HI3J1-30 Empire and Oil: BP and the Building of Global Oil Industry in Iran

20/21

Department
History
Level
Undergraduate Level 3
Module leader
Katayoun Shafiee
Credit value
30
Module duration
22 weeks
Assessment
100% coursework
Study location
University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

The building of the world oil industry served as the occasion for one of the largest political projects of technical and economic development in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Along with railroads, dams, electricity and communications networks, and other large-scale technical systems, a vast global network of oil wells, pipelines, refineries, and transoceanic shipping resulted from this enterprise.

Everyone is aware of the importance of oil to the history of the modern Middle East, but we know surprisingly little about how the social and technical properties of oil have shaped that history. Conventional ways of writing social and political history treat technical problems of producing, processing, and selling oil as practices that are external to the social world. Oil in turn has an "impact" on society, as simply a natural resource that affects political systems, social and economic orders, and state formation from the outside while blocking the possibility for democratic forms of politics. The origins of the first oil industry in the Middle East reside in a little-known part of southwest Iran, now known as Khuzestan province, bordering the Persian Gulf.

Module web page

Module aims

This module offers students the opportunity to make use of rich primary sources held in the BP Archive (e.g. company reports, newspapers, film, and photography) at the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick in order to develop an alternative account of the history of oil, specifically of BP in Iran. Focusing on the anatomy of one company, students will follow the transformation of oil through the machinery of oil operations (technical, legal, governmental, administrative), from the initial development of the Anglo-Iranian oil industry in the first decade of the twentieth century to the company's dramatic departure and subsequent return as BP during Iran's oil nationalization crisis over fifty years later. The module is designed to be attractive to students interested in the history of British empire in the Middle East as well as business history and the history of science and technology that draws on interdisciplinary thinking in science and technology studies. It encourages students to rethink historical and political analysis by drawing connections between the political and historical forces through which large-scale infrastructures such as an oil industry have been shaped and the technical forces through which politics and history have been shaped.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Part I: Oil Concessions and the Making of an Oil Industry in Khuzestan Province
Week 1: Before Oil: Local Ecologies of Mobility and Settlement
Week 2: Technological Zone: 1901 D'Arcy Oil Concession and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company
Week 3: Boundary Making: Property Claimants and Paper Companies
Week 4: Politics of Translation: Valuating Oil in Persian versus English
Week 5: Dispossession and Eviction
Week 6: Reading Week

Part II: Politics of Expertise: Petroleum Knowledge
Week 7: Research and Development: Technical Properties of Oil
Week 8: Politics of Secrecy and Transparency: Calculating Oil Reserves
Week 9: Anglo-Iranian Oil and the International Scientific Community

Part III: Building an Oil Labor Regime
Week 10: Infrastructure of Oil Labor
Week 11: Paternalism
Week 12: Reading Week
Week 13: Calculability of an Oil Worker
Week 14: Vulnerability of the Energy System: Strikes and Unions
Week 15: "Persianization"
Week 16: Reading Week

Part IV: Combatting Nationalism, Managing Nationalization
Week 17: Politics of a Profit Formula
Week 18: Oil Corporations and International Law

Week 19: BP and the 1953 Coup D'état
Week 20: Reconfiguring Oil Nationalization

Part V: Review
Week 21: Final conference

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a systematic knowledge and understanding of the connection between political and economic interests and their significance for imperial history and the present situation in the Middle East
- Critically analyse and evaluate a broad range of primary sources, including archival sources, relating to the history of the oil industry in the Middle East
- Effectively communicate ideas, and make informed, coherent and persuasive arguments, relating to the history of the oil industry in the Middle East
- Critically review and consolidate theoretical, methodological, and historiographical ideas relating to science and technology studies and the history of the oil industry in the Middle East

Indicative reading list

Reading lists can be found in Talis

Specific reading list for the module

Subject specific skills

See learning outcomes.

Transferable skills

See learning outcomes.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	18 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Tutorials	4 sessions of 1 hour (1%)
Private study	260 hours (87%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

History modules require students to undertake extensive independent research and reading to prepare for seminars and assessments. As a rough guide, students will be expected to read and prepare to comment on three substantial texts (articles or book chapters) for each seminar taking approximately 3 hours. Each assessment requires independent research, reading around 6-10 texts and writing and presenting the outcomes of this preparation in an essay, review, presentation or other related task.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
Seminar contribution	10%		No
Reassessment component			
1000 word reflection			Yes (extension)
Assessment component			
1500 word essay	10%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
3000 word source based essay	40%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
3000 word essay	40%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback provided via Tabula; optional oral feedback in office hours.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 3 of UENA-VQ32 Undergraduate English and History

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
- Year 4 of UHIA-V101 Undergraduate History (with Year Abroad)

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
- Year 4 of UHIA-V101 Undergraduate History (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
- Year 4 of UHIA-VM12 Undergraduate History and Politics (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL14 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad)