Course Outline | Spring Semester 2016

MACS 621 | Rethinking Arab Media Cultures: An Anthropological Perspective

Optional Course for the concentration track
Course Teacher: Dr. Imed Ben Labidi
Credit Value: 3
Pre-requisites: None
Co-requisites: None
Course Duration: 14 weeks; Semester 2
Total Student Study Time: 126 hours, including 42 contact hours of lectures and seminars.
Lecture time: Sunday 5-8 pm, Business & Economics Building H08-E104

AIMS

This course has both a practical and a theoretical component. It introduces students to novel and innovative modalities for studying media and visual cultures in the Arab region. It invites students to examine the relationship between everyday life, cultural and media institutions and cultural production, through an engagement with theories covered in “Critical Approaches to Media and Cultural Studies”. The practical component of the course entails visits to institutions including news networks, galleries, museums, and production houses. Students will be asked in groups to produce short ethnographic studies on an aspect of media, popular and visual culture in Doha. Through media ethnography, students will develop a self-reflexive contextual and critical understanding of the use of media both as an object of study and a tool for the conduct and dissemination of research.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOME

In line with the program learning outcomes of acquiring the skills required for further academic writing, in terms of structuring and argumentation, as well as oral communication skills such as public speaking and debating and in line with the learning outcomes of the “Media and Cultural Analysis” concentration of demonstrating a critical knowledge of the key intellectual formations that developed media and communication theory, this course enables students to acquire the following skills:

1) Subject-specific skills:

Students successfully completing this course will have acquired a critical understanding of:

- the centrality of anthropology to the study and rethinking of contemporary Arab media cultures
- key arguments and debates in media and cultural anthropology
- the relationship between everyday life, cultural and media institutions and cultural production
- engagement with theories covered in “Critical Approaches to Media and Cultural Studies”
- the ways in which media and cultural institutions produce cultural artefacts (art, news, film and entertainment)
2) Core academic skills:

By the end of the course, students will be expected to:

- appropriate different ethnographic methods to study the media
- conduct participant observation and analyse ethnographic diaries
- extrapolate key themes and issues that emerge from media fieldwork
- critically examine how media institutions operate (museums, newsrooms, TV production, film houses, media cities)

3) Personal and key skills:

- Develop ethnographic research skills
- Writing ethnographic narratives based on participant observation and interviews
- Synthesising key anthropological concepts for purposes of analysis and critique
- Acquiring the skills required for further academic writing, in terms of structuring and argumentation
- Conjectural analysis of the different facets of culture and media and their relevance to everyday life
- Contextualising culture phenomena within wider fields of cultural production and consumption

LEARNING/TEACHING METHODS

The course is based on ONE weekly 3-hour seminar:

These seminars introduce theoretical topics and demonstrate opportunities to apply the topics to relevant cultural products. All seminars will start with a lecture. The first one will examine the development of media and cultural studies as a discipline, highlighting its theoretical origins and its contributions to cultural and media critical analysis. Extra learning resources, including technical and multimedia tools such as Power Point presentations, short recordings and videos, notes, etc., will be provided for students’ use after the lectures.

Lectures will focus on assigned readings and will be followed by discussions on the significance of selected texts. The readings will be provided to the students before the start of the semester.

ASSIGNMENTS

In order to rethink media and their modes of production in the larger global context and particularly in the Middle East, all readings have to be done prior to class sessions. This is a discussion Seminar designed to be student-centred. Attendance and participation are imperative to your success in accomplishing all your written assignments. Attendance is recorded regularly in this class (as required by DI policy). Note that you are fully responsible for what you miss. Criticism and discussions of assigned texts, theories, critics’ opinions, videos, TV programs, and students’ ideas are necessary to pass this course. You will NOT be tested on your note-taking skills or memorization but rather your ability to think critically and knit together the different theoretical perspectives to make a strong argument. Students should be active learners and able
to work with a group. Any variances from this policy must be discussed with the instructor in advance.

