

ANTH 310/MENA 310:
“The Science of the Human”: An Introduction to MENA Anthropology

Credits: 3 credit hours

Program Location: Amman, Jordan / Jointly offered by Sijal Institute for Arabic Language and Culture

Name of Instructor: _____

Course Hours:

Course Description

This course examines anthropological approaches to the study of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), traditionally translated *‘ilm al-‘insan*—the science (or the knowledge) of the human. Based on long-term immersive fieldwork within communities of study and using most often the methods of participant observation—what Chicano poet-anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1994) has called “[deep hanging out](#)”—and qualitative interviews, we will ask what anthropology can reveal about what it means to be human that other disciplines cannot. In other words, what is unique about the knowledge that anthropology generates? We will consider this question in light of the *longue durée* of the Middle East: What is it exactly that coheres this region? What is the history of Western intervention in the Middle East and its enduring consequences for how scholars engage the region? What are the impacts of transnational movements and phenomena across the Middle East, such as pan-Arabism, the Islamic revival (*al-sahwa al-‘arabiyya*), neoliberal structural adjustment, and so on? This course looks broadly at the region but will foreground anthropological knowledge about Jordan to help students contextualize their experiences in the country. Rather than a comprehensive overview of anthropological work that has been done on the region—which is necessarily impossible—this course aims to introduce students to the range of work that anthropologists have produced. Ultimately, this course aims to help us think about what the human can teach us about the Middle East and, conversely, what the Middle East can teach us about being human.

We will read primarily excerpts from ethnographies—the product of anthropological writing—but we will also read from a variety of other disciplines, like history and sociology, in addition to engaging with popular representations of the Middle East, like op-eds and films. This gamut of sources is united through an *ethnographic sensibility*, a deliberate attention to lived experience as a pathway to knowledge about social phenomena. This course does not require prior knowledge either of anthropology or of Middle Eastern studies, though prior preparation in a social science discipline would be helpful. As a discussion-based seminar, however, I expect students to—and hope they will!—complete the assigned reading for the week and to contribute actively to the discussion. This course is

targeted at advanced undergraduates, and early graduate students with little prior exposure to the Middle East.

Learning Outcomes for the Course

By the completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand and articulate important anthropological concepts and techniques, such as ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation;
2. Recognize and explain some themes that have characterized the field of Middle East anthropology since its inception as well as point to new loci of interest in recent years; !
3. Provide several examples of anthropological work that has been conducted across the region, from Jordan to Egypt to Saudi Arabia; and
4. ! Have improved writing, analytical, and presentation skills

Required Reading

Readings are listed in the course schedule below. You will not need to purchase any books for this course; I will post PDFs of all the readings listed on the syllabus on the Amideast LMS. Please reach out to me if you have any issues accessing the readings.

Assessment Overview

<i>Description</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Due Date</i>
Active participation	10%	Throughout the semester
Discussion leading	15%	Twice in the semester
Reading reflection #1	15%	Throughout the semester
Reading reflection #2	15%	Throughout the semester
Media review	20%	
Final paper	25%	

Attendance and Engagement

Students are expected to attend all regularly scheduled classes and come prepared to participate fully in class activities. Students are further expected to be on time for all classes. Arriving late for class is disrespectful of both the instructor and fellow students. Beyond being in class on time, expectations of student engagement that are accounted for in this portion of the grade include both quality and quantity: full involvement in in-class exercises, class discussions, active listening and asking questions, and proactively seeking additional help during office hours if needed. Throughout the semester, there are a number and variety of program activities that are mandatory for all students. They are announced in advance and reminders are sent. Failure to attend mandatory program activities therefore reflects negatively on students' attendance and engagement grade.

Attendance Policy

Please see the terms of the attendance policy as noted in the LMS for this course.

Assessment Tasks

1. Discussion leading (15%)

As discussion is the backbone of this course, the quality of the limited time we share in class will depend largely on students' active engagement with the texts and with each other. Be civil to one another and respectful of each other's informed opinions. I ask us to read both **closely** and **generously**—this means: recognizing that authors have a message and working hard to figure out what it is; staying close to the text by providing quotes/page numbers when making an argument about a reading; and understanding an author's argument before providing critique of the argument.

At the start of the course, each student will sign up to lead discussion for two of the sessions (depending on the number of people in the class). Discussion leaders should provide opening comments for each reading assigned that week that (1) provides some biographical and/or historical information about its author(s); (2) explains its core arguments and the methods/sources employed; and (3) identifies what the reading does *well* and where the author(s) *succeeds* in their arguments.

