Fall 2017  
Cultures and Contexts: Modern Arab Nations  
CORE-UA-500-020 (17543)  
19UP Room 102

Instructor:  Professor Maya Issam Kesrouany  
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Office hours: TTR 10 – 11:30

Inji Aflatoun (Egyptian artist, 1924 – 1989)  

Recitation Instructors:

Recitation Schedule:  
F 08:00am -- 09:15am (TISC, Room LC15) [17544]  
F 09:30am -- 10:45am (TISC, Room LC13) [17545]  
F 08:00am -- 09:15am (BOBS, Room LL151) [17546]  
F 09:30am -- 10:45am (BOBS, Room LL151) [17547]

Course Description

This course explores Arab adaptations of the European model of nation-state from the 19th century until today. We will ask: How did early Arab writers represent other nations in a language before the nation-state? Did they use distinct narrative conventions to create and imagine their nations? Did they imagine one nation or many, and how does the ‘modern’ and distinctly Western view of nation-state interact with local understandings of tribe, umma (Muslim people) and community? We will read some canonical texts on the tribe, the Muslim umma, and the Arab “nation”, supplementing the canonical texts with important reflections from various Arab countries that register the encounter with a virulent “modernization”, comment on revolution and democracy, the modern nation-state, and the role of the individual elite in authoring the new nation
of the 20th and 21st centuries. To frame our answers, we begin with theoretical texts that address the Western nation-state’s birth in relation both to the people’s imaginary and the colonial situation. From Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined nation’ to Edward Said’s ‘cultural imperialism’ to Homi Bhabha’s ‘narrated nation’, we assess the stakes involved in ‘narrating’ and imagining colonial, neocolonial, and postcolonial ‘nations.’ Rather than focusing on the discursive strategies of Othering that historically shaped the relationship between the Arab world and the West, this course examines how the ‘nation’ emerged from within the modern Middle East (19-21st centuries). Studying these specific versions of the nation urge us to question the universality of the nation-state model. We start with early 19th-century depictions of Napoleon’s arrival in Alexandria, move to early 20th-century autobiographical narratives of the Egyptian nation, then to later decades with the absent nation of Palestine, the imploding Lebanese state, the imperial experiment in Iraq, the fraught disequilibrium of the Syrian state and the relative stability of the Gulf nations. Through historical accounts, travel narratives, government documents, films, contemporary graffiti, personal memoirs, novels, poems, and plays, we will examine how diverse Arab peoples responded to changing worlds and how such responses continue to frame national, ideological and cultural conflicts in the Middle East today.

Though we will be reading Arabic texts in translation, we will ask how writers uniquely and strategically address the question of language as it relates to national and individual identity. We will go as far back as the early 19th century with the historiographical narrative of Napoleon’s arrival in Alexandria (Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti), before moving to Arab travel narratives (Rifa’a Rafi’ Al-Tahtawi), and then into the early 20th century with autobiographical narratives of the Egyptian nation (Tawfiq Hakim), then into later decades with the absent nation of Palestine (Mourid Barghouti), the imploding Lebanese state (Elias Khoury), the imperial experiment in Iraq (Sinan Antoon), and the fraught disequilibrium of the Syrian state (Adonis). Through relevant films, we will expand our comparative approach to the relationship between nation and artistic narration (A Separation by Asghar Farhadi (Iran, 2011), Wadjda by Haifaa al-Mansour (Saudi Arabia, 2013)).

“Cultures and Contexts” is intended to prepare you for life in a globalized world. Through critical engagements with primary cultural materials, it introduces you to ways humans come to understand themselves as members of social, religious, national, and regional collectives, and with the dynamics of cultural interaction and influence. As a part of the College Core Curriculum, it is designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major, preparing you for your future life as a thoughtful individual and active member of society.

