Center for Middle East Studies

The Center for Middle East Studies (CMES) at Brown University promotes greater understanding of the cultural, social, and political dynamics that have impacted and continue to impact the Middle East and the people who inhabit it. MES seeks to increase knowledge and informed discussion of the region and its societies through research, teaching, and public engagement.

Since 2012, Middle East Studies has grown from an undergraduate concentration into one of the top centers in the country. Eschewing the hothouse legacy structures of the conventional Oriental and Area Studies models, CMES is driven by thematic research initiatives that tap into Brown’s tradition of interdisciplinary, critical, and engaged scholarship. Organized through partnerships, CMES seeks to integrate Middle East and Islamic Studies into the larger streams of intellectual life at Brown University by building a cutting-edge research community, producing innovative programming, and offering an exciting array of courses and opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students.

For more information please visit: http://middleeastbrown.org (http://middleeastbrown.org/)

Middle East Studies Concentration Requirements

The concentration in Middle East Studies (MES) seeks to build a strong, interdisciplinary understanding of historical and contemporary issues within the Middle East, broadly defined. Requirements are intentionally flexible to accommodate the focused interests of students in understanding the diverse dynamics, histories, and societies of this region. A variety of courses from departments across the University, addressing subjects from antiquity to the present day, expose students to methods and materials of different disciplines and help them build a framework for understanding the Middle East in historical and contemporary context. Concentration requirements are structured around four major cornerstones: language, foundational knowledge and methods, multidisciplinary area studies, and research.

A semester-by-semester roster of courses eligible for MES elective credit can be found on the Center for Middle East Studies (http://middleeastbrown.org/) website.

Standard Program for the AB Degree

Foundational Courses: All MES concentrators are expected to take both of the following foundational courses. It is recommended that students take the first foundational course (MES 0100: The Middle East: Cultures and Societies—offered every spring) before taking the second foundational course (MES 1968: Approaches to the Middle East—offered every fall). Foundational course requirements cannot be fulfilled via independent study, study abroad, or transfer credits.

- MES 0100 The Middle East: Cultures & Societies
- MES 1968 Approaches to the Middle East (HIST 1968A)

Electives: Students must take at least five elective courses chosen in consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) from among the courses listed by MES as approved electives on its website (https://watson.brown.edu/cmes/academics/undergraduate-concentration/course-listing/all-courses). Students may apply up to two Middle Eastern language credits (beyond those that fulfill the language requirement: see below) to the MES electives requirement. To allow for exposure of different disciplinary approaches to the Middle East, students must take at least one course in the humanities (offered within the departments of Archaeology and the Ancient World, Classics, Comparative Literature, History of Art and Architecture, Modern Culture and Media, Philosophy, or Religious Studies) and at least one course in the social sciences (offered within the departments of Anthropology, History, International Relations, Political Science, Sociology, or Urban Studies). Some examples of recent courses that would fulfill these requirements include:

- CLAS 0660 The World of Byzantium
- HIAA 0041 The Architectures of Islam
- RELS 0088 Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Social Sciences:

- ANTH 1150 Middle East in Anthropological Perspective
- HIST 0244 Understanding the Middle East: 1800s to the Present
- POLS 1822I Geopolitics of Oil and Energy
- SOC 1871L Migration, Displacement and Emerging Community Experiences: Contemporary Turkey

- URBN 1870K Jerusalem Divided: Politics and Cultural Heritage

Language Semesters: Middle East Studies concentrators are expected to achieve basic competence in at least one of the modern Middle Eastern languages, such as Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, or Turkish. This entails the completion of at least four semesters of Brown language coursework in one of these languages, or the equivalent through transfer or study abroad credits. Students who surpass the language requirement can apply up to two Middle Eastern language credits toward the MES elective requirements (see above). Students who have reached proficiency in a Middle Eastern language but have not received four credits at Brown (including transfer and/or study abroad credits) can fulfill this requirement:

• Through advanced reading and writing courses in that language. Recent examples include:
  - COLT 1310J The Arab Renaissance
  - COLT 1431B Modern Arabic Poetry

• Through taking courses in a second Middle Eastern language.

