

Faculty of Arts and Science
Department of Political Science, Winter 2026
POL479H1S
Comparative Urbanisms in the Middle East & North Africa

Instructor: Dr. Mohammad Yaghi
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Lecture: Thursday, 3:00 pm –5:00 pm
Office hours: Thursday, 12:00 pm –14:00 pm

Course Description:

This fourth-year seminar examines cities of the Middle East and North Africa through the lens of comparative urbanism. Moving from classical “Islamic city” debates and colonial planning to informality, neoliberal redevelopment, urbicide, migration, urban refugees, and infrastructural breakdown, the course explores how power, space, and everyday life intersect in diverse urban contexts from Casablanca, Cairo, and Beirut to Dubai, Amman, Sana’a, and Tehran. Students read across anthropology, geography, history, and political science to interrogate how colonial legacies, authoritarian governance, war, displacement, and environmental crisis shape urban form and urban citizenship. Emphasis is placed on generating theory from place, using Middle Eastern and North African cities not as “cases” for Euro-American theory but as starting points for rethinking concepts such as modernity, informality, sovereignty, and infrastructure.

Teaching Format:

This is a seminar-based course that combines short student presentations with interactive discussion. In the first week, the instructor will introduce the course, review the evaluation methods, and present and discuss the readings for Week 1.

Beginning in Week 2, the weekly readings will be presented by students. Depending on enrolment, each student will be responsible for presenting several articles over the term. Each presentation will be allocated 15 minutes, followed by 10 minutes of discussion. Students are encouraged to use slides (e.g., PowerPoint) to structure their presentation. The instructor will moderate the discussion and synthesize key points in the remaining time of the seminar.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. **Critically compare** major theoretical frameworks in Middle Eastern urban studies (e.g., “Islamic city,” colonial urbanism, informality, urbicide, comparative urbanism) and assess their explanatory limits and possibilities across different cities.
2. **Analyze how power and governance** are spatialized through planning, security infrastructures, displacement, migration regimes, and infrastructures of water, electricity, and waste in selected cities across the MENA region.
3. **Evaluate everyday practices of survival and resistance**—including nonmovements, local activism, and informal service provision—as forms of urban politics in contexts of inequality, war, and crisis.

4. **Apply comparative methods to develop original arguments** about similarities and differences among Middle Eastern and North African cities, situating them within wider debates on global and comparative urbanism.
5. **Interpret and synthesize interdisciplinary scholarship** (from anthropology, geography, history, and political science) to produce well-structured written work and seminar contributions that link empirical case studies to conceptual debates.
6. **Design and execute a focused research project on a selected city or theme in the region, demonstrating effective use of primary/secondary sources, appropriate methods, and clear analytical framing.**

Course Requirements and Evaluation

The class relies on the commitment and active participation of all students. All students must have the reading assignments completed and ready for in-depth discussion for each class. Regular attendance is important for completing the assignments. You must come to class having carefully read all materials and be prepared to discuss, question, and argue about issues raised in the readings. You should also take notes while reading the materials on issues you find enlightening, controversial, or that you do not agree with. Taking notes in class on themes, key terms, and debates we discuss will also help when you write your response papers.

Evaluation is based on four tasks:

- Four response papers (60%)
- Presentation(s) (15%)
- Midterm exam (15%)
- Participation (10%)

Details:

Response papers: Each response paper will address one of the essay questions raised in the weekly readings as assigned in the syllabus. It will be submitted in the following week(s) after the discussion and presentations have taken place in class. Each response paper should be 3–4 pages, double-spaced, in 12-point font, and should be based on the assigned readings and the discussion in class.

The response papers are designed to develop critical reading, analytical, and writing skills. Evaluation criteria include: critical and integrative analysis of texts; clarity of thought; ability to synthesize readings and class discussions into your own argument; and ability to formulate a theoretical grounding for it.

Submission deadlines:

- First Response Paper: 22 January 2026
- Second Response Paper: 5 February 2026
- Third Response Paper: 5 March 2026
- Fourth Response Paper: 26 March 2026

Presentation(s): Depending on the number of students in class, each student will do at least one presentation in class focusing on one of the weekly readings. They will have 15 minutes to present the main arguments of the article, critically analyse the reading by showing the points of agreement or disagreement with the author(s) and why, and raise questions for discussion. The presenter will also respond to the students' questions during the discussion.

The grade of this assignment will be as follows: 10% graded by students and 5% by the instructor.

