Department of Political Science
Rockefeller College
University at Albany, SUNY

RPOS 448z
IDENTITIES, BOUNDARIES, & MOBILIZATION
Fall 2012

Professor Meredith Weiss

Class: Tuesday 4:15-7:05, BI 152

Office hours: Tuesday 3:00-4:00 and Thursday 12:00-1:00, HU 16
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Course Description
This writing-intensive course explores the political nature of identities, and particularly the way collective identities are shaped, maintained, and deployed. The primary identities with which we will engage relate to nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, we will examine key dimensions of identity, modes and strategies of inclusion and exclusion, forms of “identity politics,” and questions of intersectionality (the overlapping of identity categories, as for race and gender). These issues play out in a variety of domains, from nationalism and secessionism to the politics of gender and ethnicity.

Objectives
The goals of this course relate both to the specific content presented and to critical thinking and communication. By the end of the course, you will be able to:

• Differentiate between positivist and constructivist approaches.
• Demonstrate an understanding of identity, identity categories, and intersectionality;
• Evaluate key dimensions of identity, both theoretically construed and as actually experienced and deployed;
• Distinguish how identity serves as a basis both for inclusion and exclusion, and for mobilization as well as suppression; and
• Compare and contrast how scholars from different disciplines approach and analyze issues of identity and “identity politics.”
• Express complex ideas in writing and develop skills of effective written communication through practice.

These goals align with those of the General Education category, Social Sciences, for which this course offers credit, as well as with the requirements for Writing Intensive courses.

Evaluation Criteria
This course utilizes Team-Based Learning. On the first day of the semester, you will be assigned to a team that will work together for the duration of the course. Your final grade will be influenced by team performance and team-based assignments. While in many courses, group work is structured in such a way that some students end up doing all the work while everyone
shares the credit, two factors will prevent that from happening in this class. First, most graded team work will be preceded by one or more preparatory tasks for which each individual will be accountable, thus ensuring that individual team members are each prepared to contribute to the team effort. Second, each individual’s contribution to team work will be assessed by his or her teammates at the midterm point and again at the end of the semester. Those assessments will tally for a Peer Assessment Score (PAS): a factor by which your team’s overall score for that half of the course is multiplied, giving you your own team work grade. A sample peer assessment form is available on Blackboard.

Requirements for the class include in-class exercises, RATs (see below) and quizzes, class presentations, a series of short reaction papers, a book review, and a collaborative final project. There is no midterm or final exam. The many parts that comprise your grade mean you can expect regular feedback and will have many opportunities to bring up your grade if you get off to a suboptimal start, but also mean you will need to work consistently throughout the semester to do well.

In-class assignments (5% individual, 5% team) There will be frequent in-class exercises, completed both individually and in teams. Most will be graded on a scale of 1/3/5, in which 1=inadequate, 3=satisfactory, and 5=excellent.

RATs and quizzes (10% individual, 10% team) Individual and team Readiness Assessment Tests (iRATs and tRATs) evaluate and extend your understanding of the materials before we have had a chance to discuss all the texts as a class. We will do a sample RAT sequence in the first class session; dates for subsequent RATs will be announced in advance. There may be additional pop quizzes at any point during the semester.

Discussion leading (10%) Each team will choose two days on which to lead the class discussion. Teams will select dates on the first day of class. Only two or three students (from within the same team) will present each class session. However, every team member must present once over the course of the semester, the team as a whole should prepare for each of the team’s assigned days, and discussion-leading will count toward the team grade.

One member of the designated team must email several questions to the class (via Blackboard) by 8pm the evening before the class in question. In class, those students presenting on behalf of the team will offer some initial thoughts on the readings (key concepts, links with other class themes or texts, criticisms, etc.) and lead a discussion on the questions they circulated for approximately 15 minutes. Bear in mind that all students are expected to have completed the reading; as such, there is no need for more than a “sound-bite” synopsis before moving into your critique, extension, and/or application.

While fluent, confident presentation skills are encouraged, I will assess your presentations primarily by content: thoughtful criticisms, provocative questions, astute connections, and creative approaches. Teams wishing to go beyond the standard overview-and-questions format may do so, but should check with me first—particularly if doing so will entail taking longer than the usual 15 minutes.
Reaction papers (25%) You will write one short (1 page) reaction paper each week. Do not merely summarize the assigned readings; use these papers to critique the readings, link those works with other texts or concepts we have covered, or consider possible extensions or applications to the arguments presented. (Your reaction paper and presentation may overlap to some degree in the weeks your team presents, but these reaction papers should reflect your own thinking, whereas the presentations should reflect the team’s analysis.)

