

Modern Iran: an anthropological approach
ISLA 415 fall 2012
McGill University
Thursdays 1:35-4:35 -- Room 328 Morrice Hall

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Objectives of the course

This seminar is an introduction to the anthropological study of modern Iran (19th century to the present). We will consider relevant events and issues as well as reflect on the ways in which the country has been described in scholarly work and beyond, paying attention to the theoretical models deployed in different analyses.

The subtitle, “an anthropological approach,” refers to a twofold methodological stance: on one hand, we will be concerned with the critical investigation of the conceptual vocabulary deployed when discussing Iran; on the other hand, we will take an ethnographic look at singular events (images, objects, narratives), considering the different points of view they entail, the processes of signification they trigger as well as the ways in which they resonate in different times and places.

Developing critical reflections on the ways in which Iran is represented both inside and outside the country, the course will seek to unsettle received views and explore their discursive effects across a variety of fields. Through estrangement effects, the course aims at proposing differing interpretative trajectories of Iran and its people.

The seminar is conceived as a platform for collective discussion and further research. Participants will engage in discussion of the readings, reflect critically on a variety of material (films, photos, narratives) and develop their own research project.

EVALUATION

Participation (20%)

You are expected to actively participate in discussions and commentary of the readings and lectures throughout the course.

It is essential that you read the material every week. To fulfill the participation requirement you have to:

- Discuss in class the assigned readings for that week
- **Lead one discussion** (two students will present on the same day). You will make a 10 min. presentation and generate questions to facilitate discussion on the assigned reading. You should avoid making a summary of the reading/s. Instead, you present what in your view are the most relevant points that the author is trying to make.
- If you are absent the day when you lead discussion, you will get 0% for participation.

- If you miss more than 2 classes, your participation percentage will be reduced by 3% for each additional absence, unless you have a valid excuse presented in writing (email) *beforehand*.

Essay (20%)

At the end of Part One you will reflect back on previous weeks and write a short essay [3 pages, double spaced, size 12]. You have to discuss at least **two** readings (weeks 1-5) and present them in a critical light (no summaries). In addition, you can also reflect on points raised during lectures and discussions. You have to show that you understand what you read and describe the approach of the authors you are reading. The essay is **due on Saturday October 6** at 4pm by email (setrag.manoukian@mcgill.ca).

Research Paper (60%)

You will write a research paper (20-25 pages, double spaced, size 12). You can write your paper on a number of topics: for example you can a) develop a theme from one of the readings; b) choose a topic from one of the weeks, c) write on something that is of particular interest to you. We will talk in class about possible and feasible topics.

- You will have to prepare an **abstract** (a paragraph long) with bibliography, due **OCTOBER 18 in class**. Instructor comments on the abstract will direct your research and writing.
- Use any bibliographical style as long as you are consistent.
- The final paper is due on **December 10** at 4 pm by email.

NOTE:

- There will be no supplemental mid terms or final exams.
- I will mark down 1/3 of the grade for each day any of the written assignments are late, unless I receive an acceptable and certified explanation (serious illness, family emergency).
- Each assignment is mandatory and a J grade will be given to students who do not fulfill one of the assignments.

COURSE MATERIAL

Books are available at Paragraphe Bookstore (McGill College)

- Najmabadi, Afsane. 2005. *Women with mustaches and men without beards: gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pirzad, Zuya. 2012. *Things we left unsaid*. Translated by Franklin Lewis Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications.

Other articles and some additional material will be on reserve in IIS library, and also

available as links and/or on **mycourses** where you will also find additional bibliography, links and other useful info. Make sure to visit regularly the site for updates throughout the course

MCGILL POLICIES

1. ***"McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).***(approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

"L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)."

2. ***"In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded."*** (approved by Senate on 21 January 2009 - see also the section in this document on Assignments and evaluation.)

"Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue)."