The instructor and students will evaluate presentations using a short rubric (clarity, understanding of the text, quality of critique, and discussion questions).

The instructor moderates peer grades and can adjust if there is any obvious unfairness.

The goal of the presentations is two-fold: first, to identify and explain the argument(s) that the author is making, and second, to provide your own take on that argument. Begin with a short summary of the work and then focus on the author's argument(s). Try to be concise in all parts of your analysis.

Following is a sample outline for your presentation:

- Introduction (includes the author's and your argument[s])
- Short summary of the text (focusing on central aspects of the work)
- Development and substantiation of your critique

Midterm Exam (in-class; one hour on 26 February): The midterm will cover material from Weeks 1 to 6. It will consist of 20 multiple-choice and true/false questions (10%), and one short essay (chosen from a set of three) (5%). The short essay should be clearly structured with a thesis and arguments to defend the thesis based on the readings and class discussion. **Note:** only two readings per week will be included in the material covered on the exam. The instructor will post the readings included in the midterm exam on Quercus two weeks in advance.

Participation: Based on attendance and engagement in the discussion.

- Excellent (A): almost always present, regularly contributes with comments grounded in the readings, listens to peers, and engages respectfully.
- Satisfactory (B/C): mostly present, occasionally contributes, shows some engagement with readings.
- Unsatisfactory (D/F): frequent absences, rarely or never participates.

Policies & Services

Readings: All readings are available through the University of Toronto library system. Individual chapters and articles listed in the syllabus will also be posted on Quercus; links provided when possible in the syllabus. If you are unable to locate a specific text, please contact the instructor by email.

Office hours and communication: My office hours are listed above, but you are also encouraged to reach out by email and/or to request a zoom meeting. I will do my best to respond within 24 hours on weekdays.

Written Work: Students should retain a copy of their assignment before submitting it. All essays and assignments must be kept by the student until the graded work has been returned and the final grade has been posted on ACORN.

Missed test policy: If you miss the midterm, you are required to provide one of the four supporting documents listed below:

1. Absence declaration via ACORN
2. U of T Verification of Illness or Injury Form
3. College Registrar's letter
4. Letter of Academic Accommodation from Accessibility Services

Last day to drop the course: Monday, March 16

<p>Winter Reading Week (No Classes): Monday, February 16 to Friday, February 20.</p>
<p>Use of Generative AI in Assignments: Students may use artificial intelligence tools, including generative AI, as learning aids (e.g., clarifying concepts, identifying sources to follow up on) and for language editing only (e.g., grammar, spelling, and stylistic clarity).</p> <p>Response papers must be written by the student. AI tools may not be used to generate, rewrite, or reorganize the core ideas, arguments, or structure of the paper.</p> <p>If AI tools are used, students must include a brief statement at the end of the assignment explaining how they were used. Students are fully responsible for the accuracy of all information and citations. A deduction of 3% from the assignment grade will be applied for each instance of incorrect data, citation, or factual claim that could reasonably have been avoided through proper checking.</p>
<p>Academic dishonesty: Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will be dealt with accordingly. For further clarification and information on plagiarism please see Writing at the University of Toronto http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources". A few high-level considerations:</p> <p>The most common violations are presenting some else's work as your own, copying material directly from sources without proper citation, insufficiently paraphrasing material that is cited but not quoted, using the same material for multiple assignments without prior discussion with the instructor, or falsifying sources and/or information.</p>
<p>Accessibility Services: Students with disabilities may receive accommodation from the University and need to register with accessibility services. Instructors are notified with a request for accommodation and can give the request consideration. For best practices around accommodations, visit Accessibility Services:</p> <p>https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/accessibility-services/, or email accessibility.services@utoronto.ca or Tel: 416-978-8060.</p> <p>If you do not have official documentation but have accessibility-related concerns, you are encouraged to discuss those with me.</p>
<p>Technology Support for Students: For Quercus and all other technology support, contact the Information Common Helps Desk: help.desk@utoronto.ca</p> <p>For more details, visit Info Commons Help Desk, Robarts Library.</p>
<p>Health and Wellness: Students can access a wide range of programs and services to support their health and wellbeing. Many of these programs are listed at:</p> <p>https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/health-wellness/</p>

Weekly Topics and Readings

Week 1 (8 Jan 2026): Introduction: Space, Demography, and Regional Framing

This week introduces the spatial, demographic, and conceptual foundations for studying Middle Eastern cities. Students examine how regional definitions, population patterns, and historical trajectories shape the field of urban analysis. The goal is to establish a baseline understanding of the region's urban diversity and analytical challenges.

