

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

Contemporary Middle East: Society, Culture & Politics
ANTH 4701, Thursday, 6:30 – 9:20, Chem 352
Instructor: Dr. Mahmoud Sadri
Office hours: by appointment
Email: MSadri@mail.TWU.edu

Syllabus

Course Objectives:

This is an innovative approach to the study of the Middle East. This course will unfold in three expanding and concentric circles. First we will take a penetrating look into the history of the contemporary Islam through an innovative biography of an Iranian scholar, interspersed with explanations of the episodes of the protagonist's life. Second, we will engage in a wider investigation of the history and culture of the modern Middle East through the lens of a work that examines the modern encounters that shaped the present Middle East and Islam. Third, we will widen the circle to include Islam and the advent of extremism that envelopes the Middle East and beyond. The three books then, will serve as spring boards for our discussions of the region. There will be a strong visual component to this course in the form of documentary and narrative films that illuminate the issues under discussion. Also, each session will have class discussion section as well. This part either echoes or contradicts the reading for that week.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon completions student will be able to:

1. Understand and debate the contemporary Iranian political culture as an example of the Middle Eastern culture.
2. Critique the evolution of the modern Middle East from traditional and early modern origins.
3. Critically analyze the rise of radical Islam in the modern Middle East.
4. Acquire competence in analyzing the current cultural and political affair in the Middle East.

Method of Assessment:

- Objectives 1, 2, and 3 will be assessed by discussion of each of the three texts in class and by taking examinations upon completing each of the assigned books. %45.
- Objective 4 will be assessed by the progressive development of the students' skills in dealing with the weekly news from the region. We will begin every session with a discussion of the Middle East relevant news of the week. All students are required to listen, watch, or browse media sources and have a daily log of their results. These discussions will start on Week 3. Logs will be submitted to the instructor and will be part of the participation grade for this class. 15%
- Also, in order to encourage student-led discussions, every week 2 or 3 students will lead

discussions on a news summary of the current Middle Eastern affairs. These presentations will start on Week 3. 15%

- All four objectives are further assessed when, following each visual presentation (documentary and narrative films and clips) each student submits a reflection note including the summary and commentary on the presentation.10%
- Finally, attendance is required and responses to questions concerning the materials covered each week will be recorded as participation grades. 15%

Required Readings:

- Roy Mottahedeh, The Mantle of the Prophet
- Bernard Lewis, What Went Wrong?
- Khaled Abu El Fadl, The Great Theft
- Readings posted on Blackboard or handed out in class
- Class and Blackboard handouts and postings

Schedule of classes:

Section I. Middle East in Context: History, Geography, Migration

Week 1 Middle East: Migrations, Empires and formation of the modern map
Jan.19

Resources:

Human Family Tree: 96 minutes (class viewing)

Required home viewing:

- Guns, Germs and Steel episode 1-8.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqnmT-Y_rGQ
- Imperial history of the Middle East: (home viewing)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBpQiJt3MUQ>
- Recommended home viewing:
[Iranian history: time line:](#)
- www.iranchamber.com/history/historic_periods.php
- <http://www.on-the-matrix.com/mideast/IranTimeline.aspx>
- Egyptian history: time line:
- www.toureygypt.net/ehistory.htm
- Turkish history: time line:
- www.allaboutturkey.com/history.htm
- **Class discussion: History, Deep History, Historical Timelines**

Section II. Religion, Culture and Personality in the Middle East

Week 2
Jan. 26

Culture and Biography

Readings:

The Mantle of the Prophet, prologue, Ch. 1-4

- News discussions and presentations.
- Class discussion: Intercultural Encounters

Resources:

Rick Steve's Iran (class screening)

(Visual reflection notes from the previous session due)

Week 3
Feb. 2

Culture and Religion

Readings:

The Mantle of the Prophet, Ch. 5-8

- News discussions and presentations.
- Class Discussion: Ethno-Mysticism, the Sufi path; Ascetic and Mystic, inner-worldly and otherworldly religion; mystic Islam, Three stages of the path toward the divine, rituals, music and remembrance.

Resources:

- Sufi ceremonies: (Class viewing)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=g7QtM79pBs4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7QtM79pBs4)
- [youtube.com/watch?v=2--ax5XrF1o&feature=related](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2--ax5XrF1o&feature=related)

Introduction: Explore the meaning and the varieties of Sufi orders

- <http://www.uga.edu/islam/Sufism.html> (home reading)
- poems by Rumi: Read and comment on one poem (home assignment)

Student news presentations start

Week 4
Feb. 9

Culture and Personality

Readings:

The Mantle of the Prophet, Ch. 9-Epilogue

- News discussions and presentations.

