



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Where empires come to die? Afghanistan history and Islam in the 20th and 21st centuries - 38003

Last update 12-09-2023

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: Islamic & Middle East Stud.

Academic year: 0

Semester: 1st Semester

Teaching Languages: English

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Prof Simon Wolfgang Fuchs

Coordinator Email: Simonw.Fuchs@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Monday, 15-17

Teaching Staff:

Prof Simon Fuchs

Course/Module description:

The return of the Taliban in 2021 seems to have lent truth to an old cliché of Afghanistan as a far away, isolated land that operates according to its own timeless rules and has proven itself repeatedly as a “graveyard of empires.” This course will instead shed light on the strong entanglements of the country with the Middle East, South- and Central Asia in order to de-exceptionalize modern Afghanistan.

Course/Module aims:

Learn about the history of modern Afghanistan and her entanglements with the Cold war and the wider region. Obtain insights into how politics, Islam, and various ideologies shaped the country’s fate and gain skills in academic writing, reading, and analyzing primary and secondary sources.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

- Break down the main historical phases of modern Afghanistan’s history
- Differentiate between various (ethnic) communities and their cross-border ties
- Outline the entanglements of Afghanistan with its neighbors and global trends
- Identify the reasons for the Taliban’s sudden rise in the 1990s and in the late 2010s
- Point out major flawed assumptions on which the Soviet Invasion and the War on Terror were based

Attendance requirements(%):

100

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: Lectures, discussions, group-work and analysis of primary sources

Course/Module Content:

For British-Indian military officers, the assessment was clear: Afghanistan was a country out of step with modernity, located squarely beyond any form of “civilization.” For this reason, the British Empire found it necessary to establish a “buffer zone” of British-administrated tribal areas as a protection against the “wild warriors” on the other side of the Khyber Pass (an approach that was continued

until recently by post-colonial Pakistan). This course will examine critically this supposed isolation of Afghanistan by shedding light on the strong international entanglements of the country between the Middle East, South- and Central Asia. Topics to be discussed include colonial perspective on Afghanistan and the ambitious policy of modernization pushed by King Amanullah Khan (r. 1919-1929), resulting inter alia in the drafting of a remarkable constitution that was supposed to be a synthesis of the Islamic heritage with the demands of a modern nation state. We will also consider the outcomes of substantial Western development aid after 1945 and map the establishment of a staunchly communist regime in the 1970s. The Afghan Jihad, waged in the context of the Cold War after the invasion of the Soviet Union, plays a pivotal role for the course along with Afghanistan's strained relations with Pakistan and both instances of Taliban rule (in the 1990s and after 2021). We'll also be considering the implications of the "War against Terror," the Western military intervention, and attempts at "nation-building" in Afghanistan after the attacks of 9/11. Additionally, we will take time to discuss current events in the country.

Required Reading:

Sample list of required readings (full details on Moodle):

Robert D. Crews, *Afghan Modern. The History of a Global Nation* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015)

Edward, *Heroes of the Age, Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996)

Nivi Manchanda, *Imagining Afghanistan: The History and Politics of Imperial Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020),

Faiz Ahmed, *Afghanistan Rising. Islamic Law and Statecraft between the Ottoman and British Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017)

Timothy Nunan, *Humanitarian Intervention. Global Development in Cold War Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016),

Oliver Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Julie Billaud, *Kabul Carnival: Gender Politics in Postwar Afghanistan* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015)

Wazhmah Osman, *Television and the Afghan Culture Wars. Brought to You by Foreigners, Warlords, and Activists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020)

Additional Reading Material:

A full syllabus with required readings and supplementary readings will be distributed in class and will also be made available on Moodle.

Grading Scheme:

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 80 %

Mid-terms exams 20 %

Additional information:

Please note that regular attendance is mandatory. Absences will result in a deduction from your grade. If a student accumulates more than three absences (excluding reserve duty and exceptional circumstances supported by documentation), they will be required to discontinue the course. Students are expected to come to the sessions prepared for discussion, having read the assigned material at home. Active participation will also result in bonus points which can improve your final grade.