Key questions:

- How do demographic and material structures condition the development of cities in the MENA region?
- What are the problems of defining "the Middle East" as a coherent urban region?
- How does historical framing influence present-day interpretations of Middle Eastern urbanism?

Readings:

- McKee, Musa, Martin Keulertz, Negar Habibi, Mark Mulligan, and Eckart Woertz. "Demographic and economic material factors in the MENA region." *Middle East and North Africa regional architecture: mapping geopolitical shifts, regional order and domestic transformations working papers* 3 (2017): 43. <https://shorturl.at/Fm9uZ>
- Dumper, Michael R. T., and Bruce E. Stanley. "Reevaluating the Past, Rethinking the Future." In *Cities of the Middle East and North Africa: A Historical Encyclopedia*, xvii–xix. New York: Routledge, 2006. <https://shorturl.at/vFFAk>
- Dumper, Michael R. T., and Bruce E. Stanley. "The Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Seeing Cities Comparatively." In *Cities of the Middle East and North Africa: A Historical Encyclopedia*, xvii–xxv. New York: Routledge, 2006. <https://shorturl.at/vFFAk>
- Blake, Gerald Henry, and Richard I. Lawless. *The Changing Middle Eastern City*. Routledge, 2016. The Introduction only (10 pages). <https://shorturl.at/V2Mu0>

Week 2 (15 Jan 2026): Islamic & Oriental City Frameworks

This week introduces foundational debates on the "Islamic city" as an analytical category. Students examine how Weberian, orientalist, and revisionist readings shaped early urban theory. The goal is to understand how concepts of tradition, essence, and myth shaped the study of Middle Eastern cities.

Key questions:

- To what extent does the "Islamic city" thesis rely on orientalist assumptions, and how do authors like Abu-Lughod challenge them?
- How does Weber's theorization of the city align or diverge from urban forms found in the Middle East?
- Is the category "Islamic city" analytically useful today, or should it be abandoned as historically and conceptually flawed?

Readings:

- Abu-Lughod, Janet L. "The Islamic City—Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 2 (1987): 155–176. <https://shorturl.at/XKGSm>
- Zubaida, Sami. "Max Weber's The City and the Islamic City." *Max Weber Studies* 6, no. 1 (2006): 111–118.
- Dabbour, Loai. "The traditional Arab Islamic city: the structure of neighborhood quarters." *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 45, no. 2 (2021): 107–118. <https://shorturl.at/OvM5i>
- **Watch:** Edward Said on Orientalism (40 min), 1998: <https://tinyurl.com/yc59ypbe>

Suggested Readings:

- Eickelman, Dale. "Is There an Islamic City? The Making of a Quarter in a Moroccan Town." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5, no. 3 (1974): 274–294.
- Bianca, Stefano. "The Historic Arab-Islamic City." In *Urban Form in the Arab World: Past and Present*, 21–158. Zurich: vdf Hochschulverlag; Thames & Hudson, 2000. Only the conceptual/typological parts at the beginning of that section.
- Raymond, André. "Characteristics of Arab Cities in the Ottoman Era." In *The Great Arab Cities in the 16th–18th Centuries: An Introduction*. New York University Press, 1984.

Week 3 (22 Jan 2026): Colonial Urbanism

This week examines colonial planning as a central force in reshaping Middle Eastern cities. French, British, and Ottoman encounters produced dual urbanisms marked by racial segregation, spatial hierarchy, and modernist control. The week interrogates how colonial governance continues to structure postcolonial urban space.

Note: First Response Paper Is Due Today

Key Questions:

- How did colonial states use architecture and planning as instruments of domination?
- Compare French and British colonial urbanism: what spatial legacies remain today?
- To what extent can colonial planning be considered the foundation of contemporary uneven urban development in the region?

