Conflict and Consensus:
Oman and a Changing Arab World
Instructor: Issam Khoury, PhD

“I am working for Oman – the country and its people… for me it is a delight to see my country and my people in the situation I imagined from the very first day I assumed power. I feel that I am a man with a mission rather than a man with authority.”
-His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said

“Being an Arab today implies, first and foremost – yet without generalization – mastering the Art of ‘Schizophrenia.’”
-Joumana Haddad

This course is the primary seminar for CIL's Oman Study Abroad Program. It takes as its departure point a grounded analysis of Oman from social, political, and economic development perspectives. A thorough grounding in the Omani context is designed to enhance your Arabic language experience and your exposure to the culture of the Sultanate, and to significant issues in the region during your semester of study.

The seminar then broadens focus from the study of Oman to a larger analysis of Arabian Gulf countries. These six countries (known as the Gulf Cooperation Council) possess more than one-third of the world's known oil reserves, and have used that clout to develop their economies at speeds that have been almost unparalleled in the modern world. This development has produced obstacles, conflict and contradictions, and the second section of our course explore these in some detail.

The final section of the course addresses relevant issues in the larger Arab world. The third section of the course begins with creating a strong foundation for understanding identity in the Arab world. The "Arab Spring" (as it has correctly or incorrectly been dubbed) has renewed world attention to the Middle East, and is characterized by challenges and opportunities for change in the region. The changing paradigm of gender, the relations between states, and the complex issue of identity in the region are topics explored during the final part of the seminar.

The goal of this course is to introduce you to the multiple forces that have shaped (and continue to shape) Oman, the GCC, and the modern Arab world, using multi- and inter-disciplinary perspectives from the social sciences and the humanities. Through a combination of theoretical perspectives and practical readings, you will be given a strong foundation in understanding this region of the world.

Of course, with such overarching goals, the course does not claim or aim to be a comprehensive look at Oman, the GCC, or the Arab world, but instead will serve as a launching pad from which you can then explore in further detail particular subjects and topics that are of interest to you. This course will enable you to analyze trends and topics that are relevant to the region and encourage you to engage with these multiple issues.

The objectives of this course are to:
• Offer you multiple perspectives from which to approach an analysis of Oman and the Arab World
• Encourage you to think about the complexity of issues involved in understanding the region
• Conceptualize the diversity (of ideology, class, economy, and identity) that characterizes the region
• Understand and challenge normative discourses that are used to maintain the status quo
• Strengthen your analytical, writing, reading, and speaking skills
By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Offer a reasoned analysis on Oman’s challenges and future prospects
- Write about the GCC from viewpoints other than an analysis of oil
- Debate and analyze issues in the Middle East from grounded perspectives
- Write about a novel that represents a particular experience of one country in the Arab world
- Analyze a film that represents multiple and interconnected issues in the Arab world

In order to achieve these objectives, the class will be conducted as a seminar, with heavy emphasis given to readings, participation, and writing. You are not merely a passenger on a train, but are an active participant in the learning process, actively seeking engagement with ideas, challenging the views of your peers and instructor, and struggling to make sense of complexity. There are no “right” answers, and thus, the classroom serves as a “safe space” in which any idea can be explored, discussed, debated, and debunked. Subsequently, part of this course will engender a self-reflective process on views and attitudes toward the Arab world, and how those have changed in light of the readings and videos we will have watched.

Required Texts:

- A packet of reading will be made available to you that will serve both to prepare you for lectures and seminars, as well as to offer your multiple perspectives on issues in Oman, the Gulf, and the Arab world.
- One of the following novels:
  - Djebar, Assia. Women of Algiers in their Apartment. (Algeria)
  - Mahfouz, Naguib. Midaq Alley. (Egypt)
  - Saleh, Al-Tayyeb. Season of Migration to the North. (Sudan)
  - Kanafani, Ghassan. Men in the Sun & Other Palestinian Stories. (Palestine)
  - Al-Shaykh, Hanan. The Story of Zahra. (Lebanon)
  - Sanea, Raja. Girls of Riyadh. (Saudi Arabia)

How you will be graded:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance and participation in the seminar</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 short reflection papers (2 pages each)</td>
<td>30% (5% each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Film Review (3 pages)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal of self-reflection</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book review on one of the novels above</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final debate</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Attendance and Participation:

Being in class and being present in class are important parts of the learning process, both for yourself and for your classmates. Your willingness to engage in the conversation, to display your knowledge of the readings and to question them are central parts of the learning process.

Short Reflection Papers:

These papers are intended to be reflections on the readings, and are scholarly assignments. In these papers (no more than 2 pages), you are expected to compare and contrast readings, and display a clear understanding of the material and synthesize it with the discussions held in class. There are eleven weeks of readings, and students can choose any six of these to complete these papers.

Film Review:

The reflection on the film is meant to analyze two or three of the most salient themes in one of the movies, using readings from the class and at least 2 external, scholarly articles to ground the analysis.
Journal:
Part of the process of learning about the Arab world is questioning one’s assumptions about the region. This is not a work of scholarship, but instead meant to be an exercise that is at the core of the liberal arts curriculum – and that is understanding one’s self and one’s views in order to better relate to others and engage with them. One journal entry per week is required. The journal can be in the form of a physical journal or an online blog.