Reaction papers are due on Blackboard before the start of class each week. Late papers will only be accepted under the (rare) conditions described below, but I will drop your lowest grade.

These short, frequent, focused essays will not only let you engage with the material independently before you get to class, but will help you to hone your analytical and writing skills. For that reason, you are allowed—and encouraged—to rewrite up to three reaction papers for a new grade: submit the revised version under the same assignment in Blackboard within one week of receiving your grade. (Each week’s papers will be graded prior to the next week’s class.) There will be no extensions on rewrites. Revisions must show substantial further effort. You are strongly encouraged to meet with me first.

Book review (10%) You will read Nuruddin Farah’s Maps for the week of October 30 and discuss it with your team in lieu of class. (You are free to meet either at our usual time/place or at a time and location of your choosing, so long as you meet by Wednesday.) Post notes of your team discussion to Blackboard by that Wednesday evening (counted as an in-class assignment). I recommend that in teams, you work through any confusing aspects of the plot and narrative voice, then discuss the nature of identity in the book: for instance, what sort of collective identities are at stake, what defines the content and boundaries of these identities, or what does it mean to be an insider or outsider.

You will then write a 3-4 page review of the novel: briefly sum up the plot, explain how the novel relates to the themes and theories discussed in this class, and offer a critique. While your team discussion may help structure your thinking, the review must be written individually. The essence of literary analysis—which this paper represents—is making a debatable claim about what the author is saying, supported by textual evidence. In other words, your review must go beyond a summary, instead presenting and supporting one or more arguments about the place of identity (categories, boundaries, othering, difference …) in Farah’s novel.

Final project (20% individual, 10% team) Your final project puts you (hypothetically) in the middle of an identity-based conflict. Each team will consider a different identity conflict—a secessionist movement, demand for affirmative action, or some other form of identity-based mobilization. Each team member will present one side of or perspective on the conflict. The end result will be a short book: your team will collaborate to write a preface introducing the conflict, as well as a concluding chapter integrating their individual chapters and proposing a possible solution (2-3 pages each); team members’ individual chapters (5 pages) will come in between.

As you prepare to write your own chapter, think of yourself as a framing specialist or public intellectual (terms with which you will be familiar by the time you begin this project). Your goal is to be an advocate for that cause, making an evidence-backed case for your position. Picture
yourself as arguing before the United Nations or a similar body, fence-sitting co-nationals or co-ethnics, or some similarly-situated audience. Convince them that your perspective or group has merit or is worthy of consideration. Your individual chapter be one-sided and persuasive, yet grounded in theory—think about how identity categories are defined and mobilized (per the reading you have done for the class). Overall, you must make and support an argument. Present a clear thesis of what your audience should support/believe and why, then back that thesis up with concrete evidence, drawn from scholarly sources.

As you prepare to write your team’s collaborative chapters, think about the big picture. Strive for balance and objectivity. Assume your audience now is more academic. Frame this conflict both historically and within the theories of collective identity you have read—think about what type of conflict it is, what sorts of strategies mobilization has entailed, and what makes this conflict relatively difficult or easy to resolve. This part of the project in particular should use theories of identity, boundary-setting/maintenance, and mobilization to help make sense of empirical facts.

Specific tasks and due-dates:

- Your team will select a conflict on which to focus, identifying a sufficient number of perspectives/sides to include, by October 16. Explain in one paragraph what makes this a suitable conflict, in terms of the aims of the class. In case of duplication, teams may be required to adjust their focus, so do not complete substantial research until I have approved your topic! (Graded as an in-class assignment.)
- To get you started on the research and help you clarify your perspective, you will submit an individual annotated bibliography with at least five scholarly sources (journal articles or books, as explained in the preceding library session) relating to the perspective/side you are representing. Follow closely the style guide on Blackboard for formatting citations, adding a brief paragraph on each source, identifying why that particular source is valuable for your research (theoretical perspective, empirical details, etc.). You do not need to read each source carefully to write these annotations, but will need to read beyond the abstract or back-cover blurbs. Due on Blackboard before class on November 13.
- Each team will give a 30 minute presentation on their conflict on the last day of class. Each individual student must present a brief overview of his/her side; divvy up presenting the team’s introduction and conclusion. You will submit a draft of your individual presentation (1-2 pages) by December 4; I will return your (ungraded) summary on Blackboard, with comments to help you hone your argument further, by December 6. You will receive a team grade for the presentation, so make sure you are familiar with each others’ positions and claims, and that you coordinate well.
- Your team’s book is due on Blackboard by midnight, December 11. One member of the team should submit the full, compiled text. You will receive an individual grade for your own chapter; all team members will receive the same grade for the introduction and conclusion.

Additional guidelines for written work are at the end of the syllabus.

