Students in Public exemplar details

Faculty, School and Subject Area: Humanities, SoSS, Social Anthropology

Course Unit/activity: SOAN30122 Contemporary Issues in the Social Anthropology of the Middle East

Course Unit Director/activity leader: Michelle Obeid

What is the assignment/knowledge product? News report

This is an open assignment so students are encouraged to choose a topic of interest to them using online news sites, social networks and other online sources (including blogs). There are no restrictions on the topic which could be anything from music to political upheavals in the region of the Middle East and its diasporas.

Students are not expected to engage with academic sources – although if they wish to make links with concepts and readings we cover in lectures and discussions, this will be good. However, they will not be marked down if they don't. You will be assessed with the same criteria used with formal essays. In other words, while I do not expect you to resort to academic literatures, you will still be assessed on clarity, arguments, good writing skills, structure, organization and bibliography.

I expect students to pick a story (a twitter thread; a blog; an opinion piece, etc.) and pull out points for discussion. Students may wish to show how one story can be covered in several ways, how there may be different analyses or points regarding one event, why these points raised are important, problematic, etc. I will be looking for your ability to engage critically with the sources that you pick. While this is an open assignment, I expect you to demonstrate that you have understood some of the main problems that emerge out of stereotyping the region.

Why was it introduced?
The first half of the course focuses on unquestioned conceptions of and stereotypes about the Middle East and its diasporas in mainstream knowledge production.

The purpose of the assignment is to encourage students to read and engage critically with 'the news' and information available online, with a critical eye towards misrepresentations and stereotyping.

The assignment is based on applying the knowledge learnt throughout the course without reference to academic sources to encourage different kinds of writing.

Where is/could it be published?
The assignments are not currently published.

What are the challenges (e.g. copyright)?
We would need student permissions and we would need to consider which assignments could be published, based on their quality.

What are the student perceptions/responses/attainment?
Students really enjoy this assignment and usually do exceptionally well.

This assignment initially causes a bit of worry since students are in their third year and worry that it is unconventional. But consistently across the years, they end up really enjoying it and doing exceptionally well (there are very high levels of firsts).
They also cover a range of wonderful topics (for example, critiquing TV programmes like Homeland, the discussion of the Trump Muslim ban, the Nike's Sports Hijab campaign; among other exciting stories this year).

If published, how do you monitor use of the resource/s?
N/A

Any other comments

Contemporary Issues in the Social Anthropology of the Middle East
Unit code : SOAN30122
Credit rating : 20

Aims

This course is designed to critically interrogate some of the longstanding stereotypical images and representations of the Middle East region, with a specific focus on Arab-majority societies. The course relies on comparative anthropological approaches to examine contemporary issues that emerge in everyday life and that shed light on what it means to live in or be connected to this ever-changing region. The sessions will weave together themes that explore the concept of 'modernity' in its specific cultural contexts, not least by challenging the enduring dichotomy of 'tradition and modernity'. We will explore changing gender relations, everyday Islam and emergent moralities, the construction of the political through belonging, resistance and protest, and globalisation through unpacking new forms of media and consumption, cultural production and human mobility. By focusing on ethnographic approaches, the course aims to provide students with a nuanced understanding of the heterogeneity of the region and the diversity of its peoples.

Objectives (Learning outcomes)

By the end of the course, the students should be able to:
- Have a critical understanding of some of the changing concerns of the anthropology of the Middle East and set them in a historical, political and socio-economic context.
- Appreciate the ethnographic diversity of the region.
- Demonstrate the ability to critically evaluate mainstream knowledge production of the Middle East (news, film, reports etc.).
- Make some theoretical links between the anthropology of the Middle East and mainstream anthropological themes.

Assessment methods
20% of overall course assessment: News report based on student-led research of on-line Arabic newspapers published in English. 2000 words.

80% of the overall assessment: 4000 word essay.

Course unit overview

The lecture course will cover the following themes:
1. The MIddle East as a 'Region'
2. Family, Kinship and Patriarchy.
3. Women, Morality and the Veil.
4. Middle Eastern Masculinities.
5. Islam, Islamism and Modernity.
6. State, National Identity and Citizenship
7. The 'Arab Spring' and its Aftermaths
8. New Media
9. Consumption and Modernity
10. Migration and Middle Eastern Diasporas.