Readings:

- Çelik, Zeynep. "Le Corbusier, Orientalism, Colonialism." *Assemblage* 17 (1992): 58–77. <https://shorturl.at/V2Kf1>
- Rabinow, Paul. "Colonialism, Modernity: The French in Morocco." In *Forms of Dominance: On the Architecture and Urbanism of the Colonial Enterprise*, 167–182. Aldershot: Avebury, 1989.
- Wright, Gwendolyn. "Morocco: Modernization and Preservation" (Chapter 3). In *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Suggested Readings:

- Lamprakos, Michele. "Le Corbusier and Algiers: The Plan Obus as colonial urbanism." In *Forms of Dominance*, pp. 183-210. Routledge, 2024. <https://shorturl.at/lza4d>
- Hamadeh, Shirine. "Creating the Traditional City: A French Project." In *Forms of Dominance*, pp. 241–259. Routledge, 2024.
- Myers, Garth A. *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa*. Syracuse University Press, 2003.
- Njoh, Ambe J. "Rationale for french colonial urbanism." In *French urbanism in foreign lands*, pp. 1-16. Springer International Publishing, 2015.

Week 4 (29 Jan 2026): Informality & Urban Marginality

This week explores informality as an essential mode of urbanization in the Middle East. Students analyze how informal housing, survival economies, and state neglect shape urban political life. The framework emphasizes informality as a system, not an exception.

Key questions:

- How do informal settlements challenge binary distinctions between legality and illegality?
- What political practices emerge from informal urbanization according to Bayat and Elyachar?
- Is informality primarily a structural outcome of state failure or a creative strategy of urban residents?

Readings:

- Bayat, Asef. "Who Is Afraid of Ashwaiyyat? Urban Change and Politics in Egypt." *Environment & Urbanization* 12, no. 2 (2000): 185–199. <https://shorturl.at/tSBOq>
- Elyachar, Julia. "Mappings of Power: The State, NGOs, and International Organizations in the Informal Economy of Cairo." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 3 (2003): 571–605.

- Sims, David. "Urban Slums Reports: The Case of Cairo, Egypt." In *Understanding Slums: Case Studies for the Global Report on Human Settlements 2003*, 1–24. UN-Habitat/Development Planning Unit, 2003. <https://shorturl.at/byase>

Suggested Readings:

- Dündar, Özlem. "Models of Urban Transformation: Informal Housing in Ankara." *Cities* 18, no. 6 (2001): 391–401.
- Zebardast, Esfandiar. "Marginalization of the Urban Poor and the Expansion of Spontaneous Settlements on Tehran's Fringe." *Cities* 23, no. 6 (2006): 439–454.
- Roy, Ananya. "The 21st-Century Metropolis: New Geographies of Theory." *Regional Studies* 43, no. 6 (2009): 819–830. <https://shorturl.at/jH8vG>

Week 5 (5 Feb 2026): Urban Modernities, Neoliberalism & Speculative Development

This week examines how Middle Eastern and North African cities produce distinct modernities through state-led redevelopment, neoliberal reforms, speculative real-estate frontiers, and spectacular "worlding" projects. Students analyze how new urban imaginaries—global city branding, mega-projects, security-driven smart city agendas, and financialized land markets—reshape space and social life in North African cities, Beirut, and the Gulf. The week highlights the tensions between lived modernity, political economy, and uneven development.

Note: Second Response Paper Is Due Today

Key questions:

- How do Middle Eastern and North African cities negotiate global modernity through state planning, mega-projects, speculative redevelopment, and urban spectacle?
- In what ways do neoliberal reforms and speculation generate new urban frontiers, inequalities, and forms of violence?
- Compare North African cities, Beirut, and Gulf cities: do their modernizing trajectories converge, or do they produce multiple "Middle Eastern and North African modernities"?

Readings:

- Fawaz, Mona. "Disaster capitalism: Beirut urgently needs a people-centred recovery." 5 January 2021, *Eurozine*. <https://shorturl.at/1Mol6>
- Beier, Raffael. "From visible informality to splintered informalities: reflections on the production of 'formality' in a Moroccan housing programme." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 45, no. 6 (2021): 930-947.
- Gharib, Remah, M. Evren Tok, and Mohammad Zebian. "Neoliberal urbanization and smart cities in the gulf region: the case of Abu Dhabi's Masdar City." In *Gateways to the World: Port Cities in the Gulf*, Oxford University Press, 2017. Chapter 8.
- Mitchell, Timothy. "The World as Exhibition." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (1989): 217–236.

Suggested Readings:

- Zemni, Sami. "The Tunisian revolution: neoliberalism, urban contentious politics and the right to the city." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 41, no. 1 (2017): 70-83.
- Wiedmann, Florian. "Real Estate Liberalization as Catalyst of Urban Transformation in the Persian Gulf." In *Gateways to the World: Port Cities in the Gulf*, Oxford University Press, 2017. Chapter 7.
- Roy, Ananya, and Nezar AlSayyad. "Medieval Modernity: On Citizenship and Urbanism in a Global Era." *Space & Polity* 10, no. 1 (2006): 1–20.

