

## Anthropology of the Arab World (undergrad, Rochelle Davis, Georgetown, 2013)

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course explores contemporary societies and cultures in the Arab World via methodological approaches offered in the discipline of anthropology. Anthropology as a discipline revolves around the concept of culture as a defining feature of human existence. We will discuss culture largely through ethnographies, the written products of anthropological work involving intensive years of research by the anthropologist who lives among the people under study. Thus we will explore subjects such as modernity, tradition, gender, heritage, history, citizenship, art, religion, and politics in a variety of different places and contexts. Please note that one of the goals of this class is to get us to consider what these terms mean to different people and that there is not just one way of defining them. Anthropology places value on describing and evaluating -- but not judging -- societies, cultures, and practices via the contextual and comparative study of people's beliefs, behaviors, and material products. Learning these critical thinking skills will be part of your coursework and the evaluation standards.

*We [anthropologists] have been the first to insist on a number of things: that the world does not divide into the pious and the superstitious; that there are sculptures in jungles and paintings in deserts; that political order is possible without centralized power and principled justice without codified rules; that the norms of reason were not fixed in Greece, the evolution of morality not consummated in England. Most important, we were the first to insist that we see the lives of others through lenses of our own grinding and that they look back on ours through ones of their own.*

--Clifford Geertz

<http://www.aaanet.org/about/WhatisAnthropology.cfm>

We will investigate our subjects in both broad conceptual terms as well as through details of daily life. We will always ask and attempt to answer questions related to how we understand a subject (and who we are is also varied). For example, What do we mean by gender? What forms the basis of a religion as we understand it? How do the people discussed in the books understand religion? What do we mean by modernity? Understanding how we define these terms will be discussed at the same time we explore how others understand that same subject. Thus, the course examines how these concepts and the meanings attached to them are understood and constructed locally by a variety of actors who experience them and reshape them, even as “the most local thing/belief/fashion/ conception” is in turn shaped by national and global forces. This course is about the world we live in and about living in that world.

In addition, the course will also focus on how these kinds of research are conducted, and we will mine the ethnographies we read to understand the techniques, preparation, and ethics involved in conducting research. The goal of this is to help you (the students) learn skills related to interviewing, observation, interpretation, and how to incorporate non-written sources into your written work.

The readings for the class will include ethnographies from Yemen, Palestine/Israel, Syria, Oman, Jordan, Sudan, and Egypt. Each ethnography will be supplemented with relevant film clips, podcasts, websites, etc. You are welcome to do your final project on other countries, peoples, or subjects in/across the Arab world.

### BOOKS TO BORROW OR BUY:

- Rogaia Abusharaf. *Transforming displaced women in Sudan: Politics and the Body in a Squatter Settlement*. University of Chicago, 2009.
- Fida Adely. *Gendered Paradoxes: Educating Jordanian Women in Nation, Faith, and Progress*. University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Amahl Bishara. *Back Stories: U.S. News Production and Palestinian Politics*. Stanford UP, 2013.
- Steve Caton. *Yemen Chronicle: An Anthropology of War and Mediation*. Hill and Wang, 2006.
- Niloofer Haeri. *Sacred Language, Ordinary People: Dilemmas of Culture and Politics in Egypt*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Mandana Limbert. *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory & Social Life in an Omani Town*. Stanford UP, 2010.
- Lisa Wedeen. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. University of Chicago, 1999.

All other readings (not books) will be posted on Blackboard

### LEARNING OUTCOMES/GOALS:

The students will complete the course having developed the following skills and knowledge:

- 1) basic knowledge of various cultures and societies in the Arab World;
- 2) familiarity with major themes in the study of contemporary Arab cultures and societies;
- 3) understanding of concepts and terms in contemporary social science;
- 4) development of analytical abilities and critical thinking;
- 5) how to design, conduct, and write up a short research project;
- 6) how to use primary source data in written work and analysis.

### SKILLS PRACTICED OR DEVELOPED:

- 1) oral presentation skills (focusing on summarizing arguments and presenting research results);
- 2) graphic visualization of data skills (focused on turning ethnographic and other data into graphic representations);
- 3) writing skills (analytical writing about primary source data, summarizing arguments, clarity, organization, and conciseness).

The course will be conducted as a seminar, with the majority of time devoted to discussion aimed at critical understanding of the material, comparisons among the different articles, books, and media. The point of this course is to provide you with a broad understanding both of issues within the cultures and societies of the Arab World and the perspectives of those living in there about those issues.

### Expectations and Responsibilities:

I expect you to do all of the reading, to participate actively in the class, to be polite and courteous to me and to your fellow students, and to be intelligent, motivated, and engaged.

Both you and I are bound by the Georgetown Honor Pledge.

*In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

[http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/hc/site\\_map.html#The\\_Honor\\_System](http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/hc/site_map.html#The_Honor_System)

We both are protected by and enjoy principles of academic freedom.

From the Faculty Handbook: <http://www.georgetown.edu/facultysenate/FacHbk.pdf> (p 26)

*Academic freedom is essential to teaching and research. Such freedom requires free inquiry, free expression, intellectual honesty, respect for the academic rights of others, and openness to change. The rights and responsibilities exercised within the academic community must be compatible with these requirements. All members of the faculty, in common with all other members of the community, share the responsibility for maintaining a professional atmosphere in which violations of academic freedom and responsibility are unlikely to occur. The University endorses the American Association of University Professors' 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, with clarifications that place it in the Georgetown University context (see Section XXI).*

### **Turning in Assignments:**

- Proofread your assignments. One-third of one grade will be deducted for more than five grammar/spelling mistakes.
- Late papers will be reduced by one-third of a grade for each 24 hours they are late.
- Papers should be in 12-point font, double spaced, with footnotes (not endnotes) in a standard font.

