

Spring 2010  
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, 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 who reside either in the region or in the West. Important issues to be examined include representations of class, culture, gender, genocide, 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 work, 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. Needless to say, 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:** In light of the fact that 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 (<http://Blackbord.syr.edu>) and the course listserv ([Representation@listserv.syr.edu](mailto:Representation@listserv.syr.edu)). You and I will use this 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.

Reflection Papers: You are expected to write a 10 to 15 page, typed, and double-spaced paper in this course dealing with one or more genre of films screened in class. You are expected to explore the artistic, cultural, historical, political, and/or social contribution of at least three films touching the themes of your paper. You can focus on one or two films primarily, but your analysis needs to be contextualized in term of other examples of similar representation through film. 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?

To answer the above set of questions you need to critically engage in a dialogue with the concepts, ideas and images raised in the films, class lectures, and assigned/recommended readings. I would also encourage finding other textual resources in the library to use in support of your argument. In addition to having a proper bibliography and footnotes, each paper should follow the "Four C" rule: clear, concise, coherent, and creative. This paper is due on *March 23*.

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 put together a PowerPoint presentation, draw up cartoons, write a film screenplay or a fictional essay, create a documentary film, construct a public opinion poll, develop a blog, 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.

At any rate, you are encouraged to sit down with the instructor or the TA and talk about your project. We will try to help all students identify a project they will be comfortable with. This assignment is due on *May 4*.

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. In order 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 comprehensive list of newspapers from the Middle East, visit [www.onlinenewspapers.com](http://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 - <a href="http://itoot.net/">http://itoot.net/</a>	Egypt - <a href="http://www.sandmonkeyblog.com/">http://www.sandmonkeyblog.com/</a>
Iraq - <a href="http://iraqblogcount.blogspot.com/">http://iraqblogcount.blogspot.com/</a>	Iran - <a href="http://1.blognews.name/">http://1.blognews.name/</a>
Israel - <a href="http://israblog.nana.co.il/">http://israblog.nana.co.il/</a>	Lebanon - <a href="http://www.beirutspring.com/">http://www.beirutspring.com/</a>
Morocco - <a href="http://riadzany.blogspot.com/">http://riadzany.blogspot.com/</a>	Saudi Arabia - <a href="http://saudijeans.org/">http://saudijeans.org/</a>
Tunisia - <a href="http://tuniblogs.com/">http://tuniblogs.com/</a>	Turkey - <a href="http://aegeandisclosure.blogspot.com">http://aegeandisclosure.blogspot.com</a>
UAE - <a href="http://secretdubai.blogspot.com">http://secretdubai.blogspot.com</a>	Islamic World - <a href="http://IslamonLine.net">http://IslamonLine.net</a>

**EVALUATION OF WRITTEN WORKS:** Because this is an introductory course on the Middle East, it is presumed that most students start with a minimal level of knowledge about the region. Students will be evaluated in how well they are able to grasp

important concepts and engage in critical discourse about the politics of representation. Their written work will be evaluated based on the following grading rubric:

**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

## 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 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.

## **GRADING CRITERIA**

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>When</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Attendance	all the time	10%
Classroom & Listserv Participation	all the time	10%
Research Paper	March 23	40%
Creative Project	May 4	40%

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 (research paper 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) can visit the following site:

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

## **REQUIRED READINGS**

- Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East*

since 1945 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) (available at Orange Student Bookstore)

- Readings on Blackboard

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*“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

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### **CLASS ASSIGNMENTS**

#### **Jan. 19: Introduction - The Nature and Structure of the Course**

- Syllabus review; questionnaire, orientation quiz

#### **Construction of Otherness**

#### **Jan. 21: “Othering” the Enemy**

- Video: *Faces of the Enemy* (VC 6509; 57 min.)
- Jürgen Link, "Fanatics, Fundamentalists, Lunatics, and Drug Traffickers - The New Southern Enemy Image," *Cultural Critique*, n. 19 (Fall 1991): 33-53 (Blackboard).