- Aouragh, Miriyam, and Paola Rivetti. "Digital Economies and Urban Speculation in the Gulf." *Middle East Critique* 29, no. 2 (2020): 115–129.

Week 6 (12 Feb 2026): Climate, Ecological Stress & Environmental Urbanism

This week investigates how climate change, water crisis, and ecological degradation are mediated through infrastructure, governance, and urban form in the Middle East. Drawing on cases from Palestine, Iran, and a comparative sample of 21 major Middle Eastern cities, we examine how failing sewage systems, "water bankruptcy," and intensifying urban heat islands produce uneven exposure to risk. The week foregrounds environmental injustice, urban vulnerability, and the political choices that shape (and often foreclose) possibilities for adaptation.

Key questions:

- How do infrastructures of sewage, water, and energy mediate climate vulnerability and social inequality in Middle Eastern cities?
- What do recent patterns of urban heat islands and air-quality change tell us about the geography of climate risk in the region's major cities?
- How do environmental crises—such as socio-economic drought and infrastructural failure—intersect with occupation, sanctions, and authoritarian or technocratic governance to shape adaptation strategies?

Readings:

- Stamatopoulou-Robbins, Sophia C. "Failure to build: Sewage and the choppy temporality of infrastructure in Palestine." *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 4, no. 1 (2021): 28–42. <https://shorturl.at/yWgGu>
- Madani, Kaveh, Amir AghaKouchak, and Ali Mirchi. "Iran's socio-economic drought: challenges of a water-bankrupt nation." *Iranian studies* 49, no. 6 (2016): 997–1016. <https://shorturl.at/elnaZ>
- El Kenawy, Ahmed M., Juan I. Lopez-Moreno, Matthew F. McCabe, Fernando Domínguez-Castro, Dhais Peña-Angulo, Islam M. Gaber, Abduldaem S. Alqasemi et al. "The impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on surface urban heat island changes and air-quality improvements across 21 major cities in the Middle East." *Environmental Pollution* 288 (2021): 117802.

Suggested Readings:

- Rashki, Alireza, Nick J. Middleton, and Andrew S. Goudie. "Dust storms in Iran—Distribution, causes, frequencies and impacts." *Aeolian Research* 48 (2021): 100655.
- Stamatopoulou-Robbins, Sophia. *Waste Siege: The Life of Infrastructure in Palestine*. Stanford University Press, 2019. Chapter 5: "Leakage: Sewage and Doublethink in a 'Shared Environment'" pp. 172–206.
- Khalili, Laleh. *Sinews of War and Trade: Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula*. Verso, 2020. The Introduction

Feb 19, 2026. No Classes. Reading Week

Week 7 (26 Feb 2026): Urbicide: Urbicide: Destruction of Urban Form as Politics

This week examines the destruction of cities as a method of warfare, domination, and political restructuring in Syrian cities and Palestinian urban spaces, including Gaza's refugee camps. We analyze how targeting the built environment fragments communities, erases pluralism, and enables demographic engineering, dispossession, and longer-term projects of rule. Urbicide is treated as both material violence

against infrastructure and housing and symbolic erasure, with contemporary debates on genocide, urbicide, and domicide in Gaza used to connect Coward's conceptualization to current wars in the region.

Reminder: Midterm Exam is Today

Key questions:

- How does Coward define urbicide, and in what ways do the Syrian cases and Gaza's refugee camps illustrate or challenge his understanding of the destruction of urban form?
- How does the targeted destruction of housing, infrastructures, and camps reshape political and social life in Syrian cities and Gaza (e.g., displacement, homogenization, control of property and return)?
- What are the stakes of naming violence against cities as genocide, urbicide, or domicide? How do academic analyses (Coward, Agha, Tayeh) and activist/advocacy framings (Salhani, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor) differ in explaining the logic and purposes behind urbicide?

