Youth and Youth Movements in the Modern Middle East

NYU College of Arts and Sciences
First-Year Seminar
FYSEM-UA 778
Fall 2020
Tues/Thurs 3:30-4:45

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DESCRIPTION

During the past year (2019-2020), young people have led major uprisings in Iraq and Lebanon, demanding an end to sectarianism, corruption, and economic inequality. These events are reminiscent of the 2011 “Arab spring” uprisings that overthrew dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere, and that many referred to as a “youth revolution.” Meanwhile, in between the 2011 and 2019 events, the Islamic State became famous for recruiting young people across the Arab world and beyond for its campaign to restore a so-called Islamic caliphate. Does it make sense to associate these revolutionary and counter-revolutionary movements with young people? Does the focus on youth distract from other issues, such as those of class or gender? What is the relationship between political mobilization and other expressions of youth counter-culture, such as drag racing or hip hop? In what ways are the current uprisings similar to or different from earlier upheavals in the region, such as the student uprisings that challenged European colonialism from the 1920s to the 1940s, the widespread youth rebellions of the 1950s and 1960s, or the disproportionate participation of young people in the Palestinian Intifadas since the 1980s? Are there “political generations” in the Middle East, and if so what have been the characteristics of different political generations across the past 100 years? Using “youth” and “generation” as lenses onto the history of the modern Middle East, this course will explore these and other questions related to political mobilization and revolution; religion and secularism; gender and sexuality; colonialism and nationalism; sectarianism and democracy; and experiences of war, dislocation, and migration.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

• Discuss the use of “youth” and “generation” as categories of sociopolitical and historical analysis;
• Identify and utilize primary and secondary sources for purposes of historical research and interpretation;
• Analyze scholarly arguments in secondary sources, including identifying the claims or assumptions the author is arguing against and evaluating the strength of the argument based on the author’s use of sources and mode of analysis;
• Analyze and historicize primary source texts;
• Produce a historical research paper based on analysis of primary sources and engagement with relevant secondary sources;
• Summarize and discuss major events and processes in modern Middle East history, including colonialism; nationalism; the rise of the modern nation-state; the Islamic revival; the Israeli-
Palestinian conflict; the rise of the oil monarchies; the Lebanese Civil War; and the 2011 Arab spring.

**Course Requirements**

1. Participation and attendance (15%)

   Since this is a seminar, all students are expected to participate in classroom discussions. Your participation should demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the assigned readings, which is the focus of discussions. (If you have not done the readings, please do not participate in the discussion.) Absences will have a direct effect on your grade unless you submit a 5-page analysis of the readings for the day you missed by the start of the next class. I will not accept more than two commentaries over the course of the semester. Absences are also likely to have an indirect effect on your grade, since expectations for the take-home mid-term and the final paper include engagement with questions and debates that have arisen both in the readings and in the classroom discussions.

2. Reading responses (10%)

   Write a brief reading response (3-400 words) for one of the readings assigned each week. These should be posted on Classes (Forums section) by 10am the day of class for which the reading was assigned. It is strongly recommended that you read the other students’ responses before coming to class. I will provide more detailed instructions on responses, which will change over the course of the semester, in class.

   *Important note on response papers:* Careful and fair reading of the text is a requirement of the assignment. There is usually not a single right way to interpret an author’s argument, but there are wrong ways. If you clearly misrepresent an author’s argument, your response paper grade will be negatively affected.

3. Primary source analysis paper (20%)

   5-page paper analyzing a primary source related to the themes of the course. The source may be a text, film, music video, etc. More detailed instructions will be provided.

4. Take-home mid-term essay exam (25%)

   The mid-term will consist of two short essays (your choice out of several questions I will pose) in a take-home and open-book format (5 pages total). The questions will be distributed on Oct. 15 in class and the essays are due at 5pm by email on Oct. 23. Your answers should demonstrate an understanding of the main arguments of the assigned readings and lectures as well as of issues that have arisen during class discussions.

5. Final research paper (25%)

   The final research paper (10 pages) will examine a primary source or set of sources and develop a historical argument relevant to the themes of the course, engaging with secondary works we have read and related scholarship. A draft of the paper will be reviewed by me and two of your peers and will constitute 5% of the final grade; the final version will be 20%.

6. Peer reviews of final paper drafts (5%)

   You will provide comments on two of your peers’ final paper drafts.
IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- Turn off your cellphones.
- Grades will be significantly lowered for work submitted after the due date, unless it is for a legitimate and well-documented reason.
- If you are having any difficulty with the readings, the assignments, or the course in general, make an appointment immediately to meet with me.
- Plagiarism will be reported to the university administration. See below.

Academic Integrity, Plagiarism, and Cheating (adapted from the website of the College of Arts & Science, https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html):

Academic integrity means that the work you submit is original. Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the Internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious — for example, presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written); writing a sentence or paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else’s idea(s) without a reference to the source of the idea(s); or submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance). Receiving or giving help on a take-home paper, examination, or quiz is also cheating, unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects).

NYU Resources

1. You are strongly encouraged to use the NYU writing center. You can make appointments for one-on-one meetings with faculty members for support on your writing. 411 Lafayette, 4th fl. / 212 998-8866 / writingcenter@nyu.edu / https://nyu.mywconline.com/

2. Disability Disclosure Statement: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

READINGS

The following books should be purchased. All other readings in the syllabus will be posted on Classes, unless they are available through the NYU library site.