**Themes:**

- The colonial and postcolonial context of modern Middle Eastern cultural production
- The imagined nation as a paradigm for individual and communal identity
- The cultural impact of the spread of nationalism
- Nation and Gender
- Resisting the State
- Dimensions of Exile

**Course requirements and grading**

**Attendance (10%)**

*You are expected to attend both the lectures and recitations sessions, and be actively involved in both.* I will share with you an attendance rubric. There will be frequent quizzes and
graded classwork that constitute a portion of your course grade. More than two absences will result in a one-letter grade reduction. If you absolutely have to miss class, please contact me and/or your recitation instructor beforehand with a valid excuse. Please turn off your cellphones and keep them away during class time.

- Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class.
- Lateness means arriving after we have taken the register at the beginning of class but within the first five minutes of class. Three instances of lateness will count as one absence.
- Attendance means attending prepared for work. Students who do not bring the class text, required handouts, or draft/homework assignments from previous classes or writing materials will be marked as absent. In the event that you miss a class, you are responsible for the material covered in that class, including assignments, announcements, handouts, etc., and for any preparation required for the following class.
- The course readings, discussion, and assignment sequences are structured in an integrated way. It is therefore very difficult to earn a respectable final grade without consistent attendance.

**News:** I would like you to select one Middle Eastern newspaper and one non-Middle Eastern newspaper to consult during the term. As long as the newspaper is headquartered in a Middle Eastern country, choose whichever one you like. As for the non-Middle Eastern paper, again the choice is up to the student, as long as the newspaper has a reporter or bureau based in the Middle East. Example:

http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond
http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/rss/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/default.stm

I urge you to share articles you find particularly interesting in class discussions, especially those relevant to course themes.

**Assignments**

**Three Critical Analysis Papers (25%)**
You will write three 4-page critical analysis papers throughout the semester, and those will be due at the beginning of the week. I will provide you with specific guidelines for each assignment (some will be broken up into shorter prompts) and you'll submit your work through NYU Classes to your recitation instructor. Late submissions are only allowed with a valid excuse; otherwise, they will result in a grade deduction.

**Reports on visits to a museum and neighborhood of your choice (5%)**
One of your assignments includes a 3-page report on a visit a museum and neighborhood of your choice. I will give you specific guidelines during the semester.

**Quizzes (5%)**
Throughout the semester, and often unannounced, reading quizzes will assess your engagement with the primary readings for the relevant week.

**Midterm Examination (20%)**
This will be administered in class, with both objective questions and essay prompts.
Final Examination (35%)
Make-ups will only permitted in extreme cases.

Deadlines: Late papers will be penalized. If you have an emergency, please contact your TA before the due date.

General Assignment Guidelines: All written assignments must be uploaded on Classes on specified dates. They must be double-spaced with one-inch margins all around (you are free to follow MLA or APA). Your last name and the page number must appear in the upper-right corner of every page. Part of your grade for written assignments will have to do with your documents’ presentation. Proofread and edit them for obvious typos, misspellings, and basic errors in grammar, usage and punctuation before submission. Refer to the How to cite your sources page on the NYU library website for the necessary information on the Chicago citation style and useful citation management tools.

Learning Outcomes:

• Identify the specific characteristics of Arab nationalist discourses in their historical development.
• Understand major Arab authors and Arabic texts and their significance in the development of Arab nationalisms.
• Differentiate among the various cultural politics, political discourses, and literary articulations in the Arab world.
• Analyze and contextualize the production and subversion of individual and communal identities in various forms of artistic and cultural expression.
• Improve analytical writing skills through the techniques of close reading and textual interpretation.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

It will be easy to find information about these texts online, and while there is a lot of helpful information out there, this course does not require you to consult secondary sources. Rather, our focus throughout the course will be on developing your critical and analytical reading skills and your own reactions to the texts as well as the organizing theme of the course. Plagiarism of any kind – copying someone else’s ideas without giving her or him credit, quoting, summarizing or paraphrasing without using appropriate referencing, and even incorporating one seemingly inconsequential idea from another source without giving it due credit – will result in you failing the assignment and potentially the course. If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me and we will work through that together. I am happy to work with you on multiple drafts and in office hours to help you cultivate your own response to the texts and themes at hand.