#### **Jan. 26: Orientalism and Representation**

- Video: *Edward Said on Orientalism* (VC 8109; 40 min.)
- 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 (Blackboard)

#### *Recommended:*

- Eric Davis, “10 Conceptual Sins in Analyzing Middle East Politics,” (Blackboard)
- Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), pp. 1-28.
- Mehrzad Boroujerdi, “Other-ness, Orientalism, Orientalism in Reverse, and Nativism,” in Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West* (Syracuse University Press, 1996): 1-19.

#### **Jan. 28: Pop Culture and Representation of “the Other”**

- McAlister, pp. xi-42 and chapter. 1
- Video: *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* [DVD 12805; 50 min.]
- Jonathan Lundqvist, “More Pictures of Iranian Censorship.” (Blackboard)

#### *Recommended:*

- Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001).

- Rebecca Stone, "Reverse Imagery: Middle Eastern Themes in Hollywood," in Sherifa Zuhur (ed.), *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998).

#### Feb. 2: **Deconstructing Middle East through Comedy**

- Video: *The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour* [DVD 14205; 64 min.]

*Recommended:*

- Mark LeVine, *Why They Don't Hate Us: Lifting the Veil on the Axis of Evil* (Oxford, OneWorld, 2005).
- *Literature from the "Axis of Evil"* (New York: New Press, 2006).

#### Feb. 4: **Fighting Cartoons with Cartoons**

- Video: *Muslim Demographics* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-3X5hIFXYU>
- *The Danish Cartoon Controversy* (Blackboard)
- *The Iranian Holocaust Cartoon Controversy* (Blackboard)
- <http://irancartoon.com/120/holocaust/index.htm>
- Michael Kimmelman, "When Fear Turns Graphic," *New York Times* (January 17, 2009) (Blackboard)
- James Watts, *Desecrating Scriptures* (Blackboard)
- *Mapping the Global Muslim Population* (Pew Research Center, 2009) (Blackboard)

*Recommended:*

- Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

#### Feb. 9: **Analyzing Films**

- John C. Eisele, "The Wild East: Deconstructing the Language of Genre in the Hollywood Eastern." (Blackboard).

*Recommended:*

- Hamid Naficy, "Autobiography, Film Spectorship, and Cultural Negotiation," *Emergences*, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 29-54.
- Lina Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East: Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

### **Representation of Gender & Sexuality**

#### Feb. 11: **Question of Sexuality**

- Fatema Mernissi, "Size Six: The Western Women's Harem," *Ode Magazine* (2003) (Blackboard)
- Ella Shohat, "Gender in Hollywood's Orient," *Middle East Report*, n. 162 (Jan/Feb 1990): 40-42. (Blackboard)
- Negar Azimi, "Prisoners of Sex," *New York Times Magazine* (Dec. 3, 2006): 63-67 (Blackboard)

- Hassan Fattah, “Beyond Skimpy Skirts, a Rare Debate on Identity,” *New York Times* (Oct. 19, 2006) (Blackboard)
- Video: *Headscarf Controversy in Turkey*  
<http://video.nytimes.com/video/2008/10/14/world/1194824264490/turkeys-head-scarf-debate.html>

**Feb. 16: Question of Marriage & Divorce**

- Video: *Divorce Iranian Style* (Iran, 1998) [VC 10254; 80 min.]

*Recommended:*

- Video: *Forbidden Marriages in the Holy Land* [VC 9506; 66 min.]
- Video: *Wedding in Galilee* (Israel and Palestine, 1987) [VC 6266; 113 minutes]

**Feb. 18: Love & Childbearing**

- Film: *Kadosh* (Israel, 1999) [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 (Blackboard)

*Recommended:*

- Video: *Leila* (VC 8694; 102 min.)

**Feb. 23: Conclusion and discussion of *Kadosh***

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

**Feb. 25: Female Suicide Bombing**

- 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 (Blackboard)

*Recommended:*

- Video: *To Die in Jerusalem* [Video DVD 13208]

**Through “Local Eyes”**

**Mar. 2: Interrogating a Civil War**

- *Alone with War* (France, 2000) [VC 11630; 58 min.]

