

HIST 123  
**FAMILY HISTORY IN THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST**  
MW 11:00-12:25  
HUSS C153

Description:

By focusing on your (extended) family, and reading other family histories for comparison, you will find out for yourselves how historians tell a story and what tools help them tell it. You will acquire first-hand appreciation of wide-ranging trends (like rural-urban migration since the 1960s throughout the region, or social mobility during Infitah in Egypt) as well as questions of historiographical method (the selectiveness of individual memory, the importance of critical analysis and contextualization...).

Each week, the class will combine relevant readings with a set of questions for the students to ask their families. One session a week will be devoted to discussing the readings, and one to discussing family responses.

Textbook: E. Burke III, & D. Yaghoubian, eds., *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006 (available at the bookstore)

Learning goals:

- Developing proficient interview techniques by conducting an oral history of your family.
- Demonstrating that you understand the links between political events and family histories by writing assignments that show which events affected your family most.
- Perfecting public communication skills by presenting your findings in class.
- Showing sensitivity to cultural and historical difference by comparing case studies from the past with your family's structure and practices.
- Learning historians' skills by conducting research into primary sources in the course of a library project.
- Participating in group work by critiquing your peers' work and integrating their comments into your research.

Assessment and evaluation: writing / interviewing assignments, 30%; class participation, 30%; final project, 20%; final exam, 20%.

### **Week 1 Defining families**

8 September - First day of classes

10 September -

READINGS:

- Forbes, Scott. *A Natural History of Families*, Princeton University Press, 2005, ch. 1 ("Blame Parents")
- Film: *Arab Diaries 5: Home, or maids in my family*

ASSIGNMENT:

Who is part of your family and why? What goes into making a family? What are some of the purposes families can serve? Is a family simply a biological entity? How else could we define it? What are some indicators of belonging to a family? How is membership in a family or other social group perpetuated from one generation to the next?

DEFINE: family; kin; lineage; patronage; dependents; patrimony

### **Week 2 Changing families: a chronological approach**

15 September -

READINGS:

- *Encyclopedia of Islam Online*, arts.: 'A'ila and 'Abd, especially paragraph f. (on concubines)
- Toledano, Ehud. "Shemsigul: A Circassian Slave in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Cairo," in Burke & Yaghoubian, eds. *Struggle and Survival*, p. 48-63
- *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, Leiden: Brill, art.: "Family Relations" (online)

17 September -

READINGS:

- *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, art.: "The Ottoman Empire" (online)

ASSIGNMENT:

What are some possible family structures? What were Ottoman families like? What are the differences and similarities between Ottoman families and your family? Can we speak of "traditional" and "modern" families? Why and how do families change?

DEFINE: concubine; conjugal; polygamy; patriarchy

### **Week 3 Personal histories**

22 September -

READINGS:

- Coles, Robert. *Doing Documentary Work*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, ch. 2 ("The Person as Documentarian: Moral and Psychological Tensions")

24 September -

READINGS:

- Truesdell, Barbara. "Oral History Techniques. How to Organize and Conduct Oral History Interviews"  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~csh>
- Interview with Dr. Khodadad Farmanfarmanian, Iranian Oral History Project,  
<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~iohp/farmanfarmanian.html>

ASSIGNMENT:

How should you start a family history? Who are some of the people you would like to interview? What questions do you plan to ask them?

#### **Week 4 Autobiographies**

29 September -

READINGS:

- Lively, Penelope. *Oleander, Jacaranda: A Childhood Perceived*. New York: Harper, 1995, ch. 1
- Perks, Robert, and Alistair Thomson. *The Oral History Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1998, part 4

ASSIGNMENT:

**How much do your parents and grandparents remember about their childhood? What have they forgotten? What has shaped their perception of the past?**

**\*\* 30 September - 6 October HOLIDAY \*\***

#### **Week 5 Family, migration, and changing social networks**

8 October -

READINGS:

- McMurray, David. "Haddou: A Moroccan Migrant Worker," in Burke & Yaghoubian, eds., *Struggle and Survival*, p. 377-393
- Provence, Michael. "Talal Rizk: A Syrian Engineer in the Gulf," in Burke & Yaghoubian, eds., *Struggle and Survival*, p. 405-420

ASSIGNMENT:

**Where are your parents and grandparents from? Did anyone in your family leave their country of birth? If so, why? What were the consequences on family structure and the balance of power within the family? What were the consequences for the person or people who left?**

#### **Week 6 Marriage and divorce**

13 October -

READINGS:

- Hanna, Nelly. "Marriage among Merchant Families in Seventeenth-Century Cairo," in A. Sonbol, ed., *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*, Syracuse University Press, 1996, p. 143-154
- Film: Arab Diaries 3: Love & Marriage

15 October -

READINGS:

- Rapoport, Yossef. *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, ch. 4 ("Divorce, Repudiation and Settlement")

ASSIGNMENT:

Is marriage today similar to marriage in the 17<sup>th</sup> century? What are the similarities and differences? How did social class affect marriage patterns in the past? Is divorce more common today than it was in the past? Why did people divorce during Mamluk or Ottoman times? What were the consequences of the high divorce rate?

