

PLSC 396: Politics of the Contemporary Middle East

Professor Elizabeth Nugent

Fall 2018

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Office Hours: M 4-6pm

Lecture Hours: MW 2:30-3:20pm

Office: 409 Rosenkranz Hall

Class Room:

Course Description

This course is designed as an overview of the politics of the contemporary Middle East, meaning after 1920. The course is organized thematically and (more or less) chronologically. We will examine prominent explanations for the democratic deficit in the Middle East, and challenge the notion that the region is completely devoid of competitive and meaningful politics. More specifically, we will explore the ways in which a variety of factors – including prominent issues such as – including foreign intervention, persistent authoritarianism, oil, and religion, among others – has affected domestic politics in Middle Eastern countries. We will consider a number of different aspects of domestic politics, including redistribution, gender politics, political mobilization, and public opinion. We will end the course by building on what we have learned to make sense of the 2010-2011 ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings, in an effort to understand whether these recent developments mark change or continuity.

Course Requirements, Format, and Grading

There are no pre-requisites for the course. The course will consist of series of lectures and discussion sections with pre-assigned English-language readings. Students are expected to do all the readings *before* the day for which they are assigned to gain the most from lectures and discussion sections. Each week, the entire class will meet for two 50-minute lectures, and you will also attend a discussion section with a teaching assistant.

Yale’s typical grading scale will be used for letter grades. Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- **10 points** of your grade will be determined by an in-class map quiz at the beginning of lecture on **September 19**. You will be asked to identify the locations (on a blank map), the capitols, and the current leaders of the countries of the Middle East. The quiz is intended to establish a baseline of common knowledge for the analyses we plan to conduct in this course.

- **20 points** of your grade will be determined by attendance and participation in lectures and teaching sessions. Regular attendance and participation is important for understanding the material and for getting the most out of this course.
- **20 points** of your grade will be determined by an in-class midterm on **October 15**. The exam consists of two short essays and short identifications of key terms, countries, and people we have covered in class. You will receive a copy of the syllabus during the exam to use as a guide. The midterm is intended to gauge your understanding of the fundamental concepts we will cover in the first half of the course.
- **15 points** of your grade will be determined by a five-page critical review essay of a novel (more information is provided in the following section). The essay is due in hard-copy by the beginning of lecture on **November 28**.
- **35 points** of your grade will be determined by a final paper (more information is provided in the following section). A one page outline is due to your teaching fellow at the start of lecture on **November 14** and is worth five points of your grade for this assignment. The final paper is due **December 14 at 5:00 pm**.

Writing Assignments

Review Essay

You are required to read and write a five-page review one of five English-language novels or memoirs by an Arab author. Each illustrates some of the core concepts we will discuss in the course. There are significant political and security challenges that limit access to reliable reporting, accurate portrayals, and individuals stories, and I find novels, memoirs, and other literature to be helpful in better understanding life and politics under and in spite of authoritarianism. Please choose one of the titles listed below. Copies of the books are available through Amazon, Yale's library, and the New Haven public library. I also have five desk copies of each book in my office.

- *The Queue* by Basma Abdel Aziz
- *This Blinding Absence of Light* by Tahar Ben Jelloun
- *The City Always Wins* by Omar Robert Hamilton
- *The Return: Fathers, Sons and the Land in Between* by Hisham Matar
- *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* by Assia Djebar

A hard-copy of your review essay is due **November 28** at the beginning of lecture. It should be set in 12-point Garamond font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides, and not exceed five pages. Below is a recommended outline to follow in constructing your essay.

Introduction: The introduction to a review essay lays out the general line of argument you will pursue. Use your opening paragraph to situate the book in the context in which it is written, identify the main theme of the book, and preview your own critical response. This paragraph should require no more than a half page.

Summary: Remember that in such a short assignment, you cannot summarize the entire book and will need to limit the space you devote to the summary. Focus on the central characters, plot, and political themes (related to what we have discussed in class) represented in the book. Note that as you develop your critical discussion in the following section, you can elaborate further upon important characters, moments, and themes in the text. The summary should be clear and concise, and should not exceed one page.

