Course Description:

This course focuses on the history, politics and culture of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It will take a social and cultural history approach to understanding the nature of political authority, the complex relationships between Islam and politics, secularization, social movements, the challenges of democracy and constructions of gender relationships in the MENA region.

This course aims to provide analytical insights into moments which shaped the history of the Middle East with a more particular concentration on North Africa. Successive civilizations and dynasties, moments of expansion and decline, colonial and post-colonial politics have taken turns in rearranging the configuration of the MENA historical itinerary. Different social groups have had lasting impact on the ethnic, religious and cultural identity of MENA societies. In North Africa, the history of colonialism materialized in the rearrangement of politics, culture, urbanism and the society at large in a dynamic that reinvigorated the meaning of political authority and the subsequent cultural productions and the definition of the nation states during the decolonization period. From another angle, we will address ways through which the character of the nation and national memory are shaped, how ‘origins’ interact with memories to produce identities and how memory is deployed by groups and cultural communities to speak back to the historical ‘grand narratives’ of the nation.

We will also explore the place of religion and spirituality in modes of cultural identification and the way religion impacts on the structure and functioning of the public sphere. Questions to explore will bear on how spirituality moves to shape memory and political conviction and how to develop a critical language and framework that avoids readymade and simplistic discourse about the nation. In the final part of class, the course will explore the current challenges of MENA region in the post-colonial era by looking at issues related to authoritarian rule, democracy, economic liberalization, civil society, Islamic movements and women NGOs and the more recent Arab Revolts.

Course Objectives:

During this course students will work toward being able to:

- Raise epistemological questions regarding the study of the Middle East and North Africa
- Identify the historical contexts and complexities behind MENA history in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- Review the basic historical events and political forces that have shaped the modern era in the MENA.
- Explain the necessity to be aware of not only political and diplomatic events but also how these events shape the lives of individual people.
- Recognize that MENA history has to be understood in an interdisciplinary way and that the social sciences can help us to overcome simplistic views about the Middle East and the place of Islam in it.
- Develop a very good intellectual baggage of concepts, conflicting theories and notion to describe Middle Eastern societies in their complexities.
Knowledge

This course is designed to assist students to acquire and demonstrate knowledge about:

- Different anthropological, historical, cultural and political theories about MENA.
- Basic events that have shaped the history and politics of the region and that are important for understanding the current problems that these societies are faced with.
- A better understanding of the politics and economic conditions of the region.

Skills

This course will give student the opportunity to gain practical experience in:

- Developing a critical mind in the understanding of any society.
- Looking at political, economic, cultural and social phenomena from different perspectives.
- Developing more complex, nuanced and intelligent ways about understanding “self” and “other”.
- Evaluating the situation in the modern Middle East and North Africa that will be valuable for work in any government and Non-government institutions.

Evaluation

There will be a mid-term and final assessment. The overall evaluation is structured as follows:

- Participation: 20%
- Midterm Exam: 40%
- Final Research paper: 40%

Required Readings

The readings are made up in a course reader available at the beginning of the semester;

Bibliography:

Books:


**Articles or Book Chapters:**
- Brynen, Rex; Korany, Bahgat and Noble, Paul (eds.). 1995. "*Political Liberalization: Democratization in the Arab World*". Vol. 1, Theoretical Perspectives. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner
- McDougall, James History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006, chapter 3
- Special Issue: Democratization in the Muslim World: Changing Patterns of Power and Authority, Democratization, June 2006, Vol. 13, No. 3

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SESSIONS (3 hrs each)

Session 1: History, Orientalism and the Politics of Knowledge

Issues:
- Questions of religious authority
- History of States and Dynasties
- Muslim Arabs “others”

Session 2: History, Orientalism and the Politics of Knowledge
3. Lockman, “Contending Visions of the Middle East”, chapters 2-4
4. Eickelman & Piscatori, “Muslim Politics”, chapters 2 & 3

Issues:
- History of Colonialism and Nationalism
- Parameters of French & Moroccan colonial Histories
- Islam & the West