NYU expects its students to adhere to the highest possible standards of scholarship and academic conduct. Students should be aware that engaging in behaviors that violate the standards of academic integrity will be subject to review and may face the imposition of penalties in accordance with the procedures set out in the NYU policy on academic integrity.
Primary Material (Texts and Audio-Visuals):

Texts: (available at the bookstore)
Elias Khoury Little Mountain (Lebanon, 1977)

Films:
assign • Wadjda by Haifaa al-Mansour (Saudi Arabia, 2013) (NYU Bobst Avery Fisher Center Main Collection DVD 32183 BLU 1 videodisc (Blu-ray) and DVD 32113 1 videodisc (DVD).
• A Separation by Asghar Farhadi (Iran, 2011) (DVD 23878 P)
Recommended
• A Suspended Life by Jocelyne Saab (Lebanon, 1984) (http://ezproxy.library.nyu.edu:2287/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C2800270).
• Bashu by Bahrām Bayz̤ā’ı̄ Zarrı̄n (Iran, 1986) (DVD 46316) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5v2Z33tW1fU]
• The Circle by Jafar Panahi (2001) (DVD 819)
• Turtles can fly by Bahman Ghobadi (2005)
• Paradise Now by Hani Abu-Assad (Palestine, 2006) (DVD 4044)

Visuals:
Egyptian and Lebanese Graffiti
Arabic Comics

Music
Videos online

The primary sources (that is, modern English translations of works written in Arabic) will be accompanied by relevant historical and theoretical readings.

PDF Excerpts (on our course website):
Orientalism

Theories of Nationalism
Benedict Anderson "Introduction" from Imagine Communities
Fanon "On Violence" from The Wretched of the Earth
Homi Bhabha Introduction "Narrating the Nation" to Nation and Narration (1990)
Partha Chatterjee “Whose Imagined Community?” in The Nation and its Fragments
Donald E. Pease "National Narratives, Postnational Narration"

Arab Nationalism and Arabic Culture
Youssef M. Choeiri “Nationalisms in the Middle East: The Case of Pan-Arabism,” in A Companion to the History of the Middle East (Blackwell) pp. 291 - 312
Yasir Suleiman “The Nation Speaks: On the Poetics of Nationalist Literature” in Literature and Nation in the Middle East, edited by Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi
Edward Said, “Arabic Prose after 1948,” from Reflections on Exile
Blake Atwood “Introduction: Revolutionary Cinema and the Logic of Reform” pp. in Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic

Literary, Cultural and Political Texts
Classical
Robert Irwin, Nights & Horses & the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature, 148-193
Articles from The Encyclopaedia of Islam on “Dar al- Islam,” “Umma,” and “Milla”
From Ibn Battuta, Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354
From Ibn Fadlan, Journey to Russia: The Rus

Egyptian
Al-Jabarti Napoleon in Egypt and Napoleon’s “Declaration to the Egyptians”
Muhammad ‘Abduh, “The Theology of Unity” (online)
Al-Tahtawi Selections from An Imam in Paris (1834)
Tawfik al-Hakim from Bird from the East and Diary of a Country Prosecutor (1938)
Taha Husayn from The Sufferers: Stories and Polemics, Introduction and "Ailing Egypt"
Huda Shaarawi Harem Years
Fouad Najm – poetry from Tahrir

Iraqi
Sinan Antoun, from The Corpse Washer (Iraq)
Poetry selections online

Palestinian
Mahmoud Darwish Selected Poetry

Political
Prime Minister Rabin’s Speech to Knesset on Israeli Occupation of Palestinian Territories, 18 April 1994, from Akram Fouad Khater Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East, pp. 249 – 252.
“Documents About One of the Major Political Arguments Underlying the Lebanese Civil War, 1975” in Akram Fouad Khater Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East, pp. 232-251.

Schedule of Lectures and readings (schedule is subject to change – all changes will be announced on our website and by email. Please be sure to check the site and your email.)