• Or through courses in a non–Middle Eastern language to be used in a senior capstone project (for example, Spanish for the study of Andalucía or French for the study of North Africa).
Capstone/Honors Project: MES requires all concentrators to conduct a capstone project within their senior year (i.e., in their last two semesters before graduation). The purpose of the capstone is to synthesize and apply the skills and knowledge that MES concentrators have acquired through the MES curriculum—including disciplinary perspectives, methodological and theoretical approaches, background in the historical and contemporary dynamics of the region, and language competency—to particular interests developed through the concentration. Capstones offer students the opportunity to integrate and build upon their experiences within the concentration, while demonstrating intellectual creativity, research skills, and effective communication, and should serve in some sense as a culmination of or reflection on what one has gained in the concentration. All students are expected to present their capstone research in the final semester before graduation.

Presentations of honors theses will be approximately twenty minutes long, and those of non-honors capstone projects will be approximately ten minutes long, both followed by a question-and-answer session. Capstone projects must fulfill the following requirements:

- Must be taken in the final two semesters before graduation (excluding summer and winter sessions)
- Must incorporate research in a Middle Eastern language
- Must be approved or overseen by a MES or MES-affiliated faculty member.
- Must be presented in the final semester before graduation.

Capstones can take one of three forms:

a. A Middle East–focused research paper of at least 20 pages for an existing concentration-eligible (MES-coded or X-Listed) course, undertaken with the permission and supervision of the instructor.

b. An independent study or project (artistic, research, or otherwise), approved by the DUS and supervised by at least one faculty member for at least one semester under the MES 1970 - Independent Study designation.

c. A two-semester honors thesis, completed under the supervision of a primary reader (who is an MES or MES-affiliated faculty member) and a secondary reader (who can be from other Brown departments and programs), and in coordination with the DUS.

Study Abroad

Concentrators may apply up to two courses per semester of study abroad toward their MES concentration requirements, with a maximum of four courses (for two semesters abroad). Students must meet with their advisors and have them sign off on their specific course selections prior to embarking upon their program. Study abroad transfer credits may only be applied toward fulfilling elective and language requirements. Study abroad transfer credit may not be used to fulfill foundational course requirements.

Dual Concentrators

Middle East Studies concentrators may apply up to two courses that fulfill MES concentration requirements toward fulfilling the requirements of another concentration. Language courses do not count toward this two-course limit on overlapping courses.

Honors

To be eligible for honors, students will have earned an ‘A’ (or ‘S’ with distinction) in the majority of courses for the concentration. Two semesters of Independent Study towards the Honors Thesis (MES 1970) with the thesis advisor are required. This is typically done during senior year and will raise the total number of required courses to 13.

Courses

** MES 0100. The Middle East: Cultures & Societies.**

This course highlights major cultural, social, and political developments in the amorphous region known, since the 20th century, as the Middle East. By covering expanses of space and time, this course attends to a diversity of peoples and polities, and considers different regional concepts that include some or all of the territories normally included in the Middle East (including the Fertile Crescent, the Mediterranean world, the Indian Ocean world, the Arab world, and the Muslim world) and addresses the region’s coherence in terms of shared historical and political experiences, religious and cultural references or practices, and/or socialities and ways of being.

** MES 0155. Cultures of the Contemporary Middle East.**

In our exploration of Middle Eastern social movements, this course addresses the role of culture and art in social change; the relationship between faith and politics; as well as the impact of national, regional, and transnational discourses on identity, ethics, and citizenship. The study of social movements in the region will address the impact of technology, media, women’s rights and LGBT movements, as well as economic liberalization, entrepreneurship, and the politics of oil. Finally, we will trace the emergence and consequences of the “Arab Spring.”

** MES 0165. How Did We Get Here: Middle East City from Antiquity to the Present.**

This course examines the origins, evolutions, and radical transformations of Middle Eastern cities. By combining essential and original texts in religion, law, and politics with studies of architectural form and urban morphology we explore the cultural significance and ethical claims from historically situated cities. From the ancient Levantine household to the contemporary Gulf megalopolis, the study of Middle Eastern cities. By combining essential and original texts in religion, law, and politics with studies of architectural form and urban morphology we explore the cultural significance and ethical claims from historically situated cities. From the ancient Levantine household to the contemporary Gulf megalopolis, analysis of the relationships between subtle and articulated cultural meanings and corresponding concrete architectural embodiments reveals rich depth in each case. While we might see ancient hierarchies long buried by modernity’s desire for a capitalist city, our analysis shows they are very much alive and struggling.

