

FOLK 307/617: Popular Culture and Politics in the Middle East

Wylie Hall, 111
Wednesday 1:00-3:30

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Course Description¹

This undergraduate/graduate seminar will examine the dynamics of popular culture and mass media in the Middle East, including the Arabic speaking nations, Israel, Turkey, Iran, and North Africa. Although performative and expressive arts, mass media, and popular culture have often been deemed as epiphenomenal in Middle Eastern Studies, this course

proceeds from the idea that popular culture and performance are in fact foundational means for negotiating power and resistance, social interaction, and identity. Through course readings, lectures, discussions, and various written assignments students will confront the many ways in which popular culture has had a formative and foundational impact on conceptions of self and other in the Middle East. Our readings will build upon fundamental anthropological understandings of social groups, of signs and categories, the linkages of structure and agency, and the interworkings of power in social life. Various ethnographic case studies will explore Arab pop culture, Israeli and Palestinian Hip-Hop, Egyptian Soap Operas, Turkish Pop music, Algerian masculinity, Iraqi comic books and the impact these media have on contemporary understandings of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and globalization in the Middle East.

Required Texts

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2005. *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Armbrust, Walter. 1996. *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹ The Professor reserves the right to modify, edit, or otherwise change this syllabus pertinent to the needs of the class at any time.



Hammond, Andrew. 2007. *Popular Culture in the Arab World: Arts, Politics, and the Media*. New York: The American University in Cairo Press.

Schade-Poulsen, Marc. 1999. *Men and Popular Music in Algeria: The Social Significance of Rai*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Stokes, Martin. 2011. *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Recommended Texts

Stein, Rebecca L., and Ted Swedenburg. 2005. *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Course Materials and Website

Formal course materials, readings, study guides, audio and video files, may be made available to the student via On Course web portal. This course website will be an integral means for participation in this class, turning in all assignments, accessing reading and listening assignments, lectures, and other on-line resources. It is essential that the student familiarize him/herself to the navigation of the site within the first week of class. This will better orient the student to the course structure as well as reveal any potential networking glitches with logins, rosters, etc. **All assignments and exams will be submitted through this web interface.**

In addition, we will be using various outside readings (book chapters, articles, stories, etc.), assembled into a resources folder, which will be made available to the student via the course website.

Course Requirements and Grading

This course is intended to be an advanced undergraduate/graduate seminar. Students are expected to maintain good standing; **do the reading, come to class, participate in class discussions**. Classes will be structured largely on seminar discussions of course readings and other critical thinking activities. The ultimate success of this course will be determined by your full participation in all class activities and discussions.

Final grades will be assessed based on the following:

1. **Attendance:** Students will be allowed 1 absence, after which **final grades** will be negatively impacted by 8% for each additional absence.
2. **Full Participation in All Course Activities (15%).** Basically this entails being a good citizen in class. Timely completion and preparation of all course activities. **Do the Reading!** Class attendance and contributions to group work are extremely important to the success of this class. Periodically, short quizzes and other creative writing assignments may be assigned to ensure that readings have been completed and that students are prepared for seminar.
3. **Take Home Midterm Examination (25%).** Expect a take-home midterm examination that requires the student to critically assess and synthesize course readings, discussions, movies, and other materials in a series of essay questions.
4. **Movie Response Papers (25%).** Over the course of the semester we will be viewing 4 feature films and documentaries on course topics and themes. Based on these 4 films the student will

complete a response activity. Details on the structure and format of these activities will be forthcoming.

5. **Take Home Final Examination (35%).** For the final exam expect a take home examination similar in format to the mid-term. Students will be given a series of essay questions to complete based on a comprehensive and cumulative understanding of core issues, themes, and concepts.

The grading scale for this course is the following:

A+	100-98%	B+	89-88%	C+	79-78%	etc. . .
A	97-94%	B	87-84%	C	77-74%	
A-	93-90%	B-	83-80%	C-	73-70%	

Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated in any way. Any work that is found to be involved with such misconduct may result in failing the course, and will be handled according to the policies set out in the Indiana University Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities and Conduct (<http://dsa.indiana.edu/Code/>).

