

Spring 2013
PSC 366.M001/MES366.M001
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST
Prof. Mehrzad Boroujerdi

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: In recent times, there has been an explosion of comic books, films and popular writings with depictions of the Middle East, including many bestselling books and popular Hollywood films. These artistic productions have often depicted the Middle East in a rather negative fashion: as a bastion of religious intolerance, anti-Westernism, irrational political radicalism, authoritarianism, terrorism, and women's oppression, etc. This course will examine the politics of "gazing" and cultural imagination through critical analysis of how the mass media articulates, transmits, promotes and legitimizes knowledge and information about the Middle East. It will explore how the American public and government have viewed the Middle East as an "other" -- an other that is often portrayed as carnal, enigmatic, exotic, unpredictable and violent. At the same time, the course will consider how people in the Middle East view both themselves and the outside world. The course will make use of documentaries, films, newspaper and magazine articles -- both by Westerners about the Middle East and by Middle Easterners. Important issues to be examined include representations of class, culture, gender, and the ironies of nationalism, revolution, and war. Class discussion will build around themes raised by the visual materials and readings.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: This course satisfies one of the "critical reflection" requirements for the Liberal Arts Core Curriculum. The chief educational goals of this course are:

- To encourage students to identify and move beyond stereotypes and Orientalist dichotomies of the "West" and the "East."
- By critically viewing and analyzing artistic works, students will examine how representational images are socially constructed.
- By comparing Western images of the Middle East with artistic productions that emerge from Middle Easterners (either residing in the region or the West), students will be able to process the authenticity of different representations.

You should consider this course a collective exercise in critical thinking. My role, as well as that of the Teaching Assistant, is to steer class discussion and engender an informal participatory class environment where we can all search collectively for a broader understanding of the subject matter. The present structure of the course reflects my focus and interests. However, I welcome a broadening of aims and interests. Please take note of the fact that this syllabus represents the

anticipated scheduling of lectures/readings/assignments; changes may be made to suit the actual composition and competencies of the class.

COURSE PHILOSOPHY: A Chinese proverb says that “teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself.” A Western sage (Karl Jaspers) supplemented this maxim by maintaining that “university life is no less dependent on students than on professors. The best professors flounder helplessly at a school where the student body is unfit. Hence, it is all up to the young people who are supposedly entitled to study. They must show themselves worthy of this privilege to the best of their ability.” This course has been organized on the premise that you are worthy of this privilege and that the teacher only opens the door. The success of this course depends entirely on your continued and sustained participation. Therefore, I ask that you be agile participants and intervene as often as possible in class discussion. Please keep in mind that in this course you will be exposed to a wide range of alternative views, some of which may force you to question, rethink, and, if necessary, abandon your present "understanding" of Middle Eastern culture, history and politics. Who knows, by the end of the course you might feel that you have taken part in a serendipitous voyage of discovery!

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Because my presentations will complement rather than reiterate the assigned readings, it is expected that you attend *all* class meetings. You will be held responsible for all the material we cover in readings, lectures, and films.

Participation: In addition to being physically present, I expect you to be mentally present as well! As such, you should complete all assigned readings *before* each class meeting so that you are familiar with the concepts, facts, theories, and controversies with which we are dealing. Furthermore, you can engage in discussion through the course page in Blackboard (<https://blackboard.syr.edu>) and the course listserv (Representation@listserv.syr.edu). You should use these mediums to (a) post interesting or informative e-mails about the subject matter of the course; (b) share your reflections on the films we have seen; and (c) respond to points and issues raised by the instructors or your peers.