** MES 0170. Visual Expressions of Social Change in the Contemporary Middle East.**

This course explores the relationship between the visual arts and social change in the contemporary Middle East. With a specific focus on visual art, architecture and cinema we examine how visual creativity expresses the desires of social and political groupings and, existing within historic traditions, give form and shape to larger social-political movements across the area. From the 20th century, we see the intertwining religious, political, and social movements, large and small, nationalist and separatist, embodied in visual expressions. This interdisciplinary course will uncover the iconographic origins of contemporary art to understand how visual expressions convey meanings in shaping our world.
MES 0750. Forced Displacement: History, Ecologies and Impacts. Course covers the basis, processes and consequences of forced displacement in an interdisciplinary and historical perspective. Forced displacement is unintended mobility of humans in large groups who move out of their place of origin for extended periods or often permanently. It has played a vital role in shaping our modern world. Drivers of forced displacement have persisted while others subsided. Wars, religious persecution and targeting of specific ethnic groups displace millions annually. Forced displacement is implicated in the creation of nation states, altering group identities and organizing people, and the responses of the host community, the state and wider world.

MES 0825. From Blind Owls to Mute Dreams: A Introduction to Modern Iranian Literature (in translation). This is a survey of the modern Persian literature of Iran (in translation) for students who have little to no background in the topic. Starting in the early twentieth century and continuing until the present day, we will examine the major themes and aesthetic techniques of some of the most important writers who have shaped modern Persian literature throughout the twentieth century, paying significant attention to the socio-political context and formal characteristics of texts. Prose-fiction (novels and short stories) will be the focus, also read a number of poems, essays and memoirs. All readings will be available in English translation.

MES 0850. The Wall, the Drone and the Tunnel-Theaters of Sovereignty and Resistance. Israel/Palestine is a site for experimenting with technologies of security and warfare, including those serving resistance and insurgency. The seminar examines three technologies: drones used for collecting intelligence and “targeted killings;” heavily surveilled separation walls used to enforce a strict regime of movement; tunnels used by insurgency forces for undercover movement. We will study these technologies’ modes of operation; the discourse that represent and justifies their actual deployment; the local and global economy of violence in which they are embedded; the system of state sovereignty which they enable or undermine; and the political regime which they help reproduce or destabilize.

MES 0950. Cultures, Societies and Resistance in the Arab World. This course examines the manifestations of counter-hegemony, resistance and dissent in the Middle East and North Africa. It studies the ways in which dominant forms are countered in cultural production and every day cultural practices, analyzing how subcultures, social movements and individuals have negotiated with, subverted and resisted these forms of social and political hegemones through the use of art forms such as writing, poetry, music, political film, political posters and pamphlets, performance art and public art and the mixed outcomes of many of these struggles. The readings cover major issues in cultural theory, cultural sociology, cultural studies.

MES 1000. Tradition and Protest: Persian and Iranian Music. Examines Persian and Iranian musical approaches to tradition and protest. First half focuses on traditional Iranian music. Students will learn the basic cultural and musical traditions underpinning Persian/Iranian musical styles. Through directed reading and listening, and occasional in-class performance by the instructor, students will learn the primary characteristics of Iran's classical music traditions and instruments; relevant musical concepts and terminology, and develop critical listening skills. Second half examines how modern Iranian musicians are disrupting these traditional concepts as a form of protest, making the music relevant to modern listeners while fundamentally changing conceptions of classical poetry in the process.

MES 1001. Revolution and Poets: Content and Form in Iranian Poetry. Explains classical rules of Persian poetry and development of poetic content by several different modern Iranian poets. Examines how modern poets such as Shamlou, Akhavan, and Forough have been influenced by Nima Yooshij, the father of modern poetry in Iran. We will explore different formalist approaches to poetry in Iran from the 1960's to present, and examine various literary movements and their relation to the Islamic Revolution and post revolutionary context. We will examine the new postmodern poets from the 1990's to present and the ways in which classical form is repurposed to achieve social commentary in subversive ways.

MES 1050. Israel/Palestine: A Critical Lexicon. This is an introductory course to the question of Israel/Palestine. The course uses a series of alphabetically ordered and carefully selected concepts as a way to cut through the dense history of the region and the conflicting forces that shape its present. From "Colonialism" to "Zionism", each concept will be surveyed with respect to its history, the pattern of its present usages, the discursive formations to which it belongs, and its political impact, taking into account the inevitable, conflicting ideological biases and discursive constraints of the many kinds of knowledge about Israel/Palestine.