Course Schedule

Date	Topics	Readings / Discussion	Listening / Films
8/22/12	1. Class introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pop Culture and the Politics of Representation Islamophobia in American Cinema: Consequences for thinking about Popular Culture in the Middle East <p>Movie:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People</i> 	
8/29/12	2. Defining Pop Culture: Significance and Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Storey, John. 2006. "What is Popular Culture?" Browne, Ray. 1972. "Popular Culture: Notes Toward a Definition." <p>Undergrads: Choose 1 of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nye, Russel B. 1971. "Notes for an Introduction to a Discussion of Popular Culture." Browne, Ray. 1984. "Popular Culture as the New Humanities" Fiske, Jonathan. 1989. "Understanding Popular Culture." <p>For each article come prepared to discuss/summarize the author's primary argument. While reading, identify passages that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Surprised or interested you, something that challenges a prior understanding. Piques your curiosity, something that you would like to know more about, or something that confuses you. Resonates with your own personal experiences, something that relates to your major area of study or interests. <p>*** <i>Reel Bad Arabs</i> Movie Response paper DUE Friday 8/31/12 by 5:00 pm</p>	

**9/5/12 3. Cultural
Politics in the
Arab World
Today**

- Hammond, Andrew. 2007. *Popular Culture in the Arab World*. Chapters: "Culture and Politics," "Arab Consumer Culture," "Arab Cinema," "From Umm Kulthum to Arabpop."

Study Questions:

- Given the enormous demographic, linguistic, religious, political, and cultural diversity of the area we call the Middle East, in what ways can we speak of this as a coherent/bounded region of the world? In what areas can we speak of the "Middle East?" List historical examples of the rise and fall of Arabism, When, why, and in what ways did this region conceive of itself as united?
- What happened following World War 1 and World War 2 respectively in the formation of the modern Middle East? List important events and the consequences for social and cultural development in the region.
- What is the importance of the Arabic language in discussions of cultural coherence in the Middle East?

Popular Culture succeeds where politics fail:

- The author states that, "Arab nationalism as a political ideology has been a failure." However, "on a cultural level, Arab unity has become a remarkably pervasive reality." Why might this be so? What are some of his examples of how Arab unity has been achieved through popular culture? And what have been the consequences for this process?

Globalization:

- What are the dominant fears of globalization in the Arab world? Why would Arab state regimes, local municipalities, towns, or even families, harbor severe resentment for the spread of American popular culture? Are these fears warranted? Cite examples from the text stating why or why not this might be so.
- Do you agree with the following statement? Why or why not? "Globalization could be a cover for the interests of the big countries, and the developing ones will themselves be forced to accept conditions that don't agree with their own interests. Through globalization the big countries will fix the rules of the game and developing countries will be left to drown in its currents."
- In the author's discussion of high versus low culture he gives several examples of how and why Arab state regimes would attempt to influence the definition of what is highbrow and lowbrow cultural products. For what purpose would an Arab government attempt to control the agenda of high culture? What are the consequences at stake in this discussion?
- Give examples of both high and low culture in the Arab world. What are the distinguishing aesthetic characteristics between the two? How are issues of class, lineage, and gender articulated in

this discussion?

- What are the dynamics of youth culture in the Arab world? Why is this such a pertinent issue in terms of politics, economics, culture, religion, and society? What are the persistent fears associated with youth culture? What has been the dominant reaction by state regimes in the face of a globalizing youth culture?
- How have dominant Arab regimes attempted to actively wage culture wars? Why would Arab state governments invest so much time and resources into discussions of popular culture? What are some examples of how Arab regimes have attempted to re-signify pop culture in the Arab world?
- How has the Gulf War in 1991 and the second Gulf War in 2003 had a transformative impact on conceptions of Arab nationalism? Discuss how these two events have influenced popular conceptions of Arab society and culture. In addition, factor in the pervasive Arab-Israeli conflict. In what ways has the Arab-Israeli conflict both enabled and prohibited the expansion of Arab nationalist thought?
- What effect did September 11 have on Arab regional politics and culture? In terms of political resources and popular sentiment, in what ways has September 11 changed the ways in which the Arab world conceptualizes itself?

