Anth 3707
Anthropology of the Middle East

Fall 2013
Tu/Th 11:10-12:25

Professor Ilana Feldman
Office: 2112 G St., Room 101
Tel: 994-7728
Email: ifeldman@gwu.edu
Office hours: Thursdays 2-4, and by appointment

Grader:
Grace Veatch
veatche@gwmail.gwu.edu

Course Description: This course will explore the anthropology of Middle Eastern societies. We will consider a variety of cultural forms and life experiences in the Middle East and examine debates and challenges that anthropologists face when they study this region. The course is not meant as a survey and will not address every aspect of Middle Eastern culture. It will cover a number of important themes in the anthropology of the Middle East and will provide students with the critical tools to investigate other aspects of Middle Eastern life.

Course Prerequisite: This is an upper-level course and requires a familiarity with anthropology. Students should have already taken Introduction to Sociocultural Anthropology (Anth 2) or an equivalent course. Students should also be prepared to keep up with the substantial reading load.

Course Expectations: The success of the course – and your individual success in the class – requires regular attendance, participation, and preparation. Students are expected to come to class having done the assigned readings for the day and to be prepared to actively engage in discussion about those readings and their connection to broader themes in the class. You should bring your copy of the day’s reading to each class.

Course policy on electronics: Your active presence and participation in all aspects of the course is important. For that reason no laptops, cellphones, or other electronic or communication devices are permitted.

Required Texts:
The following texts are available for purchase at the GWU bookstore and are on reserve at Gelman library:
Additional required readings are available through electronic reserves on blackboard. You should print these readings out and bring copies to class.

The novels you will be using for your presentations (see below) are also available at the GWU bookstore. All books are also available on online book-sellers, where you may get a better price.

Learning Goals:
- To recognize and analyze the richness and complexity of Middle Eastern societies.
- To recognize and identify key topics and questions in the anthropology of the Middle East
- To analyze and evaluate anthropological scholarship on the Middle East
- To apply skills in anthropological thinking in discussion, presentations, exams and essays

Course Requirements:
Attendance and participation

My expectation is that you will attend every class and will come prepared by having done the assigned readings for the day. You are responsible for the information presented in class, whether through lecture, discussion, presentation, or film. There will sometimes be in-class work and possibly occasional quizzes. Missing classes will therefore have an adverse impact on your grade. The class will include both lecture and discussion; participating in discussion will help both your learning and your grade.

In-class work and attendance: As part of our conversation, we will regularly have small group discussions. Each group will write brief notes on their conversation and each member of the group will write their name on the paper. This will provide a record of your attendance in class that day, and the notes will give me a sense of what your group discussed. Each person must write their own name on the paper. Writing the name of an absent friend will earn the entire group a zero; any repeat will be treated as a violation of academic integrity. We will do this 10 times over the course of the semester, and I will count 9 of them. Because an opportunity to miss classes in case of illness or other problem is built into the system I do not excuse absences.

Postings: Over the course of the semester, everyone is required to post – through Blackboard – 8 200-word reflections on the readings. The first posting is due (for everybody) on August 29 (more details will follow). For the remaining 7 postings you have choices about when to post. Each week I will provide a reading guide for the upcoming texts which will include questions to think about as you read. Your postings should respond to one or more questions. These reflections should be posted by 11:00pm on the night before class. I will print out the postings then and anything submitted after this time will not count toward your total. Everyone should read through the postings before coming to class. You can choose which days to submit the response, but 4 must be completed before the midterm, and 4 after. Postings cannot be submitted after the fact. These are not formal papers, but rather are an opportunity for you to react to and reflect on the readings for the week. Raise questions the readings posed for you, think about how they relate to other things we have read, consider how they fit into the course as a whole. These postings will help jumpstart our discussions of the readings, so you should be prepared to talk about your posting in class.
Participating in class discussion: I will allocate a small number of points in your overall participation grade for regularly joining in our shared discussions. I am aware that not everyone is comfortable speaking in a large group, so this portion of the participation grade is deliberately small, but a small number of points can make a difference in borderline cases – so I recommend that everyone try to join in.

Ethnographic readings of novels: presentation and paper

Group presentation: 10 times over the course of the semester there will be group presentations on novels from and about the Middle East. The purpose of the presentation is to reflect on both the ethnographic and the analytic aspects of the novel. You will provide background information about the novel, describe its ethnographic qualities, link it to the topic of the day, to the assigned readings, and to broader themes we are exploring in the course. Each group must prepare a handout for the class to accompany the presentations.

Books for presentations:
  — focus on Returning to Haifa
* Sonallah Ibrahim, *That Smell and Notes from Prison* (New Directions, 2013).
* Fadia Faqir, *Pillars of Salt* (Interlink, 1998)

Presentation paper: While the presentations will be done in groups, each member of the group is required to submit an individual paper of 2-3 pages at the next class meeting after the presentation. This paper should reflect critically on fiction as a source of ethnographic insight and should use the material in the novel to analyze one of the issues that we are exploring through other genres of writing. In your paper you should make direct reference to texts we are reading in class. You will certainly have discussed your thoughts about the novel with the other members of your presentation group, but the paper should be your own work and reflect your own conclusions. You will receive an assignment sheet with further details and instructions.

