

## Major Themes in Contemporary Middle East

IRI – USP 2020

Lecturer:

Dr. Karabekir Akkoyunlu

[karabekir.akkoyunlu@uni-graz.at](mailto:karabekir.akkoyunlu@uni-graz.at)

Sala A

Fridays, 13:00 – 16:30

### 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 19<sup>th</sup> century to our turbulent 21<sup>st</sup> 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 LGBTQ+ 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 urbanisation, 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 & Other Sources

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

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

Students are also encouraged to regularly follow these websites for updates, analyses and opinions: [al-monitor.com](http://al-monitor.com), [jadaliyya.com](http://jadaliyya.com), [merip.org](http://merip.org), [ottomanhistorypodcast.com](http://ottomanhistorypodcast.com)

## Course Language

The course will be conducted in English, including class discussions and written assignments.

## Assessment

**Attendance + Participation** (10 + 10%): Students are expected to attend and participate in all lectures, having done the assigned readings in advance and ready to engage in discussion & answer questions. As per university regulations, lower than %70 attendance is automatic failure.

**Two written responses** (20% each): Students will be asked to write two reflection essays (1,000 words each) in response to the lectures on Week 6 and Week 9. These will be submitted electronically before class on Week 7 and Week 10, and discussed in class after the screening of movies in these weeks.

**Final Essay** (40%): A 3,000-word research paper on a subject picked among a number of options provided. To be submitted electronically by **midnight Friday 19 June**.

The essays will be checked for originality so please make sure to provide appropriate reference for any idea, quote or information that is not originally yours in your text. You can do this by using **in-text citations** or **footnotes** and attaching a **bibliography** to the end of your essay.

Any unacknowledged use of someone else's work is considered **plagiarism**, which is a very serious academic offence. **Plagiarising other people's work can lead you to fail the course.**

For detailed information on how to avoid plagiarism, please see the following link and feel free to contact me with any questions:

<https://www.macmillanihe.com/studentstudyskills/page/Referencing-and-Avoiding-Plagiarism/>

## Course Outline

### Historical Background: Empire, Colonialism and Nationalism

- Week 1** (28/02)
- Fawcett, Chp. 2
  - Edward Said “Introduction”, *Orientalism*, 1978
  - Hans-Lukas Keiser et al. “Introduction”, *World War I and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, 2015
  - Recommended Documentaries:
    - o [Bernard Lewis vs. Edward Said](#) (MESA, 1986)
    - o [The Birth of Nations – Middle East](#) (BBC, 2011)

### Middle East during the Cold War

- Week 2** (6/03)
- 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](#)”
  - Recommended Documentary:
    - o [Good Guys Bad Guys – Cold War 17/24](#) (CNN, 1998)

### Political Islam

- Week 3** (13/03)
- Fawcett, Chp. 8
  - Olivier Roy “[Political Islam After the Arab Spring](#)”, *Foreign Affairs*, December 2017
  - Sami Zubaida “[Islamic Reformism?](#)”, *Open Democracy*, 5 January 2016.

### Geopolitics of Energy

- Week 4** (20/03)
- Fawcett, Chp. 5

## Socio-Economic Transformations: Environment, Urbanisation & Migration

- Week 5** (27/03)
- 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.
  - Recommended Documentary:
    - o [Ecumenopolis: The City Without Limits](#) (2012)

### The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

- Week 6** (3/04)
- Fawcett, Chp. 12 + 13
  - Nathan Thrall, “[BDS: how a controversial non-violent movement has transformed the Israeli-Palestinian debate](#)”, *The Guardian*, 14 August 2018.

### *Movie Screening: 5 Broken Cameras*

**Week 7** (17/04) **Deadline for written response no. 1**

*In your view, what is a just and sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the most effective way to achieve it?*

### Politics of the Persian Gulf

- Week 8** (24/04)
- Fawcett, Chp. 14
  - Gregory Gause, “[Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War](#)”, *Brookings Doha Center*, July 2014
  - Turki Al Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, “[Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Policy](#)”, *Middle East Policy*, 20 (4), 2013
  - Mohammad Javad Zarif, “[What Iran Really Wants: Iranian Foreign Policy in the Rouhani Era](#)”, *Foreign Affairs*, 93 (3), May/June 2014.

### Struggles for Social Justice (I): Women's & LGBTQ+ struggles

**Week 9** (8/05)

- 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](#)

*Movie Screening: Persepolis*

**Week 10** (15/05)

#### **Deadline for written response no. 2**

*"In conservative societies, democracy can pose a threat to women's rights."* Do you agree? Discuss in the context of the history and politics of the Middle East.

### The Kurdish Question

**Week 11** (22/05)

- 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*, İstanbul: İletişim, 2016, pp. 349 - 373.
- BBC Backgrounder: "[Who are the Kurds?](#)"

## Struggles for Social Justice (II): From the ‘Arab Spring’ to the ‘Arab Winter’

### **Week 12 (29/05)**

- Fawcett, Chp. 6
- Alain Gabon, “[Eight years on, the Arab Spring is far from over](#)”, *Middle East Eye*, 17 December 2018
- Gilbert Achar, “[The Seasons After the Arab Spring](#)”, *The Nation*, 25 June 2019
- Schlomo Ben-Ami, “[Not Another Arab Spring](#)”, *Project Syndicate*, 19 December 2019.

## Regionalism and External Powers in the Middle East

### **Week 13 (5/06)**

- Fawcett, Chp. 9 + 16
- Ariel Cohen, “[Will China Replace the U.S. As The Middle East Hegemon?](#)”, *Forbes*, 14 February 2019
- “[Chinese money is behind some of the Arab world’s biggest projects](#)”, *Economist*, 20 April 2019.

### **Final Essay**

**Due by midnight, Friday 19 June**

[Questions will be provided on Week 7]