



مركز النهضة الاستراتيجي
Renaissance Strategic Center



ARDD

النهضة العربية للديمقراطية والتنمية
Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development



BIRZEIT UNIVERSITY

معهد ابراهيم أبو لغد للدراسات الدولية
Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies



International Politics in the SWANA Region: Colonial Legacy, Displacement, and Humanitarian Governance

Summer Course Syllabus

A Joint Academic Initiative of the Renaissance Strategic Center (RSC), Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD), Jordan, and the Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies (IALIIS), Birzeit University, Palestine

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Renaissance Strategic Center (RSC) at Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD), in academic partnership with the Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies (IALIIS) at Birzeit University, is launching a three-week summer school designed to provide students and practitioners with a critical and grounded understanding of the contemporary Middle East.

The program responds to a growing need for **analytically rigorous and context-sensitive knowledge about the region**. Public debates and policy frameworks often reduce the SWANA region to crisis narratives, focusing on conflict, displacement, or humanitarian emergencies in isolation. This program instead situates these dynamics within their **historical, political, economic, and social contexts**, emphasizing the structural forces shaping the region.

Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from **political sociology, history, migration studies, international relations, and humanitarian policy**, the course examines key themes including colonial legacies, state formation, ideological movements, labor migration, gender politics, refugee governance, and regional political transformations. Particular attention is given to forced displacement as a structural feature of societies and to the central role of Palestine in regional politics.

Hosted in Amman, Jordan, the program offers participants a unique opportunity to study these dynamics in one of the region's most important hubs for humanitarian governance and refugee policy. Through seminars, field visits, guest lectures, policy workshops, and engagement with practitioners and scholars from across the region, participants will connect academic analysis with contemporary policy debates and field realities.

The summer school combines the policy expertise and field-based engagement of ARDD and the Renaissance Strategic Center with the academic excellence and regional scholarship of Birzeit University's Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies. Together, the two institutions provide participants with a unique learning experience that bridges academic inquiry, policy engagement, and practical knowledge.

The course is designed for international undergraduate and graduate students, early-career researchers, and practitioners working in humanitarian, development, human rights, and policy sectors who seek a deeper understanding of the political and social dynamics shaping the SWANA region.

Through this joint initiative, RSC, ARDD, and IALIIS aim to foster critical scholarship, informed policy dialogue, and regional academic exchange while contributing to a new generation of scholars and practitioners capable of engaging with the complex transformations shaping the Middle East.

Details:

Host Institution: Renaissance Strategic Center (RSC), ARDD

Location: Amman, Jordan

Duration: 3 weeks

Format: Seminar-based course with field visits, guest lectures, and policy workshops

Minimum participants: 5 students

Dates: 12 July – 30 July; 15 August- 1 September

Fees: 400\$

Course Description

This interdisciplinary summer course explores the political, social, and historical dynamics shaping the contemporary South West Asia. Drawing on perspectives from political sociology, history, migration studies, and humanitarian policy, the course examines how colonial legacies, ideological movements, social transformations, and displacement shape the region today.

The course challenges dominant narratives about South West Asia by situating contemporary political dynamics within their historical and structural contexts. It examines the formation of modern states, the emergence of ideological movements, and the central role of displacement in shaping societies across the region.

Particular attention is given to:

- Refugee governance and humanitarian systems
- Labor migration and regional political economy
- Ideological movements and political mobilization
- Gender politics and feminist movements
- The centrality of Palestine in regional politics
- Displacement as a structural feature of Middle Eastern societies

The course combines academic analysis with policy-oriented perspectives and field-based learning. Through lectures, discussions, field visits, and practitioner engagement, participants

will examine how political dynamics intersect with humanitarian governance and social transformation.

Hosting the program in Jordan provides a unique opportunity to study these dynamics in one of the most important regional hubs for humanitarian operations and refugee governance.

This course is designed for **international students as well as practitioners** working in the humanitarian and development sectors who seek to deepen their understanding of the political and social dynamics shaping the region.

Teaching and guest lectures will be jointly delivered by scholars affiliated with Birzeit University, researchers from the Renaissance Strategic Center, ARDD experts, and invited regional and international academics and practitioners working on displacement, migration, Palestine, humanitarian governance, social movements, political economy, and regional politics.

Institutional Partnership

The Summer School is jointly delivered by the Renaissance Strategic Center (RSC), the research and policy institute of Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD), and the Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies (IALIIS) at Birzeit University.

The Renaissance Strategic Center is one of the leading independent policy and research centers in Jordan working on refugee governance, displacement, migration, localization, social justice, civic engagement, and regional political transformations. Through its extensive partnerships with civil society organizations, international agencies, government institutions, and refugee communities, RSC provides a unique platform linking research, policy dialogue, and field practice.

The Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies at Birzeit University is one of the Arab region's leading centers for teaching and research in international relations, political economy, development studies, forced displacement, colonialism, and regional politics. The Institute has played a central role in advancing critical scholarship on Palestine and the broader Middle East and has established itself as an important academic hub for regional and international scholars.

The partnership between RSC and IALIIS combines policy expertise, field-based learning, and academic excellence. Participants benefit from direct engagement with both practitioners and scholars, enabling them to connect theoretical frameworks with contemporary political realities and policy challenges across the region.

Why this Course in Jordan?

Jordan offers an exceptional learning environment for studying regional political dynamics and humanitarian governance.

Jordan is:

- One of the largest refugee-hosting countries globally
- A central operational hub for international humanitarian organizations
- A key site for studying displacement governance and refugee policy

Amman hosts a dense network of NGOs, UN agencies, research institutions, and civil society organizations, making it an ideal setting for connecting academic learning with real-world policy practice.