Key themes in Middle East Anthropology

Throughout the semester we will consider key themes within the anthropology of the Middle East. You will have several opportunities to reflect on and explore these themes.

Posting #1: Your first posting – due August 29 – is a 200-word reflection on one of the themes identified in the article, “Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies.”
Critical essay: Each student will write a critical essay (1700-2000 words) analyzing one of the ethnographies we are reading in relation to a key theme in the anthropological literature on the Middle East. This paper will also require you to engage with other readings, either from the syllabus or outside the class. You will receive an assignment sheet with further details and instructions. This paper is due on November 26.

Exams

There will be two exams in this class, an in-class mid-term on October 17 and an in-class final on December 12. Tests must be taken at their scheduled times. In the case of a documented emergency that makes it impossible to sit for the exam as scheduled, students will take a make-up exam in an alternative format (take home, essay exam). The tests will require you to write reflectively and analytically about the concepts, populations, and experiences we are studying in class.

Assignments should be turned in at the beginning of class the day they are due. Electronic papers will not be accepted. Late papers will be docked one-third of a grade for each day they are late and will not be accepted after one week.

All work must be completed in accordance with The George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity. For writing assignments this means, among other things that: 1) quotes be clearly identified with quotation marks and fully cited, 2) the source of ideas not your own be properly cited, and 3) the paper represents your own work and writing. For exams this means, among other things, 1) no use of materials not explicitly permitted to take the test and 2) no looking at your classmates’ work. For further details about the university’s academic integrity policy, see: http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately at the beginning of the semester to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/.

You are responsible for the assignments and deadlines that are detailed in this syllabus as well as for any changes that may be announced in class or via blackboard.
Grading:
Participation and attendance: 20%
Your participation grade will be calculated as follows:
- Postings: 8 points
- Attendance/in-class work: 9 points
- Participating in class discussion: 3 points
* Neither postings nor in-class work can be made up after the fact*

Group presentation: 10%
Presentation paper: 10%
Mid-term: 20%
Critical Essay: 20%
Final: 20%

Class Schedule

Part One: Orientations

Introduction to the Anthropology Middle East
August 27: Introduction - no reading

August 29: No-class meeting
Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, “Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies” Annual Review of Anthropology

Posting #1 Due

Challenges of studying the Middle East: Stereotypes and other interference
September 3: Popular culture
In-class film: Reel bad Arabs: how Hollywood vilifies a people

*email me your top 5 choices for presentation groups (in order of preference) by today*

September 5: Media coverage
Edward Said, Covering Islam, Chapter 1 and 2

September 10: Gender and intervention
Practice and Ethics of Fieldwork

September 12: Challenges of fieldwork in the Middle East

September 17: Fieldwork in revolutionary and conflict times
At a minimum read the following dates: 2011: January 30 and 31; February 11; March 7 and 19, 2012: January 30. 2013: June 3. I recommend reading more as well.

Group Presentation 1: *In An Antique Land*

**Part Two: Political, Social, and Spatial Forms**

*Nation and State*
September 19

September 24

Group Presentation 2: *The Committee*

**Bedouin, Minorities, and “Marginal” people**
September 26

Group Presentation 3: *Variations on Night and Day*
October 1
Elizabeth Smith, “Place, Class, and Race in the Barabra Café: Nubians in Egyptian Media,” in Cairo Cosmopolitan, ed. Diane Singerman and Paul Amar, 399-413 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2006).

Group Presentation 4: Dancing Arabs

Urban Life
October 3: The form of the city

October 8: The camp as the city

Group Presentation 5: The Yacoubian Building

Conflict and Displacement
October 10: Palestine

Group Presentation 6: Returning to Haifa and other stories

October 15: Iraq

October 17: Midterm exam

Part Three: Religion, Ethics, and Society

October 22: On the Anthropology of Islam
Lara Deeb and Mona Harb, “Choosing Faith and Fun: Youth Negotiations of Morality in South Beirut,” Ethnos
October 24
Sherene Hamdy
Introduction, Chapter 1 and 2

October 29
Sherene Hamdy
Chapter 2 and 3 and 4

Group Presentation 7: *Miramar*

October 31
Sherene Hamdy
Chapters 4 and 5

November 5
Chapter 6-Conclusion

Group Presentation 8: *That Smell* and *Notes from Prison*

**Part Four: Gender and development**

November 7

November 12
Fida Adely
Introduction, Chapter 1 and 2

In class film: *A Veiled Revolution*

November 14
Fida Adely
Chapter 4 and 5

Group Presentation 9: *Pillars of Salt*

November 19:
Fida Adely
Chapter 6 and 7

Group Presentation 10: *Season of migration to the north*
Part Five: Migration, Consumption, Globalization

November 21: Consumption, Circulation, and Labor
Sharon Nagy, “‘This Time I Think I’ll Try a Filipina’: Global and Local Influences on Relations Between Foreign Household Workers and Their Employers in Doha, Qatar,” City and Society 10, 1 (1998): 83-103.

November 26: Popular Culture and Technology

Critical Essay Due

November 28: Thanksgiving - no class

December 5 – Wrap-up and Review