Readings:

- Coward, Martin. "The logic of urbicide". In *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction*, Chapter 2, pp. 35-54. New York: Routledge, 2009. <https://shorturl.at/faPcH>
- Agha, Munqeth Othman. "The Politics and Economics of Urbicide: Why Were Syrian Cities Destroyed?." *POMEPS Studies*, Urban Politics in the Middle East (Oct 2023): 10-23. <https://shorturl.at/vTQCv>
- Tayeh, Noor. "Refugee camps in Gaza: between upgrading and urbicide." *Journal of Palestine studies* 51, no. 3 (2022): 3-22.
- Salhani, Justin. "Genocide, Urbicide, Domicide – How to Talk about Israel's War on Gaza." *Al Jazeera*, July 3, 2024. <https://shorturl.at/OKZHY> (Short article)
- Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor. "Israel Expands Urbicide as a Tool of Genocide in Gaza." *Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor*, December 17, 2024. <https://shorturl.at/Vkeog> (Short article)

Suggested Readings:

- Fregonese, Sara. "The Urbicide of Beirut? Geopolitics and the Built Environment in the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1976)." *Political Geography* 28 (2009): 414–423.
- Cooke, Miriam. "Beirut Reborn: The Political Aesthetics of Auto-Destruction." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 15, no. 2 (2002): 393–423.
- Graham, Stephen. "Vertical Geopolitics: Baghdad and After." *Antipode* 36, no. 1 (2004).
- Graham, Stephen. "Lessons in Urbicide." *New Left Review* 19 (2003).

Week 8 (5 March 2026): Divided Cities: Fragmented Sovereignties & Partitioned Space

This week explores how Middle Eastern cities become "divided" not only through war and sectarian conflict, but also through legal status, security infrastructures, and neoliberal urbanism. Building on Silver's conceptual framework, we compare Baghdad's walled enclaves, Dubai's "city-corporation" model, and Kuwait's marginalisation of Bedoon communities. Students analyze how citizenship, statelessness, and security logics fragment sovereignty and produce unequal rights to the city.

Note: Third Response Paper Is Due Today

Key questions:

- How does Silver conceptualize "divided cities" in the Middle East, and in what ways do Baghdad, Dubai, and Kuwait City fit, extend, or challenge her typology?
- How do legal and political categories—citizen, expatriate, migrant labourer, stateless Bedoon—translate into spatial divisions and differentiated access to housing, services, and public space in Dubai and Kuwait?

- In Baghdad, how do walls, checkpoints, and security zoning (Windhauser) reshape urban sovereignty and everyday life, and how do these forms of spatial control compare with the more “corporate” and citizenship-based fragmentation analyzed by Kanna and Abu Sulaib??

Readings:

- Silver, Hilary. "Divided cities in the Middle East." *City & Community* 9, no. 4 (2010): 345-357. <https://shorturl.at/aO4Ns>
- Kanna, Ahmed. "Flexible citizenship in dubai: Neoliberal subjectivity in the emerging “City-Corporation”." *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 1 (2010): 100-129.
- Windhauser, Bret. "Walled in, Out of Sight: The Contested Urban Environment of Baghdad." *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development* 4, no. 3 (2022). <https://shorturl.at/QDhKa>
- Abu Sulaib, Faisal Mukhyat. "Stateless ‘bidoon’ in Kuwait: a crisis of political alienation." *Middle Eastern Studies* 57, no. 1 (2020): 134-150.

Suggested Reading:

- Elsheshtawy, Yasser. "Informal encounters: Mapping Abu Dhabi's urban public spaces." *Built Environment* (1978-) (2011): 92-113.
- Salama, Ashraf M., Simona Azzali, and Florian Wiedmann. "The everyday urban environment of migrant labourers in Gulf Cities: the case of the old centre of Doha, Qatar." *City, Territory and Architecture* 4, no. 1 (2017): 5.
- Windhauser, Bret. "Walled in, Out of Sight: The Contested Urban Environment of Baghdad." *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development* 4, no. 3 (2022).
- Benvenisti, Meron, and Salim Tamari. “Jerusalem... A Conversation.” In *City of Collision: Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism*, 34–48. Birkhäuser, 2006.
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). “Yemen: Urban Displacement in a Rural Society.” In *UnSettlement: Urban Displacement in the 21st Century*. Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2019. <https://shorturl.at/8uYT2>

Week 9 (12 March 2026): Everyday Politics, Policing & Urban Marginality

This week uses Bayat’s concepts of art of presence, social nonmovements, and quiet encroachment to rethink urban politics in Cairo and North African slums. Through case studies of neighborhood activism in Cairo and resistance to slum clearance in Morocco, we explore how marginalized residents claim housing, services, and space under regimes of policing, criminalization, and redevelopment. Rather than focusing on formal social movements, the week foregrounds everyday practices and local activism as key arenas where urban marginality is negotiated, contested, and governed.