- **Class Discussion: Intercultural Dialogue: Middle East and the Rest, (Communication)**

Resources:

Mahmoud Sadri: "Irani-Bazi", Notes on Liminal Predation. Powerpoint Presentation.

Film: Children of Heaven (subject to revision)

Assignment from the previous class due

Section III. Middle East and the Confrontation with West

Week 5
Feb. 16

Dealing with a resurgent West

Readings:

What Went Wrong? Ch. 1-3

- **News discussions and presentations.**
- **Class discussion: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Post-Postcolonialism**

Resources: Mahmoud Sadri: Iran and US, between trust and distrust: Powerpoint presentation.

(Quiz from the "Mantle of the Prophet", previous section)

Week 6
Feb. 23

Modernization and Secularization

Reading

What Went Wrong? Ch. 4, 5

- **News discussions and presentations.**
- **Class Discussion: Extremism and Terrorism: A general introduction**

Resources: Mahmoud Sadri: Communal Approach to Terrorism. On line Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri: Juan Williams and Million to One Fear (on line)

Week 7
March 2

Inevitability of Cultural Change

Reading:

What Went Wrong? Ch. 6,7

- News discussions and presentations.
- Class discussion: Natives and Colonial Powers

Film: Lawrence of Arabia (subject to revision)

Section IV. Puritanism, Extremism, and Fundamentalism in the Middle East

Week 8
March 9

The Rise of Puritan Islam

Reading:
The Great Theft, Part I

- News discussions and presentations.
- Class Discussion: Geopolitics, Extremism and Terrorism

Resources:
Mahmoud Sadri, Terrorism, Suicidal Homicide
Mahmoud Sadri, The Only Survivor, (on line)

Quiz from the previous section

March 16 Spring break

Week 9
March 23

Moderate versus Puritan Islam

Reading:
The Great Theft, Part II, Ch. 5-8

- News discussions and presentations.
- Class Discussion: Dilemma of Islam

Resources:
Mahmoud Sadri, "Reframing Reform: Lessons Learned from the Apostasy Trials in Iran"

Week 10
March 30

Moderate Views on Islam

Reading
The Great Theft, Part II. Ch. 9-12

- News discussions and presentations.
- Class Discussion: Three Faces of Dissent (online)

- **Civil Society, Dissent and Reform**

Film: Paradise Now

Section V. Most Recent Developments

Week 11
April 6

The Iranian Green Movement and the Arab Spring

Readings:

Hamid Dabashi, Arab Spring; Mahmoud Sadri and Nader Hashemi: How Green is the Arab Spring? (On BB)

- **News discussions and presentations.**
- **Class Discussion based on presentations of papers**

(Quiz from the previous section)

Week 12
April 13

Rise of the “Islamic State”

Resources:

Mahmoud Sadri: Da’esh and Resurgent Puritan Sunni Islam

- **News discussions and presentations.**
- **Class Discussion: Extremism in Shi’a and Sunni Islam**

<http://www.jcpa.org/jl/vp352.htm>

○ <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/30/world/europe/30turkey.html>

○

Islam and Reform Islam: the case of Iran:

○ <http://www.iranian.com/Opinion/2002/February/Theology/index.html>

○ <http://www.iranian.com/Opinion/Oct98/Soroush/index.html>

Week 13
April 20

Toward a Global Community of Compassion

Resources:

Mahmoud Sadri, Premonitions of Interfaith Dialogue

<http://www.jcpa.org/jl/vp352.htm>

○ <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/30/world/europe/30turkey.html>

- ***News discussions and presentations.***
- ***Class Discussion: Islam and Reform Islam: the case of Iran***

○ <http://www.iranian.com/Opinion/2002/February/Theology/index.html>

○ <http://www.iranian.com/Opinion/Oct98/Soroush/index.html>

Week 14
April 27

Culture, History, and Ideology in the Middle East: A recapitulation

- News discussions and presentations.

Week 15
May 4

- Class discussion: Wrapping up

Disability Policy

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at [940.565.4323](tel:940.565.4323).

Anth 4701

Weekly presentation teams:

Week 3: Alfaro, Belachew

Week 4: Berendt, Jena

Week 5: Cooke, Elizondo

Week 6: Ellis, Espinoza

Week 7: Ficsor, Floyd

Week 8: Gaffey, Hansbury

Week 9: Harrison, Husain

Week 10: Kendall, Lawrence

Week 11: Love, McDue, Oneill

Week 12: Rios, Robinson, Schulte

Week 13: Scoggin, Slack, Staratman

Week 14: Williams, Worline, Yowell