ANTH 6707
Anthropology of the State and Government in the Middle East

Spring 2018

Professor Ilana Feldman
Office: 2112 G St, Rm 101
Tel: 994-7728
Email: ifeldman@gwu.edu
Office hours: Wednesdays 10-12, and by appointment

Course Description: This course is an anthropological exploration of formations of government, state, and society in the Middle East. It will introduce students to debates in anthropology (and the social sciences more broadly) about how to analyze these categories and the relations between them. Thinking about different ways of studying government, we will consider whether anthropology – and its method of ethnography – offers a particularly helpful perspective. As we develop a shared understanding of scholarly debates, we will also turn our attention to particular examples from the Middle East. In looking at these cases, we will explore both what Middle Eastern experiences might tell us about the state and government more generally and what the theoretical literature on the subject might help us understand about the Middle East. We will study both colonial and post-colonial states; will consider government at the local, national, and international level; and will explore the diversity of social relations that participate in rule.

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.

Learning Objectives:
• To understand how anthropology and related disciplines approach the study of the state and government
• To recognize and evaluate the ways states shapes societies and human subjects
• To critically analyze scholarly debates about the state and government in the Middle East
• To conduct independent research and writing that explores these questions
Course Requirements:

Attendance and Participation: This course is a seminar and in order for it to be successful, we all need to come to class having done the readings and prepared to discuss them. I expect you to attend every class meeting. Preparation for discussion includes identifying puzzling aspects of the text, highlighting passages for analysis, and raising questions for debate. Joining in class discussion is vital. You will notice that your grade includes a participation component. I know that not everyone has the same level of comfort with joining in class discussion. If this is an area of challenge for you, come and see me early in the semester and we can try and work on some strategies for your involvement.

Reading Response: For each class, everyone is required to post – through Blackboard – ½- to 1-page reflection papers. You should also read each other’s postings before class. Responses should be posted by 9 am on the day of class (to accommodate night-owls and still leave enough time for us all to read the postings). These are not formal papers, but rather 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 are intended to help you in organizing your thoughts about the readings and to create a space for dialogue outside the classroom.

Each posting should conclude by raising a question or identifying a passage that you would like to discuss in class. Questions can include: I didn’t understand what the author meant by X, can we spend some time on this; I was intrigued by idea Y and would like to explore it further; I saw a connection or contradiction between what this author argues and what another text proposed, I’d like to discuss this further. Whatever you raise as your question or passage you should be prepared to explicate further in class. We probably won’t get to every question, but they will provide some guidance for our discussions. If you tend to be shy about jumping into discussion, your question can also give you a way of joining in.

You do not need to post for the day you are presenting.

Presentation and Leading Discussion: Each week a student (or two) will be responsible for presenting the reading to the class and for helping to lead class discussions. These presentations should be brief – 10-15 minutes. In addition to discussing the readings, presenters should comment on the postings (noting themes in the responses, interesting questions raised). The presentations are not meant to be the final word, but rather to open up class discussion on the texts. Sharing in leading discussion is a crucial part of the presenter’s responsibilities.

Critical Essay: This 5 page paper, due on **February 9**, will give you an opportunity to reflect on the readings from the first few weeks of class in the context of the Middle East. For this paper you should pick an event, a setting, a situation in the Middle East and use one (or more) of the readings from Part 1 of the course to help you analyze this subject. This is not a research paper so you should pick a subject that you have read about before, have on-the-ground experience with, or which has been the subject of media attention. That is, you should be spending your time on analysis rather than on empirical research. The purpose of the assignment is to give you further opportunity to put the theoretical/analytic concepts we focus on in Part 1 to concrete use in understanding the Middle East.
**Final project:** Your final project is something you should be thinking about and working toward throughout the semester. To this end, you will be required to submit a paper proposal and tentative bibliography on **February 28** and to do a presentation on your project on **April 18** or **April 25**, all before submitting the final paper, which is due **April 30**. The project should be 18-20 pages.

**Project options:** Everyone will engage in serious and substantial scholarly research on a topic of your choosing. There are three options for the written product that will emerge from this research. You should choose the option that works best for your interests and professional trajectory. I will expect the same depth of research for each. You will write an 8-20 page: 1) seminar paper; 2) NSF-style grant proposal; or 3) International Crisis Group-style report.

**Grading:**
- Attendance and participation: 15%
- Reading responses: 10%
- Presentation and leading discussion: 10%
- Critical Essay: 15%
- Final project: 50%

**Class Schedule**

**Part One: Anthropology, government, and the state**

January 17 - Introduction: Debates about States in Anthropology
Reading for reference:

January 24 - State forms: colonialism and post-coloniality, nation-states and global governance
January 31 - The human condition: governing people and society

February 7 - Ways of approaching the study of states and government

February 9: Critical Essay due

Part Two: The Middle East


Paper topic and tentative bibliography for seminar paper due


March 14 - Spring Break

March 21 - No class


April 18 - paper presentations

April 25 - paper presentations

April 30 – **Papers Due, by 4pm**