Key questions:

- How do Bayat’s notions of the “art of presence,” “social nonmovements,” and “quiet encroachment” help us interpret the practices described by Elwageeh et al. in Cairo’s neighborhoods and by Atia’s Moroccan slum dwellers? Where do these cases confirm or complicate his framework?
- In the Cairo and Moroccan cases, how do policing, criminalization, and state-led redevelopment projects (such as “City without Slums”) shape the possibilities and limits of everyday politics and local activism? When do residents’ actions appear as “security problems” to the state, and when as legitimate claims to the city?
- Compared to formal social movements, what are the strengths and limitations of dispersed, everyday forms of activism and nonmovements in confronting large-scale urban restructuring?

Readings:

- Bayat, Asef. Chapter 1 (Introduction: The Art of Presence, pp. 1-26) and Chapter 3 (The Quiet Encroachment of the Ordinary, pp. 43-65). In *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. 2nd ed. Stanford University Press, 2013. <https://shorturl.at/LzTBb>
- Elwageeh, Aya, Reinout Kleinhans, and Maarten van Ham. "Exploring local activism in the neighborhoods of Cairo." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 45, no. 3 (2023): 546-569. <https://shorturl.at/EkrEO>
- Atia, Mona. "Refusing a "City without Slums": Moroccan slum dwellers' nonmovements and the art of presence." *Cities* 125 (2022): 102284.

Suggested Readings:

- Fregonese, Sara. "Beyond the 'weak state': Hybrid sovereignties in Beirut." *Environment and planning D: society and space* 30, no. 4 (2012): 655-674.
- Yaghi, Mohammad. "Frame resonance, tactical innovation, and poor people in the Tunisian uprising." In *Research in social movements, conflicts and change*, pp. 115-143. Emerald Publishing Limited, 2018.
- Sadeghi, Alireza. "Neoliberal Urbanization and Informal Settlements: Housing and the Politics of the Poor in the Suburb of Tehran." *The Journal of Community Development (Rural-Urban)* 15, no. 1 (2023): 67-86.

Week 10 (19 March 2026): Migration, Labor & Demographic Transformation in Gulf Cities

This week examines Gulf cities as migrant-majority urban spaces structured by kafala, ethnocentric citizenship, and oil-led political economies. Using ethnographic and demographic work on Dubai and the UAE, we explore how migration shapes urban belonging, labour markets, and spatial segregation.

Key questions:

- How do kafala and ethnocentric citizenship regimes shape migrants' everyday experiences of inclusion and exclusion in Gulf cities?
- What does De Bel-Air's demographic and labour-market data tell us about the links between migrant-majority populations and Gulf urban form?
- In what ways do Vora & Koch and Vora & Kanna "de-exceptionalizing" Dubai and the Gulf, and where do their findings suggest region-specific dynamics that broader urban theory misses?

Readings:

- Vora, Neha, and Natalie Koch. "Everyday Inclusions: Rethinking Ethnocracy, Kafala, and Belonging in the Arabian Peninsula." *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 15, no. 3 (2015): 540-552. <https://shorturl.at/OwGhc>
- AlShehabi, Omar. "Rootless Hubs: Migration, Urban Commodification and the 'Right to the City' in the GCC." *Transit States: Labour, Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf* (2015): 101-131. <https://shorturl.at/epHUB>
- De Bel-Air, Françoise. "Demography, Migration, and the Labour Market in the UAE." *Gulf Research Center*, 2015. <https://shorturl.at/0ONrH>

Suggested Readings:

- Buckley, Michelle. "Construction work, "bachelor" builders and the intersectional politics of urbanisation in Dubai." In *Transit states: Labour, migration and citizenship in the Gulf* (2015): 132-149.
- Gardner, Andrew M. "Labor Camps in the Gulf States." In *Viewpoints: Migration and the Gulf*, 55-57. Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 2010. <https://shorturl.at/4MTOV>
- Vora, Neha, and Ahmed Kanna. "De-exceptionalizing the Field." *The Arab Studies Journal* 26, no. 2 (2018): 74-101.

Week 11 (26 March 2026): Urban Refugees: Governance, Survival & Space

This week examines how Lebanese and Jordanian cities absorb and govern large-scale Syrian refugee populations through informality rather than formal camps. Drawing on Fawaz and Sanyal, we explore “no-camp” policies, informal settlements, and planning frameworks that normalize informality as a governance tool. Al-Tal and Ghanem’s case study of eastern Amman shows how refugee inflows reshape urban form, socio-spatial inequalities, and everyday survival strategies in host neighbourhoods.