Pascal Menoret, Joyriding in Riyadh: Oil, Urbanism, and Road Revolt (2014)

COURSE SCHEDULE
Thurs 9/3: Introductions

Part 1: Youth in the Modern Era

Reading/discussion questions: What are the characteristics of what scholars often call the “modern nation-state” and the “modern family”? How did the rise of the modern nation-state change approaches to the education of youth? How did the rise of European power and colonialism influence education in the Middle East? How might the emergence of the modern family type, as either an ideal or reality, have changed experiences and understandings of childhood as a phase of life? How might it have changed gender norms? What might have been gained and lost for women (or men) in this process? Is “the modern family” an appropriate term for what we are talking about? Is it relevant to the Middle East?

Tues 9/8: Childhood and the Rise of the “Modern” Family


Nazik Ali Jawdat in Fernea, 19-32.

Thurs 9/10: Islam and Education


Tues 9/15: Making Modern Youth


Thurs 9/17: The Modern State and Education as Discipline


Tues 9/22: Women, Sexuality, Modernity

Part 2: Interlude: The Problem of Generations

Reading/discussion questions: What is a “generation”? Do political generations exist and, if so, how do we define them? What might be gained and what might be lost in thinking about politics in terms of age and generations?

Thurs 9/24


Tues 9/29


Part 3: Nationalism and Decolonization

Reading/discussion questions: Is it useful to look at decolonization movements, in the Middle East or globally, though the lens of “youth”? Did young people play a different role in political movements in the 1950s and 1960s compared to earlier times? If so, why? What was the relation between decolonization movements or wars (e.g., in Algeria and Vietnam) and youth uprisings in Western countries such as France and the United States?

Thurs 10/1: Youth and Anticolonial Uprising in Interwar Egypt


Tues 10/6: The Algerian War of Independence

Film: Battle of Algiers (watch at home)

Thurs 10/8: Decolonization and Youth in the Global 1960s


Part 4: Outside the Nation-State: Palestinian Youth

Reading/discussion questions: If youth and the nation-state are so intertwined, what happens to young people who don’t have one? How might major historical ruptures, such as the Palestinian nakba, affect relations between generations? How might intergenerational ties be strengthened and/or weakened by decades of living as refugees or under occupation? Can Palestinian resistance
movements over time be described as reflecting or producing different political generations with specific characteristics?

Tues 10/13: Young People and the Nakba

*Strongly recommended* for historical background on Zionism, the foundation of Israel, and the Palestinian *nakba*: Zachary Lockman, “A Brief History of Zionism,” [https://vimeo.com/11568199](https://vimeo.com/11568199)


**Thurs 10/15: Youth in Refugee Camps and Under Occupation**


**MID-TERM ESSAY EXAM DISTRIBUTED IN CLASS 10/15**

Tues 10/20: Youth, the Intifadas, and Music Subcultures

Film: *Slingshot Hip-Hop* (watch at home)

**Part 5: Young People and War**

*Reading/discussion questions:* What role do ideas of childhood innocence on the one hand and young male aggression on the other play in the ways people imagine and/or experience war? How does the rupture and trauma of wartime affect generational experiences and relationships, both during and after war?

**Thurs 10/22: The Lebanese Civil War**

Film: *West Beirut* (watch at home)

**FRIDAY, 10/23, MID-TERM ESSAY EXAM DUE, 5PM BY EMAIL.**

**Tues 10/27: Memory and Postmemory**


**Thurs 10/29: The Syrian War**

Film on Syria TBD (watch at home)
Part 6: Youth and the Islamic Revival

Reading/discussion questions: What role was played by colonialism and struggles over youth in the early Islamic revival movement? How does the involvement of young people, and perhaps especially young women, in the Islamic revival challenge common understandings of modernity, progress, and secularism? What is the relation of the Islamic revival among youth to processes of neoliberalism, globalization, and economic crisis?

Tues 11/3: Colonial Struggles over Youth and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood


Thurs 11/5: Young Women and the Islamic Revival


Tues 11/10: Pious Modernities

Additional reading TBA

Thurs 11/12: Youth, Islam, and Economic Crisis


Part 7: Youth Subcultures and the Oil States

Reading/discussion questions: How have young people in the Middle East been affected by neoliberalism, globalization, and the economy of oil? How have forms of new media affected youth subcultures? What is the relation of youth in the Islamic revival to youth in non-Islamic subcultures and movements such as that of joyriding?

Tues 11/17


Thurs 11/19

Menoret, *Joyriding in Riyadh*, chapters 3-4.

Tues 11/24

Menoret, *Joyriding in Riyadh*, chapters 5-6.
--NO CLASS THURSDAY 11/26: Thanksgiving Holiday--

Part 8: Revolution and Counter-Revolution: 2011 and Beyond

Reading/discussion questions: What are some of the ways in which the Arab spring has been narrated as a “youth” event? How are these narratives useful or problematic? How have young people been affected by the various anti- and counter-revolutionary events since 2011, including the military coup in Egypt, the ongoing war in Syria, and the rise of ISIS?

Tues Dec 1

Film: *The Square* (watch at home)

Paul Amar, “The Street, the Sponge and the Ultra”

Thurs Dec 3

Readings TBA

Tues Dec 8

Readings TBA

Thurs Dec 10

Final paper presentations/Wrap-up