Contemporary Arab Thought and Culture

Dr. Rana Zaher

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Course Number: 702.2137
Class Time: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 10-13
Class Location: TBA
E-Mail: ranazaher@gmail.com

Course Description:

This course offers an interdisciplinary overview of the central aspects of contemporary Arab thought and culture. Based on academic research, textual and media resources, and literature from both the Arab world and elsewhere, we will survey several fields relevant to the understanding of the contemporary Arab world’s cultural, social and political affairs. More specifically, the course will offer academic readings and discussions into the Arab world’s historical backgrounds, political agendas, gender issues, identity issues, language varieties, and probable future socio-political scenarios. The course will present ample educational opportunities and experiences that promote analytic skills and insights into another culture and its complexities.

Course Content:

This course presents 4 generic topics. The topics and their specifications are detailed below:

1. Historical vs. Contemporary Arab affairs: This topic includes a brief historical survey of Arab social and political status before and after the emergence of Islam. A special emphasis will be put on Pan-Islamism and Pan-Arabism as two leading and competing ideologies.

2. Conservatism vs. Progressivism: This topic contrasts the conservative social forces with those of a progressive nature in the Arab world. A special emphasis will be put on gender issues.

3. Orientalism and its critique: This topic will focus on the east-west relationships from a post-colonial perspective: Orientalism. Critique of this theory will be introduced as well.
4. **Identity Conflicts:** This topic will focus on the identity conflicts experienced by certain communities: Christian Arabs and Druze. Also, the relationship between Arabic language and national identity will be discussed.

**Course Requirements:**

Since this is an introductory course, there are no specific pre-requisites, and knowledge of the Arab culture or Arabic is recommended but not necessary. Attendance is obligatory for at least 80% of the classes, and active participation in classes is expected. All relevant material and articles can be found in and downloaded from the course Moodle website. All exams are open-book.

**Assessment:**
Midterm exam: 50%
Paper: 50%

**Bibliography**

**Obligatory Reading:**


Bassiouny, R. (2009). Diglossia and dialect groups in the Arab world, Arabic Sociolinguistics: Topics in Diglossia, Gender, Identity and Politics, chapter 1,9-26, Georgetown University Press.


Optional Reading:


This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the lecturer.