

## **M.Phil Seminar -- The Middle East in the Twentieth Century**

**Michaelmas Term 2008**

**Tuesdays, 2:00 – 4:00**

**St Antony's College**

**Convenor: Dr Walter Armbrust**

This essay-based teaching seminar is designed to provide a common grounding in the history, politics, and society of the Middle East. The focus is two-fold. It is to serve as an introduction to the different countries of the Middle East, with readings in the history and politics of North Africa, Iran, Israel, and Turkey in the twentieth century. You will also be exploring the methodological approaches of the different scholarly disciplines as applied to the study of the contemporary Middle East.

Meetings are led by different members of faculty, providing students the opportunity to meet the modern Middle Eastern studies community. The weekly essays and the feedback from instructors provide training in the analytical writing style particular to the Oxford system. The seminars and additional reading list serve as the preparation for one exam paper in the Qualifying Examination at the end of Hilary Term, 2009. As such, students are required to attend all sessions and to come prepared **with their essays written in advance**. Essays should be six-eight double-spaced typed pages in length (12 point font). Each week, two students will be called on at random to lead discussion on the basis of their own essays. Essays will be collected for marking at the end of the class, providing students regular assessment of their work.

Required seminar readings are kept on reserve in the Middle East Centre Library. The MEC librarian has created a web site for the seminar with links to all Oxford University University Library System locations (see <http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/mec/mec-readinglist.shtml>).

Multiple copies of the following books have been ordered and are on reserve at Blackwell's Bookstore on Broad Street:

- Cooper, John, Muhammad Mahmoud and Ronald Nettle, eds. 1998. Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Gelvin, James. 1998. Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire. Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hinnebusch, Raymond and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, eds. 2002. The Foreign Policies of Middle Eastern States. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Keddie, Nikki. 2006. Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution, 2nd edition New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press
- Lockman, Zachary. 2004. Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Milani, Mohsen. 1994. The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy

to Islamic Republic, 2nd edition, Boulder, Col: Westview.  
Said, Edward. 1995. Orientalism. Harmondsworth: Penguin.  
Shindler, Colin. 2008. A History of Modern Israel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
Zürcher, Jan Erik. 2004. Turkey: A Modern History. London : I. B. Tauris, 2004.

### **Week 1: Area Studies and the Middle East (Walter Armbrust)**

Lockman, Zachary. 2004. Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Middle East Report 205 (October-December 1997): 22-24. (special issue on Middle East Studies). Available through JSTOR (<http://www.jstor.org>) on a University ethernet-linked computer.

Mitchell, Timothy. 2002. "The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science." David L. Szanton, ed. The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines. University of California Press/University of California International and Area Studies Digital Collection, Edited Volume #3, 2002.

<http://repositories.cdlib.org/uciaspubs/editedvolumes/3>

Said, Edward. 1995. Orientalism. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

#### *Further Reading (not required):*

Ahmad, Aijaz. 1992. "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said." In Aijaz Ahmad, In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures. London: Verso, pp. 159-220.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. 1998. "Discourse." In Ashcroft et. al. Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies. New York: Routledge.

Kolluoglu-Kirli, Biray. 2003. "From Orientalism to Area Studies." CR: The New Dentennial Review v. 3, no. 3: 93-111.

Said, Edward. 1986. "Foucault and the Imagination of Power." In David Couzens Hoy, ed., Foucault: A Critical Reader. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 149-155.

Szanton, David L., ed. 2002. The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines. University of California Press/University of California International and Area Studies Digital Collection, Edited Volume #3, 2002.

<http://repositories.cdlib.org/uciaspubs/editedvolumes/3>

*Supplementary Readings:* <http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Easant1114/MPhilArea.pdf>

**Essay:** In the 1980s and 1990s one reading of Said's *Orientalism* was (and in some quarters still is) that Orientalism was incapable of producing true knowledge, and should be seen instead as a discursive means for constructing European domination of societies defined as outside itself. In this view, Area Studies was seen as a child of Orientalism, and as the inheritor of all its flaws. How persuasive are arguments for the continuing vitality of Area Studies?

