SO300 Contemporary visual cultures in/of the ‘Middle East': an interdisciplinary survey of (mis)representation

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Office Hours: Upon appointment

Course Description

This course explores the formation of the Middle East as a geographical region, an idea, and a discursive construct through visual culture.

The representation of the Middle East remains a crucial aspect of its study and understanding. The interdisciplinary field of study termed "visual culture" has come to form now possible ways of offering a critical understanding of the representation(s) of the Middle East through the theoretical insights related to analysing visual material.

Representations stem from various parties, as part of the legacy of a colonial power producing orientalist depictions that contribute to an ongoing process of othering or again by a wide range of parties with differing ways of seeing and showing to their communities, or to various others. This rich visual history of representation and misrepresentation, from within and without uncovers and contributes to the making of what we call the Middle East.

Throughout the course we will explore some of this rich archive of visual cultures produced in the region or elsewhere and addressed to different interlocutors and audiences: local, regional or foreign.

Visual cultures refer to the various forms of imaging that contribute to the formation of narratives about the Middle East and can include a wide array of forms and formats that we will explore across the semester: Iconic American films depicting the Muslim other, contemporary cinematic productions from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and elsewhere in the region that try to write a local history and think in the present, a rich world of visual narratives, graphic novels and comics, different practices of mapping from the position of power to the position of dissent, several forms of visual archiving (such as documentation of conflicts and events online, digital archiving of historic sites in war zones, or personal histories). These are some of the material we will analyse and debate in class.
Requirements

No prerequisites. Attendance is mandatory for all sessions. Students are expected to be punctual and prepared and to participate actively in the class discussions and activities. Students will have to write a mid-term and a final paper in addition to giving a 15/20 min presentation.
* Please, do not use cell phones, smart phones or similar electronic devices during seminars and screenings!

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Absences will significantly affect the grade for the course. Absences are registered in all classes. Students should notify the instructor if they are unable to attend class.

Please see the Student Handbook for college policies on absences due to serious illness or other important cause.

Assessment:

Writing Assignments

Mid-term paper: Max 2000 words. Students will be required to write a critical analysis of one specific visual cultural example of their choice that either comes from the Middle East or is about the Middle East.

Paper due 15 March [Grades to be delivered by 22 March]

Final paper: Max 3000 words. [Students will be required to write a critical analysis of one specific visual cultural genre or movement of their choice that either comes from the Middle East or is about the Middle East.]
Paper due 10 May for Seniors / 15 May for everyone else [Grades for seniors by 16 May / for others 31 May]

**Presentation:** During each session, students will give presentations of 15 to 20 min related to the weekly readings.

*The presentations can also serve as preparation for your papers.

**Class participation:** For class, students will be expected to prepare questions and discussion topics based on the readings or the weekly theme. You are encouraged to bring with you to class any examples of texts and visual material that you think is relevant to discuss together.

*Class participation constitutes 30% of the grade in this class.

**Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

All assignments and written work must be submitted electronically and on time. Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

**Grade Breakdown**

20% Mid-Term paper  
30% Final paper  
20% Presentation  
30% Participation

**Schedule**

Spring 2019 classes start on Monday, January 28 and run until Friday, May 17 with spring break planned from Monday, April 15 – Sunday, April 21. Completion week is from May 13-17. Students are required to be on campus during completion week.

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading: https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/
Required readings for each session will be determined in advance and circulated to the students by the instructors (expect around 30-40 pages of readings per week). Additional resources will also be made available for students.

Session 1: Introduction

I: Politics of Representation

Session 2: Histories & Approaches- The invention of the Orient: seeing, othering, depicting

Session 3: Representing the Middle Eastern/Muslim other
[Screening]

Session 4: Visual Narratives (1) - Writing the self in comics

II: Visual archiving and memory

Session 5: Moving Images (1) - Science fiction and imagined pasts
[Screening]

Session 6: Visual Archives (1) - Maps and digital archiving
[Guest Lecture]

Session 7: Moving Images (2) - Film & local politics
[Screening]

III: War, Violence, Journalism

Session 8: Violence and images
[Guest Lecture]
Session 9: Visual Narratives (2) - Comics as journalism

Session 10: Visual Archives (2) - War aesthetics and political archives

Session 11: Art and uprisings

**IV: Popular Culture and Fiction**

Session 12: Moving Images (3) - Egyptian film

[Screening]

Session 13: Masculinity, imagined histories, and honor on TV

Session 14: Closing notes

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**Class Resources**


Haugbolle, Sune. (2013) “Naji Al Ali and the Iconography of Arab Secularism” in Gruber & Haugbolle, chap.11.


“How to Save the Memories of the Egyptian Revolution?":


Mosireen: Archiving as a Tool of Resistance:


Rastegar, Kamran (2015). Surviving Images: Cinema, War, and Cultural Memory in the Middle East. IB Tauris, Chapter 6 'Wanting to See: Wartime Witnessing and Postwar Haunting in Lebanese Cinema”.


