

Rutgers University – Department of Anthropology Anthropology of the Middle East (01:070:242)

HSB 206, Tuesday 10:55AM – 1:55PM

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Course Description

This course explores a number of problems, approaches, and debates pertaining to the anthropology of Middle Eastern societies. We will focus on reading ethnography as a “genre” of knowledge production and writing and attempt to examine a wide range of historical and cultural processes and life experiences from across the region. This is not a survey course of the history of anthropology of the Middle East—even though aspects of this history will be examined in lectures and class discussion. Throughout the course, we will emphasize a number of themes to develop foundational understanding of this diverse region and acquire critical tools for studying different aspects of Middle Eastern experiences. Focusing on recently published ethnographies will allow us to explore contemporary themes that anthropologists of the Middle East have been researching, linking these themes to broader conversations and genealogies of anthropological writings and trends. Through our ethnographic survey, we will cover a variety of themes: state and infrastructure-making, science and medicine, religion and sectarianism, displacement and humanitarianism, class, gender dynamics, everyday life, among other themes. In addition to reading ethnographies, we will be exploring a “playlist” of films, documentaries, and music produced from the region to get a sense of conversations emerging from the region.

Prerequisites:

This is an upper-level anthropology class, which requires students’ familiarity with anthropology. Students should have already completed introductory classes in anthropology (or equivalent). Students should also be prepared to keep up with the reading load and class assignments.

Expectations:

Students are required to attend lectures regularly, having done the assigned readings and fulfilled class assignments. As an interactive class, students are expected to be prepared and to actively engage in class and group discussion. Please bring your copy of the readings for each class.

Learning goals

- 1- Familiarize students with the diversity and complexity of social life in the Middle East
- 2- Critically examine anthropological knowledge production about the Middle East.
- 3- Engage with book-length ethnographies to sharpen critical thinking, reading, and writing skills in anthropology
- 4- Locate authors’ arguments and engage them in broader conversations.
- 5- Appreciate different forms of knowledge production about the region and challenge some the narrowly-held stereotypical understandings common in present-day representations of the region.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation (20%): Be engaged with your participation in class and prepare before you come. Attendance is graded, and absence without formal excuse will impact your grade. There will be weekly group discussion, where students will be required to submit brief notes on their conversation. Each member of the group will be writing their name on the submitted notes. This will provide a record of attendance in class that day and will allow me to follow up on the broader conversations happening during this exercise.

Postings (25%)

Every student is required to submit at least 8 200 word reflections on the weekly assignments—4 before mid-term and 4 after. The reflection should either summarize your general impression about the readings or you can take on a very specific theme from the text and reflect on. If needed, I could provide a number of general guiding questions weekly that will help focus your reflections on the weekly assignment. You have the choice of which weeks you would like to write about. Deadline is 11pm the night before our class.

In class Presentation (25%)

Each student is expected to give a 10 minutes presentation on one of the assigned films for the class. Your presentation should give a short synopsis of the film, give us some background about the director, and contextualizes themes from the film in relationship to ones pertinent to our class. Each presentation should be no more than 5-7 minutes. Based on the number of students in the class, students might have to partner up to present each week.

Assignment 1: Reflections (15%)

Details for the assignment will be provide during the first week of classes and will be posted on Sakai. Students will be required to submit a one-page reflection on the third week of class--where there will be NO CLASS THAT WEEK. Question for the assignment will be posted on Sakai. This assignment is essential to get a sense of where each of you are in terms of your knowledge and understanding of the anthropology of the Middle East.

Assignment 2: Final Essay (35%)

The third writing assignment will be a longer essay (ten pages maximum). This assignment could be: a longer book review essay; a literature “review” that might form part of your pre-dissertation field prospectus; a paper on some topic that you find interesting in the course readings; a mock proposal for field research inspired by the readings, or still other options may be entertained. The exact content of the paper will become clearer to you (and me) as the class progresses. Options should be discussed with the instructor by mid-October.

Required Texts

The following texts will be on hold at Alexander library and will be available for purchase from Barnes & Nobles (you might also get a better deal buying them used or new online). Other class readings will be available on Sakai.