2. Reading reflections #1 and #2 (15% each)

Each student should write two reading reflections over the course of the semester on any three weeks of your choosing. These reflections must be on a different week from when you are leading the class discussion. In a write-up of no more than a page, write a synthetic essay that examines shared themes between the readings of that week. In other words, how do these readings speak to each other? Where do they agree, and where do they differ? The reading reflection should be uploaded to the class website by 5 pm on Tuesday, the day before class.

3. Media review (20%)

In an essay of no more than 1,500 words, write a review of a media representation of the Middle East from an anthropological perspective. "Media" in this assignment is meant broadly and can refer to: novels, films, documentaries, news reports, and so on (Please talk to me if you want some ideas or are not sure if something you're considering qualifies.) Your review should examine how the producers of that media choose to represent the Middle East, and is due to me in midterm week.

Some questions to guide your thinking: what might be the purpose of this piece of media? To what extent does this media reflect an ethnographic sensibility and a sensitivity to lived experience? Who is the intended audience for this piece? How might an anthropologist respond to this piece of media? Pay attention to the kind of language used in the media.

4. Final paper (25%)

The final paper for this class is a 8- to 12-page paper (double-spaced, in a standard font, and using an accepted citation method) that should provide anthropological insights into your experiences in Jordan, drawing upon the readings we have done together in this course. You

should use at least three sources from the readings, in addition to at least three external sources, which can be news articles, magazine pieces, reports, journal articles and other chapters from the books we have looked at in this course. Take advantage of the library and academic resources at both Amideast and Sijal Institute, and also check out the work of Jordanian media company 7iber (especially their [English archives](#))! Each student should come and consult with me individually at least two weeks before the last class. During the last class, all students will have the opportunity to give relatively informal presentations (5-10 minutes, worth 5% of your grade) on their final papers to the rest of the class for feedback and reactions. The final paper is due two weeks after the last day of class, before the Reflection Day.

Statement on Access

We all learn in different ways, and the structure and organization of this course will naturally suit some of you more than others. I would like to make this class as accessible to you as possible, so I will have you all fill out a “learning styles” sheet at the start of the course where you can describe what works best for you. A classroom becomes a community when we all participate and expand our horizons—if there are ways that our community can foster your participation, your well-being as a student, and your academic success (whether you have a documented disability or not), please come and talk to me.

Academic dishonesty of any kind, including cheating and plagiarism, will not be tolerated. Please come and talk to me if you are struggling, and we can discuss how to support your success in this course.

Course Schedule

Date	Themes and Readings
PART I: Setting Up	
	<p><u>Middle of where? East of where? The making of a region</u></p> <p>Read in class:</p> <p>Keddie, Nikki R. 1973. “Is There a Middle East?” <i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i> 4 (3): 255–71.</p> <p>Culcasi, Karen. 2010. “Constructing and Naturalizing the Middle East.” <i>Geographical Review</i> 100 (4): 583–97. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2010.00059.x.</p> <p>McGranahan, Carole. 2018. “Ethnography Beyond Method: The Importance of an Ethnographic Sensibility.” <i>Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies</i> 15 (1): 1–10. https://doi.org/10.11157/sites-id373.</p> <p>Recommended:</p> <p>Pursley, Sara. “‘Lines Drawn on an Empty Map’: Iraq’s Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State (Part 1).” <i>Jadaliyya</i> - جدلية. June 2/3, 2015. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32140.</p>

