Cultures & Contexts:
Modern Iraq
CORE-UA 500
Spring 2021
Tues-Thur 3:30-4:45

Professor Sara Pursley
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Office hours: W 1-2pm or by appointment
(Zoom office hours link on Classes course site)

Recitation Instructors:

Ellis Garey
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DESCRIPTION

Over the past century, Iraq has been at the center of some of the most dramatic forms of imperial intervention in the modern era. Under British military occupation during and after World War I, it became the world’s first large-scale experiment in controlling a territory through air bombing, or what British authorities called “rule from the air.” Almost a century later, Iraq became a testing ground for new forms of foreign intervention, this time by the US. Between and across these invasions, Iraqis formed nationalist, communist, Islamist, youth, and women’s movements; created a flourishing arts scene during the Baghdad Renaissance of the 1940s and 1950s; carried out the 1958 anticolonial revolution; and grappled with the effects of oil wealth, the rise of a totalitarian state, and decades of near-continuous war. This course will explore the interplay between local, regional, and imperial forces in shaping modern Iraqi history, taking seriously both the internal struggles of Iraqis and the role their country has played in the history of modern imperial power.

Cultures & Contexts is intended to prepare you for life in a global world. Through critical engagements with primary cultural materials, it introduces you to ways humans come to understand themselves as members of social, religious, national, and regional collectives, and with the dynamics of cultural interaction and influence. As a part of the College Core Curriculum, it is designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major, preparing you for your future life as a thoughtful individual and active member of society. This course pursues these aims by encouraging you to think critically both about how Iraqis have been understood and imagined by outsiders and about the different ways they have mobilized collectively over the past century.

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

- Discuss major themes in the global history of empires in the modern era, and compare different kinds of modern empires
- Discuss major events and processes in modern Iraqi history
- Critically analyze commonly invoked narratives of Iraq’s history
- Identify and utilize primary and secondary sources for purposes of historical research and interpretation
- Identify a scholarly argument and evaluate its coherence and use of evidence
- Analyze and historicize primary source texts

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. Attendance and participation (20%)

   Attendance at recitation sessions is required; any absence from a recitation for undocumented reasons will directly affect your grade. Excessive absences may result in a failing grade. Attendance at lectures is strongly recommended, since only the first part of each lecture session will be recorded (see Zoom section under “Technology” below). When attending both recitations and lectures, be prepared to engage in thoughtful discussions of assigned readings and lecture material. It is expected that you will have done the assigned readings whether or not you had to write an analytical paper for that week. Your class participation should demonstrate a careful reading of the assigned texts or films and not just your pre-existing opinion on Middle East politics. If you haven’t read the assigned texts or watched the assigned film, please do not participate in the class discussion for that day. The participation grade will also include the three short (1-paragraph) reading responses due on Forums (see schedule below).

2. Short Analytical Papers (20%)

   You will write five short analytical papers that engage with the assigned readings and films over the course of the semester. Note that there are six papers assigned on the schedule below; you may skip one of these at your discretion. If you do not skip one, your lowest grade will be dropped. Each section will be divided into two groups for purposes of the due dates; for most weeks, only one group has an analytical paper due. Your recitation instructor will assign members of each section to the two groups. The assignments will increase in length from one to two pages over the course of the semester. Due dates are in the class schedule below; prompts and length requirements will be provided each week as an Announcement (i.e., sent to you as an email and viewable in the Announcements section of Classes, course site).

3. Mid-term (20%)

   There will be a take-home, open-book midterm consisting of short essay questions due Monday March 29 at 10am, uploaded to the Assignments section of Classes in MS Word format. The questions will be distributed one week in advance. Your answers should demonstrate an understanding of the assigned readings and lectures as well as of issues that have arisen during recitation discussions.

4. Primary Source Analysis Paper (20%)
You will write a 3-5 page paper analyzing a primary source that was not assigned on the syllabus. You are expected to meet with the TA at least once before the deadline to discuss your source and your analysis of it. Additional information on the paper expectations will be distributed in class and posted on Classes. The papers are due on Monday April 26, 10am. They should be uploaded to the Assignments section of Classes in MS Word format.

5. Final exam (20%)

There will be a final take-home, open-book final exam consisting of short essay questions. It will focus primarily on material covered in the second half of the semester (since the mid-term) but may include some questions relevant to the entire period covered in the course. It is due Monday, May 17 at 3pm in MS Word format.

**Technology**

The main online platforms for this course are Zoom and NYU Classes, with email serving as support. If you have trouble accessing any of these platforms, contact the IT help desk: AskIT@nyu.edu or 1-212-998-3333.

1. **Zoom** will be the platform for our synchronous lectures and recitations, held at the regularly scheduled class times. Zoom sessions can be accessed through NYU Classes (main course site for lectures; section sites for recitations). Note that you must log in to Zoom via NYU single sign-on multi-factor authentication (https://nyu.zoom.us), not via the free Zoom application. I will record the first part (around 45 minutes) of each lecture session, consisting of the actual lecture, so these will be available later for asynchronous viewing. I will then stop the recording for questions and comments from students. If there are no questions and comments, I will continue with my own observations on the material until the end of class time, but will not start the recording again. To get the full class material, you will need to attend lecture sessions synchronously.

