

# PS120 Introduction to Middle East Politics

Seminar Leader: Dr. Hanan Toukan  
Email: h.toukan@berlin.bard.edu  
Office Hours: TBD  
Seminar times: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:45 am to 12:15 pm.  
Waldstraße 16, Building W16, Seminar Room 9.

## **Course Description:**

This course offers students the opportunity to engage with and think about some of the most pertinent questions and fundamental debates in the study of the politics and societies of the modern Middle East. The course has two central aims. The first is to encourage students to question the epistemological foundations of the study of the region so they learn to critically question the context in which the scholarly body of knowledge about it has been constructed and produced. The second aim of the course is to contextualize the region's modern history and politics within wider scholarly debates in comparative politics, international politics and area studies. The course is thematic rather than chronological and will cover weekly topics such as colonialism and decolonization, the authoritarian state, nationalism(s) and other ideologies, the politics of gender and sexuality and the politics of culture, the military, oil, states of security and the "global war on terror", migration and displacement, revolutions, uprisings and mass mobilizations.

## **Academic Integrity**

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Syllabi should note that, instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

## **Attendance**

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. Also please to consult the BCB Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

## **Assessment and Grade Breakdown**

**Class Participation (20%):** Participation will be evaluated at the end of each session. Students will be assessed based on the general enthusiasm, frequency and quality of the questions they raise. Regular attendance and completion of all reading assignments is also required. Recurrent absences will substantially decrease the final grade. (up to two unexcused absences are allowed).

**Class Presentations (20%):** Each student will be expected to make at least one 15 minute presentation about a particular week's readings of their own choice. Presentations should

address the author, central question and argument of the work, methodology used, and three critically engaging questions and concluding thoughts posed to the class to spark discussion. Class presentations will take place in the **Tuesday** class and students can sign up to present on the week of their choice in the first week of classes.

**Weekly diary Entries:** (20%):

Students are expected to keep a weekly diary where they reflect on and think about the class's weekly topics and related questions. The point of this exercise is to informally think creatively and critically about the class's central discussion and how it relates to the outside world, to news watched, to a gallery exhibition attended, a film previewed, an article read etc. that the student feels is worthy of documenting. This can be presented in note form, a mini visual essay, personal reflections etc, once again it is a DIARY. We will then use these entries and the questions raised in them to guide and/or contribute to class discussions.

**Due date:** The diary entries must be sent a day **before** each week's Thursday class, on **the Wednesday the day by noon at the latest.**

**Final essay:** ( 40%)

The final paper for the class consists of a 5000 word paper that addresses a particular theme or concept related to the readings and/or artworks discussed. Students will discuss the paper topics with the instructor during the set office hours and after first submitting an abstract and proposed bibliography by email. Late assignments will be penalized per day. Written assignments should include a creative title followed by your name, date, and course number. Pages should be double-spaced with 12-pt. font and one-inch margins. **Thursday December 12, 2019**

**Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

Syllabi for core and elective classes should note or refer to the following policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C.*

*Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

**1. WEEK 1- September 3, 5**

**What is the Middle East?**

***Tuesday Seminar***

**Introduction to the Course**

***Thursday Seminar***

What are the power relations embodied in the concept "Middle East"? What are the other names that have been used to refer to the geographical regions this concept covers? How do government agencies, international bodies, and the popular press represent the Middle East? How have the borders of this spatial unit changed over time? Are the borders recognizable to the inhabitants of the regions that they claim jurisdiction over?

## Readings

Bonine, et al. *Is there a Middle East?* Introduction, chapter 3  
Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*. Introduction.  
Osamah Khalil, "The Crossroads of the World: U.S. and British Foreign Policy Doctrines and the Construct of the Middle East, 1902-2007." *Diplomatic History*, 38:2 (2014) .299-344.

## **2. WEEK-2 September 10,12**

### **Middle East Studies as a Field of Knowledge**

What are the discursive, geostrategic, and regional forces that have shaped how academics have studied this region? How have the approaches, methodologies, and topics of writing on the Middle East change since the 1950s? What are the big debates and turning points? Can this field transcend the foundational impetus of always seeing it in relationship to the West? What are the intellectual and political stakes of studying the Middle East?

### ***Tuesday Seminar***

#### Readings

Bonine, et al. *Is there a Middle East?* Chapters 1,4.  
Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*. Chapter 2.

### ***Thursday Seminar***

#### Readings

Timothy Mitchell, "The Middle East in the Past and the Future of Social Science." In David Szanton, Ed., *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines* (UC Press, 2004)

## **3. WEEK 3 September 17, 19**

Researching Comparative Politics

### ***Tuesday Seminar***

*What is the Comparative Method? How does it factor in to comparative area studies?*

#### Readings

Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph. 2003. "Engaging Subjective Knowledge: How Amar Singh's Diary Narratives of and by the Self Explain Identity Formation" in *Perspectives on Politics* 1(4): 681-694.

