Course Description and Goals
The goal of the course is to provide a thorough introduction to North African societies and politics. The Maghrib (the “farthest west” in Arabic)—encompassing Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya—has historically been a critical frontier zone linking Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. This crossroads region continues to remain strategically important with sub-Saharan and North African migration, political Islam, terrorism/counterterrorism, the Sahara question, Islam-West relations, climate, and Mediterranean trade relationships among the current pressing international concerns related to the Maghrib.

The course will meet three days a week, with each week exploring a prominent theme related to North African society and politics, including an overview of Maghrib history; the legacies of colonialism and nationalism; political systems and opposition; religion, ethnicity, and race in North Africa; and Maghrib policy issues in the 21st century. To maximize interactions related to North Africa, the course will also include meetings with local experts and virtual field trips to key sites in the region including Fez, Volubulis, Marrakesh, the Sahara desert, Algiers, Tunis, and Leptis Magna (in Libya).

Reading List:


All other readings including selected chapters and journal articles available electronically.

North Africa FILM RECOMMENDATIONS (not required)

Course Structure and Requirements:
The course structure will combine lectures, which will help organize, summarize, and outline material into principal themes, and class discussions, allowing students to interact with, evaluate, and debate issues raised in the course and as these relate to current events.

Attendance and Participation 10%
[*YSS attendance policy: You will be dropped from the course if you miss 2 classes in first week, or 3 total during the session. This policy is enforced because of the shortness of our time and limited number of meetings]
Quizzes (Map and Key Term) 20%
[A word bank of possible items on these quizzes will be provided prior to quiz. Learning goal is not to trick you but to help you develop a basic literacy of key places, names, events related to North African history]

Weekly Reading Responses (ca. 500 words) 40%

Research paper (from 10-12pgs / 2500-3500 words) 30%

Course Writing Fellow
XXX will be our course writing fellow. XXX is available to discuss any writing you do in this course (draft not required). Email at xxxxxx to set up an appointment, and they will respond with a Zoom link where you can meet to discuss your work.

Note on Academic Integrity
Students are expected to adhere to the standards prescribed in the Undergraduate Regulations (Links to an external site.) regarding cheating, plagiarism, and documentation. Appropriately using and documenting sources is an integral component of developing necessary professional and academic skills. Students are encouraged to access the resources available through the Poorvu Center website (Links to an external site.) when preparing writing assignments.

Course Calendar

WEEK 1: Panoramic Views of North African History


- Wyrten, Introduction

W 6/9 (2) Ancient North Africa: From Prehistory to the Byzantines

- Naylor, Chapter 1-2

- VIRTUAL FIELD-TRIP: Volubulis, Lepits Megna, Moulay Idriss Zerhoun
F 6/11 (3) Varieties of Islamic State Formation in North Africa

- Wyrtzen, Chapter 1

*QUIZ 1 – Maghrib Map (Morocco and North Africa) [Term Bank]*

VIRTUAL FIELD-TRIP: Ziz oasis complex, Sijilmasa, and Sahara. Possible Zoom Q&A with local expert: Tata Abdelkrim

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WEEK 2: Legacies of Colonialism and Nationalism

M 6/14 (4) 19-20 Century European Colonization: Penetration, Pacification, and State-Building

- Wyrtzen, Chapter 2

W 6/16 (5) Colonial Logics of Legibility/Legitimization and Local Resistance and Accommodation

- Wyrtzen, 3-5

Optional readings:


F 6/18 (6). Anti-Colonial Nationalism and Decolonization

- Wyrtzen, Chapter 8-9
- Watch *Battle of Algiers*

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WEEK 3: Post-Colonial Political Systems, Opposition, and Reform

M 6/21 (7) Post-Colonial State Formation and Modes of Opposition (Islamist, Berber, Feminist)

- Willis, Chapter 2-4

W 6/23 (8) Intra-Maghrib and International Relations (The Western Sahara issue, Algerian Civil War, Maghrib Union, European Union)
*QUICK 2 – Key terms [Term Bank]*

F 6/25 (9) Islam in Society and Politics

- Willis, Chapter 5

WEEK 4: Religion, Ethnicity, and Race in the Maghrib

M 6/28 (10) The Jewish Question in North Africa

- Wyrtzen, Chapter 6, Negotiating Morocco’s Jewish Question

VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP: Imperial Port of Essaouira, Imperial City of Marrakesh (Saadian Tombs, Mellah, Badia Saadian Palace, Bahia Palace)

W 6/30 (11) Arab-Berber, Whiteness-Blackness and Ethno-Racial Boundaries

- Willis, Chapter 6

Fri 7/2 (12) Family Codes, Gender, and Legal Reform

- Wyrtzen, Chapter 7
- Žvan-Elliot, Katja. 2015. Modernizing Patriarchy: The Politics of Women’s Rights in Morocco. Austin: University of Texas Press. (Chapter 4; Chapter 5)

WEEK 5: The Maghrib in the 21 Century


- WATCH (40 mins): "My Makhzen and Me [Links to an external site.]" (2012)


- Wyrtzen (forthcoming), "North African Trajectories Towards Constitutional Multiculturalism: The Cases of Morocco and Algeria"

W 7/7 (14) Migration / Race / Africa Pivot / Climate Change / Security Policy Questions [Student's Topic Choice Option!]


F 7/9 (15) Final Project Presentations