NEST-GA 2785 Sociology of The Middle East: Contemporary Everyday Life in Iran

This course will explore social and cultural theories and practices of everyday life. We will study various theoretical approaches to the understanding of everyday realities and focus on Iran as a contemporary case study. Theories of everyday life focus on the elusive character of our reality called "everydayness," the commonplace, ordinary, familiar and generally taken-for-granted world. What are the social and cultural elements that constitute life as ordinary reality? Study of everyday life is a highly powerful representation of how physical public space can be infused with the full richness and ambiguity of the imaginary – in a material context where the future path of a society is being decided through people’s ‘innocuous’ everyday actions (gathering to drink tea or coffee, playing music, or going shopping). A ‘lifestyle’ expresses a political allegiance, however murkily and grainily understood. It is ‘below’ the level of rational discourse, in imaginatively infused habitus. We will particularly focus on the variety of everyday practices in post-revolutionary Iran under the Islamic Republic. The class starts with a brief section on the social and cultural history of modern Iran and studies important scholarly works on the Iranian Revolution of 1979. We will also examine the social and cultural changes taking place in Iran over the past three decades. Most of the course will focus on various forms of everyday life practices in Iran. Some areas of everyday life we will examine are: consumption and life style; youth and underground culture; love and sexual experiences; public and private sphere; new and old religiosity; leisure time and secularization of time; and war as an ideological practice.