Critical Discussion: In the context of scholarly inquiry, a critical discussion evaluates the contribution of the text under review to the discipline of which you are a part (for this assignment, pretend you are a political scientist!). As a starting point, consider how the book illustrates some of the core political themes we have discussed in class related to how individuals' lives, opinions, and behaviors are influenced by an authoritarian context. Identify the particular theme(s) addressed by the author in relation to our course of study. Once you have situated the book, you can then begin your critical analysis. In the course of your critical analysis, you should refer to other writings. Namely, you should reference the pieces we have read on the particular theme in order to expand your critical engagement with the book's broader political contribution. This will take up the bulk of your essay, around three pages.

Conclusion: The essay should end with a paragraph summarizing your argument and answering the question, "so what?" This should not be a repetition of your introductory paragraph. Rather, it should summarize the points you have made differently and consider unanswered questions or concerns related to your argument. It should also consider what is important about this book for understanding Middle East politics.

Final Paper

The final assignment for this class is a 20-page term paper in which you answer the following question: "In your opinion, which is the most convincing explanation for the continued lack of democracy in the Middle East?" In the readings we will cover in this class, we will address at least four main explanations:

1. Cultural: the theory that there is something inherently undemocratic about Arab and/or Muslim culture in the way it tolerates pluralism and gender rights, which then precludes citizens from demanding democracy.
2. Economic: the theory that rentier (resource-rich) states can fend off any democratization through a number of defensive, distributive, and repressive behaviors.
3. Institutional: the theory that the countries of the Middle East were endowed with or have developed institutions that appear to be democratic but actually stabilize authoritarianism.
4. Relational: intervention by foreign powers – first colonial states with specific economic and security interests, and later western democracies with interests related to the global economy, national security, and the spreading of "democratic" ideals – keeps the Middle East undemocratic by undermining processes of political reform.

In writing the paper, you must engage in a critical conversation with the essays we have read and the conversations we have had in class. You will necessarily draw upon the ideas of others authors

in making your argument. You must show how you are building upon, altering, or working in opposition to their ideas and definitions through your quotation and analysis of their concepts and evidence. After your introduction, you should define democracy and discuss how the authoritarian regimes of the region differ from this ideal type. Next, outline the explanations we have discussed in class in your own words. Then make a convincing argument for one, and be sure to discuss where competing explanations fall short in your essay. Keep in mind that there are no correct answers to this essay prompt. Rather, I am interested in how understanding how the covered material informs your thoughts in making an argument.

This assignment asks you to develop a deep understanding of a contentious body of literature, and to engage with it. This comprehensive understanding is essential for students who want to continue their study of the Middle East, and it is equally important for students whose academic interest with the region ends with this course. The arguments covered in the course inform not only academic research but also general conversation, news coverage, and government policies related to the Middle East. Your engagement with these arguments will enable you to become an informed consumer of news and politics, and to evaluate others' arguments about the Middle East. Moreover, having a highly polished, analytical writing sample is important for future graduate school and job applications.

A hard-copy of your one page outline of the final paper is due to your teaching fellow at the start of lecture on **November 14**. The outline should include a rough draft of your opening paragraph, which will lay out the argument you intend to make, and an annotated sketch of the remainder of the paper. This component is worth five points of your total grade for the assignment. The full paper is due **December 15th at 5pm**.

Writing Resources

I encourage you to start your writing assignments early in order to take advantage of the resources available to you through the [Yale College Writing Center](#).

Course Policies

During Class

Computers will be allowed in class for note-taking only. Please refrain from using computers for anything but activities related to the class. Phones are prohibited.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected in all lectures and required for all discussion sections. If you miss more than three discussions sections without a valid excuse, you will receive no credit for your participation grade. The exam will include questions on material covered only in lectures in addition to the readings.

E-mail Policy

If you have a quick (i.e. non-substantive) question, email is the best way to contact me. While I typically respond to emails quickly, please allow 48 hours for a response. If you do not receive a response within 48 hours, follow up with a reminder. This article is recommended reading about how to draft an effective email: Laura Portwood-Stacer, [“How to Email Your Professor \(without being annoying AF\).”](#)

If you email me or your teaching fellow the night before a deadline with a last minute request, please do not expect a response. It is important that you look at the assignments early to ensure we can answer any questions you may have in a timeframe that is useful to you. Longer questions – for example, those dealing with your performance in the course or substantive questions about the course material – are better asked in person. I will hold regular office hours on Mondays from 4-6pm throughout the semester, and appointments can also be made on an individual basis upon request. Your teaching fellows will also hold regularly scheduled office hours throughout the semester.