	<p><u>'ilm al-insan/anthrobolijiyya/insaniyyat: wherefore anthropology?</u></p> <p>Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1989. "Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World." <i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i> 18: 267–306.</p> <p>Deeb, Lara, and Jessica Winegar. 2012. "Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies." <i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i> 41 (1): 537–58. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092611-145947.</p> <p>Hafez, Sherine, and Susan Slyomovics, eds. 2013. <i>Anthropology of the Middle East and North Africa: Into the New Millennium</i>. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.</p> <p>Read: Jon W. Anderson, "Anthropology's Middle Eastern Prehistory: An Archaeology of Knowledge"</p> <p><i>Recommended:</i></p> <p>Alessandrini, Anthony and the Middle East Studies Pedagogy Initiative (MESPI). 2018. "Essential Readings: Said's Orientalism, Its Interlocutors, and Its Influence." <i>Jadaliyya</i> - جدلية. September 5, 2018. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/37894.</p> <p>Shamel, Salma. 2018. "Who Told You History Is an Open Buffet? On Facts, Fiction and Absence in the Archives." <i>Mada Masr</i> (blog). May 5, 2018. https://www.madamasr.com/en/2018/05/14/opinion/u/who-told-you-history-is-an-open-buffet/.</p>
<p>PART II: Moving Through</p> <p><i>This is a tiny slice of the vast array of work out there. Feel free to ask me for reading suggestions for topics you'd like to delve further into!</i></p>	
	<p><u>Questions of faith and belonging</u></p> <p>Schielke, Samuli. 2010. "Second Thoughts about the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life." <i>ZMO Working Papers</i> 2: 1–16.</p> <p>Mittermaier, Amira. 2019. <i>Giving to God: Islamic Charity in Revolutionary Times</i>. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.</p> <p>Read: Divine Minimum Wage</p> <p>Rose, Lena. 2020. "Nazareth Village and the Creation of the Holy Land in Israel-Palestine: The Question of Evangelical Orthodoxy." <i>Current Anthropology</i> 61 (3): 335–55. https://doi.org/10.1086/708762.</p> <p>Read: 335-346 and <u>one</u> of the responses from James Bielo, Khaled Furani, Naomi Haynes, Hilary Kaell, or Vincent Wimbush.</p> <p><i>Recommended:</i></p> <p>Anjum, Ovamir. 2007. "Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors." <i>Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East</i> 27 (3): 656–72. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-2007-041.</p>
	<p><u>Gender binaries and beyond</u></p>

	<p>Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2002. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others." <i>American Anthropologist</i> 104 (3): 783–90. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2002.104.3.783.</p> <p>Kisch, Shifra. 2007. "Disablement, Gender, and Deafhood among the Negev Arab-Bedouin." <i>Disability Studies Quarterly</i> 27 (4). https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v27i4.45.</p> <p>Atshan, Sa'ed. 2020. <i>Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique</i>. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.</p> <p>Read: LGBTQ Palestinians and the Politics of the Ordinary</p>
	<p><u>Race, genetics, and medical technologies</u></p> <p>Kisch, Shifra. 2004. "Negotiating (Genetic) Deafness in a Bedouin Community." In <i>Genetics, Disability, and Deafness</i>, edited by John V. Van Cleve, 148–73. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.</p> <p>Inhorn, Marcia C. 2012. <i>The New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East</i>. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.</p> <p>Read: Islam and Assisted Reproduction</p> <p>Samin, Nadav. 2015. <i>Of Sand or Soil: Genealogy and Tribal Belonging in Saudi Arabia</i>. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press.</p> <p>Read: Toward a Genealogical Rule of Governance</p> <p>El-Geressi, Yasmine. 2020. "Racism in the Arab World: An Open Secret." <i>Majalla</i>. June 12, 2020. https://eng.majalla.com/node/91756/racism-in-the-arab-world-an-open-secret.</p>
	<p><u>Ideologies of language and communication</u></p> <p>Haeri, Niloufar. 2003. <i>Sacred Language, Ordinary People: Dilemmas of Culture and Politics in Egypt</i>. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.</p> <p>Read: Humble Custodians of the Divine Word: Classical Arabic in Daily Life</p> <p>Schulthies, Becky. 2015. "Do You Speak Arabic? Managing Axes of Adequation and Difference in Pan-Arab Talent Programs." <i>Language & Communication</i> 44 (September): 59–71. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2014.10.010.</p> <p>Paz, Alejandro I. 2018. <i>Latinos in Israel: Language and Unexpected Citizenship</i>. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.</p> <p>Read: Becoming Israeli Citizens: Latino Youth, Uncanny Similarity, and the Message of Citizenship</p>
	<p><u>The work of work</u></p> <p>Ababneh, Sara. 2016. "Troubling the Political: Women in the Jordanian Day-Wage Labor Movement." <i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i> 48 (1): 87–112. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743815001488.</p> <p>Moll, Yasmin. 2017. "Subtitling Islam: Translation, Mediation, Critique." <i>Public Culture</i> 29 (2): 333–61. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-3749093.</p> <p>Mickel, Allison. 2021. <i>Why Those Who Shovel Are Silent: A History of Local Archaeological Knowledge and Labor</i>. University Press of Colorado.</p>