**Mar. 4: Middle East, Muslims and African-Americans**

- McAlister, chapter 2
- Mark Holland, *Islamophobia, and the ‘Muslim’ Caricature of Barak Obama* (Blackboard)

*Recommended:*

- Film: *Nasser 56* (Egypt, 1996) [VC 10340; 150 min.]
- Gallup Poll, *Religious Perceptions in America: With an In-Depth Analysis of U.S. Attitudes Toward Muslims and Islam* (Blackboard)

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Mar. 9: **Commodity Nationalism**

- McAlister, chapter 3

Mar. 11: **Banality and Chaos of Life in Iran**

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

*Recommended:*

- Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present, and Future* (London: Verso, 1998.)
- Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Mar. 16 & 18: **No classes (Spring Break)**

Mar. 23: **Banality and Chaos of Life in Egypt** (*Research Papers due*)

- Film: *The Yacoubian Building* (2006; 162 minutes)

*Recommended:*

- Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (Cairo: American University Press, 1998).
- Claudia Roth Pierpont, "Found in Translation: The Contemporary Arabic Novel," *New Yorker* (January 18, 2010)

Mar. 25: **Conclusion of *The Yacoubian Building***

Mar. 30: **Banality and Chaos of Life in Turkey**

- Film: *Yöl* [The Road] (Turkey, 1982) [VC 6534; 90 min.]

Apr. 1: **Discussing *Yöl***

Apr. 6: **Remembering the Armenian Genocide**

- Film: *Ararat* (Canada, 2002) [DVD 11543; 115 min.]

*Recommended:*

- Video: *Back to Ararat* [VC 11647; 96 min.]

Apr. 8: **Conclusion and discussing of *Ararat***

*Recommended:*

- Elif Shafak, *The Bastard of Istanbul* (Viking Adult, 2007)

**Contrasting Images of a Conflict**

Apr. 13: **Representing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (I)**

- Video: *Israel: A Nation is Born* (USA, 1997) [VC 8302; 55 min.]

*Recommended:*

- Film: *Exodus* (USA, 1960)

Apr. 15: **Representing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (II)**

- Video: “*Al Nakba: The Palestinian Catastrophe 1948*” (Israel and Palestine, 1997) [VC10232; 56 min.]

*Recommended:*

- Video: *Promises* (Israel and Palestine, 2001) [VC 10498; 106 min.]

**“Covering” The Middle East**

Apr. 20: **U.S. Media & the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

- Video: *Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land* (USA, 2004) [DVD 12796; 80 min.]

Apr. 22: **Discussing *Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land***

- McAlister, chapt. 4

*Recommended:*

- *Promises* (VC 10498; 106 min.)

Apr. 27: **“Perceiving” Iran**

- McAlister, chapter 5
- Touraj Daryaee, *Go Tell the Spartans* (Blackboard)
- Hollywood film accused of insulting Iran (Blackboard)
- Another Image of Iran  
<http://video.google.co.uk/videoplay?docid=4776399388472138731&total=31&start=0&num=10&so=0&type=search&plindex=1>

*Recommended:*

- Hamid Nafici, “Mediating the Other: American Pop Culture Representation of Postrevolutionary Iran,” in Yahya Kamalipour (ed.), *The U.S. Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 73-90.
- Mary Ann Heiss, “Real Men Don’t Wear Pajamas: Anglo-American Perceptions of Mohamed Mossadegh and the Iranian Oil Nationalization Dispute,” in Mary Ann Heiss and Peter Hahn (eds.), *Empire and Revolution: The United States and the Third World Since 1945* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2001).

Apr. 29: **Media and Anti-Americanism**

- McAlister, chapter 6 and conclusion
- William A. Rugh, “Anti-Americanism on Arab Television: Some Outsider Observations,” *TBS Journal*, no. 15 (January-June 2006) (Blackboard)
- <http://cagle.msnbc.com/news/IranViewsAmerica/main.asp>
- Nicole Alam, *American Public Diplomacy Efforts in the Middle East: the Disconnect Between Messenger and Audience* (Blackboard)

*Recommended:*

- Video: *Al Jazeera: Voice of Arabia* [VC 10862; 52 min.]

- Ibrahim Al-Marashi, “The Dynamics of Iraq’s Media: Ethno-Sectarian Violence, Political Islam, Public Advocacy, and Globalization.” (Blackboard)

May 4: **Evaluations & Open Discussion about the Course**

*(Creative Projects are due)*