Session 3: The Imperial Encounter
2. Ruedy, “Modern Algeria”, chapters 3-4

Issues:
- European imperialism in MENA, the reconstruction of social order and the emergence of a colonial culture
- Post-colonial period: Reforms vs. continuity of Islamic tradition

Session 4: The Imperial Encounter
1. McDougall, “History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria”, chapter 3
3. Clancy-Smith, “ Rebel and Saint”, chapters 3-7

Issues:
- Survival of saints cult
- Cultural representations of colonies in French military novels

Session 5: Contending Visions of Nationalism
2. Göçek, “Social Constructions of Nationalism in ME”, chapters 4-9
5. Massad, “Colonial Effects”, chapter 3

Issues:
- The rise & fall of “Arab” Nationalism
- The making of national Identity: Palestine & Jordan
- The Power of Salafi Ideology in Morocco: Sate & Religion

Session 6: The Cultural Basis of Political Authority in Morocco
5. Gregg, “Themes of Authority”, pp. 215-242

Issues:
- The inscribing of kinship in relations with Power in Morocco: “Makhzan” vs. “Zcmiyas”
- The cultural legacy of power and the evolution of the political role of Islam in Morocco

Session 7: Islamic Movements between Radicalism and Moderation
2. Roy, “Globalized Islam”, chapters 6-7 & 8

Issues:
- The movement of Islam beyond traditional borders and the assertion of westernized Muslims’ identity in a non-Muslim context
- Islamism vs. secularism

Session 8: Islamic Movements between Radicalism and Moderation
1. Wickham, “Mobilizing Islam”, chapter 7
2. Wiktorowicz, "Islamic Activism", chapters 1-2 & 8

Issues:
- The relationship between the changing nature of state power and patterns of Islamic activism
- The rise of Islamic activism among Egypt’s university-educated youth

Session 9: The Rise of an Active Civil Society in the MENA
1. Brynen, “Political Liberalization: Democratization in the Arab World”
2. Norton, “Civil Society in the Middle East”, Vol.1, chapters 4-5 & 6

Issues:
- Reform strategies in the Arab world
- The formation of Civil Society: Iran, Israel, Algeria & Sudan

Session 10: The Rise of an Active Civil Society in the MENA
1. Norton, “Civil Society in the Middle East”, Vol. 2, chapter 7
2. Sater, “Civil Society In Morocco”, chapters 4-5

Issues:
• The role of civil society in the normalization of authoritarianism in the Middle East and the challenges that new organized groups pose to well-established Arab regimes, and the varying ways in which those regimes are responding
• Social Mobilization in Morocco and the State’s consolidation of civil society in the 1990's

Session 11: The Middle East between Authoritarianism and Liberalization
2. Salamé, “Democracy Without Democrats”, chapters 2-4 & 9
3. Posusney, “Authoritarianism in the Middle East”, chapters 3

Issues:
• Autocracy and the challenge of secularization in the Arab world
• Socio-economic change in the Maghreb and its political implications on democratization

Session 12: The Middle East between Authoritarianism and Liberalization
1. Posusney, “Authoritarianism in the Middle East”, chapters 5 & 7
2. Pratt, Democracy and Authoritarianism, chapters 1-5

Issues:
• The role of non-state actors in the maintenance of or resistance to the discourse that underpins authoritarian politics

Session 13: The Arab Revolts and the Prospects for Democracy in the MENA
Because this is part of the very recent events, the readings will be assigned as they appear from more scholarly sources which will be more readily available as we approach the beginning of the semester.

Issues:
• The uprising of youth: the end of authoritarianism & beginning of true democracy?
• Tunisia & Egypt: Ben Ali’s Ousting and the fall of Mubarak regime
• Morocco: the King’s initiation to constitutional reforms

Session 14: The Arab Revolts and the Prospects for Democracy in the MENA
Because this is part of the very recent events, the readings will be assigned as they appear from more scholarly sources which will be more readily available as we approach the beginning of the semester.

Issues:
• Current development of protests
• Post-Ben Ali & Mubarak
• What’s next?