JIMES 373 Freedom in the Middle East

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Office Hours: 1-2 T/Th

Course Description

What is the relationship between language and freedom? This course studies North African, Middle Eastern, and Arab-American novels, poetry, and memoirs. Although our readings begin and end with two quintessential states of non-freedom -- prison and slavery, respectively -- we will allow our authors to shift the locus of liberty from subjects (i.e., individuals) to their mode of expression: language. Freedom will be assessed through questions of language choice, interpretation, orality, storytelling, and testifying. Together, we will develop critical tools to revisit the topic of freedom in the Middle East, as well as concepts like Islam, gender, and political repression, and analyze their place in our own cultural assumptions and beliefs.

The primary mode of evaluation for undergraduates will be two short papers, written over the course of the semester, and a longer paper in lieu of a final. Works in this class were originally published in Arabic, Hebrew, Spanish, and French. Students with requisite language proficiency are welcome to read the original alongside the class translation.

Learning Outcomes

This class will encourage students to develop the following skill areas, which we will work towards over the course of the semester:

- Summarize and critically evaluate works of literature using appropriate criteria
- Analyze the stylistic and thematic aspects of literary texts in class discussion, in preparation for writing papers
- Understand, critically evaluate, and compare the concepts of freedom that authors develop, perform, and/or reject in their works
- Write thoughtful essays that develop original, critical arguments supported by appropriate forms of evidence

Required Texts (available at the Campus Bookstore):

Elias Khoury, *Gate of the Sun*
Laila Lalami, *The Moor’s Account*
Anton Shammas, *Arabesques*
Sinan Antoon, *I’jaam*
Evaluation

In-class participation (25%)

You will be evaluated on two key areas: the intellectual merit of your contributions to class discussions and the overall “good sportsmanship” you demonstrate. Contribute thoughtfully, respectfully, and consistently to class discussion, and you will excel in this area.

Students who for any reason feel that they are unable or unwilling to meet these discussion criteria should contact the instructor as early as possible in the semester to arrange for alternative participation strategies.

Short Papers (20% each)

4-5 pages each; topics distributed during the semester.
Students who wish to design their own topics must do so in consultation with the instructor and have a finalized topic (in writing and approved by the instructor) no less than one week before the paper deadline.
Papers to be submitted on Canvas in Word format by 5pm on the deadline. Please note Canvas will close the assignment at 5pm.

Final Paper (35%)

8-10 pages; topics distributed at the end of the semester.
Students who wish to design their own topics must do so in consultation with the instructor and have a finalized topic (in writing and approved by the instructor) by December 5th.
Paper to be submitted on Canvas in Word format by 5pm on December 12th. Please note Canvas will close the assignment at 5pm.

Grading Scale (based on percentages):

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-93</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>92-90</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>86-83</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>82-80</td>
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<td>C+</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>62-60</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
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Please note that the rounding up or down of percentage points will take place at the discretion of the instructor.

Graduate Students

Students taking the course for graduate credit will:
- Give a 20-30 minute presentation (ideally on a topic relevant to the student's research) that offers background and context, a coherent reading of the text(s) assigned for class that day, and raise several avenues for discussion. Students will sign up for presentations in the first week of class. The presentation should be treated as practice for conferences; students who run a class discussion instead of presenting a formal reading of the assigned material will not do well on this assignment.
- Write one 8-10 page paper (the student will choose which of the short papers to submit) and a 20-25 page final paper (covering at least one class reading, at least one theoretical text chosen in consultation with the instructor, at least one novel that is not on our syllabus). All graduate students will design the topic of their final papers.
- Grading distribution for grad students: participation (25%), presentation (10%), short paper (25%), final paper (40%)

Disabilities and Special Needs

Students who feel they may require academic accommodations in order to meet the requirements of this course should ensure that they are registered with the Cornerstone Center and inform the instructor.

Schedule

This schedule outlines the major topics we will study and will be modified, with notification, as necessary. **Instructions for reading this schedule: the reading that appears next to a date is due in-class that day. For example: on October 31st, you should come to class having read the materials listed next to October 31st.**

**Unit 1: Interpretation**

**Week 1**

August 27     Introductions

August 29     In-class: watch and discuss *Ibn al-‘Am*

*Recommended* -- watch at home before class

**Week 2: Prison Writing**

Sept. 3       *I‘jaam* 1-50

Sept. 5       Finish *I‘jaam*
Week 3: Islam, the War on Terror, Interpretation

Sept. 10
Saba Mahmood, “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire”
Nasr Abu Zayd, *Voice of an Exile* ix-16
Mohammed Salama, “Reclaiming Qur’anic Exegesis”