Week 1. 9/5 and 9/7: Narratives of Nationalism

Tuesday, 9/5
Introduction to the Course
Towards a Working Definition of Nationalism (PPT Presentation)
“Timeline” in Gelvin 339-341
Maps of the Middle East

Thursday 9/7: Orientalism
Edward Said, Introduction to Orientalism (pp. 1-28)

Assignment: Watch Instructional Video on Theories of Nationalism (respond in recitation discussion)
Week 2. 9/12 and 9/14: Nationalism and its Arab Versions

Tuesday, 9/12: Cultural Narratives of the Nation
Benedict Anderson "Introduction" from Imagined Communities
Homi Bhabha Introduction "Narrating the Nation" to Nation and Narration (1990)

Assignment One: Critical Analysis Essay (3-4 pages) [due at the beginning of the week]

Thursday, 9/14: Arab Nationalism
"Dar al- Islam," “Umma,” and “Milla,” articles from The Encyclopaedia of Islam
Handout on Ibn Khaldun
Youssef M. Choheiri “Nationalisms in the Middle East: The Case of Pan-Arabism,” in A Companion to the History of the Middle East (Blackwell) pp. 291 - 312

Assignment: Watch instructional video on the Historical Background on the Rise of Arab Nationalisms (respond in recitation discussion)

Week 3. 9/19 and 9/21: Do Nations need Narratives or Narratives need Nations?

Tuesday, 9/19: Earlier Forms of Arab Nations and their Literary Expressions
Robert Irwin “Court Culture: 7th and 8th Centuries” from Nights & Horses & the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature, 148-193
Rihla excerpts:
From Ibn Battuta, Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354
From Ibn Fadlan, ”Journey to Russia: The Rus”

Thursday, 9/21: Literature and the Nation
“Art and National Identity: A Critic's Symposium” (online)
Salman Rushdie "Notes on Writing and the Nation"
Yasir Suleiman “The Nation Speaks: On the Poetics of Nationalist Literature” in Literature and Nation in the Middle East, edited by Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi

Week 4. 9/26 and 9/28: Defensive Modernity, Preemptive Measures and the Transformation of Empire

Tuesday, 9/26
Gelvin, Introduction to Part II; Chapter 5: “Defensive Developmentalism”
Al-Jabarti Excerpts from Napoleon in Egypt
Namik Kemal, an extract from the journal Hürriyet in Gelvin, pp. 173-174.

Thursday, 9/28:
Rifaa Rifaa‘at Al-Tahtawi, an extract from The Purification of Gold in Gelvin pp. 170-171 (extra extract online)
Muhammad ‘Abduh, “The Theology of Unity” in Gelvin, pp 171-173 (longer extract online)
Week 5. 10/3 and 10/5: The Spread of Nationalism

Tuesday, 10/3:

Partha Chatterjee “Whose Imagined Community?” In *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, pp. 3-13


Thursday, 10/5


Fanon “On Violence” (60 pages excerpts)

Changing definitions of “Arab”

Week 6. 10/10 and 10/12: Occupation in Egypt and Egyptian (Self-)Narratives of the New Nation

Tuesday, 10/10: Literary (Bourgeois) Narratives of the Nation

Gelvin, Chapter 9: “Secularism and Modernity” pp. 143 - 149

Qassim Amin “The Emancipation of Women in Egypt”, 1900 (online).

Tawfik el-Hakim from *Bird from the East* (1938)

Thursday, 10/12:

Tawfik el-Hakim from *Bird from the East* (1938) and *Diary of a Country Prosecutor*

Taha Husayn Excerpts from *The Sufferers: Stories and Polemics* (Published in Arabic in 1955), Translated by Mona El-Zayyat (1993)

Week 7. 10/17 and 10/19: Mass Politics: Nationalism, Communism, Islamism

Tuesday 10/17

Gelvin, Introduction to Part IV: “The Contemporary Era”

Sayyid Qutb, “The Characteristics of the Islamic Community and the Correct Method of Its Formation” and “A Muslim’s Nationality and Belief,” *Milestones*, available online

Speech Delivered by President Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser at Port Said in Gelvin.