### **Week 2: Modern Arab History; The Post-WWI Settlement (Eugene Rogan)**

**Readings:** Gelvin, James. 1998. Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire. Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press.  
Hurewitz, J.C. 1979. The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics, vol. 2. New Haven: Yale University Press.  
(documents 12,13, 16, 23, 25, 31, 33, 39, 44, 47, 49).  
"King-Crane Report on the Near East," Editor & Publisher 55.27 (December 2, 1922), available online:  
<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1918p/kncr.html>

**Recommended:** Antonius, George. 1938. The Arab Awakening. London: Hamish Hamilton.  
Zeine, N. Zeine. 1960. The Struggle for Arab Independence: Western Diplomacy and the Rise and Fall of Faisal's Kingdom in Syria. Delman, NY: Caravan.  
Al-Husri, Abu Khaldun Sati. 1966. The Day of Maysalun: A Page from the Modern History of the Arabs, trans. Sidney Glazer. Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute.

**Essay:** What role did the post-WWI settlement play in fostering nationalism in Syria in the immediate aftermath of the Ottoman era?

### **Week 3: The Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Edmund Herzig)**

**Readings:** Keddie, Nikki. 2006. Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution, updated edition. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.  
Milani, Mohsen. 1994. The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution. From Monarchy to Islamic Republic second edition. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

*Further readings (recommended to get a more immediate sense of the revolution and its ideas):*

Bakhash, Shaul. 1986. The Reign of the Ayatollahs. Iran and the Islamic Revolution. London: Unwin Paperbacks.  
Khomeini, Ruhollah. 1981. Islam and Revolution. Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini, translated and annotated by Hamid Algar. Berkeley CA: Mizan Press.

Mottahedeh, Roy. 1986. The Mantle of the Prophet. Religion and Politics in Iran. London: Chatto and Windus.

*Further readings (not required):*

- Abrahamian, Ervand. 1982. Iran between Two Revolutions. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Arjomand, Said Amir. 1988. The Turban for the Crown. The Islamic Revolution in Iran. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ashraf, Ahmad and Ali Banuazizi,. 1985. 'The State, Classes and Modes of Mobilization in the Iranian Revolution.' State, Culture and Society, Vol. 1, No. 3: 3-39.
- Akhavi, Shahrough. 1991. 'Shi'ism, Corporatism, and Rentierism in the Iranian Revolution.' In Juan Cole ed., Comparing Muslim Societies: Knowledge and the State in a World Civilization. Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, pp. 261-93.
- Bill, James. 1982. 'Power and Religion in Revolutionary Iran', Middle East Journal, Vol. 36, No. 1: 22-47.
- Calder, Norman. 1982. 'Accommodation and Revolution in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence: Khumayni and the Classical Tradition.' Middle Eastern Studies Vol. 18, No. 1: 3-20.
- Enayat, Hamid. 1983. 'Iran: Khumayni's Concept of the 'Guardianship of the Jurisconsult.' In James Piscatori (ed.), Islam in the Political Process. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 160-180.
- Fischer, Michael M.J. 1980. Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution. Cambridge, Mass.and London: Harvard University Press.
- Green, Jerrold. 1982. Revolution in Iran: The Politics of Countermobilization. New York: Praeger.
- Halliday, Fred. 1979. Iran: Dictatorship and Development second edition. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Kazemi, Farhad. 1980. Poverty and Revolution in Iran. New York: New York University Press.
- Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 1987. 'Iran's Turn to Islam: From Modernism to Moral Order.' The Middle East Journal, Vol. 41, No. 2: 202-217.
- Parsa, Misagh. 1989. Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Zubaida, Sami. 1989. Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East. London: I.B. Tauris.

**Essay:** Discussion of Iran's 1979 Revolution often focuses on the role of religion in bringing down the Pahlavi monarchy and deciding the outcome of the revolutionary upheaval. The revolution is widely referred to as the Islamic

Revolution, and Islam emerged as the hegemonic ideology of the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic. Assess the importance of Islam in the development of the revolutionary movement and the success of the revolution. In the light of your work and readings in weeks one and two, identify potential pitfalls for Islam-centred explanations of a Middle Eastern revolution and consider whether the studies you have read succeed in avoiding them.