Individual work (65% of total grade)

- In-class assignments 5%
- iRATs & quizzes 5%
- Book review 10%
- Reaction papers (drop lowest) 25%
• Annotated bibliography 5%
• Final project (individual chapter) 15%

Team work (35% of total grade; your team grade will be multiplied by your PAS as described above)
• In-class assignments 5%
• tRATs 10%
• Discussion leading 10%
• Final presentation 5%
• Final project (team chapters) 5%

My expectations
I expect you to complete all readings, attend class regularly, and participate meaningfully in class discussions and activities.

• You WILL FAIL the course if you do not do the reading—this is NOT the sort of course in which you can skip or skim the reading and just wait for me to lecture on it! I expect you to come to class prepared; we will then focus our limited class time on deepening and applying your new knowledge. Be aware, too, that the structure of the class (meeting once per week for three hours) means you will have a large amount of reading due every Tuesday. Do not assume that you can begin the reading Monday night!
• Each team will sit together in class and will have a team folder. One member of each team should pick up the folder at the start of each class and note any absences. Any handouts and/or returned work will be in the folder.
• There is no separate score or penalty for attendance or participation. However, being absent or inactive will count against you, in two ways. First, if you do not come to class and/or do not participate actively in tRATs and team assignments, you can expect a lower peer assessment score. Second, we will have frequent in-class exercises, as well as RATs and quizzes. Absences will translate into zeros. (Per university policy, in case of documented religious observance or medical/family emergency—but only in such cases—you may have the option of making up missed individual work.) You will not receive credit for tRATs or team assignments for which you are not present.
• I will only accept late papers or other assignments in the case of religious observance (for which I must be notified in the first two weeks of class) or documented medical or family emergency.
• This class uses Blackboard 9.1. This syllabus, all assigned non-textbook readings, and any other materials will be hosted there. You are encouraged to use Blackboard, too, for online conversations with your classmates; you will have both class and team-specific blogs for that purpose.
  o Make sure that your email address on Blackboard is correct. The “email” setting on Blackboard will direct messages to that external account. (The previous version of Blackboard stored a copy of forwarded emails on Blackboard; the new version does not do so.)
Class etiquette
• Be aware that not everyone in the class shares the same political or other views—and that these views do tend to emerge in Political Science classes. Please be respectful of your classmates and professor. All perspectives are welcomed in this class.
• Cellphone use during class is disrespectful, and thus strictly prohibited (voice or text). Phones used in class will be confiscated for the duration of the class session, to remove the temptation.
• You may use a laptop in class, but only for valid class-related reasons. Upon the second warning for using a laptop for any other purpose, you will forfeit laptop privileges for the duration of the semester.

Special needs
Students with special needs due to physical, learning, or other disabilities will be accommodated. To request such accommodation, first register with the Disability Resource Center (Campus Center 137, http://www.albany.edu/disability/DRC/); they will provide you with a letter to me, detailing the provisions requested. To ensure equitable treatment of all students, please submit these letters within the first two weeks of the semester (in person, so we can discuss appropriate arrangements), then also remind me before each relevant event (RAT, etc.).

Academic honesty
I expect all students to be ethical and honest in completing all work for this class. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with the university’s guidelines on academic integrity (http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html); ignorance is NOT an excuse. Violations of this code, such as plagiarism, cheating, copying, or misrepresentation of work as your own, will meet with appropriate penalties and discipline as outlined in UAlbany’s regulations, up to and including loss of course credit, suspension, or expulsion from the university. It is the responsibility of every student also to report any observed violations. If you have any question as to the limits of acceptable team collaboration, please ask the professor for clarification.

Course readings
One required text is available for purchase from either the UAlbany bookstore or Mary Jane Books.
• Nuruddin Farah, Maps, New York: Penguin, 1999. (Other editions are acceptable.)

Two recommended texts are also available for purchase, as well as on reserve at the main library. (We will read only selected chapters, but too large a proportion to post online.)

Unless otherwise noted, all other readings are available electronically on Blackboard. If a link does not work or you are having trouble accessing Blackboard, find the readings in the library, instead; many are readily available in online journals.
Expect to spend a lot of time reading—the precise amount will vary, but averages around 100 pages per week. Some of the readings will be challenging. **Read carefully and critically:** ask yourself as you read what the main ideas of the reading are, what questions you have for us to discuss in class, and how that day’s reading relates to what has come before.

Assignments may change over the course of the semester from what is listed below. You are responsible for knowing what is assigned and for completing the reading.

**SCHEDULE**
Readings are due on the date under which they are listed. In-class assignments, activities, and deadlines are listed with a ➤.”