MES 1055. Zionism and some of its Jewish Critics: Political, Philosophical, and Theological Perspectives. Zionism is an idea, an ideology, a national movement that sought to solve "the Jewish question" in Europe, a political project that morphed into a political regime, a mighty colonial force, a form of Jewish secularization and an engine for religious revival. As such Zionism has been accompanied with criticism from its inception. The first part of the seminar will study of Zionism through the eyes of some of the major thinkers who shaped its ideology and practices. The second part will look at Zionism through the eyes of some of its (more and less sympathetic) Jewish critics.

MES 1120. Art, Culture, and Society in Tehran. This course explores the city as physical and metaphorical space and aggregator of possibilities. It focuses on Tehran, in its historical, geographical, artistic and virtual specificity, and artists who have lived there, including: Kamal-ai-molk (and his followers in the early twentieth century; artists associated with Saqqakhaneh (modern school of art) at mid-twentieth-century, artists of the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s and 1990s, and contemporary urban and transnational artists. By examining urban participation, aesthetics, and politics in Tehran across more than a century, the course provokes critical reflection on experience and representations of urban space, citizenry and creativity.

MES 1150. Labor and the Long Downturn in the Middle East. This course examines the question of labor in the contemporary Middle East. The 1970s saw a global economy defined increasingly by deindustrialization, intensified competition, financialization, and squeezes on profitability. For workers, these changes meant that technological development, agrarian change, debt, and increasing precarity have transformed who works, where they work, and the sorts of politics that work (or its absence) gives rise to. This course examines these wider concerns within the context of the Middle East. Through a focus on social history and ethnographic accounts, it illuminates the ways different groups of workers experience and grapple with these broader transformations.

MES 1151. Middle East in Anthropological Perspective (ANTH 1150). Interested students must register for ANTH 1150.

MES 1170. Iranian Art: Sites and Sights. This course introduces students to the modern and contemporary history of art in Iran, including architecture, visual art, cinema, theatre, and politics. It starts with the transition from the Qajar period (1781-1925) and its visual culture to the modern 20th-century nation-state, addressing processes of urbanization; spread of modern technologies; revolutionary sentiment of 1979; displacement and formation of diasporic communities after the Islamic revolution; and the emergence of Internet technology in the 21st century. This historical backdrop informs investigation into artistic milieus, platforms, and the ever-changing notion of creativity. Course readings consist of excerpts from primary sources in addition to textbook assignments.
Over the last two decades negative perceptions, conceptions, and
treatment of Jews, and the effort to preempt and suppress them have
been marked by fierce debates about “antisemitism.” Everything about the
term – what it designates, its historical, theological, and scientific origins,
its current targets, how to trace and fight it, and its relation to racism,
colonialism and anti-colonial struggles, anti-Zionism, and Islamophobia –
is disputed among scholars, educators, and political actors; creating
odd alliances and dividing old communities. The seminar offers a study
of contemporary antisemitism in the context of these debates and their
historical background, theoretical presuppositions, and political stakes.

The course examines visual politics in contemporary MiddleEastern
society and grapples with fundamental debates in the study of cultural
politics and visual cultures of the Arab region in a global context. We
will contextualise the region’s contemporary visual cultures within
wider debates and scholarship on the construction of subjectivities, the
distribution of power, the formation of identity and belonging, and culture
and representation. Emphasis is on translation and reception in a global
context and transnational frame by focusing on how states and security,
conflicts and displacements, social movements and revolution, aesthetics,
art and global media are linked, characterized, analyzed.

MES 1222. Modern Palestinian History.
This course examines the origins of one of the longest running and most
significant settler colonial realities in modern history. It explores social
dynamics in late-Ottoman Palestine; the birth of the Zionist movement;
the establishment of British imperial rule; the Palestinian revolt of 1936-39; the
1948 Nakba; the creation of the state of Israel; the dispossession of the
Palestinian refugees; and the 1967 occupation and its aftermath. Students
will consider questions of social, demographic, and cultural transformation
as well as political dynamics. Using a range of primary sources, they will
reflect upon the period in question on its own terms and search for the
voices of its protagonists. This subject has attracted lively debate and
contributed to major theoretical approaches such as post-colonialism and
comparative settler-colonial studies. The course will engage these
approaches and major historiographical debates in the field.

MES 1235. Policing and Imprisonment in the Modern Middle East.
Policing figured prominently in recent events, from the self-immolation
of Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi to the rise of the Islamic
State. Repressive regimes relied heavily on police, prisons, and criminal
law to maintain power and authority. This course examines recent
uprisings and ongoing conflicts, and questions of state and non-state
violence. Major topics are: the role of Islam in law and criminal justice;
the imposition of European colonial rule; the rise of police states; the
production and maintenance of a gendered social order; non-state and
informal mechanisms of maintaining “law and order”; and the role of law
and security.