Listening:

- Arab Music Playlist

9/12/12 4. Rai and Masculinity in Algeria

- Schade-Poulsen, Mark. 1999. *Men and Popular Music in Algeria*. Chapters 1-3

Graduates also read:

- Langlois, Tony. 1996. "The Local and the Global in North African Popular Music."

Study Questions:

- What is the author's initial approach to studying Algerian Music and Society?
- What are some of the fundamental social, political, and demographic changes that have emerged in Algeria since 1962? What might be the consequences of these changes for popular culture?
- What was the author's approach to his fieldwork? What were some of the logistical challenges he faced in studying this popular music in Algeria? And what were some of his tactics for overcoming these obstacles?
- The author provides a basic list of terms necessary to understanding Rai music. What is the significance of these terms for understanding how popular music is interpreted by its

audiences?

- This musical phenomenon coincided with the death of the vinyl record in Algeria and the rise of the cassette tape. What is the importance of this new recording technology in the development of Rai music?
- Describe the various ways in which Rai music has been represented throughout its development. Specifically, how was it that Rai moved from a rural population of impoverished single men, psychologically disturbed, and urbanized peasants to a celebrated national art form?
- What are some of the fundamental differences in the ways in which Rai has been conceptualized in the Western and local media? What are the consequences for these different interpretations of Rai music?
- Discuss the social relationships embedded in a typical Rai performance. Who are the main players? And how do they interact with one another in performance?
- What are the aesthetic and performative tactics through which artists attempt to re-create the social aspects of live performance in the production of their recordings?

Listening:

- Rai Playlist

Movie:

- *100% Arabica*

9/19/12 5. Rai and Masculinity in Algeria

- Schade-Poulsen, Mark. 1999. *Men and Popular Music in Algeria*. Chapters 6-7
- *100% Arabica*: Discussion

Undergrads: Choose 1 of the following:

- Bennet, Tony. 1986. "Introduction: Popular Culture and the Turn to Gramsci"
- Hall, Stuart. 1986. "Popular Culture and the State."

Study Questions:

- Discuss the ways music facilitates the interaction between men and women in the so-called spheres of pleasure outlined by the author? For what purposes do these spheres of pleasure exist?
- How is Rai interpreted within the discourse of the family and Islam? How is the music mapped onto discourses of the pure and impure, sacred and profane? What are the consequences for this in terms of family relations, gender construction, and the interpretation of Rai within Algerian society?
- How is it that Rai is most associated with weddings and cabarets,

seemingly conflicting contexts? How are gender dynamics, familial relations, and discourses of the pure and impure negotiated in these differing contexts?

- What are the distinguishing characteristics between “clean” and “dirty” Rai?
- What are some of the strategies the author uses to show the similarities between the experiences of his informants and the content of the music?
- How does Rai negotiate the conflicting discourses of home life and street life? In what ways are familial relations negotiated in the lyrics of the songs?
- This book largely discusses the impact of drastic demographic and sociological changes affecting Algerian society refracted through the practices of music making. In the process the author discusses the ways in which the music reflects deep-seated anxieties faced by young men attempting to make their way in the world. What are the consequences of these deep sociological changes on mainstream conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity? What do we learn about the nature of masculinity among Algerian youth cultures by studying Rai? How are women portrayed throughout this narrative? Does the author’s approach to studying male and female relationships reveal anything about gender relations in Algeria?
- What are the various ways in which women are conceptualized both among the Algerian youth interviewed in this text but also within the repertory of songs discussed? What are the consequences for these types of stereotypical interpretations of women and femininity? What are the limits of such an analysis?