Book Review:
Each of the novels in the list is a seminal work in modern Arabic literature (all the novels are in translation) and represent different experiences of the Arab world. (Here it should be noted that *Girls of Riyadh* is not considered seminal, but was such a groundbreaking work that it was banned by Saudi Arabia, and challenged the Arab world’s tacit understanding of gender and gender relations). The book review is meant to display your understanding of the novel and its themes, and relate it to what we have learned in the course, and to outside readings. For this assignment, students are required to incorporate two scholarly, peer-reviewed articles that complement the novel in order to provide a greater understanding of the social, cultural, political, and economic context in which the novel is set.

The course outline provided below is intended to give you a roadmap of how the course will be structured. The readings for each week are to be read before the lectures that week. Response papers (for the six that you choose to do) will be due on Thursday of each week.

Note on Academic Honesty:
CII follows customary university policies on cheating, plagiarism, and fabrication of data. A few simple guidelines for you to follow:

- You have to write all your own assignments. Nobody else can write them for you.
- You have to cite your quotes. If the idea isn’t yours, attribute it properly.
- If you paraphrase someone else’s idea, it does not become yours. Cite your source.

Failure to follow these simple guidelines (and the rules set by your university) will result in failing that assignment as well as possible consequences with your university upon your return.

Citing Sources:
There are multiple conventions for citing sources in the social sciences and humanities (MLA, APA, Chicago). This course is a hybrid course between the humanities and social sciences, and so you can choose your citing style of choice and be consistent with it throughout the semester.

Note on holidays:
There are three holidays that will happen during your stay in Oman: Eid al-Adha (the week of October 5), Hijri New Year (the week of October 30), and Oman’s National Day (November 17). Because Oman follows the lunar calendar, these holidays are dependent on the sighting of the moon, and are announced officially only days before the actual holiday. The government announcement also informs us how many days we will have off. While we will still have class, our schedule during those weeks is likely to be modified, but all topics on the syllabus will still be covered.

September 7 – 11: Socio-political foundations in Oman

Required Readings:

- Valeri, M. *Oman: Politics and society in the Qaboos State*. Chapters 1 & 2
- Peterson, J.E. *Oman’s diverse society: Northern Oman
Oman’s diverse society: Southern Oman
The emergence of post-traditional Oman*

Optional Reading: Jones, J. *Negotiating change: The new politics of the Middle East*. Chapter 6
September 14 – 18: Leadership and foreign policy in Oman

Required Readings:
- Al-Busaidi, S. Oman’s approach to development.
- Peterson, J.E. The solitary Sultan and the construction of the new Oman.
- Oxford A. Oman’s succession unlikely to jeopardise stability.
- Valeri, M. The Qaboos-state under the test of the ‘Omani Spring’
- Jones, J. Oman’s quiet diplomacy.
- Valeri, M. Oman’s mediatary efforts in regional crises.
- Lefebvre, J. Oman’s foreign policy in the twenty-first century.

Optional Reading:

September 21 – 25: Social issues in 21st century Oman

Required Readings:
- UNICEF. MENA Gender Equality Profile. Oman.
- Haque, F. 100,000 expats to lose jobs in Omanisation (with reader comments). (Times of Oman, 2014)
- Al-Shaibany, S. Gender bias in offices irks Oman women workers. (Times of Oman, 2014)

September 28 – October 2: Economic development and trends in Oman

Required Readings:
- QNB. Oman economic insight 2013.
- Harrison, R. Special country report: Oman.

Optional Reading:

October 5 – 9: Theories of economic development in the Arabian Gulf

Note: Eid Al-Adha Holiday

Required Readings:
- Levins, C. The rentier state and the survival of Arab absolute monarchies.
- Gray, M. A theory of “late rentierism” in the Arab states of the Gulf.

Optional Readings:
- Transformation Index BTI 2014 Country Reports available at: http://www.bti-project.org/reports/country-reports/mena/index.nc

October 12 – 16: Socio-political foundations in the Arabian Gulf

Required Readings:
- Abdulla, A. The Arab Gulf States: Old approaches and new realities.
- Dresch, P. Societies, identities, and global issues.

Movie:
- City of Life.
October 19 - 23: Labor and human rights

Required Readings:

GCHR. Rising human rights challenges in the Gulf region and beyond.


October 26 – 30: Tensions in the Gulf

Note: Hijri New Year

Required Readings:

Kirkpatrick, D. 3 Gulf countries pull ambassadors from Qatar over its support of Islamists.

Yemen Times. Saudi-Qatari tensions and implications for the Persian Gulf.

Kerr, S. Saudi Arabia moves to ease regional tensions with Iran.

Hellfont, T. Inter-GCC tensions through American eyes.

Dickinson, E. How Qatar lost the Middle East.

Schanzer & Weinberg. How Saudi Arabia and Qatar are the tortoise and the hare of the Middle East.

November 2 – 6: Identities and the Middle East

Required Readings:

Said, E. Orientalism. Introduction and Chapter 1. (Review from Research Course)

Held & Cummings. The peoples and cultures of the Middle East.

Zubaida, S. Beyond Islam: A new understanding of the Middle East. Introduction.

Movie:

The Yacoubian Building

November 9 – 13: Changing Gender Paradigms

Required Readings:

Book Summary of “Arab Women after the Arab Spring”

Abu Khalil, A. Women in the Middle East.


Additional Articles

November 16 – 20: The Arab Spring & Beyond

Note: Oman National Day

Required Readings:

Cammett & Diwan. The political economy of the Arab uprisings.

Economist. The people still want a bigger say.

Schwartz, D. What happened after the Arab Spring?

BBC News. Arab Spring: 10 unpredicted outcomes.

November 23 – 27: Thinking about the issues: The Debate

You will be given a scenario, divided into teams, each representing different interests, and be asked to debate the issue. You will have this week to prepare and debate the issues at hand.