### **Missing Class:**

**Attendance:** Any absence for any reason will result in a drop in your participation grade by one full grade, IF a make-up assignment is not turned in. You are responsible for getting the notes from the class from a classmate. The make-up assignment is a 300-600 word response addressing the week's readings. You are responsible for doing this (I will not ask for it or remind you). A failing grade in the class will be earned to anyone with 4 or more absences for any reason.

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

**1) Weekly Assignments and Participation:** Each week I will send out an assignment for class that is based on the readings. They may be written assignments or presentations, and some will be long and some will be short. You must do them all.

**Participation and Assignments: 30% of your grade.**

### **2) Graphic representation from one of the books:**

You are required to produce a graphic representation of material from one of the books or one of the issues/discussions/data that appear in one of the books. This can be new material that you can present that will enhance the material in the book OR you can envision the issues discussed in another way graphically. See examples given in class, but this could include historical images, OR maps, graphics, charts, etc. that you create about a topic (For example – a map or flowchart of refugee movements in Sudan. OR a storyboard of educational experiences in Jordan. OR a powerpoint with graphics from Syria OR a graphic novellete OR ...). Your grade is based on 1) your understanding of the material as expressed in the graphic work; 2) your effort in working with the graphic form

**DUE: Class presentation on the day the book is completed or the following week:**

**Graphic representation: 25% of your grade.**

### **3) Primary source research project:**

You will design and conduct research using primary sources (for this class, we will include newspapers, images, reports, texts, interviews, speeches, etc.) for your final paper.

**DUE:** For this project, you will need to do a project proposal (**Due October 3**) and a draft of your methods/questions, your sources, your bibliography (**Due October 31**). Both are due via email. I will review each of these with you and respond with guidance. The larger written paper should be around 3500 words depending on the project. (**Due December 19**) You will also give a presentation of the subject in class on **December 5**.

**Oral Presentation in class: 15% of your grade (Due December 5)**

**Written Paper: 30% of your grade (Due December 19)**

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### August 29

IN CLASS: Media and Music – The Arab World

### September 5 Introduction to terms and ideas and geography

Concepts/words that we will use in class: Culture, Society, Nationalism, Modernity, History, Heritage, Family, Gender, Patriarchy, Identity, Ethnicity, Human Rights, Politics, among others.

Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar. "Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies." *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 2012. 41:537-58.

Lisa Malkki. "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees." *Cultural Anthropology*. 1992. Vol 7, No 1: 24-44.

Hussein Agrama. "Reflections on secularism, democracy, and politics in Egypt." *American Ethnologist*, 2012. Vol 39: 26–31.

Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock. "In the best interests of youth or neoliberalism? The World Bank and the New Global Youth Empowerment Project." *Journal of Youth Studies*. 2008. Vol. 11, Iss. 3, 301-312.

Short selections on definitions of terms.

## **:: SECTION 1: POLITICS, MEDIA, AND SYMBOLS ::**

### September 12

Amahl Bishara. *Back Stories: U.S. News Production and Palestinian Politics*. Stanford UP, 2013. Pp. 1-135.

+ 1 additional short article

### September 19

Amahl Bishara. *Back Stories: U.S. News Production and Palestinian Politics*. Stanford UP, 2013. Pp. 167-256.

### September 26

Lisa Wedeen. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. University of Chicago, 1999. Pp. 1-160.

### October 3

Short works on Syria today:

Francesca De Chatel. "The Role of Drought and Climate change in the Syrian Uprising: Untangling the Triggers of the Revolution." Forthcoming, *Middle East Studies*.

Bassam Haddad. "Business as Usual in Syria?" MERIP, 9/2001.

Hassan Abbas, "The Dynamics of the Uprisings in Syria," *Jadaliyya*. Oct 2011.  
<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2906/the-dynamics-of-the-uprising-in-syria>  
An analytical take on the revolution:  
Vijay Prashad. Malaise over Syria. Sept 21, 2013.  
<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/14249/malaise-over-syria>  
Interview with Khaled al-Khalifa, Syrian writer. <http://vimeo.com/73374019>  
Marwa Daoudy: Sectarianism in Syria: Myth and Reality  
<http://www.opendemocracy.net/marwa-daoudy/sectarianism-in-syria-myth-and-reality>

**DUE:** Project topics – email them to me

**:: SECTION 2: LANGUAGE, POLITICS, CULTURE ::**

**October 10**

Steve Caton. *Yemen Chronicle: An Anthropology of War and Mediation*. Hill and Wang, 2006. Pp 1-190.

**October 17**

Steve Caton. *Yemen Chronicle: An Anthropology of War and Mediation*. Hill and Wang, 2006. Pp. 191-342.

**October 24**

Niloofer Haeri. *Sacred Language, Ordinary People: Dilemmas of Culture and Politics in Egypt*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Pp 1-158.

Short assignment on Language, Politics, and Culture

**:: SECTION 3: GENDER, NATION, EDUCATION, FAITH ::**

**October 31**

Fida Adely. *Gendered Paradoxes: Educating Jordanian Women in Nation, Faith, and Progress*. University of Chicago Press, 2012. Pp. 1-175.

**DUE:** Project Methods & Sources & Bibliography (via email)

**November 7**

Rogaia Abusharaf. *Transforming displaced women in Sudan: Politics and the Body in a Squatter Settlement*. University of Chicago, 2009. Pp. 1-155.

**November 14**

Mandana Limbert. *In the Time of Oil: Piety, Memory & Social Life in an Omani Town*. Stanford UP, 2010. Pp. 1-176.

**November 21**

Selection of articles based on current events (TBD depending on world events)

**November 28** – No Class, formal holiday

**December 5** – Presentations on Final Projects

**DUE:** Final Paper, December 19