

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

Spring 2018

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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:

- Tim Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-67* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).
Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (New York: Verso, 2007).
Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
Omar Dewachi, *Ungovernable Life: Mandatory Medicine and Statecraft in Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).
Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).
Asef Bayat, *Revolution Without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

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 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 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:

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization: Close Encounters of the Deceptive Kind," in *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 79-96

January 24 - State forms: colonialism and post-coloniality, nation-states and global governance

Frederick Cooper, "States, Empires, and Political Imagination," in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, 153-203 (Berkeley; University of California Press, 2005).

Partha Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?," "The Colonial State," and "The National State," in *The Nation and its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) – pp.3-34, 200-219.

Katherine Verdery, "Whither 'Nation' and 'Nationalism'?" *Daedalus*, 122, 3 (1993): 37-46.

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Spatializing states: Toward an ethnography of neoliberal governmentality," *American Ethnologist* 29, no. 4, (2002): 981-100.

January 31 - The human condition: governing people and society

- Michel Foucault, "Governmentality" In *The Foucault Effect: studies in governmentality*, ed. G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller, 87-104 (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press. 1991).
- Louis Althusser, from "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) – pp. 140-148, 170-176.
- Hannah Arendt, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man," in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 267-302 (New York: Meridian Books, 1951).
- Partha Chatterjee, "Populations and Political Society," in *Politics of the Governed: Reflections of Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

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

- Timothy Mitchell, "Society, Economy, and the State Effect," in *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*, ed. George Steinmatz, 76-97 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999)
- James Scott, "Nature and Space," in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) – pp. 11-52.
- Akhil Gupta, "The State and the Politics of Poverty," in *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India*, 41-72 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).
- Jane Cowan, "Fixing national subjects in the 1920s southern Balkans: also an international practice," *American Ethnologist* 35, 2 (2008): 338-56.

February 9: Critical Essay due

Part Two: The Middle East

February 14 - Tim Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

February 21 - Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

February 28 - Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (New York: Verso, 2007).

Paper topic and tentative bibliography for seminar paper due

March 7 - Omar Dewachi, *Ungovernable Life: Mandatory Medicine and Statecraft in Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

March 14 - Spring Break

March 21 - No class

March 28 - Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

and: Lisa Wedeen, "Ideology and Humor in Dark Times: Notes from Syria," *Critical Inquiry* 39 (2013): 841-73.

April 4 - Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

April 11 - Asef Bayat, *Revolution Without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

April 18 - paper presentations

April 25 - paper presentations

April 30 – **Papers Due, by 4pm**