Thursday 10/19 (literature)


Midterm on Tuesday, October 17
Week 8. 10/24 and 10/26: Gender and Nation

Tuesday, 10/24

Thursday, 10/26
Maya Mikdashi “How Not to Talk about Gender in the Middle East”

Art: Inji Aflatoun (website)

Week 9. 10/31: Syria and Modernist Cultural Narratives

Tuesday, 10/31
Adonis Selected Poems and Interviews
*Resolution of the Syrian General Congress at Damascus, 2 July 1919 in Gelvin, pp. 227-228.
Zakaria Tamer, Interview, “On the Side of the Syrian People”

Thursday, 11/2

Week 10. 11/7 and 11/9: Zionism, Palestinian Nationalism, and 1948

Tuesday, 11/7
Balfour Declaration in Gelvin, pp. 230
Gelvin, Chapter Eighteen: “Israel, the Arab States, and the Palestinians,” pp. 283 – 293
Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah* (pp. 1-70)

Thursday, 11/9
Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah* (pp. 1-70)
*Prime Minister Rabin’s Speech to Knesset on Israeli Occupation of Palestinian Territories, 18 April 1994, from Akram Fouad Khater *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East*

Instructional Videos on the Intifada – Assignment: Respond in Recitation Discussion

Week 11. 11/14 and 11/16: 1967 and the Lebanese Civil War

Tuesday, 11/14
Elias Khoury *Little Mountain*
“Timeline of Lebanon’s History” Al-Arabiya
http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2007/10/18/40501.html
Thursday, 11/16
Elias Khoury Little Mountain
“Documents About One of the Major Political Arguments Underlying the Lebanese Civil War, 1975” in Akram Fouad Khater Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East, 232-251.
Edward Said, "Arabic Prose after 1948," from Reflections on Exile

Recitation Lectures: Focus on responding to Visuals and Film – Fact, Data and Fiction
Suggested film: Jocelyn Saab’s A Suspended Life)

Week 12. 11/21: Oil and Sovereignty

Wadjda by Haifaa al-Mansour (Saudi Arabia, 2013) [trailer at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3koigluYOH0]
Gelvin, Chapter Sixteen: "Oil"
The D’Arcy Oil Concession in Gelvin.

Assignment: Film Screening and Critical Response

Thanksgiving Recess Wednesday, November 22 – Sunday November 26, 2017

Week 13. 11/28 and 11/30: Iraq and the Poetics of Nationhood from Saddam to US Occupation

Tuesday, 11/28
Muhammad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri’s (1889-1997) “Lullaby For The Hungry”
Poetry from Abdel Wahhab al-Bayyati and Nazik al-Malai’ka

Thursday, 11/30
Reidar Visser “Other People’s Maps” (2007)
Fadil al-Azzawi “The Last Iraq” (1987)
Dunya Mikhail “America”

Assignment: Critical Reading of Poetry and its Relationship to Political Movements

Week 14. 12/5 and 12/7: Iran's Revolution

Tuesday, 12/5:

Thursday, 12/7:
Film: A Separation by Asghar Farhadi (Iran, 2011)
Gelvin
Blake Atwood “Introduction: Revolutionary Cinema and the Logic of Reform” pp. in Reform Cinema in Iran: Film and Political Change in the Islamic Republic
Rustin Zarkar presentation
Assignment: Film Screening and Critical Response

Week 15. 12/12 and 12/14: Revisiting Orientalism: From September 11 to the Arab Uprisings

Tuesday, 12/12
Comics and Magazine articles
Magdy el-Shafee *Metro: A Story of Cairo* (excerpts online)
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khR0OC1jsuo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khR0OC1jsuo)
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdKwDPJ0SxU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdKwDPJ0SxU)
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZpt49008aM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZpt49008aM)

Images of Street Art (Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt)
From *Walls of Freedom* (online)

Paul Amar, *Why Mubarak is Out*, *Jadaliyya* 1 February 2011
Excerpt from Samar Yazbek's *A Woman in the Crossfire: Diaries of the Syrian Revolution*, Translated from the Arabic by Max Weiss

Thursday, 12/14: Nostalgic Returns and Interrupted Movements

Do we still need the nation?

Elizabeth Thompson, Chapter 11: "Wael Ghonim of Egypt: The Arab Spring and the Return of Universal Rights."
Donald E. Pease “National Narratives, Postnational Narration”

Instructional Video on the Arab Uprisings and the “end?” of the national narrative: Response Recitation Sessions: Reading Comics

Final Exams