#### **Week 4: The Arab Maghreb Union (Michael Willis)**

- Readings:*
- Chtatou, Mohamed. 1993. "The present and future of the Maghreb Arab Union." In George Joffé ed., North Africa: Nation, State and Region. Routledge: London.
- Deeb, Mary-Jane. 1993. "The Arab-Maghribi Union and the Prospects for North African Unity." In William Zartman and William Mark Habeeb ed., Polity and Society in Contemporary North Africa. Boulder: Westview.
- Jabri, Mohamed Abed. 1985. "Evolution of the Maghrib Concept: Facts and Perspectives." In Halim Barakat ed., Contemporary North Africa: Issues of Development and Integration. Kent: Croom Helm.
- Messari, Nizar and Michael Willis. 2003. "The Arab Maghreb Union." In David W. Lesch ed., History in Dispute: The Middle East Since 1945 Volume 14, Second Series. Farmington Hills, MI: St. James Press.
- Mortimer, Robert A. 1999. "The Arab Maghreb Union: Myth and Reality." In Yahia H. Zoubir ed., North Africa in Transition. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Ruedy, John. 1985. "Historical Influences on Intra-regional relations in the Maghrib." In Halim Barakat ed., Contemporary North Africa: Issues of Development and Integration. Kent: Croom Helm.
- Zartman, I. William. 1999. "The Ups and Downs of Maghrib Unity." In Michael Hudson ed., Middle East Dilemmas: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Zoubir, Yahia. 2000. "Algerian-Moroccan Relations and their Impact on Maghribi Integration." The Journal of North African Relations Volume 5, Number 3 (Autumn).

#### *Further Readings (not required) on Regional Integration and Nationalism*

- Dawisha, Adeed. 2003. Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fawcett, Louise. 2005. "Alliances, Cooperation and Regionalism in the Middle East." In Louise Fawcett ed. International Relations of the Middle East. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Hudson, Michael ed. 1999. Middle East Dilemmas: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Laursen, Finn ed. 2004. Comparative Regional Integration: Theoretical Perspectives. London: Ashgate.
- Luciani, G. and G. Salame eds. 1988. The Politics of Arab Integration. New York: Croom Helm.
- Mattli, Walter. 1999. The Logic of Regional Integration: Europe and Beyond. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

*Reading List for the M.Phil. Option on North African Politics:*

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Easant1114/MPhilNoAfPo.pdf>

*Reading List for the M.Phil. Option on History of the Maghreb:*

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Easant1114/MPhilMagh1830.pdf>

**Essay:** Is the rise and fall of the Arab Maghreb Union best explained with reference to regional integration theory or the dynamics of Arab nationalism?

**Week 5: Modern Islamic Thought (Ronald Nettler)**

*Reading:* Cooper, John, Muhammad Mahmoud and Ronald Nettler, eds. 1998. Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond. London: I.B. Tauris. (Read the introduction and whichever of the chapters interest you).

*Further background reading:*

- Smith, W.C. 1957. Islam in Modern History. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Waines, David. 2003. An Introduction to Islam. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- John Esposito, ed. 1983. Voices of Resurgent Islam. New York: Oxford University Press.

*For the essay:*

- Nettler, Ronald. 1994. "A Modern Islamic Confession of Faith and Conception of Religion: Sayyid Qutb's Introduction to the Tafsir, Fi Zilal al-Qur'an." British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 21 (1994) 102-14.
- Nettler, Ronald. 1996. "Guidelines for the Islamic Community: Sayyid Qutb's political interpretation of the Qur'an." Journal of Political Ideologies 1: 183-96.
- Nettler, Ronald. 1998. "Mohamed Talbi's Ideas on Islam and Politics." In John Cooper, Muhammad Mahmoud and Ronald Nettler, eds. 1998. Islam and Modernity: Muslim Intellectuals Respond. London: I.B. Tauris, pp.129-156.
- Nettler, Ronald. 2004. "Mohamed Talbi on Understanding the Qur'an." In Suha Taji-Farouki, ed. 2004. Modern Muslim

- Intellectuals and the Qur'an. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 225-239.
- Mohamed Talbi. 1995. "Unavoidable Dialogue in a Pluralist World: A Personal Account." Encounters: Journal of Inter-Cultural Perspectives 1: 56-69.
- Dale F. Eickelman. 1998. "Inside the Islamic Reformation." Wilson Quarterly (Winter): 80-89.

**Essay:** Write an essay on the conceptions of Islam and its role in the modern world put forth by Sayyid Qutb, on the one hand, and Mohamed Talbi, on the other. Pay particular attention to their approaches to the Qur'an in the exposition of their ideas. Give detailed examples and discuss what you see as essential differences and similarities. Are there any obvious social and political influences on the development of the ideas?