Burawoy, Michael, "Two Methods in Search of Science: Skocpol vs. Trotsky" in *Theory and Society* 18 (1989).

### ***Thursday Seminar***

### **Readings**

Lichbach, Mark, "Social Theory and Comparative Politics" in Lichbach and Zuckerman (eds.), *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure* (Cambridge University Press 1997).

Shohat, Ella, "Area Studies, Gender Studies, and the Cartographies of Knowledge" in *Social Text* 20.3 (2002) 67-78.

### **4. WEEK- September 24, 26**

#### **Politics in culture/culture in Politics**

##### ***Tuesday Seminar***

What are the problems of Culture as an Analytical Tool? What can Cultural Theory teach us about politics and culture?

##### **Readings**

-Anderson, Lisa, "Democracy in the Arab World: A Critique of the Political Culture Approach" in Brynen et al (eds.), *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, Vol. 1: Theoretical Perspectives* (Lynne Rienner, 1995): pp. 77-92.

-Sa'id, Edward, *Orientalism*, (Penguin Books, 1978): pp. 1-15 and 25-28 and especially 'The Latest Phase' pp.284-328.

##### ***Thursday Seminar***

What is "Third World Literature? What are the limitations of Orientalism as a Methodology?

##### **Readings**

-Ahmad, Aijaz, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" in *Social Text*, No. 17 (Autumn, 1987), pp. 3-25.

Makdisi, Saree, "'Postcolonial' Literature in a Neocolonial World: Modern Arabic Culture and the End of Modernity" in *boundary 2* 22:1 (Spring, 1995), pp. 85-115.

-al Azm, Sadiq, 'Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse' in *Khamsin* No 8 (Ithaca Press, 1981).

### **5. Week 5-September October 1, 3**

#### **Colonialism, Anti-Colonialism, Decolonisation**

##### ***Tuesday Seminar***

How has colonialism affected the Middle East and what have some of the responses to colonialism been?

##### **Readings**

Wolfe, Patrick. "History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory, from Marx to Postcolonialism" in *The American Historical Review* 102:2 (Apr., 1997), pp. 388-420

McDougall, James, "Savage wars? Codes of violence in Algeria, 1830s-1990s" in *Third World Quarterly* 26:1 (March 2005): 117-131.

### **Thursday Seminar**

What is the "discussion" on violence in the anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggle about? Fanon, Frantz., *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press, 1963): pp. 35-107 ('Concerning Violence').

### Readings

**Film: *The Battle of Algiers*, , 1966, Dir, Gillo Pontecorvo**

Please watch the full film before class and come to class with questions about the scenes in the film you would like to discuss against the backdrop of the readings and questions of the Tuesday seminar.

## **6. WEEK 6- October 8, 10**

### **Empire, Imperialism and the post-colonial present**

#### **Seminar 1**

What "remains" of colonialism after its "end"?

### Readings

Massad, Joseph, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (Columbia University Press, 2001).

Mitchell, Timothy, *Colonizing Egypt* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Young, Robert J.C., *Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction* (Blackwell Publishing, 2001): pp. 13-57; 182-193, 293-308 ('Colonialism', 'Imperialism', 'Neocolonialism', 'China, Egypt, Bandung', 'The Subject of Violence').

#### **Seminar 2**

Empire and the Colonial Presence

### Readings

Gregory, Derek, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Blackwell, 2004).

Khalidi, Rashid, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, 2004).

## **7. WEEK 7- October 15-17**

### **Colonialism: Lived Realities**

#### **Tuesday Seminar**

*What does Colonialism do to people?*

Readings:

Djebar, Assia, *Children of the New World*. Trans. Marjolijn de Jager (The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2005 [1962]).

**Thursday Seminar**

*What does colonialism do to women in particular and how do they feature in the literature that addresses the role of gender in colonial and anticolonial struggle ?*

Readings:

Bigelow, Gordon, "Revolution and Modernity: Assia Djebar's "Les enfants du nouveau monde"" in *Research in African Literatures* 34:2 (Summer, 2003), pp. 13-27

Faulkner, Rita A., "Assia Djebar, Frantz Fanon, Women, Veils, and Land" in *World Literature Today* 70:4 (Autumn 1996), pp. 847-855.

Mildred Mortimer, "Edward Said and Assia Djebar: A Contrapuntal Reading", in *Research in African Literatures* 36:3 (Autumn 2005), pp. 53-67.

**8. WEEK 8-November 5, 7**

**State, Society and Citizenship**

**Tuesday Seminar**

There is so much emphasis in the media on the authoritarian state in the Middle East, but what is this „state and how much does it tell us if we use it as unit of analysis by itself?

Readings

Anderson, Lisa, "The State in the Middle East and North Africa" in *Comparative Politics* 20:1 (1987): 1-18.