Sept. 12
Nasr Abu Zayd, *Voice of an Exile* 17-35, 153-180 and “The Dilemma of The Literary Approach to the Qur’an”

Week 4

Sept. 17
Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* 1-33, 128-160
Available as an e-book at Olin Library -- note the British spelling to facilitate your search
Charles Hirschkind, “Egypt at the Exhibition” (review of *Colonising Egypt*)

Sept. 19
Faris al-Shidyaq, *Leg Over Leg*
Kamran Rastegar, “On Nothing and Everything”
Optional: Rebecca C. Johnson, “Foreword”

Week 5

Sept. 24
Discussion of topics and expectations for Paper 1

Unit 2: Language Politics

Sept. 26
Gil Hochberg, “Bringing Hebrew Back to its (Semitic) Place” in *In Spite of Partition* (Chapter 3); available as e-book at Olin Library.

Week 6: Israel/Palestine

October 1
No class: Paper 1 due

October 3
*Arabesques* through Part 4 (stop at 5)
Week 7: Israel/Palestine

October 8  *Arabesques* Parts 5-7
Yael Feldman, “Postcolonial Memory, Postmodern Intertextuality”

October 10  Conclude *Arabesques*

Week 8: Fall Break

October 15  **No class**

October 17  **No class**

Week 9: The Maghreb

October 22  Nabile Farès, *Hearing Your Story* vii-35, 145-165
Peter Thompson, “Nabile Farès: Translation and Alterity”
*NB: look up the Madrid Accords and the Sahrawi people*

October 24  *Hearing Your Story* 36-63
Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 1-33
W.B. Yeats, “Literature and the Living Voice”

Week 10: Paper 2

October 29  Writing: in-class peer review

October 31  **Paper 2 due**

Week 11:

Nov. 5  *Gate of the Sun* up to 80
M.M. Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” available via Olin Library (see Canvas for link)

Nov. 7  *Gate of the Sun* up to 163

Week 12:
Nov. 12  
*Gate of the Sun* up to 231
Amos Goldberg, “Narrative, Testimony, and Trauma”

Nov. 14  
No class

Week 13:

Nov. 19  
Laila Lalami, *The Moor’s Account* Chapters 1-5
Laila Lalami, “So To Speak”
Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents*

Optional: David Williams, “This Hyphen Called My Spinal Cord: Arab-American Fiction at the Beginning of the 21st Century”

Nov. 21  
*The Moor’s Account* Chapters 6-9
Yogita Goyal, TBD

Week 14: Thanksgiving Break

No classes held this week -- finish *The Moor’s Account*

Week 15:

Dec. 3  
*The Moor’s Account*

Dec. 5  
Conclusions

**Final papers due December 12th by 5pm on Canvas**

**Class Policies**

**Academic Integrity**

All students will be expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and ethical conduct. Plagiarism is defined as “using the ideas of writings of another as one’s own.” In all of your work for this class, ensure that you appropriately and fully acknowledge the ideas and contributions of others.
Students are asked to review and adhere to the policies outlined at the following website: http://wustl.edu/policies/undergraduate-academic-integrity.html. Should you have any questions regarding this policy, please contact the instructor to discuss your concerns.

**Conduct and Participation**

To prepare for class discussions, please read the assigned readings closely and critically. You might consider the following questions when preparing your reading assignments:

For literary texts:
- What genre are we dealing with? How can you describe the author’s style (e.g., realistic, sentimental, fantastical, etc.) and tone (e.g., sarcastic, mournful, suspenseful, etc.)?
- What is the plot? Do we have all the information we need, or is something withheld?
- Whose voice tells the story (e.g., a character, a narrator, multiple characters)? How do you think the story would change if it were told from another perspective?

For non-literary texts:
- What is the author’s main point? How does he/she argue for this point?
- What kinds of evidence does he/she rely on?
- Do you find it convincing, and why/why not?
- Where was the text published, and what do you know about about this venue?

Please give your full attention to class activities and turn off your phones (to silent, not vibrate) and wireless connections. If you need to respond to an emergency in class time, please leave the room. Violations of this policy will lead to an all-class ban on laptop usage; please consider your fellow students before you check your email in-class.

Please refrain from eating in class.

In your email communication with me, please allow for a reasonable response time (i.e., 24 hours during the week; 48 hours on weekends). Note that I am generally (but not always) checking my mail during working hours, and I do not access email via smartphone. 3am emails are unlikely to receive an immediate response. If you haven’t heard from me in 48 hours, please feel free to resend your email.

To ensure an open and trusting classroom environment for all members of the course, any voice or video recording of class discussions without the written permission of the professor and the consent of the class is strictly forbidden.