Overview
This course will introduce students to contemporary trends in the political geography of the Middle East. The aims of the course are to familiarize students with the modern historical development of the region and its relationship to larger global processes; to encourage critical thinking about representations of the Middle East that we encounter in our daily lives; and to establish an understanding of the ways in which geography can be practiced to better understand the region today. The course will begin by examining the invention of the “Middle East” as a regional construct, and will move to consider how ‘we, here’ know ‘them, there’, to unsettle facile understandings of the region that lies at the heart of this course. While this course does not privilege any one nation or state over another, particular attention will be paid to the following themes: Orientalism; the Palestine-Israel conflict and its resonances both in the region and beyond; US policy in the Middle East; the political economy of oil and the Gulf States; the Arab revolutions that have recently swept the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region; and the rise of the Islamic State (IS). Throughout the course we will pay close attention to the evolving relationships between the Middle East and Europe and the U.S.

Learning objectives
The central purpose of the course is to provide students with a series of tools that they can use to understand the contemporary political geography of the region we have come to call the ‘Middle East’. This course will not give you a comprehensive overview of the entire Middle East. Instead, it will teach students about the major political historical geographies that have – and continue – to shape the region. By the end of the course students should be able to answer a series of important intellectual and political questions, such as: what role has colonialism played in shaping the Middle East? What are the relationships between Europe, the US and the Middle East? What does ‘discourse’ mean? What is Orientalism? In what ways do Orientalist discourses inform present understandings of the Middle East? How might these discourses be challenged, resisted or elided? Students will also become familiar
with a series of timely contemporary issues and should be able to answer the following questions: what role does oil play in shaping the Middle East and how is this changing? Why did the US and several other countries invade Iraq and Afghanistan, and what are the consequences? What is the Palestine-Israel conflict all about and why does it seem irresolvable? What is ‘Occupation’? Do Muslim women need ‘saving’ by Western liberal powers? What brought about the Arab revolutions and what are some of its consequences? Why did the popular uprising in Syria turn into a bloody civil – and transnational – war and not a non-violent revolution? What is ISIS, where did they come from and where are they going? There are no ‘right’ answers to these questions: the aim is to think critically about these issues and to challenge dominant representations and misconceptions about the Middle East and its diverse peoples. What the course teaches, therefore, is ultimately a geography of care to mitigate against what Derek Gregory once called the ‘architecture of enmity’ that have so violently shaped Western understandings and interventions in the Middle East.

Social media
This course will be managed on the course blog @: middleeastgeographies.wordpress.com. Please consult the ABOUT US tab on the blog to see how we will be using it. Students are encouraged to post comments, to make suggestions and to share new material/media. News and links to interesting debates and articles will be shared on Twitter @Mideastgeog. We want this to be a multi-way conversation, so please share your own thoughts and findings via Twitter and post to @Mideastgeog, creating your own hashtags.

Course requirements and evaluation
1) PARTICIPATION
   Participation in in-class discussion and contributions to discussions on social media: 10%. Needless to say, this means you are expected to attend all classes. You should also check the blog regularly and contribute under the COMMENTS section of each entry/page.

2) BLOG ENTRY
   For this assignment you will select one of two options, which will count for 25% of your grade. Both have a word-count of 1-2,000 words and are due 12th February in class in HARDCOPY. Late assignments will not be accepted without a doctor’s note. This assignment will relate themes and theories from the course to a) a contemporary event in the Middle East (option one) or b) a book or film review (option two). We will go over the details of the assignment in class. The best essays and reviews will be posted on the blog – so make them stand out, intellectually and aesthetically.

a) The first option is a photo/other media blog entry of a current event. Possible topics include (but are not limited to): the Arab revolutions; the rise or targeting of IS; the 2014 war on Gaza; the on-going Syrian war; the refugee crisis in Lebanon; the ‘withdrawal’ from Afghanistan, etc. If you have other ideas or interests make sure that you run them by me in person before you begin to research and write. The emphasis here is to combine essay/blog writing with media (by which I mean images, videos, poetry, music or sound etc.). This is an opportunity to construct your own interactive
blog-post and your piece must contain both a mix of writing and other media. For examples of how to do this in an effective way see: www.geographicalimaginations.com and www.warlawspace.com.