#### **Week 7 Gender and the family**

20 October -

READINGS:

- Bahithat al-Badiya. "Lecture in the Club of the Umma Party," in M. Badran and M. Cooke, eds. *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 227-238
- Ahmed, Leila. *A Border Passage from Cairo to America - A Woman's Journey*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999, ch. 5 ("Harem")

22 October -

READINGS:

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Migdim: Egyptian Bedouin Matriarch," in Burke & Yaghoubian, eds., *Struggle and Survival*, p. 271-289

ASSIGNMENT:

**Women's and men's roles: who does what in your family? Who controls finances? Who makes more money? Who decides how money should be spent? Compare the pattern that prevails in your family with the patterns described in your readings for this week.**

**Week 8 Defining childhood**

27 October -

READINGS:

- Zelizer, Viviana. *Pricing the Priceless Child. The Changing Social Value of Children*. Princeton University Press, 1994, ch. 1 ("From Mobs to Memorials: The Sacralization of Child Life")
- Film: *El Banat Dol*

29 October -

READINGS:

- Sonbol, Amira El Azhary. "Adults and Minors in Ottoman Shari'a Courts and Modern Law," in *ibid.*, ed., *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws*, p. 236-256

ASSIGNMENT:

How are your lives different from those of your parents? How have definitions of childhood changed in the past hundred years? What is expected of children, and how does that change according to time, place, and social / economic class?

**Week 9 Culture, class, and education**

3 November -

READINGS:

- Issawi, Charles. "Growing Up Different," in E. Fernea Warnock, ed. *Remembering Childhood in the Middle East. Memoirs from a Century of Change*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002, p. 34-44
- Makdisi, Jean. *Teta, Mother and Me. An Arab Woman's Memoir*. London: Saqi, 2005, ch. 11 ("A Nineteenth-Century Syrian Schoolgirl")

5 November -

READINGS:

- Interview with Prince Hamid Kadjar, Iranian Oral History Project, <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~iohp/kadjar.html>

ASSIGNMENT:

What defines a family's culture? How can that culture change over time? How can education shape family culture? How does gender affect education? How was your education different from that of your parents? How was it different from the schooling described in your readings?

#### **Week 10 Political activism**

10 November -

##### READINGS

- Ghabra, Shafeeq. "My Childhood: Innocence, Politics, and Rebellion," in E. Fernea Warnock, ed. *Remembering Childhood*, p. 256-268

12 November -

##### READINGS:

- Jamila Buhrayd: Two interviews, in E. Warnock Fernea and B. Qattan Bezirgan, eds., *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977, p. 250-263

##### ASSIGNMENT:

How do we form our political opinions? Are they different from those of our parents? What kinds of political activities did your parents engage in? What do you think shaped their political involvement or lack thereof?

#### **Week 11 A death in the family**

17 November -

##### READINGS:

- Nedoroscik, Jeffrey. *The City of the Dead. History of Cairo's Cemetery Communities*. Greenwood Press, 1997, ch. 1

19 November -

##### READINGS:

- Giladi, Avner. "Sabr (Steadfastness) of Bereaved Parents: A Motif in Medieval Muslim Consolation Treatises and Some Parallels in Jewish Writings," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 80, No. 1/2 (Jul. - Oct., 1989), pp. 35-48

##### ASSIGNMENT:

Was death more or less common in the past than it is today? Did this make people indifferent to death? What are some factors that determine our attitudes towards death? How have these attitudes changed over time?

#### **Week 12 Making family history**

24 November -

##### READINGS:

- "Writing a Non-Boring Family History"  
<http://www.writerswrite.com/journal/jul02/edwards5.htm>

##### ASSIGNMENT:

Start putting together the elements you have gathered since the beginning of semester, and write up short biographies of your parents and grandparents.

26 November -

##### ASSIGNMENT:

Library assignment: What are the major historical events that affected your family? Using library sources, find out more about these events (in groups of 2 or 3), and write up a short explanation of how they affected your family.

**Week 13 Chronology**

*1<sup>st</sup> December -*

- Lecture: Egypt in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

*3 December -*

- Presentations

**Week 14**

*8 December -*

- Presentations + submit written assignments

*10 December -*

**Week 15**

*15 December - Last day of class*

- Review session

**Saturday 20 December FINAL EXAM 8:30-10:30**