Film(s) Review: You are expected to write an 8 to 10 page, typed, and double-spaced paper in this course dealing with one or more genre of films screened in class (instructor will provide you with a list of films suitable for review). You are expected to explore the artistic, cultural, historical, political, and/or social contribution of one or more films touching the themes of your paper. I expect you to situate these films in their appropriate cultural and intellectual setting, and develop a thesis about their meaning and function. What I mean here is that I don't want you to be commenting on the artistic quality of the film(s) (good actors, nice cinematography, dazzling scenery, etc.). After briefly explaining the film's plot (i.e., melodramatic story), I want you to tell me how should I understand this film in terms of its portrayal of "representations" or "politics of representation" (tradition-modernity, nationalism, revolution)? Does the film tell a universal story? Does the film identify important historical themes and moments? Is the producer/director trying to communicate a certain "message" to the audience (sexism, racism, negative values and cruelties of Middle Eastern culture)? Does the film suggest in a subtle manner themes such as cultural diversity, female empowerment, racial tolerance, ethnic harmony, and the strength of the family? Does the film deal metaphorically or in a brutally honest monologue with such issues as prejudice (against poor, disabled, women, minorities, etc.)? Does the film have a very strong

motif (i.e., anti-war, anti-Americanism)? Does it reinforce stereotypes and "typecasting" of "others"? What effect did such representations induce in you? Does the film enable you to share and feel the texture of the main protagonist's world? What do you consider to be the "emotional center" of the film? Feel free to contextualize your reviews by drawing upon other examples of representation through film. The film reviews are due *February 26*.

Book Review: After the instructor provides you with a list of books suitable for review, you are expected to choose one by *February 12* (send an e-mail to the TA telling him which books you will be reviewing). Afterwards, you will write an 8 to 10 page, typed, and double-spaced book review in which you address the following questions: (a) what is the author's *thesis*?; (b) what are some *useful concepts* s/he presents?; (c) what do you consider to be the major *strengths and weaknesses* of the work?; and (d) what *questions* have come to your mind considering the reading and class discussions? The book reviews are due on *March 28*.

Creative Project: I value and admire creativity. Each student is expected to do a creative project dealing with the theme of representation of the Middle East. You can draw up cartoons, write a film screenplay or a fictional essay, create a short documentary film, create a "Middle East for Dummies" PowerPoint, use Survey Monkey to create a survey asking Freshman about their views of the Middle East, develop a blog, do a fictional interview, write a Wikipedia entry, analyze how American Presidents or Secretaries of State have talked about the Middle East in their memoirs, or fashion a creative literary response to one of the films (i.e., stories, poetry about the characters and setting), etc. It might be helpful to you to monitor "representations" of the Middle East as they happen in the mass media for the duration of this semester. The creative project is due on *April 30*. For a sample project done by a former student see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy89boZ60us>

In all three of the above assignments you need to critically engage in a dialogue with the concepts, ideas and images raised in the films, class lectures, and assigned readings. Remember that your papers should follow the "Four C" rule: clear, concise, coherent, and creative. I would also encourage finding other resources in the library or on the Internet to use in support of your arguments. You are encouraged to sit down with the instructor or the TA and talk about what you want to do. We will try to help all students identify a project they will be comfortable with.

GRADING CRITERIA

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>When</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Attendance & Participation	all the time	10%
Film Review	February 26	30%
Book Review	March 28	30%
Creative Project	April 30	30%

Extra Credit Assignments: Students who wish to improve their grade in this course have the option of attending any Middle East related event such as speakers, conferences, art exhibits, and films (this semester the Middle Eastern Studies Program is running a great film series) held on campus and writing a 1-2-page report afterwards. Each extra-credit assignment will replace 1% of the lowest grade students received in each individual assignment (film/book review or creative

project). Students can do up to five extra credit assignments. In addition, students who wish to see additional films and videos on their own about the Middle East (available in the media section of Bird Library on the 4th floor) can visit the following site:

<http://middle-eastern-studies.syr.edu/CampusResources.htm>

Grading Rubric for Evaluation of Written Works:

Argument:

- 4- Clear thesis; explains importance of argument
- 3- Recognizable thesis statement; perhaps somewhat broad
- 2- Thesis statement not fully identifiable and needs to be inferred
- 1- No coherent argument, random observations