b) The second option is a critical review of a film or book that relates directly to the course. Please consult the class blog – FILM AND DOCUMENTARY tab – for ideas for films, and the extended syllabus – SYLLABUS tab – for ideas for books. Again, these lists are not exhaustive so if you want to review a different film or book do make sure that you run it by me in person before you begin to research and write. Note that this is not an opportunity to take what you may think is the easier option. I expect high-quality and critical reviews that evaluate the given media using the ideas and theories we have discussed in class. It is not an opportunity to wax lyrical about how you liked – or didn’t like – watching a flick. For examples of good reviews see: www.antipodefoundation.org/book-reviews/ (book reviews) and, www.societyandspace.com/reviews/ (book and film reviews).

3) IN-CLASS GROUP PRESENTATION
(20%) In groups of 3-4 you will present your photo/media blog entry to the class. You will be allocated into groups based on the theme of your blog entry. This will be done in class on 12th February. You will work with students who have written on the same or a similar topic, media, event or place. For example, you may have written about the revolution in Egypt, and so you can team with someone who has written about revolution in Tunisia, war and revolt in Syria etc., or with someone who has written about the Mubarak regime or the role of social media in revolutions. You will be graded on the content and quality of your individual presentation but the emphasis of this assignment will be on your ability to work with others and to create a seamless, coherent and logical presentation that is more than the sum of its individual parts. This will mean making meaningful links between what you and the others in your group have written. Each group will have five minutes per person (so 15-20 minutes total), 10% will be awarded for individual presentation (content and delivery) and 10% for overall effectiveness, impact (“wow!” factor) and cohesion. Presentations will take place in class on the 26th and 31st March and 2nd April. A projector and any other resources you may need will be made available.

4) MAJOR ESSAY
40% plus 5% for essay proposal. 3,000 words. This will be the final and most important assignment of the course. The emphasis here is on concepts and ideas, rather than analysis of a contemporary event. The best essays will combine the two but the essay will be driven and structured around concepts, theories and ideas. You are expected to critically evaluate theories and ideas from the reading list (and beyond), and – where possible – to add something new to existing debates of your chosen topic. This assignment can build from your in-class presentations but must be different from your blog entry. You will be required to submit a 1-page (max) outline/proposal for your essay on March 17th in class in HARDCOPY. This will be worth 5% of your grade and is designed to make sure you are on the right track: the more effort you put into it the more relevant the feedback you receive will be. We will go over this assignment in class on 24th March so it is essential that you attend; any questions you have will be addressed.
then and not via email. Essay **Due 9th April in class in HARDCOPY AND VIA UBC CONNECT.** Late assignments will receive a 0.5% penalty per day unless a doctor’s note is provided.

**Important Dates**
- Last day to withdraw without a ‘W’ standing on your transcripts – **19th January.**
- Last day to withdraw with a ‘W’ standing: **13th February.**
- Blog Entry due: **12th February, in class.**
- Major essay proposal: **March 17th, in class.**
- Going over the major essay in class: **24th March.**
- In class presentations: **26th and 31st March and 2nd April**
- Term paper due: **9th April, in class.**

**Course readings**
Readings are available online through UBC Library e-journals or e-books. Google Scholar is a valuable resource, as are the several physical libraries on campus: use them. Difficult to find readings will be available on the course blog under the **READINGS** tab. If you can’t find a reading please tell me. The Geographic Information Center, RM 112 offers access to computers, books, videos, and reserve materials.

Readings marked with an asterisks (*) are **required readings.** Each week has **one** required reading. Please consult the expanded syllabus – posted on the blog under **SYLLABUS** - for further reading suggestions. **One reading each class is not much.** I’ve designed the reading list this way to encourage you to read a little rather than overwhelm you and have you read nothing at all. The **required reading is – no surprise – actually required** and I will be checking.

There is no textbook or single overarching book for this course but the following give a very good overview of the history and making of the modern Middle East:


CLASS SCHEDULE
Most classes will be lectures but you’ll notice that several sessions are reserved for discussion. The first 10 minutes of each class will be spent discussing current news and social media. Each class I will come prepared with at least one news item to share with the class and I ask that you do the same. Sharing material and being part of these discussions is how you will get your grade for participation but if we make it so, it might also just be the most fun, relaxed and low-stakes part of the course. So come with news!