For recitations, it is expected that you will have your video turned on to facilitate communication and human connection during discussions. If there is a reason you cannot have your video on during recitations, please talk to your recitation instructor. You must have a functioning microphone and be able to participate verbally in recitations.

2. **NYU Classes** is the platform where we will post all of the materials for this course, including the syllabus, the readings, and audio-visual media. All of this material will be on the course site (not the section sites) of Classes. We will also send out group emails through Classes for updates and changes to the reading and assignment schedule. Please verify that your email address on Classes is correct and let us know ASAP if you are not receiving class emails.

You will post all of your assignments for the course to the individual section sites (not the general course site) of Classes.

3. Do not hesitate to contact either the professor or the TAs by email at any time (after making sure your question is not answered on this syllabus). Please use appropriate email etiquette: https://academicpositions.com/career-advice/how-to-email-a-professor
DISCUSSION POLICY

Due to the size of the course, most in-depth discussions will take place in recitation sections, though there will be an opportunity for questions and comments at the end of lectures as well. Please remember that there are no bad questions; if you are confused about something, there is a good chance that others are as well. Also, please note that because the study of history involves argument and debate, critical disagreement with your peers and your instructors is welcome, as long as it remains civil. Criticism should focus on the argument, not the person making it. Personal attacks and offensive remarks about class members will not be tolerated.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the NYU administration. For NYU policy on plagiarism and academic integrity, see http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism, come talk to one of us before the assignment is due.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Since the short analytical essays are the basis for recitation discussions, late submissions of those will not be accepted. Difficulties completing other assignments on time will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

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 Students with Disabilities (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

Please acquire from the NYU bookstore or elsewhere:
(Note: it is recommended that you start reading this novel early in the semester, if you do not want to have to read the whole thing the last week.)

Other readings and videos will be posted to Classes.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: It is expected that all readings/videos for the week will be completed by the time of your recitation session on Wednesday. It is recommended that you complete those with an asterisk (*) by the time of the Tuesday lecture.

Thurs 1/28: Introduction

Week 1: Empires in World History
General questions: What is an empire? How is it different from a nation-state? What are some different kinds of imperial power?

Lectures:
Tues 2/2: Empires in World History
Thurs 2/4: The Ottoman Empire

ONE-PARAGRAPH READING RESPONSE DUE Tues 2/2 at 10am on Forums (in your section site of NYU Classes)

Readings/videos (complete by Wed 2/3):
1. Watch at least the first 16 minutes of PBS documentary *Islam: Empire of Faith, Part 2.*

Week 2: European Empires and Orientalism

General questions: What were the major imperial powers in Iraq and the broader Middle East in the long 19th century? How did Europeans view the Middle East in the 19th century? How did they view Iraq/Mesopotamia in particular?

Lectures:
Tues 2/9: Orientalism
Thurs 2/11: European Empires and the Middle East

ANALYTICAL PAPER #1 DUE FOR GROUP 1, Tues 2/9 10am on Classes (under Assignments)

Readings (complete by Wed 2/10):
3. Primary sources: European travelers in Mesopotamia (see “Primary Sources for Week 2” folder in Resources)

Week 3: The “Tribal” Question

General questions: Are “tribe” and “tribal” useful categories for analyzing Iraqi history? What are the benefits and costs of using these categories?

Lecture:
Tues 2/16: The “Tribal Question”
NO CLASS THURS 2/18 (NYU on a Monday schedule)

ANALYTICAL PAPER #1 DUE FOR GROUP 2, Tues 2/16 10am on Classes (under Assignments)
Readings (complete by Wed 2/17):

**Week 4: Governing Iraq in the 19th Century**

**General questions:** What strategies did the Ottoman state use to govern Iraq in the long nineteenth century? How and why were these changing?

**Lectures:**
- Tues 2/23: Religion and Governance in Ottoman Iraq
- Thurs 2/25: Nineteenth-Century Reforms and Local Politics

**ANALYTICAL PAPER #2 DUE FOR GROUP 1, Tues 2/23 10am on Classes (under Assignments)**

Readings (complete by Wed 2/24):
4. Primary Sources for Week 4 (folder in Resources)

**Week 5: The British Occupation and the Mandate System**

**General questions:** How have different scholars conceived of Britain’s primary interests in Iraq? How were forms of imperial rule changing globally in the interwar period? What was the role of Iraq in these changes?

**Lectures:**
- Tues 3/2: World War I and the British Occupation
- Tues 3/4: The Mandate System

**ANALYTICAL PAPER #2 DUE FOR GROUP 2, Tues 3/2, 10am on Classes (under Assignments)**

**Readings:**
4. Primary sources:
   - Stanley Maude, “Proclamation to the People of Baghdad”
   - Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant

**Week 6: Anticolonial Rebellion and Nationalism**

*Questions:* Is Iraq an “artificial state”? What gets lost in this narrative? What were the motivations and organizing principles driving anti-British rebellion in Iraq during and after World War I? What were the main narratives used by British officials to explain Iraqi rebellion?