The two trends exemplified in the thought of Qutb and Talbi have become prominent in recent Islamic intellectual history in the Middle East and N. Africa. They are usually referred to as **political Islam** (or **Islamism**) and **Islamic modernism**, respectively, though names and labels are numerous and often used inconsistently. Also, bear in mind that we are here considering mainly the intellectual side of phenomena that have political and social dimensions as well. There are other important trends, such as the traditionalism of the ulama' and Sufism, to mention but two, that will be mentioned in the seminar.

### **Week 6: International Relations (Alia Brahim)**

*Readings:* Hinnebusch, Raymond and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, eds. 2002. The Foreign Policies of Middle Eastern States. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

#### *Further readings:*

- Barnett, Michael N. 1996. "Identity and Alliances in the Middle East." In Peter Katzenstein (ed.), The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics. New York: Columbia University Press, pp.400-447.
- Hinnebusch, Raymond. 2003. The International Politics of the Middle East. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Dessouki, Ali Hilal Eddin and Bahgat Korany, eds. 1991. The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Change. Boulder: Westview.
- Nonnemann, Gerd. 2003/4. The Review of International Affairs 3 (2) (articles on the foreign policies of Middle Eastern states).
- Robins, Philip. 2006. "A Double Gravity State: Turkish Foreign Policy Reconsidered." British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 33 (2): 199-211.

*Readings for the M.Phil. Option on International Relations of the Middle East:*  
<http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Easant1114/MPhilIR.pdf>

**Essay:** Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Hinnebusch & Ehteshami approach (especially pp.1-55 and 335-350) in its attempt to develop a framework of analysis for the foreign policies of the Middle Eastern states.

**Week 7: Kemalism and Democracy in Turkey (Celia Kerlake)**

- Readings:* Zürcher, Jan Erik. 2004. Turkey: A Modern History. London: I. B. Tauris, 2004.
- Poulton, Hugh. 1997. Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic. London: Hurst. Chapters 4 and 7.
- Demirel, Tanel. 2004. "Soldiers and Civilians: The Dilemma of Turkish Democracy." Middle Eastern Studies 40 (no. 1): 127-150.
- Toprak, Binnaz. 2005. "Islam and Democracy in Turkey." Turkish Studies 6 (no. 2): 167-186. [For citation purposes note that this writer is female.]

*Further readings (not required):*

- Poulton, 1997 [as above]. Chapter 8.
- Gülalp, Haldun. 2005. "Enlightenment by Fiat: Secularization and Democracy in Turkey." Middle Eastern Studies 41 (no. ??): 351-372.
- İçduygu, Ahmet and Soner, B. Ali. 2006. "Turkish Minority Rights Regime: Between Difference and Equality." Middle Eastern Studies 42 (no. ??): 447-468.

**Essay:** Has Kemalism promoted or hindered the development of democracy in Turkey?

**Week 8: Israel: State, Society, Identity (Raffaella A. Del Sarto)**

- Readings:* Shindler, Colin. 2008. A History of Modern Israel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnett, Michael N. 1996. "The Politics of Uniqueness." In Michael Barnett ed, Israel in Comparative Perspective: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom, Albany: SUNY, pp. 3-25.
- Migdal, Joel S. 1996. "Society Formation and the Case of Israel." In Barnett, Israel in Comparative Perspective: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom, pp. 173-198.

*Further reading (not required):*

- Sternhell, Zeev. Introduction, pp. 3-46. The founding myths of Israel: nationalism, socialism, and the making of the Jewish state. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997.)



- Kook, Rebecca. "Between Uniqueness and Exclusion: The Politics of Identity in Israel in Comparative Perspective." pp. 199-225, in: Israel in comparative perspective: challenging the conventional wisdom. Barnett, Michael N. (Albany : State University of New York Press, c1996.)
- Kimmerling, Baruch, Chapter 2, pp. 56-88. The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society, and the Military. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.)
- Del Sarto, Raffaella A., pp. 87-129 (Chapter 4, Israel), Contested State Identity and Regional Security in the Euro-Mediterranean Area. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.)
- Telhami, Shibley. "Israeli Foreign Policy: An Ideal-Type or a Breed of Its Own?" pp. 29-51, in: Israel in comparative perspective : challenging the conventional wisdom. Barnett, Michael N. (Albany : State University of New York Press, c1996.)