Note: Fourth Response Paper Is Due Today

Key questions:

- How do Fawaz and Sanyal help us understand informality not just as a problem, but as a central mode of governance in Lebanon’s response to the refugee crisis?
- In what ways does the arrival of Syrian refugees contribute to socio-spatial transformation in eastern Amman, according to Al-Tal and Ghanem, and how does this compare to the Lebanese “no-camp” model discussed by Fawaz and Sanyal?
- Across these cases, who plans and governs refugee urbanization in practice—state planners, municipalities, humanitarian actors, or residents themselves—and how do their interactions shape refugees’ access to housing, services, and urban belonging?

Readings:

- Fawaz, Mona. "Planning and the refugee crisis: Informality as a framework of analysis and reflection." *Planning Theory* 16, no. 1 (2017): 99-115.
- Sanyal, Romola. "A no-camp policy: Interrogating informal settlements in Lebanon." *Geoforum* 84 (2017): 117-125.
- Al-Tal, Raed Salem, and Hala Ghanem. "Impact of the Syrian crisis on the socio-spatial transformation of Eastern Amman, Jordan." *Frontiers of Architectural Research* 8, no. 4 (2019): 591-603.

Suggested Reading:

- Achilli, Luigi. "Back to Syria?: conflicting patterns of mobility among Syrian refugees in Jordan." *Orient* 57 (2016): 7-13.
- Kikano, Faten, Gabriel Fauveaud, and Gonzalo Lizarralde. "Policies of exclusion: The case of Syrian refugees in Lebanon." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34, no. 1 (2021): 422-452.
- Irgil, Ezgi. "When the government comes to the Neighbourhood: Everyday regulations and Syrian refugees’ encounters with local state authorities." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 35, no. 2 (2022): 893-909.

Week 12 (2 April 2026): Infrastructure, Everyday Survival & Urban Services in MENA Cities

This week explores how water and electricity infrastructures shape everyday life, authority, and inequality in Baghdad, Sana’a, and Tehran. Alahmad shows how post-2003 state-building in Iraq is literally “illuminated” through the politics of electricity; Aklan and co-authors trace how residents in the Sana’a basin improvise water access amid war and state failure; Tayebi and colleagues analyze how neighbourhood water capacity and consumption patterns in Tehran produce uneven urban vulnerability. Together, the readings highlight infrastructure as a site where governance, crisis, and survival intersect.

Key questions:

- How does Alahmad’s analysis of electricity in occupied Iraq help us understand infrastructure as a tool of state-building, governance, and control in Baghdad?
- In Sana’a and the Sana’a basin, how do households’ shifts between network water, wells, tankers, and other sources (Aklan et al.) reveal new forms of everyday improvisation and inequality under war?

- What does Tayebi et al.'s neighbourhood-level study of water carrying capacity in Tehran show about the relationship between spatial-demographic factors, infrastructure planning, and differentiated urban risk—and how does this compare to the Iraqi and Yemeni cases?

Readings:

- Alahmad, Nida. "Illuminating a state: state-building and electricity in occupied Iraq." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 8, no. 2 (2017): 335-353. <https://shorturl.at/cisZc>
- Aklan, Musaed M., Charlotte De Fraiture, and Laszlo G. Hayde. "Which water sources do people revert to in times of war? Evidence from the Sana'a Basin, Yemen." *International Journal of Environmental Research* 13, no. 4 (2019): 623-638.
- Tayebi, Safiyeh, Bakhtiar Feizizadeh, Saeed Esfandi, Banafsheh Aliabbasi, Seyed Ali Alavi, and Aliakbar Shamsipour. "A neighborhood-based urban water carrying capacity assessment: analysis of the relationship between spatial-demographic factors and water consumption patterns in Tehran, Iran." *Land* 11, no. 12 (2022): 2203.

Suggested Reading:

- Almaweri, Ahmed, and Hasan Al-Awami. "Local Service Provision During War-A Case Study of Yemen." *Public Administration and Development* (2025).
- Giannotta, Anna Karin. "Making place for waste: governance between the formal and informal by Casablančan waste collection and collectors." *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea* 44 (2022). <https://shorturl.at/q3YKo>
- Abi Ghanem, Dana. "Energy, the city and everyday life: Living with power outages in post-war Lebanon." *Energy research & social science* 36 (2018): 36-43.