DISCOURSES AND DEBATES ON THE MIDDLE EAST

Course Instructors:
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Course assistant:
To be announced

Course Dates and Location
Start date: 3 September 2012
End date: 5 November 2012
Course days: Lectures, Mondays 14:00–17:00

N.B.: On some occasions the classes will take place on Mondays and Wednesdays (see the weekly schedule). Any additional changes to the schedule will be announced in due time.

Course Objective:
The course introduces the major debates on the Middle East in various social science disciplines, ranging from sociology and political science to anthropology and international relations, among others. The aim is to lay the conceptual and theoretical groundwork for a better understanding of the political and cultural dynamics of Middle Eastern societies. Particular emphasis will be laid in this context to the thorny relationship between Islam and the Middle East, the pros and cons of the discourse of ‘clash of civilizations’, debates on orientalism, secularization, modernization, nationalism, multiculturalism and minorities, globalization and securitization. The course concludes by discussing the relevance of the concepts and theories that guide these debates for understanding the contemporary Middle East.
Course Structure:
The course consists of mandatory lectures and written assignments. All students are expected to take an active part in discussions and complete the readings prior to the classes each week.

Course Grading and Assignments:
The specific assessment for each class component is as follows:

• Class Attendance (20%)
All classes are mandatory. Extraordinary personal or health reasons must be communicated to the course coordinator before the class.

• Pop Quizzes (40%)
There will be three pop quizzes (i.e. given without prior warning) during the course based on the readings assigned for each week.

• Final Paper(40%).
The papers will be submitted electronically to Umut Ozkirimli on 5 November 2012 at 17:00, and should be 7-10 pages long (double space, times new roman).

N.B.: Important note on plagiarism. The Oxford Dictionary defines plagiarism as ‘to take and use as one’s own the thoughts, writings, or inventions of another’. All of the following are considered plagiarism: turning in someone else’s work as your own; copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit; failing to put a quotation in quotation marks; giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation; changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit; and copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not. Please note that plagiarism is considered as an act of ‘fraud’ in most countries and may lead to various preventive measures including, in severe cases, expulsion. Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism.

**Course Schedule and Readings**

All students are expected to complete the Preliminary Reading List before the start of the course. See below for weekly reading assignments.


**WEEK 1 – LECTURE 1 (3 September 2012)**

Introduction (Umut Ozkirimli - Mark Levine?)

**Key Issues and Questions:**
A general introduction to the course and the themes that will be covered in the following weeks; information on the structure and format of the lectures, the instructors and their expertise, assessment and grading; overview of the rationale for the course and its goals and objectives. A preliminary, ‘interactive’, discussion on the Middle East based on the Preliminary Reading List.

**Required Reading:**
Preliminary reading list

**WEEK 2 – LECTURE 2 (10 September 2012)**

Orientalism and its detractors: framing the study of Islam (Umut Ozkirimli - Mark Levine?)

**Key Issues and Questions:**
What is ‘orientalism’? Is there a ‘Muslim’ mind, shaping the evolution of Muslim societies? Can Muslim societies be explained by reference to some essential characteristics of Islam? Is politics a function of culture and religion? Are Muslim societies homogeneous? What is the impact of orientalist discourses on (foreign) policy-making? Do postmodernist accounts provide a working alternative to orientalism? Is there a binary opposition between the ‘West’ and the Muslim world? How can the field of postcolonial studies contribute to the debates on orientalism? How can we explain the rise of Islamism in what some call a ‘post-orientalist’ age?

**Required Readings:**


WEEK 3 (17 September 2012)
Reading week

WEEK 4 – LECTURE 3 (24 September 2012)
Islam, nationalism and the Middle East: Critical reflections (Umut Ozkirimli)

Key Issues and Questions:
How can we explain the lack of interest in Islam in the field of nationalism studies? Why do we think of the Arab world or the Middle East when we talk of ‘Islam and nationalism’? Is the Middle East an exception so far as the relation between Islam and nationalism is concerned? What do we mean by ‘Arab nationalism’? What is the link between pan-Arab nationalism and nationalism in particular Arab countries? Is there a future for Arab unity?

Required Reading:

WEEK 5 – LECTURE 4 (1 October 2012)
Islam, the Middle East and international relations: a ‘clash of civilizations’? (Spyros A. Sofos)

Key Issues and Questions:
How can religion be incorporated into the study of international relations? Is there a need for rethinking international relations after 9/11? Is international relations theory inherently Eurocentric? How does area studies fit into this picture? Is there such a thing as ‘political Islam’? Is there an ‘Islamic’ state? How can we make sense of the transnational reconfiguration of Islam? What is the role of (political?) Islam in foreign policy-making? Is there a ‘clash of civilizations’ between Islam and other cultures?

Required Reading:
WEEK 5 – LECTURE 5 (3 October 2012)

The Sociology of Religion: the secularization thesis and the ‘return’ of Islam (Spyros A. Sofos)

Key Issues and Questions:
What does the ‘secularization thesis’ claim? What is the relationship between secularization and modernization? Is religion an impediment to the proper functioning of a modern state? Do the processes of modernization and secularization observed in Europe constitute a template for the rest of the world? What does ‘Islamic Reformation’ imply? Can we talk of a ‘desecularization’ process? How does Islam redefine itself in secular democratic settings?

Required Reading:


Lawrence, Bruce, Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995, Chapters 1, 4 and 8.

**WEEK 7 – LECTURE 6 (15 October 2012)**

Multiculturalism and Islam: the question of minorities (Umut Ozkirimli - Spyros A. Sofos)

**Key Issues and Questions:**
Why are debates on multiculturalism in Europe restricted to the question of Islam and the presence of Muslim communities? Does Islam pose a threat to ‘Western’ ways of life? What is ‘Islamophobia’ and how can we deal with it? Are policies of integration and/or assimilation viable solutions? How can we strike a balance between the values of coexistence and diversity? How could we make sense of the role of diasporic communities? Can we talk of a reconfiguration of religiosity in Western settings?

**Required Reading:**


**WEEK 8 (22 October 2012)**

Reading week

**WEEK 9 – LECTURE 7 (29 October 2012)**

The Middle East and Islam in Security Studies: the implications of 9/11 (Spyros A. Sofos)

**Key Issues and Questions:**
How did 9/11 contribute to the securitization of Islam? Is there a link between terrorism and (political?) Islam? Is Islam prone to violence? Can we talk about an Islamic challenge to global security? What are the root causes of terror and violence, Islamic or otherwise? How can we approach ‘state violence’?

**Required Reading:**

Hoffman, Bruce, ”’Holy Terror’: The Implications of Terrorism Motivated by a Religious
WEEK 9 – LECTURE 8 (31 October 2012)

Islam and the debates on globalization: is there a ‘global ummah’? (Spyros A. Sofos)

Key Issues and Questions:
How does globalization affect Islam in the Middle East and the Western world? Does globalization lead to a reconfiguration of public spheres and social networks? Can we talk about the formation of a ‘global ummah’ as Olivier Roy argued? Is fundamentalism a reaction to globalization? Are there similarities between Islamist movements and anti-globalization movements?

Required Reading:
Allievi, Stefano and Joergen Nielsen (eds), Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe, 2003, Leiden: Brill, Chapters 1 and 12.


WEEK 10 – LECTURE 9 (5 November 2012)

Taking stock: how to study Islam and the Middle East? (Umut Ozkirimli)

Key Issues and Questions:
A general assessment of the course.