Movie:

- *100% Arabica*

9/26/12 6. Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt

- Armbrust, Walter. 1996. *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt*. Chapters 1, 2, 4.

Graduates also read:

- Herrera, Linda 2010. “Young Egyptians’ Quest for Jobs and Justice.”

Chapter 1 and 2 Study Questions:

1. What are some of the reasons why popular culture has not been adequately studied in the Egyptian context?
2. In his analysis of the study of popular culture, the Armbrust argues that in order to understand how Egyptians deploy their common stock of imagery and personalities in popular culture, we must approach it the same way past scholars have studied medieval texts – relating them (texts) to each other, comparing them with other textual traditions, juxtaposing them, classifying them rather

than pursuing an anthropological approach to popular culture based on ethnographic research data, experiencing the culture through a prolonged in-depth interaction with informants, picking up the language in the field, and placing this data within a theoretical framework. Discuss the methodological consequences of such an approach. What are the pros and cons of this textual approach? What types of data would be recovered in each of these scenarios?

3. How has the development of popular culture in the Arabic speaking world differed from that of Europe? How have the twin processes of nationalism and modernism influenced this process?
4. In his analysis of the Egyptian soap opera, *The White Flag*, the author attempts to show how this widespread and extremely popular television program reflected much larger social and cultural issues facing Egyptian society. What are some of these issues? And how do the characters in the soap opera embody those issues in their various performances?
5. What is the importance of language in discussing the social and cultural impact of *The White Flag* on mainstream Egyptian society? How does the varying usages of language influence the ways in which the characters are interpreted by the audience?
6. What are some of the cultural markers used to identify the characters in this show as good or evil? How is this mapped onto the discourses of modernism and nationalism?
7. Following the show's dramatic climax, what was the show's social and political message? How did people interpret this dramatic message?
8. Ultimately what problems did *The White Flag* reveal about Egyptian society and the pressures of modernism and nationalism?

Chapter 4 Study Questions:

- How is the life of Mohammad Abdal Wahab important in the discussion of modernism in Egypt? In what ways did his life and career mirror the rise of modernism in Egypt?
- Listen to the recording of one of Abdal Wahab's most famous compositions. What elements of Egyptian modernism do you observe in the music? Speculate why he was so closely associated with this cultural movement.
- What effect did popular magazines have on the re-conceptualization of Egyptian society in the 1930s? Give examples of how these magazines attempted to bridge the gaps between Egyptian authenticity and Western modernity.

*** 100% Arabica Movie Response paper DUE Friday 9/28/12 by 5:00 pm

10/3/12 7. Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt

- Armbrust, Walter. 1996. *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt*. Chapters 5, 6, 7.

Graduates also read:

- Colla, Elliot. 2012. "The Poetry of Revolt."
- Lindsey, Ursula. 2012. "Revolution and Counterrevolution in the Egyptian Media."

Chapter 5 and 6 Study Questions:

- In the beginning of chapter 5 the author compares and contrasts two movies from the 1930s, the *White Rose and Resolution*, each with differing portrayals of the middle class and colloquial/vernacular lifestyles. Explain how each of these films portray the developing middle-class. How are issues of education, language, folklore, and authenticity represented in the characters of these movies?
- Why is the Egyptian movie *Resolution* often considered to be one of the best films of the pre-revolution era? How was this film unusual compared to its contemporaries? Discuss the elements of realism that are associated with this film.
- Egyptian cinema changed considerably in the 1960s. What are some of the changes that occurred? And what was largely responsible for these changes?
- Discuss the plot to the Egyptian movie, *Pay Attention to Zuzu*. How is this movie seen as a logical extension of the earlier films in terms of abdicating for a new Egyptian modernity?
- How are issues of gender, religion, and education articulated within the discourse of modernity in this movie?
- In the climax to this movie the lead character explains that she and everyone else suffers from an acute form of schizophrenia, saying, "we are all children of an environment that the world has left behind. And every time we tried to rise, it weighs us back down to earth. We don't know whether to hate ourselves or the world." Explain the significance of this statement in relation to our previous discussions in terms of the social consequences of modernity. How do the producers of this movie use this scene as an opportunity for advocating for a specific Egyptian modernity?
- What is the importance of education in each of these three movies? What is the role of education in the discourses of modernity?