MES 1240. Middle East as Global History: Comparing and Connecting
Theories and Approaches.
This seminar explores a global history perspective to the Middle East and
a Middle Eastern perspective to global history since the late eighteenth
century to the twentieth century and beyond. This is a time in which
shifting global orderings and ties between regions of the world become
reconfigured around newly visible, large-scale processes and shifting
flows of power: statesmen, thinkers, revolutions, war and migration render
themselves to new forms of global imagination beyond imperialism and
colonialism. The seminar intends to provide a rich expose on new trends in
history writing focus on global history and transnational perspectives.

“Palestine-Israel” is a name designating a territory between the east
shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. In addition to
the two national movements that fight over this territory, the Jewish
(Zionist) and the Palestinian, this land is a matter of on-going engagement,
investment, and entanglement for foreign powers, religious orders, and
international organizations. This course will introduce main aspects of
this ongoing struggle, its history, and its recurring patterns. Each of these
perspectives will be part of what needs to be narrated and explained, not
imposed as a framework for the narrative and the explanation at stake.

MES 1244. Orientalism and the Question of Palestine: Theory, History,
Literature.
Edward Said’s ground breaking work, Orientalism, was published in 1978
and soon became a founding moment for the field of postcolonial theory
and a pivotal point of return within it. A year later, Said published The
Question of Palestine. This was one of the first comprehensive accounts
of the Palestinian condition as a stateless nation. The book’s explicit
goal was to present the Palestinian story and cause to an American and
European audience, with a special effort to reach out to Jewish American
intellectuals. The seminar first task will be to highlight and explore explicit
and tacit links and divergences between the two books. The goal is to
identify two, not entirely compatible frames for studying “Palestine,” as
a piece of land, a homeland, and above all a set of historically changing
conditions of Jewish-Palestinian co-existence and co-habitation.

This seminar seeks to achieve three interrelated goals: to introduce
students to the condition of statelessness experienced by two ethnic
groups in the Middle East, the Kurdish and Palestinian peoples; to
examine the contours and potency of, and the problematics associated
with, the concept of statelessness; and to offer the production and
management of statelessness as a viable perspective for the study of the
modern Middle East. We look for analogies and distinctions between the
two cases, and qualify and multiply the condition of statelessness for each,
guided by categories of Nation, State, Nationalism, Colonization, Settler
Colonialism, Citizenship, and Precariously.

MES 1265. Culture and Politics in the Modern Middle East.
This seminar examines the various cultural and artistic manifestations of
protesting histories of violence in the Middle East. By studying the ways
in which dominant understandings are countered in cultural production
and everyday cultural practices, it will analyse how collective and personal
memories have been appropriated by artists, writers and filmmakers
throughout the region to protest social and political hegemonies. The
readings cover major issues in cultural theory, cultural sociology, cultural
studies and visual cultures. The seminar will theorize themes such as the
aesthetics of resistance, memory, dissensus, social movements and global
culture through specific case studies.

MES 1270. Histories of Watching and Surveying.
How are surveillance practices historically embedded in social fabric?
How have surveillance technologies altered social life throughout history?
This course explores these questions by mapping the complex ways that
technologies and societies interact to produce security, fear, control, and
vulnerability. Some of the areas covered include close-circuit television
(CCTV) in public and quasi-public spaces, biometric technologies on the
border, and a host of monitoring technologies in cyberspaces, workplaces,
and the home. Readings are drawn from the critical theories in visual
culture, science-fiction, and popular media.

MES 1290. War and Cultural Representation in the Modern Middle East.
This is an overview of contemporary Arabic and Persian literatures and
cinemas through war in literature and film originating from the Eastern
Arab World, Iran and Afghanistan. Using contemporary works of prose
fiction, poetry and film, we interrogate the various ways in which the
people of the region have grappled, through literature and film, with
some of the most brutal conflicts that the world has witnessed in the late
twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. We will explore the Lebanese
Civil War, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq since
1991, Afghanistan since 1979 and the current Syrian Civil War. While
this course is open all students it is especially geared towards students
concentrating in MES and who have upper-level reading/ translations
ability in Persian or Arabic. Students at the advanced language level will
do translation in lieu of a second paper.
In 2016, UNESCO's director-general stated: “The heritage of Jerusalem is indivisible, and each of its communities has a right to the explicit recognition of their history and relationship with the city. To deny, conceal or erase any of the Jewish, Christian, or Muslim traditions, undermines the integrity of the site, and runs counter to the reasons that justified its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage list.” This reflects the reality of Jerusalem’s Old City’s intertwined historical, cultural, and religious legacies, but does not address the geopolitical conflict, in which ideological and territorial claims produce diverging heritage narratives. This seminar examines how Israeli, Palestinian, and international interests shape competing heritage narratives. It explores archaeological exploration, discovery, and interpretation in Jerusalem in the contexts of social, political, and religious debates from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, emphasizing its urban landscape.

