Contemporary Arab Thought and Culture

Dr. Rana Zaher

Course Number: 702.2137
Class Time: Thursday 12:00-15:00
Class Location: 2006 Terrace Bldg.
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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 6 interrelated generic topics, and 2 classes (approximate to semester’s length) will be designated for each topic. The topics and their specifications are detailed below:

1. History:
   
   The Arab world map, the Arab League, the emergence of Islam, the Arab identity before and after Islam, the rise and fall of the Islamic empire, pan Arabism and pan Islamism.

2. Gender:

   The status and challenges of Arab women in the 22 Arab countries, prominent Arab women, the secular Arab feminist movement, the Islamic feminist movement, and the Tunisian experience.
3. **Theory and Thought:**
   Orientalism as a cornerstone theory to the post-colonial studies, Edward Said’s argument about the relationship between east and west, and Bernard Lewis ‘critique of Orientalism.

4. **Language and Identity:**
   Linguistic characteristics of MSA-Modern Standard Arabic (as compared to English), the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) of MSA, non-linguistic characteristics of Arabic: religious and national symbolism, and borrowing and codeswitching among speakers of Arabic.

5. **Religion and Identity:**
   Christian Arabs in the Arab world: status, challenges and identity.
   Druze in the Middle East: status, challenges and identity.

6. **Patterns of Change:**
   Globalization processes, and The “Arab Spring” revolutions.

**Course Requirements:**

Since it 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 are expected. All relevant material and articles can be found in and downloaded from the course Moodle website. All exams are open-book ones. The purpose of the individual meetings is to follow-up the students’ progress in their paper work and to provide and open space for them to discuss different paper or course related issues.

**Assessment for Regular Students:**

Midterm exam: 20 % 
Final exam: 50% 
Individual meetings: 10% 
Paper: 20%

**Assessment for Seminar Students:**

Midterm exam: 20% 
Final exam: 20%
Individual meetings: 10%
Seminar 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.