TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY
International B.A. in Liberal Arts
Social and Cultural History of the Modern Middle East: Syllabus

Tuesday, 10:00-12:00, Dan David 207/8
Instructor: On Barak
Office hours: Tuesday. 16:00-17:00, Gilman 444, by appointment

Course description:

If until the last third of the twentieth century history mostly addressed the lives and deeds of “big men” – rulers, diplomats, generals, or inventors – historians have in recent decades gradually broadened their perspective to include in their narratives women, the middle- and then lower classes, and eventually non-Western people as well. Along these lines, this course examines the history of the modern Middle East from the bottom up. We will examine what made the nineteenth and twentieth centuries “modern” for the inhabitants of the region and what constituted their lived experience of the tumults of colonialism, nationalism and post-colonialism. Exploring case studies from Egypt, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia among other settings, we will examine the shifting media infrastructures, cultural protocols, religious beliefs, class formations, and political agendas of different social groups in the region. Beyond reading recent and innovative academic literature on these issues, instruction will heavily rely on primary materials such as graffiti, cinema, music and recordings of religious materials, poetry and short stories.

Course requirements:

Attendance and active participation are mandatory. Students are expected to have read the weekly assignments closely and critically before coming to the class. When reading a primary source, pay special attention to historical context: who is the author? When did s/he live? What other works did s/he write?

Assignments: in addition to the weekly reading assignments, you are required to submit a midterm paper: write a 2,000 word essay situating Tawfiq al-Hakim’s, Maze of Justice in its historical context.

Grading: 15% of your grade in the course will be determined by your performance in the seminar. This portion of the grade will be determined by your attendance and active participation. 25% of the grade will be determined by your written midterm paper. 60%
of the grade will be determined by a final take-home exam. Both the mid-term assignment and the take home exams are individual assignments, which each student is expected to complete by him- or herself.

Course schedule:

Week 1: Introduction: types of history, types of sources, types of archives
No readings assigned

Week 2: Rethinking “the social”, “Middle East”, and “the modern”
On Barak, “En Route”, in On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt

Week 3: From scribal- to print-culture

Yahya Hakki, “The Lamp of Umm Hashim” in The Lamp of Umm Hashim: And Other Stories

Week 4: Enter the masses: the hajj
Wreck Report for 'Jeddah', 1881

Week 5: World War I
Midterm paper due


Week 6: A social history of the conflict over Palestine

Week 7: The age of oil
Timothy Mitchell, Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil, chapter 8

Week 8: Between 3 cities – urbanism in Riyadh, Mecca, and Cairo
Padcal Menoret, “Street Terrorism,” Joyriding in Riyadh: Oil, Urbanism, and Road Revolt, 133-163
**Week 9: Sound and affect**


**Week 10: Culinary culture and course conclusion**