MES 1299. Rural Palestine: Natives, Peasants, and Revolutionaries.
This course looks at how the inhabitants of rural Palestine were seen (and saw themselves) as natives, peasants, and revolutionaries. Over the 19th and 20th centuries, rural Palestine was understood as both isolated and globalized; timeless and transforming; unchangeable and critically vulnerable to forces of modernity. The native, the peasant, and the revolutionary emerged as different actors—European missionaries and Palestinian activists, international NGOs and local cooperatives, village cultivators and urban CEOs, seed banks and financial banks—drawn on rural practices, knowledges, and histories. How, then, does the rural past become the basis for claims on, and struggles for, Palestine’s future?

MES 1300. Intellectual Change: From Ottoman Modernization to the Turkish Republic.
A critical survey of Ottoman intellectual history in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Modernization, formation of the modern state and issues of nationalism and other ideologies of the time form the main framework, analyzing their political, social and cultural impact on intellectual production in the Ottoman Empire and through the making of Republican Turkey. It is a history of mentalities organized around thematic/chronological modules, each representing a set of concepts, ideas, movements as well as facts and problems, which will be compared to the larger world of modern state formation both in thought and practice.

MES 1301. Interventions and Activism in the Contemporary Middle East.
It is not uncommon to hear simplifying perspectives when it comes to analyses of politics and everyday lives of people in the Middle East. Instead of reducing lived experiences into binary categorizations (success or failure, authoritarian or democratic), this course examines the intricate relations between top-down political decisions, interventions and bottom-up resistance movements. It raises questions about the connections among economy, crises, democracy, and humanitarianism, and introduces diverse stories and perspectives. Using comparative historical and social scientific analysis, we will discuss topics ranging from struggles against colonial containment to the role of urban movements in social change; from the impacts of Global North-induced crises on Islamic mobilization to the use of humanitarianism as a governance tool; from LGBTQ+ movements to artistic and digital unrest; and from “Arab” Spring to the intersectionality of struggles across identities.

MES 1350. Israel/Palestine: The One State Condition.
This course follows the formation and transformation of the Israeli Regime, since its inception in the last years of the British Mandate in Palestine. At the theoretical level, we shall explore the difference between State and regime, ask what is a political regime, how to classify types of regimes and how to determine the regime of any given state. At the historical level we shall reconstruct and question the structural transformations and continuities of the Israeli regime, giving special attention to the impact of Palestinians’ civic status and almost half a century of “occupation” of Palestinian territories.

MES 1400. The Middle East in Berlin: Urban Spaces and Voices.
This seminar explores the physical and human landscapes of post-war Berlin: its steadily expanding urban fabric and how it engages with the rapidly changing population make-up. The focus will be on the tension between past and present histories, new German identities, the recent massive migrations, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and how these social and geopolitical phenomena interact with the city’s urban spaces and monuments. As case studies we will explore the relationship among Germans and three other significant communities: Turks, Israelis, and Palestinians.

MES 1450. The Archival of Gestures.
Often people think about archives as static spaces. How to develop a gestural archive able to translate instances and desires of justice? This course provides students with a theoretical and practical background on the archival of gestures in performance and the role that artists-archivists can play in contributing to change through exploring and problematizing social and political memories. We explore how Arab artists have sought and investigated this role after the “Arab Spring” and of civil disobedience against Arab regimes. We then look closely at a series of performance works, by Arab, Israeli and international artists. No dance experience required.