Organization:

- 4- Clear and well-developed organization, paper well-structured
- 3- Paper organization is logical; use and division of paragraphs and sections could be improved
- 2- Paper somewhat hard to follow; organization not well-structured and logical
- 1- Little to no coherent organization; reads like random observations

Evidence:

- 4- Good and appropriate use of outside sources; proper citations
- 3- Some good use of outside sources; most appropriate sources sometimes overlooked; minor citation errors
- 2- Insufficient use of sources; appropriate sources from academic books and journals overlooked almost completely
- 1- Little to no use of outside sources; citations improper and not consistent

Films:

- 4- Films connect well; relevant scenes well described and analyzed
- 3- Films acceptable, but most appropriate films perhaps not chosen; analysis sometimes extraneous
- 2- Films connect somewhat tangentially; analysis of films often irrelevant (mostly summary)
- 1- Films do not connect well at all; analysis to connect insufficient

Theory:

- 4- Relevant theory on “representations” well incorporated
- 3- Relevant theory introduced, but not fully used in analyzing films
- 2- Major theoretical confusion; insufficient use of theory
- 1- Little to no attempt to process film with relevant theory

Writing:

- 4- Writing clear and intelligent; few to no grammatical errors
- 3- Writing basically clear; a good number of grammatical and spelling errors overlooked however
- 2- Writing rather sloppy; somewhat hard to read at times

- 1- Paper appears not to have been read for grammatical and spelling errors; extremely sloppy

REQUIRED READINGS

- Lina Khatib, Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012)
 Melani McAlister, Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005)
 Edward W. Said, Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World (New York: Vintage, 1997)

- All assigned articles on Blackboard unless given their URL.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Following news: You will be expected to monitor developments in the Middle East as they occur. Events taking place can help to further stimulate debate and reflection in the classroom. To keep abreast of developments, everyone is encouraged to read a daily newspaper such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, or *The Washington Post*. If you can read Arabic, Hebrew, Persian or Turkish, then feel free to follow a newspaper of your choice in that language as well (for a list of Middle Eastern newspapers, visit www.onlinenewspapers.com). Also, following a Middle Eastern blog for the duration of the semester may also help provide material and inspiration for your various projects. Here are a few examples of blogs in Arabic, English, French, Hebrew, and Persian:

Arab World http://blogs.aljazeera.net/ or http://www.dubaidebates.com/	Egypt - http://www.sandmonkey.org/ or http://www.arabist.net/
Iraq - http://iraqblogcount.blogspot.com/	Iran - http://balatarin.com/
Israel - http://israblog.nana.co.il/	Lebanon - http://www.beirutspring.com/ http://mayazankoul.com/
Morocco - http://riadzany.blogspot.com/	Saudi Arabia - http://saudijeans.org/ or http://saudiwoman.wordpress.com/
Tunisia - http://tuniblogs.com/	Turkey- http://aegeandisclosure.blogspot.com
UAE - http://secretdubai.blogspot.com	Islamic World - http://www.islamicity.com
Bahrain - http://mahmood.tv/	Yemen - http://afrahnasser.blogspot.com/
Jordan - http://www.black-iris.com/	Gaza - http://livefromgaza.wordpress.com/

Statement Regarding Disability-Related Accommodations

Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 304 University Avenue, Room 309, (315) 443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review

those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, [Office of Disability Services, http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/](http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/).

Academic Integrity Statement

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy (<http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>) and know that it is their responsibility to learn the instructor's expectations and the general academic rules with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>. Students found to cheat will receive an F for that assignment. Students have a right to appeal.

Faith Tradition Observance Policy:

Syracuse University recognizes the diverse faith traditions represented among its campus community and supports the rights of faculty, staff, and students to observe according to these traditions. I am willing to accommodate for students' observance needs provided you notify me (in writing) no later than the end of the second week of classes.

"A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms...after long use seem firm, canonical and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are."

