This course examines the peoples and societies of the region that Westerners have named the “Middle East” from an anthropological perspective. It explores the issues posed by orientalism and power dynamics, and the role of anthropology in the formation of the idea of the “Middle East” as an area of study and military intervention. The course is divided into sections devoted to understanding and problematizing concepts and themes that are central to understanding the region: tribe and state, family and kinship, gender and sexuality, honor and shame, tradition and modernity, and religion and secularism. Course materials will include critical ethnographies based on fieldwork, films, and other visual arts.

1. Teaching and Learning Methodologies

Culture and Power in the Middle East is organized around readings, lecture, and classroom discussion. The required readings are often difficult, and the aim of the course is not to help you understand the broader anthropological and political debates that our authors are part of, and to offer a lucid interpretation of their texts and positions. Close reading of the texts and class discussion are at the core of this course’s methodology: you are expected to read all the week’s texts in advance, to think about them carefully, and to participate actively in our discussions. The learning outcomes will be assessed through three written assignments and one oral presentation. You are expected to attend classes and to engage in critical discussion of the texts.

Submit work on time. You must complete all assigned coursework to pass the course. It is your responsibility to submit all assignments on time by email. Work not turned in, or turned in after the due date without a documented explanation will receive an F.

There will be no tolerance for plagiarism. Academy integrity is the acknowledgment of what we owe to other writers and researchers. Plagiarism is the non-acknowledgment of our sources and ranges from improperly quoting to paraphrasing to copying an author without admitting it. Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and all cases will be submitted to the university administration. For more information on academic integrity at Brandeis University, see: https://lts.brandeis.edu/courses/instruction/academic-integrity/index.html

Address your concerns and issues during office hours. If you experience difficulties with the readings and the assignments, see me as soon as possible. Office hours are opportunities to discuss the course material, get my advice and help on how to best work on assignments, and inform me of issues you may have with the course.
2. Learning Outcomes

There is no prerequisite for this course. You will learn how to describe precisely complex arguments about the Middle East. You will acquire knowledge of most of the prominent issues related to culture and power in the Middle East, with a focus on Arab societies. You will be expected to interpret the texts, to understand their context, and to reconstitute the fieldwork that gives them meaning and content. You will learn how to craft better papers, and will be introduced to social anthropology through the reading of some of its key texts.

3. Assignments

a) In class participation. (25% of the final grade)

b) First assignment: you will write a reflection paper based on at least three readings and organized around a broad issue. You will come to my office to discuss your main essay question and the readings you select. Assignment due on March 1. (20% of the final grade)

c) Second assignment: write an essay that studies a film from an ethnographic perspective. Each student will choose a different film (see list below) and will organize their essays around a series of visuals from the film. Assignment due on April 1. (20% of the final grade)

d) Third assignment: you will write a research paper on (a) either a current affair topic, which you will analyze with the course’s tools (drone war, torture, military occupation, etc.), or (b) fieldwork conducted in or around campus, or (c) an ethnographic interview, introduced and commented. You will come to my office to discuss your topic and methodology. You will present and discuss your draft with the class on either April 14 or 19. Assignment due on May 1. (35% of the final grade)

List of films for the second assignment:

- Youssef Chahine, Cairo Station (Bab al-hadid), Egypt, 1958 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUzP7G7WHFY)
- Salah Abu Seif, I am Free (Ana horra), Egypt 1959 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-Elj04Alfk)
- Gillo Pontecorvo, The Battle of Algiers (La battaglia di Algeri), Italy-Algeria 1966 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-j4WVTgWc)
- Shadi Abdessalam, The Night of Counting the Years (Al-mumiya’), Egypt 1969 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upPumI2yMkg)
- Tewfik Saleh, The Dupes (Al-makhdu’un), Syria 1973 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRZzbmNwi8w)
- Youssef Chahine, *Alexandria... Why? (Iskandereyya leh?)*, Egypt, 1979 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuORr3zNwD0)

4. Course Schedule

**January 14:** Introduction

- *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power,* part 5: “Crude Diplomacy” (PBS Series 1992), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIJxBrHcSUo

**Week 1 – What is the Middle East?**

**January 19:** What is the Middle East?

- Roger Adelson, “British and US Use and Misuse of the Term Middle East,” in *ibid.*, p. 36-55.
- Diana K. Davis, “Scorched Earth: The Problematic Environmental History that defines the Middle East,” in *ibid.*, p. 170-188.

**January 21:** What is orientalism?


**Week 2 – Orientalism and colonialism**

**January 26:** The orientalism debate


**January 28:** Colonial ethnography


**Week 3 – Decolonizing ethnography**

**February 2:** Functionalist anthropology
- Talal Asad, “Two European Images of Non-European Rule,” in *ibid.*, p. 103-120.

**February 4: Decolonizing ethnography?**

**Week 4 – The predicament of Western ethnography**

**February 9: The predicament of Western ethnography, 1**

**February 11: The predicament of Western ethnography, 2**

**Week 5 – Ethnography and the US military**

**February 23: Why the US army loves anthropology**

**February 25: Why the US army should fear (feminist) anthropologists**

**Week 6 – Urban ethnography**

**March 1: Urban ethnography**
- Pascal Menoret, *Joyriding in Riyadh: Oil, Urbanism, and Road Revolt* (Cambridge University Press 2014), chapters 1, 2, and 3.

**March 3: Ethnography of youth and revolt**
- Pascal Menoret, *Joyriding in Riyadh*, chapters 4, 5, and 6.
Week 7 – Ethnography of gender, 1
March 8: Gender and modernity
March 10: Gender and sexuality

Week 8 – Ethnography of gender, 2/Ethnography of religion, 1
March 15: Transgender, transsexuality, homosexuality
March 17: Religious revival and politics

Week 9 – Ethnography of religion, 2
March 22: Religious revival and urban spaces
March 24: Religious revival and neoliberal piety
- Mona Atia, *Building a House in Heaven: Pious Neoliberalism and Islamic Charity in Egypt* (University of Minnesota Press 2013), chapters 1, 2, and 3.

Week 10 – Ethnography of religion, 3
March 29: Religious revival and medical anthropology
March 31: Violence and death

**Week 11 – Ethnography of violence and mobility**
**April 5: Humanism and terror**
**April 7: Migration and empire**

**Week 12 – Ethnography of labor**
**April 12: Migration and labor**
**April 14-19: Presentations**