The phenomenon generally referred to in Arabic as the Palestinian Revolution (al-Thawra al-Filastiniya) was momentous by any standard. Unfolding over several decades between 1948 and 1982, it had profound implications for the history of Palestine, the Middle East, and global anti-colonialism. Traditionally, it is studied using top-down state, diplomatic and military themes in history and politics. In contrast, this course focuses on the grassroots level, approaching Palestinian revolutionary narratives as subjects, rather than objects, of politics and history. While taking account of the role of external historical forces, the focus here is on Palestinian popular structures, movements, cadres, philosophies, feminist initiatives, songs, poetry, art, tactics, and strategies. As such, the course explores the development of collective agency, political production, and active engagement with history. It also addresses transnational connections that bound the Palestinian revolution with other anti-colonial struggles and solidarity movements worldwide.

This course approaches multiple aspects of otherness by examining major sites where the work of “othering” takes place: debates relating to the “Jewishness” of the Jewish State; the legal and theological debates over the question who is a Jew; immigration and naturalization law; the “Jewishness” of the Jewish State; the legal and theological debates over the question who is a Jew; immigration and naturalization law; the regulation of marriage, burial, and religious conversion, and the recent racialization of non-Jewish aliens. The course materials are drawn from Zionist thinkers, legal documents, news items and analyses, and academic studies, as well as from literary and cinematic works. Students may concentrate on the more theoretical texts, the legal documents, or the literary and cinematic works.

MES 1650. The Pen and the Gun: Literature and the Political Body.
This course will examine the sphere and influence of literature and film as vehicles of expression and memory reconstruction during and following periods of dictatorship. We will explore themes such as history and/as fiction, the structuring of truth and national narrative, the intersection of human rights and medicine, and discourse of the nation as a body. Taking a transnational and cross regional approach, we will include prominent writers from Latin America (with a focus on the political ‘disappearances’ of the 1970’s), Africa (post-colonial and civil war texts), and the Middle East (writing of, within, and through the Arab Spring).

MES 1968. Approaches to the Middle East (HIST 1968A).
Interested students must register for HIST 1968A.

Limited to juniors and seniors. Section numbers vary by instructor. Please check Banner for the correct section and CRN to use when registering for this course. Required: all proposals for independent study must be approved by the faculty sponsor and the MES program director. Students should not register for any section of MES 1970 without this approval.
MES 1997A. Islam and Human Rights
Are Islam and human rights compatible? Both human rights and Islam raise universal claims that may conflict in some cases. We will consider various attempts by religious and legal theorists to reconcile these claims through reinterpretation, or deriving human rights from Islamic sources. We will explore the practical side of these issues by examining issues that the Middle East has raised. We will pay special attention to the status of women and non-Muslim minorities. We will examine tensions arising from Muslims living in Europe and N. America, such as recent debates over secularism and religion, multiculturalism and the scope of tolerance.

MES 1997B. Visualizing the Middle East
How has the capacity to visualize been both an enabling and limiting condition in relation to the post-colonial production of knowledge in the Middle East? The act of seeing is taken up in its practical dimension in the ways that it requires one to pay attention to the cultural and historical specifity of mechanisms of visibility and modes of representation. Through readings and discussions, we will take heed of the following questions: What is allowed to be seen? By whom? Under what circumstances? How is the visible structured?

MES 1997C. Ethnographic Perspectives of Islam: Tradition, Religiosity and Modernity
Media coverage presents two ways of thinking and approaching modern Islam. One assumes Islam to be an entire way of life and single set of religious beliefs with compulsive adherence to the Quran and the Prophetic Sunna. The other reduces Islam to a set of essentialist principles, rules and spiritual values that even many Muslims have trouble grasping.

Recent anthropological scholarship makes every-day practical interpretations, practices and living social relationships central towards understanding Islam. This class will explore socio-historical and cultural specificities by which Muslims grapple with their faith, and how they shape these resources into everyday beliefs and practices.

MES 1997D. The Politics of Heritage, Tradition and Culture in the Middle East
Western media has pervasively portrayed the Middle East as “a-historical”, “timeless”, or “Other” that is beyond the logic of modern time. Simultaneously, it is also considered the cradle of “Western Civilization” where vital elements of “world” patrimony may be traced. But how do those who inhabit the region relate to their past and what are the various ways by which it discourses are drawn upon to embody different socio-political and ethical life-worlds? This course explores recent texts on heritage and memory while offering insights of ways in which modalities of history and memory have shaped the postcolonial dynamics of this region.

