

ANTH 391: Anthropology of the Middle East

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Deniz Ünsal

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course aims at introducing students to the politics of culture in contemporary Middle Eastern societies (including Turkey, Israel and Iran) by analyzing the impact of colonialism, national and religious ideologies and power hierarchies on the everyday negotiations of identity. The Middle East has long been in the focus of international politics and media, and this course offers a safe and critical environment to discuss our preconceptions through a critical anthropological evaluation of cultural expressions and artistic productions that aim to subvert or reinforce the existing power relations in the region. Drawing upon a body of ethnographic work from the last 20-30 years on the societies of the Middle East, we will examine public ceremonies (national days and commemorations, local and religious celebrations), popular culture and media (TV shows, film, music and impact of social media) and contemporary art practices as critique of power and hegemony. We will discuss orientalism, nationalism, displacement and exile, gender and Islamic identities. Films, graphic novels and art viewings will complement course readings and class discussions.

Learning objectives

- Map the contemporary ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of the people of the Middle East
- Identify and describe different national and religious ideologies in contemporary Middle Eastern societies
- Examine the role of popular culture and mass media on the perceptions of gender, class, national and religious identity.
- Discuss the role of artistic and cultural expressions as a critique of power relations
- Develop an anthropological terminology to discuss media reportings on the Middle East

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Upon completion of this course the students will be able to

- Adopt a critical approach to different anthropological perspectives on the Middle East
- Recognize academic resources on the Middle East
- Develop critical reading, academic writing and discussion skills