	<p>Read: Site Workers as Specialists, Site Workers as Supporters</p> <p><i>Media review due end of this week.</i></p>
Spring break!	
	<p><u>Sharing knowledge: teaching the past, teaching the future</u></p> <p>Adely, Fida J. 2012. "'God Made Beautiful Things': Proper Faith and Religious Authority in a Jordanian High School." <i>American Ethnologist</i> 39 (2): 297–312. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2012.01365.x.</p> <p>Davis, Rochelle. 2011. <i>Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced</i>. Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.</p> <p>Read: Village History and Village Values</p> <p>Farquhar, Michael. 2017. <i>Circuits of Faith: Migration, Education, and the Wahhabi Mission</i>. Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.</p> <p>Read: Leaving Medina</p>
	<p><u>Economic subjects in the time of neoliberalism</u></p> <p>Atia, Mona. 2013. <i>Building a House in Heaven: Pious Neoliberalism and Islamic Charity in Egypt</i>. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.</p> <p>Read: The Economy of Charity</p> <p>Allan, Diana. 2014. <i>Refugees of the Revolution: Experiences of Palestinian Exile</i>. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.</p> <p>Read: Economic Subjectivity and Everyday Solidarities</p> <p>Sukarieh, Mayssoun. 2016. "On Class, Culture, and the Creation of the Neoliberal Subject: The Case of Jordan." <i>Anthropological Quarterly</i> 89 (4): 1201–25. https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2016.0073.</p>
	<p><u>Infrastructural perils and possibilities</u></p> <p>Elyachar, Julia. 2010. "Phatic Labor, Infrastructure, and the Question of Empowerment in Cairo." <i>American Ethnologist</i> 37 (3): 452–64. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2010.01265.x.</p> <p>Bishara, Amahl. 2015. "Driving While Palestinian in Israel and the West Bank: The Politics of Disorientation and the Routes of a Subaltern Knowledge." <i>American Ethnologist</i> 42 (1): 33–54. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12114.</p> <p>Bou Akar, Hiba. 2018. <i>For the War Yet to Come: Planning Beirut's Frontiers</i>. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.</p> <p>Read: Constructing Sectarian Geographies</p> <p><i>Recommended:</i></p>

	<p>Stamatopoulou-Robbins, Sophia. 2020. <i>Waste Siege: The Life of Infrastructure in Palestine</i>. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.</p> <p>Read: Leakage: Sewage and Doublethink in a “Shared Environment”</p> <p>Arini. 2014. <i>Mapping Jebel Natheef</i>. https://arini.org/mapping-jabal-al-natheef-publication/.</p>
	<p><u>Disability and difference</u></p> <p>Scalenghe, Sara. 2019. “Disability Studies in the Middle East and North Africa: A Field Emerges.” <i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i> 51 (1): 109–12. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743818001228.</p> <p>Açıksöz, Salih Can. 2019. “Prosthetic Debts: Economies of War Disability in Neoliberal Turkey.” <i>Current Anthropology</i> 61 (S21): S76–86. https://doi.org/10.1086/705654.</p> <p>Sargent, Christine. 2020. “The Stakes of (Not) Knowing.” <i>Medicine Anthropology Theory</i> 7 (2): 10–32. https://doi.org/10.17157/mat.7.2.683.</p> <p>Atalla, Munir. 2020. <i>How a Blacksmith in Jordan Created His Own Sign Language</i>. Atlas Obscura. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQ7-ih2gnkA.</p> <p><i>Meeting about final paper by end of this week.</i></p>
PART III: Wrapping Up	
	<p><u>halla’ l-wayn: future directions</u></p> <p>Inhorn, Marcia C. 2014. “Roads Less Traveled in Middle East Anthropology—And New Paths in Gender Ethnography.” <i>Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies</i> 10 (3): 62–86. https://doi.org/10.2979/jmiddeastwomstud.10.3.62.</p> <p>Altorki, Soraya, ed. 2015. <i>A Companion to the Anthropology of the Middle East</i>. Wiley Blackwell Companions to Anthropology. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.</p> <p>Read: Deniz Kandiyoti, “Enduring Concerns, Resilient Tropes, and New Departures: Reading the <i>Companion</i>”</p> <p>Deeb, Lara, and Jessica Winegar. 2016. <i>Anthropology’s Politics: Disciplining the Middle East</i>. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.</p> <p>Read: Introduction: Academics and Politics & Appendix A: Methods</p>
	<p>Students’ final presentations and concluding thoughts</p> <p><i>Final papers due two weeks after this class, before Reflection Day.</i></p>
	<p>Reflection Day: tour and discussion with Underground Amman Tour (tentative)</p>