PART I: LOCATING, DEFINING AND APPROACHING THE MIDDLE EAST

1) 6TH JANUARY. ‘IT SNOWS IN THE MIDDLE EAST’: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE
Today we will go over the syllabus, assignments, readings, the course blog and other course logistics. This is a very important class: do not miss it. We’ll also start unlearning what we know (and what we think we know) of the Middle East. If you have questions like ‘does it really snow in the Middle East?’, ‘what is this course about?’ or ‘what will we cover?’, today is the day to ask!

No assigned readings today

2) 8TH JANUARY. THE INVENTION OF THE “MIDDLE EAST” AND THE BIRTH OF AREA STUDIES
This week we will examine how the region that lies at the centre of this course came to be known and defined as the “Middle East”. We will explore the social construction of the “Middle East” but more importantly we will begin to think about the “Middle East” as both performed and performative. The naming of the region has material consequences in the real world, and this is a theme to which we shall return throughout the course.


**12th January PUBLIC TALK [highly recommended]: ‘First Peoples, Palestine, and the Crushing of Free Speech’ by Steven Salatia. 7:30pm in the Segal Rooms, SFU Harbour Centre. Meet at 7pm in the reception area. **

3) 13TH JANUARY. ORIENTALISM AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

KEYWORDS: Orientalism; representation; East/West; identity; discourse

This week we will be looking closely at arguably the most important text in this course: Edward Said’s seminal Orientalism. As well as understanding his central arguments and his critique of the discourse of Orientalism we will also examine the impact his work has had, especially in post-colonial theory and geography. We will watch excerpts from an interview
with Said where he describes the power of his theory: see Edward Said on Orientalism 1998 Documentary @ www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MYYDEj4fIU


PART II: HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

4) 15TH JANUARY. FROM THE OTTOMANS TO SYKES-PICOT
The early twentieth century was a time of unparalleled change in the Middle East. In today’s lecture we look at the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the imposition and establishment of a new and distinct nation-state system. The Western imposition of territorial boundaries changed the Middle East forever and laid the political foundations for the Modern Middle East. Particularly important to this part of Middle Eastern history is the Sykes-Picot agreement, which promised to carve-up Arab Provinces of the Ottoman Empire for the British and French, and the Balfour Declaration, in which the UK stated its support for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.


5) 20TH JANUARY. COLONISATION AND ‘DECOLONIZATION’
What is colonisation and what is decolonisation? How do we define these terms in relation to one another? Do these terms mark a historical rupture or can we see parts of each in the other? Today we will answer these questions by looking at the national independence struggles that swept through the Middle East in the middle of the 20th Century. Special attention will be paid to the role that violence plays in anti-colonial struggles and we will be watching excerpts from Gillo Pontecorvo’s famous film, The Battle of Algiers. The required reading this week is not directly about the Middle East but the ideas raised by Fanon have much to say about (post)colonialism everywhere.


6) 22ND JANUARY. WORLD WAR II, THE HOLOCAUST AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST
The Holocaust and the end of World War II in 1945 shaped the Middle East in profound ways. The Allies emerged victorious from the war and the horrors of the Holocaust lent great weight to the Zionist case for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. On the 29th November 1947 the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 181 calling for the partition of the British-ruled Palestine Mandate into a Jewish state and an Arab state. In 1948 Israel was founded (Israeli ‘Independence’) and Palestinians suffered mass forced displacement (Palestinian Nakba) and war broke out. This is a crucial
period in the history of the Middle East and we will pay special attention to the role played by the Zionist movement and the Palestinian people, but also to the geopolitical alignments and interests from the US, Europe and USSR.


**PART III: THE COLONIAL PRESENT, THE ‘WAR ON TERROR’ AND ISLAMAPHOBIA**

7) 27TH JANUARY. THE COLONIAL PRESENT [Guest lecture by Derek Gregory]
If you haven’t read *The Colonial Present*, you really must because Gregory won’t do the work for you! Today he has been invited to talk about how he came to write it, what the response has been, and how things have changed since it was published in 2004. He’ll also be sharing his thoughts on geography’s interest in war and how ideas and practices of war in the region have – and are – changing. His analysis will reveal much about key themes in this course – Orientalism; geopolitics; US power; (post)colonialism, etc. – so come caffeinated and well read to make the most of it!