Policies on Incomplete Grades and Late Assignments

All five reading summaries are due to your teaching assistant by the last day of classes, December 7. I suggest you space these out throughout the semester, but this is up to you. The final paper is due December 15 at 5 pm. For every day the paper is late, you will lose a third of a letter grade. No papers will be accepted after December 20. Familiarize yourself with [Yale University’s policy on incomplete grades.](#)

Academic Integrity

Familiarize yourself with Yale University’s policy on academic integrity. In short, don’t turn in the same paper for two classes, don’t plagiarize someone else’s work, and don’t cheat on the in-class exam or other assignments. When in doubt, speak to me or your teaching assistant. To ensure that you do not accidentally violate Yale’s academic honesty policies, please review [Yale University’s Definitions of Plagiarism, Cheating, and Documentation of Sources.](#)

Reading and Lecture Schedule

The schedule is tentative and subject to change. Please have the assigned reading completed before class on the day for which it is listed in order to get the most out of the lectures.

August 29 – Course Introduction

August 31 – No lecture

September 3 – Labor Day

September 5 – Studying the Middle East: Definitions and Biases

Fromkin, David. “How the Modern Middle East Map Came to be Drawn.” *Smithsonian* (May 1991): 166-170.

Lockman, Zachary. *Contending visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*. Cambridge University Press, 2009. Read chapter 5.

Said, Edward. “Islam through Western Eyes.” *The Nation*, 26 April 1980.

September 10 – Colonial and Pre-Colonial Origins of the Modern Middle East

Gasper, Michael. “The Making of the Modern Middle East” in *The Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust: CQ Press, 2016. Pages 1-38.

Hudson, Michael. *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977. Read chapter 5, “The Legacy of Imperialism.”

September 12 – Independence

Gasper, Michael. “The Making of the Modern Middle East” in *The Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust: CQ Press, 2016. Pages 38-64.

September 17 – Nationalism and Other Ideologies

Hourani, Albert. *A History of the Arab Peoples*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002. Read chapters 24 and 25, “The Climax of Arabism” and “Arab Unity and Disunity.”

September 19 – The Arab-Israeli Conflict

MAP QUIZ in section

Tessler, Mark. “The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” in *The Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust: CQ Press, 2016. Pages 288-368.

September 24 – Authoritarianism I

Lust, Ellen. "Institutions and Governance" in *The Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust: CQ Press, 2016. Pages 160-204.

Bellin, Eva. 2004. "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Politics* 36:2, 139-157.

September 26 – Authoritarianism II: Monarchies

Anderson, Lisa. "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East." *Political Science Quarterly* 106, no. 1 (1991): 1-15.

Herb, Michael. "Princes and Parliaments in the Arab World." *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 367-384.

Suggested: Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia case studies in Lust textbook

October 1 – Authoritarianism III: Republics

Posusney, Marsha. "Multi-Party Elections in the Arab World: Institutional Engineering and Oppositional Strategies." *Studies in Comparative International Development*, vol. 36, no. 4, (December 2002): 34-62.

Thiel, Tobias. "The Middle East Despot's 13-Point Guide to Longevity and Prosperity." *Middle East Report*, no. 269, Winter 2013.

Suggested: Skim the Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen case studies in Lust textbook

October 3 – Authoritarianism IV: Repression and Political Control

Wedeen, Lisa. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, 1-34.

October 8 – Foreign Alliances + Foreign Interference *Guest lecture by Dr. Nicholas Lotito*

Bush, Sarah Sunn. "When and why is civil society support 'made-in-America'? Delegation to non-state actors in American democracy promotion." *The Review of International Organizations* 11.3 (2016): 361-385.

Hinnebusch, Raymond. "The US invasion of Iraq: Explanations and implications." *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 16.3 (2007): 209-228.

Lustick, Ian. "The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers: Political 'Backwardness' in Historical Perspective." *International Organization* 51 (Autumn 1997): 653-83.

October 10 – Review session

October 15 – In-class midterm

October 17-21 – Fall Break

October 22 – Economics, Oil & Politics I

Cammett, Melani and Ishac Diwan. “The Political Economy of Development in the Middle East” in *The Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust: CQ Press, 2016. Pages 106-159.

