Assistant Professor in Arabic Language and Culture
(with a secondary specialization in French or another language preferred)

Marie-Claude Thomas

Civil Marriage Narratives in Lebanon: Construction of Citizenship

Thursday, February 19
12:15—1:15 p.m.
2014 Hall, P101
Pitzer Family Archive and Conference Center

This paper traces the emergence of marriage as a highly political institution and analyzes the challenges faced by young couples and civil society activists in their attempt to legalize civil marriage in Lebanon. It presents a brief history of the formation of the religious confessional and personal status jurisdictions, beginning under the French Mandate in the 1920s and 1930s through Lebanon's independence and development as a modern state.

I ask a simple question: "How does Lebanon disentangle the old triangular alliance between the state, religion and the family?" Focusing on law and contemporary discourses of civil marriage, the paper explores the meaning of marriage in the context of the modern state and the identities upon which it rests. I suggest that the state needs to adapt to new realities by shifting articulations of embedded concepts of confessions
(sects) to open a path of true citizenship.

About Marie-Claude Thomas
Marie-Claude Thomas received her PhD in philosophy from the University of Paris I, Sorbonne, her MA in journalism from the French Press Institute, University of Paris 2, and her MBA in international management from Baldwin Wallace University in the United States. She taught courses on women and gender in the modern Arab world, modern Arab thought and Arabic language at Oberlin College in Ohio. Prior to Oberlin, she taught courses on French literature, modern France, and comparative studies of French and American Institutions at Baldwin Wallace University in Ohio. Most recently, Thomas taught Arabic language and culture in the Languages and Cultures Department at the United States Naval Academy. She is the author of Women in Lebanon: Living with Christianity, Islam, and Multiculturalism (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). She published articles on satellites as means to development in the '80s; religions in Lebanon; and women, modernity and religion in the Arab world. She is currently researching minorities in the Arab world.

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