UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Arabic Culture

2526-1-E2002R008

Course title

Arab culture

Topics and course structure

This course provides a critical introduction to Arab culture, understood as a complex set of religious practices, intellectual traditions, literary productions, and historical developments that have emerged in Arabic-speaking societies from the pre-Islamic period to the contemporary era.
Particular attention will be devoted to the formation of Arab-Islamic civilization, the religious and cultural foundations of Islam, the development of the Arabic literary tradition, and selected key issues shaping the contemporary Arab world.
The course aims to equip students with analytical tools to understand:
the formation and historical development of Arab-Islamic civilization
the religious and cultural foundations of Islam
the evolution of Arabic literary traditions
major historical, political, and cultural dynamics of the contemporary Arab world
The course is structured into three main modules.
Module 1
Islam and Islamic Civilization
The first module introduces the religious and historical foundations of Islam, a religion that has played a central role in shaping Arab-Islamic civilization and the cultural and political history of societies in the Arab world.
The module will address the following topics:
the historical context of pre-Islamic Arabia
Arab society and poetry during the ??hiliyya
the prophetic mission of Mu?ammad
the formation of the first Muslim community
the period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs

the Qur??n and the development of major exegetical traditions
Particular attention will be devoted to the diversity of interpretations of Islam across different historical periods and within the contemporary world. In this context, the emergence and development of the major branches of Islam (Sunni and Shi?i) will also be examined.
Main reference text
Carole Hillenbrand, Islam. Una nuova introduzione storica. Turin: Einaudi, 2016.

Module 2
History and Society in the Arab World
The second module provides an overview of the major historical and political transformations that have shaped Arab societies.
The module will focus in particular on:
the formation and expansion of the Islamic empires
cultural and intellectual developments in the medieval Islamic world
interactions between the Arab world, Europe, and the Mediterranean
European colonialism in the Arab world
the emergence of modern Arab states
Part of this module will be dedicated to the Palestinian question, a central issue in the political and cultural history of the contemporary Middle East.
Additional teaching materials will be made available on the course e-learning platform, including lecture slides, historical maps, primary documents, and selected academic articles.

Module 3
Literatures and Cultures of the Arab World
The third module explores key cultural expressions of Arab modernity through the study of literary texts and intellectual traditions.
Topics include:
an introduction to the Arabic literary tradition
the concept of adab
the emergence of modern Arabic literature during the nah?a (Arab cultural renaissance)
literature and identity in the contemporary Arab world
narrative representations of exile and displacement
Particular attention will be devoted to Palestinian literature and to literary representations of exile and diaspora.
Reference text
Paolo Branca, Adab ?arab?. Pagine di letteratura araba dagli inizi ai nostri giorni (selected chapters to be indicated).

Objectives

The course aims to provide students with a critical understanding of Arab culture through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates historical, religious, and literary perspectives. Through the study of key historical developments, religious traditions, and literary texts, students will acquire the analytical tools necessary to interpret the cultural and intellectual dynamics of Arab societies from the pre-Islamic period to the contemporary era.
Learning Outcomes (Dublin Descriptors)

1. Knowledge and understanding
   Students will acquire a foundational knowledge of the main dimensions of Arab culture, including its historical development, religious traditions, and literary production.
2. Applying knowledge and understanding
   Students will be able to apply the knowledge acquired during the course to the analysis and interpretation of literary texts, historical documents, and cultural materials related to the Arab world.
3. Making judgements

Students will develop the ability to critically interpret cultural, political, and religious dynamics within the contemporary Arab world, situating them within their broader historical context.

4. Communication skills
   Students will be able to present and discuss the main themes addressed in the course in a clear and structured manner, using appropriate academic terminology.
5. Learning skills
   Students will develop independent learning skills through the critical reading and analysis of the texts included in the course bibliography.

Methodologies

The course consists of lectures complemented by interactive components that encourage students' participation in classroom discussions.
During the course, literary texts, historical documents, and audiovisual materials will also be analyzed in order to deepen the understanding of the topics addressed.
Lecture slides and teaching materials will be made available on the course e-learning platform.

Online and offline teaching materials

Classes will be held in person. Course slides will be uploaded to the e-learning platform, together with information on how to access films, videos, and the readings assigned for the course.

Programme and references

Required readings:
Carole Hillenbrand, Islam. Una nuova introduzione storica. Torino: Einaudi, 2016.
Paolo Branca, Adab 'arab?. Pagine di letteratura araba dagli inizi ai nostri giorni. Milano: Ares, 2019. (selected sections to be indicated)
Additional teaching materials will be provided by the instructor on the course e-learning platform.

One of the following texts (to be chosen by the student):
Students are required to choose one of the following volumes:
Marco Allegra, I palestinesi. Storia e identità di un popolo. Roma: Carocci, 2010.
Massimo Campanini, Il Corano e la sua interpretazione. Roma–Bari: Laterza, 2013.
Massimo Campanini, Quale Islam? Jihadismo, radicalismo, riformismo. Brescia: Editrice La Scuola, 2015.
Patrizia Manduchi – Nicola Melis, ?ih?d – Definizioni e riletture di un termine abusato. Milano: Mondadori Università, 2019.
Vermondo Brugnatelli, Libia inedita. Roma: L'Asino d'oro Edizioni, 2012.

Literary text (one novel to be chosen):
Students are required to choose one novel from those listed below, representing different literary traditions of the contemporary Arab world:
Ghassan Kanafani, Uomini sotto il sole. Palermo: Sellerio, 2003.
Abdelwahab Meddeb, Il talismano. Milano: Jaca Book, 2006.
Tahar Ben Jelloun, Il razzismo spiegato a mia figlia. Milano: Bompiani, 1998.
Ahmed Saadawi, Frankenstein a Baghdad. Roma: Edizioni e/o, 2015.

Naguib Mahfouz, Il ladro e i cani. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1989.

Assessment methods

Oral Examination
The oral examination will assess students' understanding of the topics covered during lectures as well as the assigned readings.
Assessment Criteria:
-Mastery of course content;
-Ability to perform critical and analytical reasoning;
-Command of the relevant disciplinary terminology;
-Capacity to integrate and connect the various topics discussed throughout the course.

Office hours

By appointment via e-mail: emna.nefzi@unimib.it

Programme validity

The syllabus remains valid for a period of two academic years.

Course tutors and assistants

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION