

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF YEMEN

By Dr. Thomas Stevenson

Course Description:

Like any society, Yemeni culture is too complex to be analyzed in a short course. To get as wide an understanding as possible, this course has two main foci, examination of some central components of social organization in contemporary Yemen and the intersection of cultural ideas with development programs.

Among the key questions to be addressed are what is Yemen and what makes someone Yemeni? How do these ideas differ throughout the country? What is a tribe? Why is tribal identity important? What are other forms of identification? How is gender conceived in Islam, within the tribe, and within different regions? How is gender performed? Are notions of identity and gender the same in rural and urban centers?

These topics will be addressed from an anthropological perspective, but the course does not require prior knowledge of anthropology. Through class-room presentation and discussion, students will acquire the requisite background. The advantage of having a course on Yemen in Yemen is the ability for students to develop participant observation skills. Beyond the class-room, students will make on-site visits to a number of locations within Sana'a and outside. Beyond the specifics of each site, students will develop and understanding of the Yemen's cultural diversity.

The three assigned texts provide the basis for the central topics. One focuses on the socio-political history of north and south Yemen and their merger. The next addresses the concept of tribe and tribalism. The last examines a case of development. A selection of readings supplements these topics to expand understanding of Yemen. Comparison to other countries in the region will be presented in class.

Course Requirements:

Students are required to come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Students are required to keep a journal of their experiences in Sana'a, including some required from the attached list (to be developed) and their site visits. In lieu of an examination, each student will make a presentation on a topic developed from the readings to the college. Class discussion represents 40% of the final grade, diary-writing 30% of the final grade, and the final lecture 30% of the final grade.

Texts:

*Shelagh Weir. 2007 - *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*

*Paul Dresch. 2001 - *A History of Modern Yemen*

*Marina de Regt 2007 - *Pioneers or Pawns?: Women Health Workers and the Politics of Development in Yemen*

Tentative Class Schedule:

Week 1

Partial answers to questions that may come to mind from what you see on the street. As you've walked around Sana'a or even the college area, what do you see? What questions does this raise? How do your observations conform or conflict with your expectations?

Readings:

Stevenson and Alaug, *Football in newly united Yemen: Rituals of equity, identity and state formation*

Miller, *The Moral Resonance of Arab Media*, Ch 1

Vom Bruck, *The Imagined 'Consumer Democracy' And Elite (Re)Production in Yemen*

Readings on Qat:

Wedeen, *Qat Chews as Public Spheres*

Varisco, *On the Meaning of Chewing: The significance of Qat in the Yemen Arab Republic*

What is Yemen? Is there one Yemen? What makes someone Yemeni? What do recent separatist actions suggest about Yemeni society? What are important factors in Yemen and Yemeni life (particularly as seen in Sana'a?)

Text: Dresch: *A History of Modern Yemen*

Academic Lab: Trip to Ancient Sites in Ibb, Yarim and Ta'izz

Week 2

Migration, Family and Marriage are extremely significant elements of Yemeni life.

Readings:

Stevenson, *Migration, family and household in highland Yemen: The impact of socio-economic and political change and cultural ideals on domestic organization*

Ho, *Empire through diasporic eyes: a view into the other boat*. Society for Comparative Society and History

What is a tribe? How are tribes in Yemen organized? What is the basis of affiliation? Is Yemen a tribal society? What other groups exist or existed in Yemen? Is tribalism a male idiom? What is the relationship of Islam, gender and tribe?

Text: Weir: *A Tribal Order*

Readings: Vom Bruck, *Islam, Memory and Morality*, Ch1 and 2

Academic Lab: Dar al-Hajar for Tribal Dancing

Week 3

Gender is the most obvious division in Yemen. How separate are the worlds of women and men? What is the role of Islam in creating or reinforcing this separation? How is gender constructed and acted out? How do gender discourses vary throughout the country?

Readings:

Katz, *Women's Mawlid Performances in Sanaa and the Construction of "Popular Islam*

Moors, *Fashionable Muslims: Notions of Self, Religion, and Society in San'a*

Dahlgren, (Adeni women)

Meneley, *Tournaments of Value*, Ch 1, 2, 4

Academic Lab: Movies *Haram Yemen & Stranger in Her Own City*

Academic Lab: Guest Speaker on Gender

Week 4

What is development? What are the pros and cons of “development” assistance? What is the history of development in Yemen? How has Yemen benefited? How has Yemen’s growth been retarded? What are the obstacles that planners have to prepare for in their plans?

Text: De Regt, *Pioneers or Pawns*

Readings on development Issues:

Ward, *Practical Responses to Extreme Groundwater Overdraft in Yemen*

Tutwiler, *Research Agenda for Sustainable Agricultural Growth and Natural Resource Management in Yemen*

Nugent, *Yemeni Agriculture: Historical Overview, Policy Lessons and Prospects*

Readings on Gender and Development:

Wenz, *Supporting Equal Chances for Women in a Fragile State: Yemen*

Bartelink and Buitelaar, *The challenges of incorporating Muslim women’s views into development policy*

Academic Lab: Guest Speaker on Development Planning

Week 5

Final Presentations !