*Lectures*
Tues 3/9: The “Artificial State” Debate
Thurs 3/11: Anticolonial Rebellion and Nationalism

**ANALYTICAL PAPER #3 DUE FOR GROUP 1, Tues 3/9 at 10am on Classes (under Assignments)**

*Readings:*
1. Sara Pursley, “‘Lines Drawn on an Empty Map’: Iraq’s Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State,” *Jadaliyya*, June 2, 2015, Parts I and II.*
4. Primary Sources for Week 6

**Week 7: Minorities and National Formation**

*General questions:* How did Iraq’s various minorities relate to its formation as a state?

*Lectures:*
Tues 3/16: Jews, Leftist Politics, and Zionism
Thurs 3/18: Kurds and the Kurdish National Movement

**ANALYTICAL PAPER #3 DUE FOR GROUP 2, Tues 3/16 10am on Classes (under Assignments)**

*Readings:*
2. Film excerpts (TBA): *Forget Baghdad* *
4. Primary Sources for Week 7

**Week 8: Communism and Countercultures**
General questions: Why was communism so popular in Iraq? What political and social conditions shaped the engagements of Iraqi artists in the Baghdad Renaissance?

Lectures:
Tues 3/23: The Iraqi Communist Movement
Thurs 3/25: Urban Countercultures

ANALYTICAL PAPER #4 DUE FOR GROUP 1, Tues 3/23 10am on Classes (under Assignments)

Readings:

Week 8: Rural Life

**MONDAY 3/29: MIDTERM ESSAY RESPONSES DUE 10AM ON CLASSES**

General questions: How was agrarian life changing in Iraq? What caused the agrarian crisis? What role did new forms of US and international expertise play in projects to reshape rural life?

Lectures:
Tues 3/30: Rural Life and Agrarian Crisis
Thurs 4/1: US and Global Development Interventions

ONE-PARAGRAPH READING RESPONSE DUE Tues 3/30 10am on Forums

Readings:
1. Elizabeth Fernea, Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village (1965), 1-56.*

Week 9: The Revolutionary Era (1958-63)

General questions: What were the causes of the 1958 revolution? In what ways did it succeed or fail? How might we explain the 1963 Ba’th coup?

Lectures:
Tues 4/6: The 1958 Revolution
Thurs 4/8: The 1963 Coup

ANALYTICAL PAPER #4 DUE FOR GROUP 2, Tues 4/6 10am on Classes (under Assignments)
Readings:
3. Primary Sources for Week 9.

**Week 10: Ba’thist Iraq**

**General questions:** What factors led to the rise of Ba’th Party rule in Iraq? How have different scholars explained why it stayed in power so long? How did war shape Iraqi society from the 1980s on?

**Lectures:**
- Tues 4/13: Rise of the Ba’th
- Thurs 4/15: War and Society

**ANALYTICAL PAPER #5 DUE FOR GROUP 1, Tues 4/13 10am on Classes (under Assignments)**

**Readings:**
4. Primary Sources for Week 10

**Week 11: The 1990s**

**General questions:** What are some different ways scholars have understood the rise of US power globally and in the Middle East? How were US techniques of invasion and governance in Iraq similar to and different from those of Britain in the 1920s and 1930s? How did sanctions affect life in Iraq during the 1990s?

**Lectures:**
- Tues 4/20: The US in the Middle East
- Thurs 4/22: The First Gulf War and the Sanctions Era

**ANALYTICAL PAPER #5 DUE FOR GROUP 2, Tues 4/20 10am on Classes (under Assignments)**

**Readings:**

**Week 12: The 2003 US Invasion**

*General questions:* Why did the US invade Iraq in 2003? What different narratives have been invoked to explain what is widely viewed as the failure of the invasion to achieve its goals? What are the lasting effects of the invasion on Iraqi life?

**MONDAY 4/26 PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS DUE 10AM ON CLASSES**

*Lectures:*
- Tues 4/27: The 2003 Invasion
- Thurs 4/29: The Invasion’s Aftermath

ONE-PARAGRAPH READING RESPONSE DUE Tues 4/27 10am on **Forums**

*Readings/films:*
1. Film TBA
3. Primary Sources for Week 12

**Week 13: The Invasion’s Aftermath**

*General question:* What questions does the novel raise for you?

*Lectures:*
- Tues 5/4: The Invasion’s Aftermath Continued
- Thurs 5/6: Guest Speaker Sinan Antoon and Wrap-up

ANALYTICAL PAPER #6 DUE FOR GROUPS 1 AND 2, Tues 5/4 10am on Classes (under Assignments)

*Reading:*
- Sinan Antoon, *The Book of Collateral Damage*

**MONDAY 5/17: FINAL EXAM ESSAY RESPONSES DUE 3PM ON CLASSES**