

Brown University - Dept. of History (Fall 2007)

**HI 1971P**

**IDENTITY CONFLICTS IN MIDDLE EAST HISTORY, 1900-PRESENT**

AS REFLECTED IN MEMOIRS & NOVELS

W 3:00 -5:20, **Wilson 204**

Instructor: Engin Deniz Akarli

Office hrs: W. 12-1 & Th. 1-2 (or by appointment)

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**Course description:**

Recent studies on the formation of modern identities point to the complex tensions that emerge between individual cultural affiliations in a given society and its political ideological representations, because the former tend to be heterogeneous, multilayered, overlapping and fluid whereas the latter are usually monolithic and homogenizing. We will look into this relationship between cultural affiliations (or “belongings”) and ideological representations in various Middle Eastern societies since the turn of the century from a historical perspective. We will rely on mostly novels but also some memoirs, essays and poems by Middle Eastern intellectuals as our primary sources (in English translation). When used critically, with due attention to the particular historical context in which they are written, real life stories and insightful artistic representations and reflections help us recognize the tangible manifestations of identity issues in human relations, experience and sentiments. These works reflect the interactions of various cultural identities shaped by religion, language, class, gender, and different forms of education. In addition they show how rival political agendas and/or ideologies (such as Ottomanism, colonialism/mandate rule, regional nationalism, “pan-” or integral ethnic nationalism, and politicized religious movements) have aimed at eliminating difference by trying to shape, re-shape and monopolize the self-image of individuals & individual groups. This semester, we will focus on “stories” from Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, and Iran.

**Goals:**

This seminar aims at expanding your knowledge of modern Middle East history as well as your appreciation of the complexity of identity issues in the modern era in general. The Middle East was one of the most cosmopolitan and culturally mixed parts of the world in recorded history. Even now, despite the nationalist and religious struggles (and homogenizations) of the modern era, the region retains some of its historic cosmopolitanism. Indeed, much of the identity tensions that have emerged in the modern history of the region, whether at the personal, communal, or “national” levels, are directly related to the very complexity of its pre-modern cultural configurations. Because of this situation, the recent history of Middle Eastern societies offers an ideal laboratory for the study of identity conflicts in the modern world. This seminar should provide us the opportunity to peek at that laboratory and to reflect on our observations in a joint effort to improve our understanding of the formation of modern identities and the various problems it involves.

**Evaluation:**

Your grades will be based on participation in class discussions (25%), weekly journals on **seven** of the ten main readings (35%), and a final term paper (40%).

Punctual reading of the assignments as well as regular presence and participation in class discussions are crucial for achieving our goals. Class discussions will provide you the opportunity to share and compare your interpretations of a text with your friends' and thus enable you to acquire a subtle understanding of identity issues both within the context of Middle Eastern history and within a broader comparative framework.

Journals aim at encouraging you to express in writing (in two-three pages) your reflections on the identity issues covered in seven of the ten weekly assignments. Journals are due ten days after the discussion of the related assignment in class, and they should reflect your impressions of the class discussion as well. Delay of journals will cost points.

The final paper aims at encouraging you to formulate, and elaborate on, your ideas on a specific aspect of the identity problems covered in this course. You can do this by concentrating on the works and experience of a particular author or on a specific theme that recurs in the works of several authors. You can also design your own project according to your own interests within the general framework of this course. Deadline for the final paper is **December ??**.

### **Readings:**

Many of the books listed in the course outline below are available at the campus bookstore. The *HI 197/39 Reader* includes supplementary readings and four of the main assignments. The *Reader* is available at Allegra Print. Most of the readings will be available also on reserve at the Rockefeller Library. If you feel a need to refurbish your knowledge of modern Middle East history, please consult William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed) (Westview Press, 2004), several copies of which are available at Rock (DS62.4 .C53 2004).

### **COURSE OUTLINE AND ASSIGNMENTS:**

#### **Introduction:**

**Sept 5 & 12:** Concepts: What is identity? + Contours of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Middle East history  
Akarli, "Introduction" in "Notes on Middle East History" in the *Reader* + Amin Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong* (Penguin, 2000).

#### **1900-1920: The End of Empires:**

**Sept. 19:** Attempts at redefining the self and the society when cultural boundaries harden but political boundaries continue to remain open: The case of Jurji Zaidan (1861-1914): *The Autobiography of Jurji Zaidan* in the *Reader*.

**September 26:** Family, "nation," and revolution: Egypt in 1917-19:

Naguib Mahfouz (b. 1912), *Palace Walk* + in the *Reader*: Akarli "Notes on Egyptian History," J. Brugman on Mahfouz, and S. Somekh's summary of Mahfouz's "Trilogy."

**1920-1950: Collision of the Images of the Past, the Present, and the Future Under European Mandate:**

**Do all alleys lead to a dead end?**

**Oct. 3:** Tawfiq al-Hakim (1902? -1987), *The Maze of Justice: Dairy of a Country Prosecutor in the Reader* + Israel Gershoni, "Tawfiq al-Hakim's Influence on Nasser and his Generation," and Brugman on al-Hakim in the *Reader*

**Oct. 10:** Naguib Mahfouz, *Midaq Alley* + Miriam Cooke, "Men Constructed in the Mirror of Prostitution," in the *Reader*.

**Dead ends or alienation(s) of Iranian intellectuals: Why? Iran's Zoroastrian legacy, the messianic roots of its Shiism, or "A Plague from the West"?**

**Oct. 17:** Sadeq Hedayat (1903-1951), *The Blind Owl* + In the *Reader*: Akarli, "Notes on Iranian History & Shiism" and Michael Hillmann on Hedayat ("The Modernist Iranian Writer's Almost Inevitable Nightmare.")

**Oct. 24:** Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969) *By the Pen* (in the *Reader*) + Michael Hillmann on Al-e Ahmad ("Cultural Dilemmas") in the *Reader*.

**Since 1950: Feminine voices and identity wars**

**Oct. 31:** Iran: Poems by Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967) and excerpts from her writings + Hillmann, "Epilogue" in the *Reader*)

**Nov. 7:** Is Lebanon a microcosm of the Middle East? Lebanese civil war over identities in women's eyes  
Etel Adnan's *Sitt Marie Rose*. G. Selamé, "Lebanon's Injured Identities" in the *Reader*. (Recommended: "Beirut: The Last Home," a film by Fox & Bustros.)

**Nov. 14:** Lebanese civil war continued: Identities and soul-searching:  
Elias Khoury, *The Journey of Little Gandhi*

Nov. 21: Have a happy Thanksgiving holiday

**Nov. 28:** Egypt: Alifa Rifaat, *Distant View of A Minaret & Other Stories*

**Recapitulation and an open-ended conclusion:**

**Dec. 5:** Tayeb Salih (b. 1929), *Season of Migration to the North* + Articles by Mona Amyuni, Peter Nazareth and Samir Seikaly on Tayeb Salih's work in the *Reader*.

**December ??: Final papers are due**

**HAVE A NICE SEMESTER!**