Instructor generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

· *"If you have a disability please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. It would be helpful if you contact the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#) at 514-398-6009 before you do this."*

· *"End-of-course [evaluations](#) are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student's learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available on Mercury, the online course evaluation system. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students."*

· *"McGill has policies on sustainability, paper use and other initiatives to promote a culture of sustainability at McGill." (See the [Office of Sustainability](#).)*

CALENDAR

Week 1. September 6

Introduction

PART I. SPACE-TIME

Week 2. September 13

Who are we, who are they? : Comment peut-on être Persan?

Al Ahmad, Jalal. 1984. *Occidentosis: a plague from the west*. Berkeley: Mizan Press. (available on my courses)

- Author's Preface, Chapters 1, 5, 7, 10, 11

You can also read/ consult the other translation of the book

Al-e Amad, J. 1982. *Plagued by the West (Gharbzadegi)*, trans. Paul Sprachman.

Delmar, New York: Caravan Books.

Suggested:

Montesquieu Persian Letters <http://rbsche.people.wm.edu/teaching/plp/> (not a great translation)
check Montesquieu 1973. *Persian letters*, Penguin Books, or original French
<http://bacfrancais.chez.com/lpersanes-integrale.html>

Week 3. September 20

The space/time of the nation

Kashani-Sabet, F. 2000. *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946*. London: I.B. Tauris.

- Introduction, 3-14.
- Conclusion: "What's in a name? From Persia to Iran 1926-1946", 216-226.

Tavakoli-Targhi. 2001. *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography*. Houndmills (UK): Palgrave.

- Chapter 1

Tavakoli-Targhi, M. 2002. "From Patriotism to Matriotism: A Tropological Study of Iranian Nationalism." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (02): 217-238.

Week 4. September 27

The space/time of the modern city (part 1)

Manoukian, Setrag. *City of knowledge in twentieth century Iran Shiraz, history and poetry*. Routledge 2012. Available from

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=444011>.

- Chapters 2, 3 and 4

Week 5. October 5

The space/time of the modern city (part 2)

Ehsani, K. 2003. "Social Engineering and the Contradictions of Modernization in Khuzestan's Company Towns: A Look at Abadan and Masjed-Soleyman." *International Review of Social History* 48: 361-99.

ESSAY DUE ON FRIDAY OCTOBER 6 , at 4pm

PART II THE MAKING OF IRANIANS

Week 6. October 11

Family relations

Pirzad, Zuya. 2012. *Things we left unsaid*. Translated by Franklin Lewis Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications.

Week 7. October 18

Gender relations 1

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 2005. *Women with mustaches and men without beards: gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Introduction
- Part I

ABSTRACTS DUE

Week 8. October 25

Gender relations 2

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 2005. *Women with mustaches and men without beards: gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Part II: chapters 7, 8 and Epilogue

Sima Shakhsari. "From Homoerotics of Exile to Homopolitics of Diaspora: Cyberspace, the War on Terror, and the Hypervisible Iranian Queer." Journal of Middle East Women's Studies 8.3 (2012): 14-40. *Project MUSE*.

Week 9. November 1

Bodily and spiritual relations

Fischer, Michael M. J. *Iran from religious dispute to revolution*. University of Wisconsin Press 2003. Available from <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10256034>.

- Chapters 2, 3, 5

Week 10. November 8

Legal relations

Osanloo, A. 2009. *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran*. Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Available from <http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?ANTH;1667557>.

- Intro.
- Chapter 1, 2

Chehabi, H. E. 2007. How Caviar Turned Out to Be Halal. *Gastronomica* 7 (2).

Week 11. November 15

No class (Middle East Studies Meeting) Paper writing period

Week 12. November 22

Internet relations

Doostdar, Ali Reza. 2004. The Vulgar Spirit of Blogging: On language, culture and power in Persian Weblogestan. *American Anthropologist* 106 (4): 651-662.

Week 13. November 29

- Research papers discussion
- Conclusion

RESEARCH PAPER DUE DECEMBER 10