**28 Aug**  **Introduction and overview**
- Team formation
- *Practice RAT sequence* (ungraded)
- Selection of days for leading discussion
- Exercise on critical reading/writing

**4 Sept**  **Approaches to identity: Understanding identity and collective identity**
- Exercise on literary analysis

**11 Sept**  **Defining the collective: Setting boundaries and “othering”**
  - Don’t get lost in the details—read for main ideas

**18 Sept**  **No class**
25 Sept  No class

2 Oct  **Defining the collective: Oppositional consciousness**

- RAT #1: Approaches to identity and Defining the collective
  - Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris (ed.), *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*, chap. 1, 2, 4 (not on Blackboard!)
  - Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New Press, 2010), chap. 6 (Introduction is optional)
    - Think about the call for action that Alexander describes in terms of the theoretical framework Mansbridge and Morris present (and remember this book when you read Strolovitch later). You may find it helpful to read Alexander’s Introduction, as well.

9 Oct  **Nation-states and nationalism: Concepts & processes, mapping the nation**

- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, chap. 1-3, 10 (not on Blackboard!)

16 Oct  **Nation-states and nationalism: Experiencing and policing the nation**

- *Choice of conflict* for final project due (submit on Blackboard by start of class)
- Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers*, pp. 49-85

23 Oct  **Nation-states and nationalism: Subnationalisms**

- RAT #2: Nation-states and nationalism
- David Brown, “Are There Good and Bad Nationalisms?” *Nations and Nationalism* 5:2 (April 1999), pp. 281-302

30 Oct  **No class:** Meet in teams to discuss novel
  - Team discussion notes due on Blackboard (on team blog) by **Wednesday** evening
  - Book review due on Blackboard (under Assignments) by 5:00 pm **Friday**, 2 Nov.
• Nuruddin Farah, *Maps* (leave yourself adequate time to read the full novel!)

6 Nov  **Intersectionality: Concepts and theories, advocating at the intersections**
  - Think of Michele Alexander’s claims regarding the foci of civil rights groups—that they have neglected the criminal justice system
• IGLHRC, *Written Out: How Sexuality is Used to Attack Women’s Organizing* (2005), http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/publications/written.htm or http://www.iglhrc.org/binary-data/ATTACHMENT/file/000/000/16-1.pdf, pp. 25-64 (access online; skim any other sections that interest you)

13 Nov  **Identity politics: Class, ethnicity, and status**
  - Annotated bibliographies due
• Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Preamble and Sections I and II
• Meredith Weiss, Edward Aspinall, & Mark Thompson, “Toward a Framework for Understanding Student Activism in Asia,” in Meredith Weiss & Edward Aspinall (ed.), *Student Activism in Asia: Between Protest and Powerlessness* (Minnesota, 2012), pp. 1-32
20 Nov  **Identity politics: Gender & sexuality**

27 Nov  **Identity politics: Virtual identities and redressing marginalization**
  ➢ **RAT #3:** Intersectionality and identity politics

4 Dec  **Beyond established boundaries**
  ➢ Time in class to work in teams on final project
  ➢ Draft of individual presentations due on Blackboard by midnight
  - Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*, pp. 35-56

11 Dec  **Team presentations**
  ➢ Group projects due online by midnight
Guidelines for written work

- The standard formatting for written assignments for this class is: **12 point Times New Roman font, 1” margins, double-spacing, numbered pages.** (For your final project, compile all chapters so the page numbers run consistently throughout, and include a table of contents.)

- Always *edit your work* and *proofread* carefully.

- Follow the style guide on Blackboard for formatting in-text citations and your bibliography. If you refer to readings from the course, include those in your bibliography. Outside research is *not* required (and generally discouraged) for weekly reaction papers. Your final projects (both team and individual chapters) *must* draw on outside sources as well as class readings, although the balance will likely be tilted toward outside sources for your individual chapter. Each chapter should have its own bibliography.

- You should always allow time for *at least* two full drafts.

- For the final project in particular, begin with an outline (which you are strongly encouraged to bring to my office hours for feedback). You need to learn about a likely-unfamiliar case, find sources on the conflict as a whole and one relatively narrow perspective/side specifically, then both write your own chapter and collaborate on the team’s chapter. Allow time, too, for acclimating to the *style of writing* required—few of you likely have experience with writing for advocacy or persuasion (what may be termed a “position paper”).

- For the final project, you are welcome, but not required, to write and speak in a first-person voice. Even if you write in the third person, remember that you write as an advocate.

- Grading will be per the rubrics posted on Blackboard. Most important, for all written work: *make and support a coherent argument.* I will also consider organization and development of your ideas, quality of your sources (when applicable), how well you apply theoretical concepts, and readability (including sentence style and grammar).