Chapter 7 Study Questions:

- How was school of troublemakers a radical departure from the modernist formula prevalent in mass media from the 1930s to the 1970s?
- What do all of the songs discussed in this chapter have in common? From this, how can we define what is vulgar in Egyptian

		<p>society?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If Mohammad Abdel Wahab and Ahmed Adawiya were each incredibly popular, inspired a new musical fusions and innovations, and both sold very well in the public marketplace, why is it that Adawiya was largely ignored by the mainstream media? What are the differences between these two artists?• In the author's interview with Ahmed Adawiya's songwriter, we learn an interesting perspective on vulgarity in Egyptian music. How does he define what is vulgar? How does this turn the discourse of official culture on its head?• Discuss the importance of the poster, "100 years of enlightenment." What are some of the underlying themes of this poster? And how are they represented in the various figures depicted? What has been the overall impact of this kind of modernist propaganda? For whom it is directed? And what does this say about the limitations of the state in propagating modernist ideology?• In terms of the discourses of modernity, how has Egyptian cinema changed since the 1970s? In relation to the remake of the 1942 film, <i>If I Were Rich</i>, what are the primary changes that are made to the plot line and character structure? And how do these changes reflect a larger transformation of Egyptian cinema after 1970? <p>Listen:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arab Music Playlist
10/10/12	8. The Politics of Television in Egypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hammond, Andrew. 2007. <i>Popular Culture in the Arab World</i>. "Television: From Media Mobilization to Satellite Revolution"• Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2005. <i>Dramas of Nationhood</i>. Chapters 1-4. <p>Study Questions Forthcoming:</p>
10/17/12	9. The Politics of Television in Egypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2005. <i>Dramas of Nationhood</i>. Chapters 5-8 <p>Study Questions Forthcoming:</p>
10/24/12	10. Arab Comics	<p>Douglas and Malti-Douglas. 1994. <i>Arab Comic Strips</i>. Chapters 1-4.</p> <p>Study Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The author takes an interesting stand on the ever-present nature of censorship in the Arab world with regard to Arab comic strips. What is this stance? What has been the effect of entrenched structures of censorship in the Arab world? How is it then that Arab comic strips can be, as the author suggests, a double-edged sword?• List the ways in which Western comic strips, and comic strip

		<p>characters, have been adopted and adapted into indigenous Arab cultural frames.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss the relevance of “The Adventures of Ramses in Paris” for thinking through contemporary discourses of modernity in Egypt. What are the themes of this comic strip? What commentary does it make?• Explain the historical strategies that were employed in the Egyptian biography of President Jamal Abd Al-Nasser. How did the authors of this comic adapt the techniques of comic strip writing to better reflect and communicate both historical and biographical narratives?• How might we interpret the Egyptian biography of Pres. Jamaal Abd Al-Nasser in terms of Egyptian politics and culture? What are its underlying ideological messages?
10/31/12	11. SEM Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No Formal Class Meeting• Take Home Midterm Exam <p>Mid-Term Exam DUE Friday 11/2/12 5:00 pm</p>
11/7/12	12. Popular Culture in Israel / Palestine	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stein and Swedenburg. 2005. “Popular Culture, Relational History, and the Question of Power in the Palestine and Israel.”• McDonald, David. 2013. <i>My Voice is My Weapon</i>. Chapters 8-9. <p>Study Questions Stein and Swedenburg:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the two dominant paradigms for understanding history and politics in Palestine and Israel? What are the consequences of these two paradigms? And what do the authors propose as an alternative?• Why has popular culture been marginalized in the study of Palestine and Israel?• Why is the study of popular culture deemed essential to understanding politics and power in the Middle East?• Discuss the limitations of both the National and Marxist political Economy paradigms. What do they share in their understanding of popular culture, politics, and power?• Within the Palestinian context, where severe occupation, violence, and humanitarian struggles are an everyday reality, is it frivolous or perhaps irresponsible to devote academic study to popular culture? Why or Why not?• What developments did the Birmingham School bring to the discussion of popular culture, power, and politics? <p>Study Questions McDonald:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are some of the performative ways in which DAM attempts to engage both Israeli Jewish and Palestinian audiences? Describe how each of these modalities are articulated in a DAM