MES 1998. The Arab Spring
The Middle East has witnessed significant socio-cultural, political, and economic transformations in recent decades. This seminar will explore the role of both state and non-state actors in these processes. In the face of globalization, liberalization, democratization, conflicts, and regional instability, what social movements have emerged and in what specific contexts? Additionally, how have civil society, mass media, global discourses, and Islamist groups and ideologies shaped the contemporary reality? What are the prospects for security, prosperity, and pluralism in the region? These are central questions we will attempt to address in this course.
MES 1999. Arab Youth: Movements, Cultures, and Discourses.
"Youth" has become a central social concept in the contemporary global economy. In the wake of 9/11, the discussion of "youth" in the Arab world became a global priority. This course takes an anthropological and sociological approach to studying youth. Why has "youth" become a focus of concern now? How does this shape our thinking about social, economic, political, and historical issues in the Arab world, and what issues does it obscure? The course examines the historical emergence and transformation of categories of "youth," "teen" and "adolescent" in the contexts of capitalist industrialization, nationalism, postcolonialism, state formation and globalization. Enrollment limited to 20.

MES 1999A. Cultures of Neoliberalism in the Middle East.
The course focuses on debates in the social sciences in the Arab world around contradictions of the cultures of neoliberalization in contemporary Arab culture(s), society (ies) and economy (ies). We will explore the relevance of neoliberalism to the increasing relevance of consumption and consumerism, for citizens and scholars alike, in shaping selfhood, society, identity and even epistemic reality, the concomitant eclipse of such modernist categories as social classes, the burgeoning importance of generation, ethnicity, gender, identity and social movements. Also covered, the relation of political Islam to neoliberalism, and the rise of labour migration in/out of the Arab world.

MES 1999B. Colonialism and Human Rights.
Are anti-colonial struggles human rights struggles? Is emancipation the objective of these struggles? Where and when do anti-colonial and human rights discourses converge and diverge? What is the role of violence in the moral, political and discursive trajectories of anti-colonialism and human rights? This course takes up these questions, starting with the reconstruction of the historical relationship between colonialism, anti-colonial struggles and the post-World War II formation of the international human rights regime. We then turn to discuss different authors who developed their anti-colonial thought and dealt with, appropriated or ignored human rights in their different conceptions of anti-colonial justice.

MES 1999C. Elites in Arab Culture and Society.
Social science studies the marginalized while ignoring elites and their role. This is especially the case with "Arab" Elites. Yet, to understand the conditions of the poor and marginalized, one must study elites. Elites are a lens to historically understand class formation in the Arab World, and influences beyond. We will consider how and why we study elites, different theories and methodologies of studying elites, and focus on elites in Arab societies. The course will deal with elites in the mandate period and early independence. The last part of the course will focus on elites in contemporary Arab society.

MES 1999D. Anthropology /Sociology of Development in the Arab World.
After the Second World War, questions of economic growth, poverty, and inequality were internationalized, leading to the rise of national and international agencies which aimed to promote development in the "Third World." This course examines the anthropological study of development. Touching on development theory (and the political context of each model), we examine connections to anthropological models of socio-cultural change, and consider the relationship between anthropology and the development industry. How can cultural relativist and applied anthropology approaches be reconciled? Can anthropologists and anthropological knowledge contribute to improving development interventions and outcomes, or are they merely critical of such interventions?

MES 1999E. Displacement and Refugees in the Middle East.
Displacement and refugees constitute one of the most significant sources of upheaval, instability, and uncertainty in our time. In 100 years, the Middle East saw waves of displaced persons, with no singular explanation and no end in sight: Armenians, Circassians, Palestinians, Iraqis, Yazidis, Kurds, and Syrians. The impetuses for displacement include wars, fall of empires and nations, crafting of new states, and modernization attempts and environmental disasters. These stories of displacement are distinctive for their multitude of causes and protracted defiance of resolutions. They challenge the narratives of the durability of nation-states, ascendency of capitalism, and emplaced, "timeless" Arab populations.

MES 2000A. Decolonizing the Racialized Female Subject: Black and Indigenous Women’s Self-Making Under Empire.
This study grapples with conceptions of freedom and humanity emergent in Black and Indigenous women’s practices under empire. Colonialism is prefaced on construction of an “other.” Aimé Césaire refers to this as “thingification,” whereby colonial subjects are dehumanized and the colonizer “decivilized.” Totalizing dehumanizing forms are resisted by praxes and epistemologies which challenge the prevailing symbolic order and assert the humanity of those regarded as subhuman. We will examine how epistemological and political contestations of the human inform discourses on freedom and sovereignty and interrogate how various categories of identity refract and re-frame conceptions of humanity, freedom, and sovereignty.