Nietzsche

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Jan. 15: Introduction - The Nature and Structure of the Course

- Syllabus review; questionnaire, orientation quiz.

Construction of Otherness

Jan. 17: Orientalism and Representation (I)

- Video: *Edward Said on Orientalism* (VC 8109; 40 min.)
- Said, pp. xi-Lxx.

Jan. 22: Orientalism and Representation (II)

- Joseph G. Rahme, "Ethnocentric and Stereotypical Concepts in the Study of Islamic and World History," *The History Teacher*, vol. 32, no. 4 (August

1999): 473-494.

- Brian Whitaker, "Its best use is as a doorstep," *Guardian*
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/may/24/worlddispatch.usa>

Jan. 24: "Othering" the Enemy

- Video: *Faces of the Enemy* (VC 6509; 57 min.)
- Maryam Khalid, "Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror," *Global Change, Peace & Security*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Nov. 2011): 15-29.
- Moustafa Bayoumi, "The Race Is On: Muslims and Arabs in the American Imagination," *Middle East Report* (March 2010).
- Jürgen Link, "Fanatics, Fundamentalists, Lunatics, and Drug Traffickers - The New Southern Enemy Image," *Cultural Critique*, n. 19 (Fall 1991): 33-53

Jan. 29: Hollywood's Orientalism

- Video: *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* [DVD 12805; 50 min.] Also available at http://youtu.be/DmVoSZk_fvo
- McAlister, pp. xi-42 and chapter 1.
- Ella Shohat, "Gender in Hollywood's Orient," *Middle East Report*, n. 162 (Jan/Feb 1990): 40-42.
- John C. Eisele, "The Wild East: Deconstructing the Language of Genre in the Hollywood Eastern."

Jan. 31: Islam as News

- Said, chapter 1
- Gallup Polls, *Religious Perceptions in America* (2009)

Feb. 5: "Covering" Iran

- Said, chapter 2
- McAlister, chapter 5
- Sam Fayyaz & Roozbeh Shirazi, "Good Iranian, Bad Iranian: Representations of Iran and Iranians in Time and Newsweek (1998–2009) *Iranian Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1 (Jan. 2013): 53-72.

Feb. 7: Knowledge and Power

- Said, chapter 3
- Assaf Kfoury, "The Fourth Estate in the Service of Power: Media Coverage of the Middle East," *Logos*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2010).
- Video: "Empire: Hollywood and the War Machine," *Al Jazeera*, August 9 2012 (47 min.)
<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/empire/2010/12/2010121681345363793.html>

Feb. 12: Critique of Western Media

- Amir Hussain, “(Re)presenting: Muslims on North American Television,” *Contemporary Islam*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2010), pp. 55-75.
- Nir Rosen, “Western media fraud in the Middle East”

Feb. 14: **Representing (Anti-)Americanism**

- “Tom & Jerry is a Jewish Conspiracy” (4 min.)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40VFcJTIduw>
- McAlister, chapter 6 and conclusion
- Alia Alkassem Abu-Reesh, “The Image of America as Reflected in Contemporary Arabic Novels,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3, (May 2011): 497 - 514
- William A. Rugh, “Anti-Americanism on Arab Television: Some Outsider Observations,” *TBS Journal*, no. 15 (January-June 2006).

Feb. 19: **Representing Islam in Europe**

- Video: *Muslim Demographics* (8 min.) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-3X5hIFXYU>
- Video: *Arabs and a Jew* (8 min.)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIS2cRB5f8o>
- K. Humayun Ansari, “The Muslim World in British Historical Imaginations: `Re-thinking Orientalism`?” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1 (April 2011): 73–93
- Michael Kimmelman, “When Fear Turns Graphic,” *New York Times* (January 17, 2009)
- Nilüfer Göle, "Mute symbols of Islam"
- *The Danish Cartoon Controversy*
- *The Iranian Holocaust Cartoon Controversy*
<http://irancartoon.com/120/holocaust/index.htm>

Representation of Gender & Sexuality

Feb. 21: **Representations of Sexuality**

- Fatema Mernissi, “Size Six: The Western Women’s Harem,” *Ode Magazine* (2003).
- Laila Lalami, “The Missionary Position,” *The Nation* (June 19, 2006).
- Negar Azimi, “Prisoners of Sex,” *New York Times Magazine* (Dec. 3, 2006): 63-67.