8) 29TH JANUARY. ORIENTALISM IN PRACTICE [discussion led by Wesley Attewell]
Building on the previous class, today’s lecture and discussion will explore some of the ways in which Orientalist imaginative geographies are put to work in the real world, both ‘here’ and ‘over there’.


9) 3RD FEBRUARY. THE PALESTINE-ISRAEL CONFLICT: 1880-2000
So much of today’s news and political commentary fail to address the historical dimensions of the Palestine-Israel conflict. Often, the war between Palestine and Israel is framed as dating back to the war of 1967 but in reality the roots of the conflict go much further back. We begin our analysis in the late 19th Century (drawing from Morris and Pappé) but the main focus will be on the war of 1948, the Palestinian refugee question and on the decades of Occupation from 1948 to the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada (uprising) in September 2000.


10) 5TH FEBRUARY. PALESTINE-ISRAEL: 2000-PRESENT
The second Intifada marks an important shift in the Palestine-Israel conflict, especially as it has been conceived and understood by the Israeli political and military establishments. According to Israel, the popular Palestinian uprising against decades of oppression and occupation engendered a new form of warfare that would enable and justify new and extended forms of Israeli violence against a largely defenceless Palestinian population. Palestinian suicide bombers attacked civilian population centres in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, blowing up cafes and buses. Later, Hamas would rise to power in Gaza and began firing missiles into Israel. Meanwhile, Gaza and the West Bank were forcibly isolated from one another; Gaza was put under an international siege; assassination of Palestinians became normal as did mass incarceration and torture. We will explore these contemporary political geographies and examine them in the twin contexts of local and regional politics as well as the ‘war on terror’.


11) 10TH FEBRUARY. LAWFARE: FRAMING WAR THROUGH LAW IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES
In today’s lecture we discuss the changing relationship between war and law and the application of ‘lawfare’ in the Palestine-Israel conflict. Traditionally, war and law are understood to be separate and even oppositional spheres. Today, however, we will draw from rich philosophical critiques (including Walter Benjamin; Carl Schmitt; Michel Foucault; Giorgio Agamben) and critical approaches to law in order to advance a theory that conceives of the spaces of war and law as overlapping and sometimes also mutually reinforcing. To illustrate the case we remain for the most part in Palestine-Israel but cast our glance also to Iraq and Afghanistan. Specifically, we will draw on my fieldwork and interviews with Israeli military lawyers who give advice to the Israeli military on whom – and under what circumstances – the Israeli military can target and kill particular Palestinians, both civilian and combatants. If you are going to miss one lecture, don’t let it be this one.


12) 12TH FEBRUARY. WAR FOR OIL? ON THE POLITICAL ECONOMIES OF INTERVENTION
ALLOCATE GROUPS FOR GROUP PRESENTATIONS TODAY
BLOG ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS TODAY

Today we examine the role that oil has played in the Middle East. Oil is often understood both as a source of revenue but also as a ‘resource curse’ and today we ask: is oil inevitably a curse? What role has the Western appetite for oil and US exceptionalism played in the region? How do the political economies of oil affect international alliances between Western states and oil-producing states?
MIDTERM BREAK: NO CLASS ON 17TH AND 19TH FEBRUARY

13) 24TH FEBRUARY. IRAQ & AFGHANISTAN: DEVELOPMENT AND COUNTERINSURGENCY [guest lecture: Wesley Attewell]
Today, we will continue our investigation of modern warfare in the Middle East by focusing our attention on the ways in which development and humanitarian assistance have been rediscovered as more humanitarian forms of counterinsurgency warfare in contemporary battlespaces such as Afghanistan.


14) 26TH FEBRUARY. THE GULF STATES & ECONOMIC MIGRATION [guest lecture by Siobhán Mcphee]
The role of economic migration between countries within the region and role of this in shaping economic, social and political relations between origin and destination countries – specifically the role of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE as destinations countries for Arabs across the region.


