

:: MAAS 519 :: Culture and Society in the Arab World ::
Georgetown University, Fall 2015

Rochelle Davis, SFS/CCAS
Office 147 ICC (inside CCAS 241 ICC)
Rad39@georgetown.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday, 3:30-5:30 and often on W and F

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course explores contemporary societies, cultures, and Culture in the Arab World via books written by anthropologists, in addition to historians and area studies/literature scholars. Most use methodological approaches offered in the discipline of anthropology and write historically or ethnographically based books, which are products of intensive years of research by the scholar who lives among and works with the people who are the subject of the research. By focusing on these intensive methods to study culture and society, we will explore subjects such as modernity, tradition, identifications, tribes/clans, 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? And also 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 histories and ethnographies from Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine/Israel, Morocco, Egypt, and the almost never taught or talked about Somalia. We'll also do a book of essays and fiction and art from Syria, and a book of essays on Arab theatre. Each book 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 (all are on reserve in the library):

Dina Rizk Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 2013, Cambridge University Press.

Jonathan Smolin, *Moroccan Noir: Police, Crime, and Politics in Popular Culture*, 2013, Indiana University Press.

Lidwien Kapteijns, *Clan Cleansing in Somalia: The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*, 2014.

Lori Allen, *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights: Cynicism and Politics in Occupied Palestine*, 2013, Stanford University Press.

Amahl A. Bishara, *Back Stories: US News Production & Palestinian Politics*, 2013, Stanford University Press.

Malu Halasa, Zaher Omareen & Nawara Mahfoud, *Syria Speaks, Art and Culture from the Frontline*, 2014, Saqi Books.

Eyad Houssami, *Doomed by Hope: Essays on Arab Theatre*, 2012, St. Martin's Press.

Farha Ghannam, *Live and Die Like a Man*, 2013, Stanford University Press.

Lara Deeb & Mona Harb, *Leisurely Islam: Negotiating Geography and Morality in Shi'ite South Beirut*, 2013, Princeton University Press.

Mona Atia, *Building a House in Heaven: Pious Neoliberalism and Islamic Charity in Egypt*, 2013, University of Minnesota Press.

LEARNING OUTCOMES/GOALS:

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

- 1) 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 conduct primary source research for a short 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) visualization of data skills (supplementing writing material with visuals or 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. All of the work for this class should be original, your own, and not have been turned in for a grade anywhere else.

The Georgetown Student Pledge

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

- We both are protected by and enjoy principles of academic freedom, and the Faculty Handbook determines that “Academic freedom promotes intellectual honesty and requires respect for the academic rights of others.” <http://facultyhandbook.georgetown.edu/toc/section3>
- Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault. University policy requires faculty members to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University’s response to sexual misconduct. Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include: Jen Schweer, MA, LPC, Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention (202) 687-0323, jls242@georgetown.edu, Erica Shirley, Trauma Specialist, Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) (202) 687-6985 els54@georgetown.edu. More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>

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) Participation and Assignments: Each week I will send out a discussion questions or ideas or an assignment for class that is based on the readings. You are expected to discuss the readings in a meaningful, intelligent, and engaged manner.

25% of your grade.

2) Visuals or Graphic representation from one of the books:

You are required to produce a graphic representation of material for one of the books or one of the issues/discussions/data that appear in one of the books. This can be in one of two forms:

1) new material that you present that will enhance the material in the book. This new material could include historical images, maps, graphics, charts, videos, supplementary material, etc., that you gather and present about a topic to illuminate what we have read.

OR

2) a graphic representation that you envision and create of an issue or issues in the book. The graphic representation is a product of your own devising – figuring out a way to represent the subject/s and/or issue/s described in the book in a way that is visual.

Your grade is based on 1) your understanding of the material; 2) the relevance of your material; 3) organization of the material; 4) innovation and creativity; 5) your presentation style. **DUE: Class presentation on the day the book is read in class.**

25% of your grade.

3) Primary Source Research project: (Total 50%)

Your paper will be based largely on primary sources, such as newspapers, videos, tweets, oral histories, autobiographies, social media, photographs, poetry, plays/performances, etc.

For this project, you will need to do

1) a project proposal (**Due October 13**), and 2) a draft of your methods/questions, your sources, your bibliography (**Due November 10**) (**10% of your grade**)

Both are due via email – I will provide you with a specific guide to follow. I will review each of these with you and respond with guidance.

The larger written paper should be around 5000-6000 words depending on the project. (**Due December 18**)

You will also give a presentation of the subject in class on **December 5**.

Project Proposal and draft of methods/questions/sources: 10% of your grade (Oct 13 & Nov 10):

Oral Presentation in class: 10% of your grade (December 8)

Written Paper: 30% of your grade (Due December 18)

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 8 IN CLASS: Media and Music – The Arab World

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

September 15

Dina Rizk Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime*, 2013, Cambridge University Press. (253 pages)

September 22

Lidwien Kapteijns, *Clan Cleansing in Somalia: The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*, 2014. (pp. 1-130)

September 29

Lidwien Kapteijns, *Clan Cleansing in Somalia: The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*, 2014. (pp. 131-240)

October 6

Jonathan Smolin, *Moroccan Noir: Police, Crime, and Politics in Popular Culture*, 2013, Indiana University Press. (238 pages)

October 13

Lori Allen, *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights: Cynicism and Politics in Occupied Palestine*, 2013, Stanford University Press. (280 pages)

DUE: Project topics – email them to me

October 20

Amahl A. Bishara, *Back Stories: US News Production & Palestinian Politics*, 2013, Stanford University Press. (256 pages)

October 27

Malu Halasa, Zaher Omareen & Nawara Mahfoud, *Syria Speaks, Art and Culture from the Frontline*, 2014, Saqi Books. (289 pages)

November 3

Eyad Houssami, *Doomed by Hope: Essays on Arab Theatre*, 2012, St. Martin's Press. (186 pages)

November 10

Farha Ghannam, *Live and Die Like a Man*, 2013, Stanford University Press. (173 pages)

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

November 17

Lara Deeb & Mona Harb, *Leisurely Islam: Negotiating Geography and Morality in Shi'ite South Beirut*, 2013, Princeton University Press. (222 pages)

November 24

Mona Atia, *Building a House in Heaven: Pious Neoliberalism and Islamic Charity in Egypt*, 2013, University of Minnesota Press. (165 pages)

December 1 – Final wrap-up and discussion of issues raised in class (assigned questions)

December 8 – Presentation of Final Papers

DUE: Final Paper, December 18