Mitchell, Timothy, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics" in *The American Political Science Review*, 85:1 (March 1991), pp. 77-96.

Ismail, Salwa, *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters: Encountering the Everyday State* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

**Thursday Seminar**

*What happens when we bring citizens and societies in to the analytical framework?*

Readings

Wedeen, Lisa, "Seeing like a Citizen Acting like a State: Exemplary Events in Unified Yemen" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45: 4 (Oct 2003): 680-713.

Shafir, Gershon, and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

## **9. WEEK 9-Novembe 12, 14**

### **Gender, Sexuality and Politics**

#### **Seminar 1**

What is a feminist reading of history? What do feminist methodologies of research bring to the study of the region?

#### Readings

Booth, Marilyn, "New Directions in Middle East Women's and Gender History" in *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 4:1 (2003).

Najmabadi, Afsaneh, "(Un)veiling Feminism" in *Social Text* 18: 3 (Fall 2000), pp. 29-45.

#### **Seminar 2**

How have queer politics factored in to political conflict and state-society relations?

How are we to read the internal politics of the Queen Boat incident in Egypt? What role does international activism play with regards to sexuality and what parallels are there to previous struggles over transnational feminisms?

#### Readings

Ritchie, Jason "Pinkwashing, Homonationalism, and Israel-Palestine: The Conceits of Queer Theory and the Politics of the Ordinary." *Antipode* 47.3 (2015): 616-34.

Pratt, Nicola. "The Queen Boat Case in Egypt: Sexuality, National Security and State Sovereignty" in *Review of International Studies* 33 (2007), pp. 129-144.

Film: *Oriented* Jake Witzenfeld dir, 2015

**10. WEEK 10-Novembe 19, 21**

**Authoritarianism and Oil**

**Seminar 1**

What is the rentier state?

Readings

Okruhlik, Gwenn. "Rentier Wealth, Unruly Law, and the Rise of Opposition: The Political Economy of Oil States," *Comparative Politics* 31:3(1999), pp. 295-316.

Choudhry, Kiren Aziz, "Economic Liberalization and the Lineages of the Rentier State" in *Comparative Politics* 27:1 (1994), pp. 1-25.

**Seminar 2**

How do authority and oil feature in the security state and why does the Middle East seem to possess so many of these authoritarian forms of government

Readings

Mitchell, Timothy. "McJihad: Islam in the World Order" in *Social Text* 20:4 (2002), pp. 1-18

Davis, Mike, "Fear and Money in Dubai" in *New Left Review* 41 (2006), pp. 47-68.

**11. WEEK 11-November 26, 28**

**Politics from Below: Subversion, Struggle and Survival**

**Seminar 1**

What is politics from below?

Readings:

Bayat, Asef, "From 'Dangerous Classes' to 'Quiet Rebels': Politics of the Urban Subaltern in the Global South" in *International Sociology* 15:3 (September 2000), pp. 533-557.

Mitchell, Timothy, *The Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (University of California Press, 2002). Chapter 5 "Nobody Listens to a Poor Man".

**Seminar 2**

How are politics subverted in everyday life and through cultural production?



Readings

Wedeen, Lisa, *Ambiguities of Domination* (Chicago University Press, 1999) TBD

Cooke, Miriam, *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007). TBD

12. **WEEK 12-December 3, 5**

**Revolutions and Counter-Revolutions**

***Tuesday Seminar***

*What are the roots of the 1979 Iranian Revolution? What can that revolution tell us about revolution and its eruption in other parts of the region*

Readings

Abrahamian, Ervand, "Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution" in *MERIP Reports* 87 (May 1980), pp. 21-26.

Kurzman, Charles. "Can Understanding Undermine Explanation? The Confused Experience of Revolution" in *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 34:3(September 2004), pp. 328-351.

***Thursday Seminar***

How can we understand the Arab revolutions of 2011-2012 and their repercussions? How are they connected to wider regional or international politics

John Chalcraft. ***Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East***. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). TBD

Charles Tripp. ***The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East***. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). TBD

Asef Bayat. ***Revolution without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring***. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017). TBD

13. **WEEK 13-December 10, 12**

**The Global War on "Terror"**

***Tuesday Seminar***

*What kind of unit of analysis is "terror"?*

Required Readings

Tilly, Charles, "Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists" in *Sociological Theory* 22:1 (2004), pp. 5-13.

Puar, Jasbir K. and Amit S. Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots" in *Social Text* 20:3 (2002), pp. 117-148.

### **Thursday Seminar**

How has "terror" been constructed and why?

#### Readings

Asad, Talal, *On Suicide Bombings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). TBD

### **14. Week 14-December 17**

#### **The Middle East in Global Context: Refugees and Displacement**

#### Readings

Natalia Ribas Mateos, ed *Spaces of Refugee Flight in the Eastern Mediterranean..*  
Cheltenham 2016: Edward Elgar Publishing. Chapters 1, 2, 5