15) 3rd MARCH. “SAVING WOMEN” – GENDER, RACE & MILITARY FEMINISM [half lecture/half discussion]
Lila Abu-Lughod begins her book ‘Do Muslim Women Need Saving’ with the claim: “People in the West believe that Muslim women are oppressed.” She said this to a woman who lives in a small village in southern Egypt who responds: “But many women are Oppressed! They don’t get their rights in so many ways – in work, in schooling, in…”

Are Muslim women oppressed? This, I think, is the wrong question, because women are oppressed everywhere and independent of their religion, albeit to different degrees in different places. In this lecture we disentangle the question of women’s oppression from the oppression of women by Islam and dispel the myth that Islam is an inherently oppressive religion. This is important because one of the reasons given for invading Afghanistan was to protect Muslim women’s rights. But, as Abu-Lughod asks, ‘do Muslim women need saving’? Why would America want to ‘save’ Muslim women? In this lecture we learn about the intersections and disconnections between gender, feminism and empire.

*Abu-lughod Lila (2013) Do Muslim Women Need Saving?. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. [Chapter 1: Do Muslim women (still) need saving?]
PART IV: THE NEW GEOGRAPHIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

16) 5TH MARCH. THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS IN CONTEXT
In 2010, after decades of living under authoritarian rule, Arabs in several countries across the MENA, including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, rose up in revolution. Civil uprisings erupted in Bahrain and Syria – the latter quickly turned into an all out civil war – and protests broke out across the region from Algeria and Morocco to Palestine and Jordan. In this lecture we examine the historical and contemporary roots and causes of the revolutions and tentatively evaluate some of the consequences. Each revolution and state of civil unrest has been radically different so the emphasis here will be on the geographies of revolution and the importance of space in political mobilization.


17) 10TH MARCH. EGYPT, REVOLUTION AND THE PRODUCTION AND CIRCULATION OF ‘CULTURE’ [Skype-in with Rayya El-Zein]
Today we discuss the cultural aspects of the revolutions that have swept the Middle East. We pay particular attention to Arab cultural productions, including hip-hop, art graffiti and cartoons, protest and the use of social media.


18) 12TH MARCH. SYRIA I: UNDERSTANDING THE CIVIL WAR
TBA. The literature on Syria is vast and changing fast. See blog for updates on today’s focus and reading. Cockburn’s anthology is geography and journalism at is best:


19) 17TH MARCH. SYRIA II: TRANSNATIONAL CONFLICT, REFUGEES AND THE GEOGRAPHIES OF DEATH

MAJOR ESSAY PROPOSAL DUE TODAY IN CLASS

Film: Return to Homs and discussion of below reading:

20) 19TH MARCH. THE MAKING OF THE ISLAMIC STATE
The Islamic State (IS), otherwise known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), did not come from nowhere. Its origins can be traced back 1999 but the group gained strength in Iraq following the US-led invasion and later gained a foothold in Syria in 2011. Following a series of high-profile beheadings and massacres, in early 2014 the US began bombing IS targets in Iraq in August 2014. But the Iraq war was supposed to be over, American troops are supposed to have withdrawn. In this lecture we try to make sense of the rise of IS in the context of the events of the last decade and a half. Are the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan related to the rise of IS? What kind of threat does IS pose and how likely are US air-strikes to defeat them? What implications does the rise of IS and the US re-intervention have on the region?

Again, the literature is emerging fast so the required reading is TBA. Yet again though, Cockburn is a fine place to start – if we can wait till February 3 2015.


21) 24TH MARCH. WORKSHOPPING THE MAJOR ESSAY
Today you will receive the feedback on your essay proposals and we will spend the whole class going over what is required to make your essays brilliant. You’d be really disadvantaged by skipping this one.

No required reading

22) 26TH MARCH. IN CLASS PRESENTATIONS (GROUP 1)
No required reading

23) 31ST MARCH. IN CLASS PRESENTATIONS (GROUP 2)
No required reading

24) 2ND APRIL. IN CLASS PRESENTATIONS (GROUP 3)
No required reading

25) 7TH APRIL WHERE TO FROM (W)HERE’? NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST TBA.

26) 9TH APRIL. DECOLONIZING KNOWLEDGE/FEEDBACK AND REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING

MAJOR ESSAY DUE TODAY: HAND-IN AFTER CLASS

Today we will discus our learning experiences and re-visit the question of what we think we know and do not know about the region and people of the Middle East. This will be an open format, inclusive and safe environment to share your own personal reflections and experiences on the course and your wider education. The last 30 minutes will be spent on student evaluations.

Reading TBA