performance.

- How do Palestinian-Israelis ('48s) differ from Palestinians in exile and under occupation? What has been their role in the nationalist movement since 1948?
- Explain the Dual Society Paradigm and the move towards relational histories and relational identities.
- What effect did the events of October 2000 have on DAM? How did they respond?
- How does DAM's work articulate with the discourse of terrorism? What have they done to reconfigure the debate on terrorism?
- In the DAM performance in Ramallah the group was faced with a crowd unaccustomed to Hip-Hop. What did the artists do to win over the crowd? How did they use Hip-Hop to change both the cultural and political anxieties present in the audience?
- What is the significance of the ID card in DAM's Ramallah performance?

Movie:

- *Slingshot Hip-Hop*

11/14/12 13. Popular Culture in Israel / Palestine

- Swedenburg, Ted. 2000. "Sa'ida Sultan/Danna International: Transgender Pop and the Polysemiotics of Sex, Nation, and Ethnicity on the Israeli-Egyptian Border."
- Horowitz, Amy. 2005. "Dueling Narrative: Zehava Ben Sings Umm Kulthum"
- Colla, Elliot. 2005. "Sentimentality and Redemption: The Rhetoric of Egyptian Pop Culture Intifada Solidarity."

Study Questions Swedenburg:

- The author begins this chapter with a critique of an editorial published in the Egyptian press regarding the Israeli pop star Dana international. In his critique of this editorial, the author outlines several social and cultural anxieties commonly expressed in the Egyptian media. What are these social and cultural anxieties? To whom are they targeted? And what do they reveal about Egyptian society?
- What is commonly asserted to be the solution to these anxieties?
- How does this analysis compare with Walter Armbrust's description of Egyptian popular culture?
- What were some of the musical, social, and cultural elements that made it so appealing and desirable to Egyptian youth?
- What does this song reveal about mainstream Egyptian perceptions of homosexuality, transsexuality, and politics more generally?
- How did the interpretation of Dana international differ from Egyptian interpretation? In what ways was she controversial?

		<p>Israeli national culture?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• On page 108 the author speculates as to the social and cultural consequences of this music in Egypt. He states, “perhaps then,[this music opens] potential spaces for the emergence of movements and autonomous activity... created through the consumption of Danna.” Explain this statement, and the authors concluding consequences of listening to this music.• Explain the concept of local transit nationalism. How does this influence the listening practices of Dana international? <p>Movie:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Arab Labor</i>
11/21/12	14. Thanksgiving Break	No Formal Class Meeting
11/28/12	15. Cultural Intimacy and Turkish Popular Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stokes, Martin. 2010. <i>The Republic of Love</i>. Chapters 1-3. <p>Listening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turkish Pop Music Playlist <p>Study Questions Forthcoming:</p> <p>*** <i>Slingshot Hip-Hop</i> Movie Response paper DUE Friday 11/30/12 by 5:00</p>
12/5/12	16. Cultural Intimacy and Turkish Popular Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stokes, Martin. 2010. <i>The Republic of Love</i>. Chapters 4-6. <p>Listening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turkish Pop Music Playlist <p>Study Questions Forthcoming:</p> <p>*** <i>Arab Labor</i> Movie Response paper DUE Friday 12/7/12 by 5:00 pm</p>
Take Home Final Exam Due 12/12/2012 to On Course by 7:00 pm		