For more details on attendance see the DI policy: https://www.dohainstitute.edu.qa/Documents/AcademicPolicies/DIAcademicPolicies_Attendance_1015.pdf

Class Readings:
A course packet will be made available with all the primary readings for the course. It is strongly recommended that students print the text and bring it to class. The use of PCs and phones will not be allowed during class sessions.

Assignment Details
Students will be required to take 2 in-class critiques and write 3 class reflections that centre on visual media, class readings and discussions after the first few weeks of the semester. The purpose of these assignment is to enhance your ability to deconstruct media images, develop interpretive skills, and uncover embedded layers of meaning in news reports, TV shows, drama series, and other popular productions. Students are required to develop an ethnographic project (3000 words), present it in class, and apply all the research skills as they learn them. More details will be discussed in class. At the end of the semester, students will take a final exam.
Pay attention to the dates on the syllabus for all assignments. There are no make-up chances for in-class essays or presentations. Late projects will be graded down one full letter grade for each day they are late.

ASSESSMENT
1- Two essays are weighted at 20% of the overall grade. The criteria for essay marking include: evidence of an overall coherent argument, evidence of depth and width of reading, originality, correct grammar and presentation.

2- Three one page class reflections are weighted at 20%. The dates for these reflections are unannounced and only the best two will count.

3- Ethnographic project 3000-word paper weighed at 30%

4- The Final Exam is weighted at 30% and it may include multiple-choice questions, short answer questions, and/or a short essay to assess students’ grasp of the course materials. The three-hour exam will be administered during the official exam period.
Plagiarism:
Plagiarism is a form of scholastic dishonesty and a disciplinary offense including cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; falsifying data or neglecting to cite others’ ideas and research conclusions. All instructors are required to report all established cases of academic dishonesty to the DI administration. For more information on DI policy see:


SYLLABUS PLAN

February
Sunday 28: Course Introduction and Syllabus
Lecture: Arab cultures and everyday life
This lecture argues for the centrality of the everyday in studying Arab cultures. It opens up the debate around the importance of culture and cultural production to the ways in which we live, consume, and make sense of everyday life.

READ:

Screening: segments from Media Hubs of the Middle East

March
Sunday 6: Key debates and concepts in Cultural Anthropology
This lecture introduces students to key concepts and debates in Cultural Anthropology. It addresses the role and value of culture to the discipline of Anthropology, tracing the shifts it underwent since its inception and development alongside colonialism. The lecture will ask why is it important to study culture ‘anthropologically’? Can we speak of an ‘epistemological rupture’ in Anthropology with respect to its links to colonial ideologies? How have shifts in the concept of culture, race and ethnicity changed the paradigms through which we study culture 'anthropologically’?

READ:
Abu-Lughod, Lila. “The Interpretation of Culture(s) after Television.” Representations, No. 59, Special Issue: The Fate of “Culture”: Geertz and Beyond, (University of California Press, 1997), pp. 109-134
Sunday 13: Key debates and concepts in Media Anthropology

This lecture introduces students to key debates in Media Anthropology. It explores the importance of Media Anthropology as an ethnography of communication (visual, written, oral and sensory) that is crucial to the study of culture. It examines culture as a process of mediating and staging everyday processes of people and communities.

READ:


FIRST IN-CLASS ESSAY

Sunday 20: Doing ethnographic research

This lecture introduces students to the methods of ethnographic research with a specific focus on participant observation. The lecture will equip students with the practical skills required to carry out ethnographic research such as; what and how to prepare for ethnographic visits; how to conduct interviews, collect data and write ethnographic diaries. It will also outline the limitations and ethical problems of ethnographic methods. The lecture will also introduce students to visual methods in ethnographic research such as film and photography

READ:

Alawi, Saussi Amin. “Jean Rouch’s Ethnography.” Arabic text
http://doc.aljazeera.net/magazine/2010/03/20103113630589137.html

Sunday 27: Researching media and cultural institutions: structures, contexts and texts

The lecture critically examines the processes of researching media and cultural institutions. It explores the possibilities, challenges and limitations of conducting institutional research. The lecture will highlight the importance of studying media and cultural institutions in terms of their internal workings, their socio-political and cultural context, their programmes/ outputs and vision.