1. Jordan hosts a large number of refugee camps, including those in camps under both **UNHCR** and **UNRWA**, and operates within multiple refugee protection frameworks (UNHCR, UNRWA, IOM, etc.).
2. Despite being a **non-signatory state**, Jordan has demonstrated strong and practical good practices. For example, the recent invitation from Colombia to participate in their events, and the nature of the questions they are exploring, reflect this recognition. This is a key strength, as it brings a more practical (rather than purely theoretical) dimension.
3. **The role of civil society** in Jordanian approach to the refugee waves has developed over the years inasmuch as currently localization policies are being considered and implemented by all relevant stakeholders. Jordan therefore is a fundamental **case study** to examine civic space dynamics when addressing refugee and migration issues.

Field visits and practitioner engagement will allow students to examine how displacement governance and humanitarian systems operate in practice.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course participants will be able to:

1. Critically analyze dominant narratives about the Middle East and their implications for policy and scholarship.
2. Understand the historical foundations of contemporary regional politics, including colonial legacies and state formation.
3. Examine ideological movements shaping political mobilization in the region.
4. Analyze the sociological and political dimensions of displacement.

5. Assess humanitarian governance and refugee policy in practice.
6. Connect academic frameworks with policy and humanitarian work.
7. Develop analytical and policy-writing skills relevant to international development and humanitarian sectors.

Course Structure

The course runs for **3 weeks** with **three seminar sessions per week**.

Each session lasts **2.5 hours** and includes lecture, discussion, and group activities.

Additional activities include:

- Field visits
- Guest lectures
- Policy workshops
- Student presentations

Tentative schedule

Orientation Day

Session: Introduction to the Course and Institutional Context

Topics include:

- Introduction to ARDD and the Renaissance Strategic Center
- Overview of Jordan's political and social landscape
- Course expectations and assignments
- Introduction to humanitarian governance in Jordan

Section 1

Narratives, History, and Political Structures

This week introduces the historical and conceptual foundations necessary for understanding contemporary regional dynamics.

Class 1

Orientalism and Knowledge Production

This session examines how representations of the Middle East have shaped academic scholarship, media narratives, and policy frameworks.

Topics include:

- Orientalism and the production of knowledge about the Middle East
- Power, discourse, and representation
- Implications for research and policy

Class 2

Empire, Colonialism, and the Making of the Modern Middle East

This session examines the transition from imperial rule to modern state formation in the Middle East.

Topics include:

- Ottoman governance structures
- Colonial mandates
- Borders and state formation

Key historical event

Sykes-Picot Agreement

Class 3

States, Power, and Political Economy

This session examines political economy and state–society relations in the region.

Topics include:

- Authoritarian governance
- Rentier economies
- Political legitimacy and social contracts

Section 2

Ideologies, Social Movements, and Gender

This week examines ideological mobilization, social movements, and gender politics.

Class 4

Ideological Movements in the Middle East

Topics include:

- Arab nationalism
- Political Islam
- Leftist movements
- Contemporary protest movements

Key historical moment

Arab uprisings (2011)

Class 5

Gender Politics and Feminist Movements

This session examines feminist mobilization and gender politics in the region.

Topics include:

- Feminist activism
- Gender and authoritarianism
- Gender and conflict

Class 6

Labor Migration and Political Economy

Guest lecture from a regional migration expert.

Topics include:

- Labor migration systems
- Gulf political economy
- Migrant precarity and rights

Section 3

Refugees and Humanitarian Governance

This week focuses on displacement and humanitarian systems

Class 7

Forced Displacement in the Middle East

Topics include:

- Refugee regimes
- International refugee law
- Humanitarian governance

Key actor

UNHCR

Suggested readings

Class 8

The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Jordan

Topics include:

- Refugee governance in Jordan
- Host community relations
- Policy challenges

Class 9

Humanitarianism and the Politics of Aid

Topics include:

- Humanitarian governance
- Localization debates
- NGO politics

Section 4

Palestine and Regional Politics

This week examines the centrality of Palestine in regional political dynamics.

Class 10

Palestine: Colonialism, Resistance, and Regional Politics

Topics include:

- Settler colonialism
- Palestinian political movements
- Regional geopolitics

Key historical event

Nakba (1948)

Class 11

Palestinian Refugees and Protracted Displacement

Guest lecture

Topics include:

- Refugee camps
- Education and social services
- Politics of long-term displacement

Class 12

Regional Futures: Conflict, Mobility, and Social Transformation

Final synthesis session examining:

- regional geopolitical transformations
- displacement and mobility futures
- policy implications for humanitarian governance

Experiential Learning Alternative City Tour — Amman

Participants will explore the social and political geography of the city through an alternative urban tour examining:

- migration and displacement
- urban inequality
- refugee neighborhoods
- humanitarian infrastructures

Field Visit

Participants will visit a Palestinian refugee camp such as **Al-Baqa'a Camp**.

Activities include:

- meetings with local civil society organizations
- discussions with community representatives
- analysis of humanitarian governance in practice

Assignments and Assessment

Participation and Discussion — 25%

Active engagement with seminar discussions and readings.

Field Reflection Paper — 25%

Students will reflect on the field visit and connect observations to course concepts.

Length
1000 words

Policy Brief/Essay — 50%

Students will write a practitioner-oriented policy brief addressing a regional issue related to displacement or governance. **Potential for publication in RSC website.**

Length
1500–2000 words

Expected Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will:

- Understand the historical foundations of contemporary Middle Eastern politics
- Analyze displacement as a structural feature of the region
- Examine ideological and social movements shaping political change
- Critically evaluate humanitarian governance systems
- Connect academic knowledge with policy and practice