- Dewachi, Omar. *Ungovernable Life: Mandatory Medicine and Statecraft in Iraq*. 1 edition. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017.
- Ghannam, Farha. *Live and Die Like a Man: Gender Dynamics in Urban Egypt*. 1 edition. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Doostdar, Alireza. *The Iranian Metaphysicals: Explorations in Science, Islam, and the Uncanny*. Princeton ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Feldman, Ilana. *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics*. First edition. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018.

- Nucho, Joanne Randa. *Everyday Sectarianism in Urban Lebanon: Infrastructures, Public Services, and Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- Crapanzano, Vincent. *The Harkis: The Wound That Never Heals*. Chicago ; London: University Of Chicago Press, 2011.

Class Schedule

Week one: Sept 3.

Introduction and Course Overview

(No readings)

Week Two: Sept 10 [Skype Session]

- Deeb, Lara, and Jessica Winegar. 'Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41, no. 1 (2012): 537–58.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1989. "Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18 (January): 267–306.
- *Watch*: Edward Said on Orientalism: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd_Z_g

Week Three: Sept 17 [NO CLASS]

Assignment 1 due

Week Four: Sept 24

Medicine and State Making in Iraq

- Dewachi. Ungovernable Life. **Introduction-chapters 5**
- *Watch*: Bahman Gobadi, Turtles Can Fly, Iran 2003. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2QSdZZwh94>

Week Five: October 1

- Dewachi. Ungovernable Life. **Chapter 6- Conclusion**
- *Watch*: Parine Jaddo. Broken Record, Iraq, 2012: <https://vimeo.com/57941021>

Week Six: October 8.

Gender Dynamic in Egypt

- Ghanam. Live and Die Like a Man. **Chapters: Introduction, 1, 2, 3**
- *Watch*: Youssef Chahine, Cairo Station (Bab al-hadid), Egypt, 1958 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYAG_Gi2iDA

Week Seven: October 15

- Ghanam. Live and Die Like a Man. **Chapters: 4, 5, Conclusion**
- *Watch*: Sharif Arafa, Irhab w Kabab, Egypt 1992: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_1_0qINy0w

Week Eight: October 22

Science and Islam in Iran

- Doostar. The Iranian Metaphysicals. **Introduction, Part 1**

- Watch: Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Close up. Iran 1990 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjLVCiAtvls>

Week Nine: October 29

- Doostar. The Iranian Metaphysicals. Parts, 2, 3, Conclusion.
- Watch: Majid Majidi, The song of sparrow. Iran. 2009:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHpUjBrWqos&list=PLPHE0t6VcuvIOgv5pyVGipiQc6a3zMdkP&index=30>

Week Ten: November 5

Sectarianism and Infrastructure in Lebanon

- Nucho. Everyday Sectarianism in Urban Lebanon.
- *Watch:* Ziad Doueiri. West Beirut, Lebanon 1998:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCkQ7qC0C6I>

Week Eleven: November 12

Displacement and Humanitarianism

- Feldman. Life Lived in Relief. Part 1
- *Watch:* Elia Suleiman. Chronicle of Disappearance. Palestine. 1997:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-sv8-hxZlY>

Week Twelve: November 19

- Feldman. Life Lived in Relief. Part 2
- *Watch:* TBA

Week Thirteen November 26

Diasporic Wounds

- Crapanzano. The Harkis. Chapters: Introduction, 1, 2, 3,
- *Watch:* Marcello Gatti. Battle of Algiers. 1967: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_N2wyq7fCE

Week Fourteen December 3

- Crapanzano. The Harkis. Chapters: 4, 5, 6, 7
- *Watch:* Moufida Tlatli. Silences of the Palace. Tunisia. 1995:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbeNlh8UU30>

Week Fifteen: December 10

Music and Soundscapes from the Middle East

- No reading. In class viewing, listening, and discussion
- Watch: Fatih Akin. Crossing the bridge: The Sounds of Istanbul. 2005:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTLjL_BdOs

Assignment 2 due