*Readings for the M.Phil. Option Israel: State, Society, Identity:*

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Esant1114/MPhillsrael.pdf>

**Essay (please choose one of the following essay questions):**

1. What are the main changes that took place in Israeli society since the foundation of the state until the present? Identify two major developments and discuss their political implications.
2. Does Israel really represent a unique case of state- and nation-building, as has often been claimed, or is it comparable to other states?

**Extra Topic: Anthropology: The Field and Fieldwork (Walter Armbrust)**

*Ethnography:* Winegar, Jessica. 2006. Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

*The Field and Fieldwork:*

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1989. "Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World." Annual Review of Anthropology, Vol. 18: 267-306.
- Clifford, James. 1986. "Introduction: Partial Truths." In James Clifford and George Marcus eds., Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 1-26.
- Dresch, Paul. 2000. "Wilderness of Mirrors: Truth and Vulnerability in Middle Eastern Fieldwork." In Paul Dresch and Wendy James eds., Anthropologists in a Wider World, pp. 109- 128.
- Dresch, Paul and Wendy James. 2000. "Introduction: Fieldwork and the Passage of Time." In Paul Dresch and Wendy James

- eds., Anthropologists in a Wider World: Essays on Field Research. Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 1-26.
- Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson eds. 1997. Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science. Berkeley: University of California Press. (introduction)

*Further Readings (not required):*

- Guyer, Jane. 2004. "Anthropology in Area Studies." Annual Review of Anthropology 33: 499-523.  
(<http://arjournals.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.anthro.32.061002.093129>)
- Asad, Talal. 1986. "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology." In James Clifford and George Marcus eds., Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 141-164.
- Asad, Talal ed. 1973. Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter. London: Ithaca Press.
- DeWalt, Kathleen and Billie DeWalt. 2002. "What is Participant Observation?" and "Learning to Be a Participant Observer." In DeWalt and DeWalt, Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers. New York: Altamira Press, pp. 1-34.
- Rabinow, Paul. 1986. "Representations are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology." In James Clifford and George Marcus eds., Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 234-261.
- Rabinow, Paul. 2007 [1977]. Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco, with a foreword by Robert N. Bellah ; afterword by Pierre Bourdieu. Berkeley: University of California Press.

*Supplementary Readings on the Field and Fieldwork:*

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Esant1114/MPhilField.pdf>

*Reading List for M.Phil. Option on Social Anthropology of the Middle East:*

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Esant1114/MPhilSocAnth.pdf>

**Essay:** Was Winegar's approach to "participant observation" fundamental to the success (or lack thereof if that is how you see it) of Creative Reckonings in analyzing the politics of art and culture in Egypt?

**Extra Topic: Culture and Politics in the Middle East**

- Readings:* Wedeen, Lisa. 1999. Ambiguities of Domination - Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Anderson, Lisa. 1995. Democracy in the Arab World: A Critique of the Political Culture Approach. In Brynen R, Korany B, Noble

P, eds. Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, Vols. 1, 2. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1:77–92.

*Recommended:*

- Huntington Samuel. 1995. The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Makiya, Kanan. 1991. The Monument: Art, Vulgarly and Responsibility in Iraq. London: Deutsch.

*Further reading (not required):*

- Kedourie E. 1994. Democracy and Arab Political Culture. London: Frank Cass.
- Inglehart, Norris P. 2003. The True Clash of Civilizations. Foreign Policy, March–April: 67–74.
- Brass, P. 2000. Foucault Steals Political Science. Annual Review of Political Science, Vol. 3: 305-330.  
<http://arjournals.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.305?prevSearch=%28Foucault%29+AND+%5Bjournal%3A+polisci%5D>

*Supplementary Readings:* <http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Esant1114/MPhilCultPol.pdf>

**Essay:** What has become known as “the cultural turn” in social science since the 1970s has brought attention to the ways in which culture and power structure and govern politics in the Middle East. The increased visibility of culture, media, and public contestation in the last decade has given new incentives to this approach. However, while the influx of critical theory has enriched our understanding of politics, some political scientists remain sceptical that culture can help us answer fundamental questions about Middle East politics. Others worry about the essentialising ways in which “culture” is appropriated by thinkers like Huntington and the political establishment in the West. Should culture and politics be studied as separate realms of social reality? What are the potential pitfalls and gains of “political ethnography” exemplified by Lisa Wedeen?