Mitchell, Timothy. “Carbon Democracy.” *Economy & Society* 38 (3, 2009), 399-432.

October 24 – Economics, Oil & Politics II

Kuran, Timur. *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Read chapter 2, “Analyzing the Economic Role of Islam.”

Ross, Michael. “Does oil hinder democracy?” *World Politics* 53:3 (2011), 325-361.

October 29 + 31 – Religion & Politics

Lee, Robert and Lihi Ben Shitrit. “Religion, Society, and Politics in the Middle East” in *The Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust: CQ Press, 2016. Pages 205-242.

Byman, Daniel. 2014. “Sectarianism Afflicts the New Middle East.” *Survival* 56:1, 79-100.

October 31 – Islamism

Nugent, Elizabeth R. “What do we mean by ‘Islamist’?” *The Washington Post* June 23, 2014.

Schwedler, Jillian. “Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis.” *World Politics* 63, no. 2 (April 2011): 347-376.

Cammett, Melani and Pauline Jones Luong. “Is There an Islamist Political Advantage?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 17(May and June 2014).

November 5 – Gender and Politics I

Abu-Lughod, Lila. “Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others.” *American Anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 783-790.

Masoud, Tarek, Amaney Jamal, and Elizabeth Nugent. “Using the Qur’an to Empower Arab Women? Theory and Experimental Evidence From Egypt.” *Comparative Political Studies* 49.12 (2016): 1555-1598.

Ross, Michael. "Oil, Islam and Women." *American Political Science Review* 102, 1 (February 2008): 107-123. Read pages 107-111, skim the rest.

November 7 – Gender and Politics II

Amar, Paul. "Middle East Masculinity Studies: Discourses of 'Men in Crisis,' Industries of Gender in Revolution." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1 November 2011; 7 (3): 36-70.

Amar, Paul, and Omnia El Shakry. "Introduction: Curiosities of Middle East studies in queer times." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45.2 (2013): 331-335.

Habib, Samar. "LGBT Activism in the Middle East." *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*.

November 12 – Participation I: Public Opinion

Clark, Janine A. and Lina Khatib. "Actors, Public Opinion, and Participation" in Ellen Lust in *The Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust: CQ Press, 2016. Pages 242-246.

Inglehart, Ronald, and Pippa Norris. "The True Clash of Civilizations." *Foreign Policy* March/April 2003: 67-74.

Tessler, Mark, "Islam and Democracy in the Middle East: The Impact of Religious Orientations on Attitudes toward Democracy in Four Arab Countries," *Comparative Politics* 34 (April 2002): 337-54.

November 14 – Participation II: Social Movements and Informal Participation

Final Paper Outline Due

Clark, Janine A. and Lina Khatib. "Actors, Public Opinion, and Participation" in Ellen Lust in *The Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust: CQ Press, 2016. Pages 248-282

Bayat, Asef. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010, 1-18.

November 18-25: Fall Break

November 26 – The 'Arab Spring' I

Pearlman, Wendy. "Emotions and the Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings." *Perspectives on Politics* 11(2) 2013: 387-409.

Patel, David, Valerie Bunce, and Sharon Wolchik. "Diffusion and Demonstration" in Marc Lynch.

Suggested: Anderson, Scott. "Fractured Lands: How the Arab World Came Apart," New York Times Magazine 10 August 2016.

November 28 – The ‘Arab Spring’ II

Review Essay Due

Beissinger, Mark, Amaney Jamal, and Kevin Mazur. "Explaining Divergent Revolutionary Coalitions: Regime Strategies and the Structuring of Participation in the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions," *Comparative Politics* (October 2015): 1-21.

Nugent, Elizabeth R., and Chantal E. Berman. "Ctrl-Alt-Revolt? Online and Offline Networks during the 2011 Egyptian Uprising." *Middle East Law and Governance* 10, no. 1 (2017): 59-90.

December 3 – The ‘Arab Spring’ III, or the Persistence of Authoritarianism

Bellin, Eva. "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics* 44 (January 2012): 127-149.

Brownlee, Jason, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, "Why the Modest Harvest?" *Journal of Democracy* 24 (October 2013): 29-44.

Gause, Gregory F. "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability" in *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2011).

December 5 – Final Class

December 14 – Final Paper Due