)", *Open Democracy*, 12 December 2011.
- Alain Gabon, "[Eight years on, the Arab Spring is far from over](#)", *Middle East Eye*, 17 December 2018

Week 11. Struggles for Social Justice (II): Women's & LGBT struggles (28 May)

- Sami Zubaida, "[Women, democracy and dictatorship](#)", *Open Democracy*, 15 February 2012.
- Deniz Kandiyoti, "Locating the politics of gender: Patriarchy, neo-liberal governance and violence in Turkey", *Research and Policy on Turkey*, 1: 2, 2016, pp. 103 – 118.
- Ayca Alemdaroglu, "[The politics of sexuality and the LGBTQ crackdown in Egypt](#)", *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 16 February 2018.
- Film Screening: [Feminists Inshallah: The Story of Arab Feminism](#)
- Recommended podcasts:
 - o [Gay in Iran](#)
 - o [Ottoman History Podcast: Women, Gender, and Sex in the Ottoman World](#)

Week 12. Great Powers, Regional Alliances in the 21st century (4 June)

- Fawcett, Chp. 16 + 9

Week 13. Latin America and the Middle East (11 June)

- Guest Lecture by Professor Guilherme Casarões, FGV
- Reading TBA

Week 14. Final Exam (18 June)