Kallander, Amy A. “From TUNEZINE to Nhar 3la 3mmar: A Reconsideration of the Role of Bloggers in Tunisia’s Revolution”. Arab Media and Society (Issue 17, Winter 2013)

APRIL

Sunday 3: Researching publics: between drama and comedy

This lecture critically explores media and culture as it manifests outside the institution. It focuses on sampling ethnographic readings of public spaces and urban/rural environments where culture is encountered, embodied and consumed. The lecture explores different forms of critiquing social and cultural issues and the role of humor in addressing social crises.

READ:

Dick, Marlin. “Syria under the Spotlight: Television satire that is revolutionary in form, reformist in content. Arab Media and Society.” October, 2007


SECOND IN-CLASS ESSAY

Sunday 10: Visit to Aljazeera and Qatar News Agency
Students will be divided into two groups. Each will be accompanied on a field trip to a news broadcaster, either Al-Jazeera or Qatar News Agency. The visit will include presentations by journalists, cameramen, and editorial staff on their tasks, key roles and the challenges they face in their profession. The purpose of this visit is to get students to apply their ethnography research skills (participant observation) to conduct research and collect data (ethnographic diaries, photographs, films).

READ:
Olivier Da Lage. “The Politics of Al Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha.”

Sunday 17: Visit to Newspaper newsrooms
Students will be accompanied on a field trip to two newspapers based in Doha. The fieldwork will introduce students to newsroom operations. The visit will include presentations by journalists, writers, editorial staff and designers. The purpose of this visit is to get students to apply their ethnography research skills (participant observation) to conduct research and collect data (ethnographic diaries, photographs, films).

Sunday 24: READING WEEK
MAY

Sunday 1: Visit to Mathaf museum: presentation by senior curator

Students will be accompanied on a visit to Mathaf: Arab Museum for Modern Art. The museum is the first of its kind in Doha, Qatar. Students will receive a tour of the building, the gallery spaces, and library. The visit will introduce students to the processes of collecting, exhibiting and displaying art. The visit will also include talks by exhibitions curators, programs curators, and acquisition advisers.

Sunday 8: Workshop session of case-studies

Students are invited in this workshop to introduce their ethnographic data and reflect on their ethnographic research experience. We will discuss the outcomes of their visit in terms of the knowledge they acquired and data they collected. The session will encourage students to develop self-reflexive contextual and critical understanding their experience as media ethnographers.

Sunday 15: Workshop on Media publics

This workshop addresses the role of the media in forming and mobilizing publics. It critically questions whether it is possible to think of, conceptualise and concretely study “media publics” today. The Internet has allowed publics to co-create media for entertainment, knowledge and action across multiple platforms. What implications does this have on the study of ‘publics’? How can we rethink Habermas’s seminal thesis of the ‘public sphere’ in the context of these technological changes and the globalisation of media?

READ:

Kellner, Douglas. “Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention”

https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/habermas.htm

Sunday 22: Media and Public

This week students will explore a specific case of media mobilisation and discuss the triangular intersection between public outreach, organizing, and mobilizing.

READ:


Screening: Arab Uprisings
Sunday 29:
This week students will participate in a symposium entitled: ‘Rethinking Arab Media Cultures’ at which they will present the final draft of their ethnographic research project. The data analysis and argument is expected to borrow from concepts and theories outlined in the first half of the module.

June
Sunday 4:
Guest Speaker: Kamahl Santamaria- Al Jazeera English

INDICATIVE READING LIST


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| Week 7 | Visit to Al Jazeera and Qatar News Agency | Olivier Da Lage. “The Politics of Al Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha.”
Mohammed El Oifi. “Influence without Power: Al Jazeera and the Arab Public Sphere.” |
| Week 8 | Visit to Newspaper newsrooms | |
| Week 9 | | READING WEEK |
| MAY |
| Week 10 | Visit to Mathaf museum: presentation by senior curator | |
| Week 11 | Workshop session of case-studies | |
| Week 12 | Workshop on Media publics | Kellner, Douglas. “Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention” |
| Week 14 | | Presentation of Research |
| Week 15 | Guest Speaker: Kamahl Santamaria- Al Jazeera English | |