Feb. 26: **Veil and its Symbolism**

(film Reviews due)

- Video: *Headscarf Controversy in Turkey* (7 min.)
<http://video.nytimes.com/video/2008/10/14/world/1194824264490/turkeys-head-scarf-debate.html>
- Video: Van Gogh’s *Submission*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGtQvGGY4S4> (11 min.)

- Hassan Fattah, “Beyond Skimpy Skirts, a Rare Debate on Identity,” *New York Times* (Oct. 19, 2006).

Feb. 28: **Representations of Secular/Religious Divide**

- Video: *Laïcité, inch'Allah!* (Video DVD 17278; 71 min.)

Mar. 5: **Love & Childbearing (I)**

- Film: *Kadosh* (VC 922; 117 min.)
- Gabriel Piterberg, “Domestic Orientalism: The Representation of ‘Oriental’ Jews in Zionist/Israeli Historiography,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2 (Nov. 1996): 125-145.

Mar. 7: **Love & Childbearing (II)**

- Discussing *Kadosh*
- Ella Shohat, “Sephradim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text* 19 (Fall 1988).

Mar. 12 & 14: *No classes (Spring Break)*

Through “Local Eyes”

Mar. 19: **Interrogating a Civil War**

- *Alone with War* France (VC 11630; 58 min.)
- Khatib, The Visual Legacy of the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon
- Khatib, Hizbullah: Image Management and Political Survival
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanese_Civil_War

Mar. 21: **Representations of a Theocracy**

Video: *Persepolis* (DVD 14189; 95 min)

Mar. 26: **Banality and Chaos of Life in Egypt (I)**

- Film: *The Yacoubian Building* (2006; 162 minutes)
- Claudia Roth Pierpont, “Found in Translation: The Contemporary Arabic Novel,” *New Yorker* (January 18, 2010)

Mar. 28: **Banality and Chaos of Life in Egypt (II)** (*Book Reviews due*)

- Discussing *The Yacoubian Building*

Apr. 2: **Banality and Chaos of Life in Turkey (I)**

- Film: *Yöl* [The Road] (VC 6534; 90 min.)

Apr. 4: **Banality and Chaos of Life in Turkey (I)**

- Discussing *Yöl*

Contrasting Images of Conflicts

Apr. 9: **Contrasting Representations of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (I)**

- Video: *Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land* (DVD 12796; 80 min.)

Apr. 11: **Discussing Contrasting Representations of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (II)**

- McAlister, chapter 4.

Apr. 16: **Representing Suicide Bombers (I)**

- Video: *To Die in Jerusalem* (Video DVD 13208; 76 min.)

Apr. 18: **Representing Suicide Bombers (II)**

- Discussing *To Die in Jerusalem*
- Claudia Brunner, "Occidentalism Meets the Female Suicide Bomber: A Critical Reflection on Recent Terrorism Debates: A Review Essay," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 32, no. 41 (2007): 957-971.

Apr. 23: **Representing a Failed Uprising**

- Video: *Fragments of a Revolution* (DVD 17181; 56 min.)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D61uriEGsIM&feature=watch-vrec>
- Khatib, The Politics of (In)visibility in Iran

Apr. 25: **Representing Successful Arab Revolutions**

- Khatib, The Visual Rush of the Arab Spring
- Khatib, Television Images and Political Struggle
- Khatib, From Images of Dictators to Images of Citizens

Apr. 30: **Evaluations & Open Discussion about the Course**

(Creative Projects due)