

Boston College
Department of Slavic and Eastern Languages
Language, Memory, and Identity in the Middle East
SL147/SC148

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Course Description:

This course explores the role of language and the way in which Middle Eastern writers have used language in the construction of national and cultural identities. We will examine some of the ways in which languages, dialects, and history—remembered, restored, fabricated—have been used in the process of myth building and in the development of collective memories and corporate identities during the late 19th, and 20th century Middle East. We will also try to shed some light on alternative and revisionist views that have challenged earlier accounts and accepted narratives of modern Middle East history.

During the course of this semester, we will examine the roles played by Modern Standard Arabic in the elaboration of Arab nationalism, and Modern Hebrew in the elaboration of Zionism. We will also parse and examine the importance of pre-modern national “churches,” local dialects and liturgical languages in the conceptualization of local national identities and territorial nationalisms rivaling and reconsidering both Zionism and Arabism’s monistic impulses. In particular, we will examine the ideas of Greater Syria, the Egyptian Pharaonic idea, Lebanonism, Phoenicianism, Mediterraneanism, Mesopotamianism, and the Canaanite (or Young Hebrews) movement in Israel.

Course Requirements and Organization:

This course will be divided into 14 weekly topics, each consisting of 2 weekly lectures and one weekly discussion session during which both the lectures and the related reading assignments will be discussed. Therefore,

- 1- **regular attendance**, active participation in class discussions, keeping up with reading assignments, and regular visits to office hours will account for 15% of your total grade. Participation is multiform, and you can earn that portion of your grade in many different ways. To fulfill this part of the grade, you are required to hand in a question about the readings assigned for each class—dealing with an issue you found puzzling, and

- demonstrating that you have done the readings and are familiar with the arguments made in them. Questions will receive a double-mark (√√), a simple mark (√), or nothing (if incoherent or not handed in.) Please remember that you are required to pay me *at least* three office visits during the semester; make sure they don't all take place during the last week of instruction.
- 2- **blog entries**, will account for another 15% of the final grade. I have created a course blog, and most of you should have already received invitations to sign up for the group (if you haven't, expect to receive one soon.) You are responsible for blogging at least five times per semester, posting your reactions to news stories you might find relevant to course material and lectures. You should provide a link to the story you're blogging, and your reactions should be written in the first person; curious critical original non-traditional interpretive thinking is strongly encouraged. Ideally, *everyone* in the class should react and comment on a classmate's given post. But it is understandable that this is not always possible with a class the size of ours. I don't expect each post to have a 30+ comments thread. But, obviously, those who provide a minimum of 5 posts during the course of the semester, thoughtfully field and manage the comments and questions generated by their posts, and react to others' blog entries—on a **regular basis** and **not during the last week of class**—will be the ones who will earn the full 15% of this part of the grade.
 - 3- **two essay assignments** (up to 2000-words each), each accounting for 10% of the final grade. The essays **can** be book reviews, reaction papers, lecture and/or course readings critique, or a developed version of a blog-entry synthesizing the various reactions it initially generated. Due dates are February 22, and March 28, 2008.)
 - 4- **An oral presentation** (form a list of topics I will be providing), and a **research paper** based on your presentation (to be completed in two stages; outline and bibliography due on April 4th, then a ten-page paper due on May 2nd, 2008.) This will account for 30% of the course grade. (If you would rather come up with your own paper topic, you will need to discuss it with me prior to your first submission.
 - 5- **Four unannounced quizzes** will count towards 20% of the course grade.

General Comments/Reminders:

- 1- You are encouraged to suggest your own Paper topics and develop your own quiz questions, all of which will be taken into consideration. If I use quiz questions that you have suggested, you will earn bonus-credit for them.

- 2- You are required to pay me *at least* three office visits during the semester; “during the semester” is a key-phrase. Please make sure your visits don’t all take place during the last week of instruction.
- 3- All quizzes are cumulative. Missed work will count as zero; no make-ups will be given. Papers must be given on time, and must be turned in on their due dates, before the beginning of class, to receive full credit (so, missing class in order to complete your work will not help.) Late work will be reduced by one letter-grade for each day after the deadline.
- 4- **If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Boston College and you require special accommodations in this class, you should speak to me immediately.**
- 5- **Finally, please note that I am very stringent concerning student honesty issues, as described in the [Boston College policy on Academic Integrity](#). Please read the University's Policy and Procedures on the topic, as suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the office of the Dean of A&S, and will be investigated by the Academic Integrity Committee.**

Reading Materials:

Basic Texts:

Adeed Dawisha, *Arab nationalism in the Twentieth Century*
James Diamond, *Homeland or Holy Land: the Canaanite Critique of Israel*
Jankowski and Gershoni, Ed., *rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*
John Joseph, *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious*
Ephraim Karsh, *Rethinking the Middle East*
Ron Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism*
Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity*
Ronald Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*

Additional Texts and Recommended Print Media, Periodicals, Reference Works, Internet Sources, and other Additional Readings:

William Downes: *Language and Society*.: *Language and Society*.
Fishman, Joshua: *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity*
Tove Skutnabb-Kangas: *Linguistic Genocide in Education--Or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?*
Yasir Suleiman, *Language and Ethnic Identity in the Middle East and North Africa*
Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language
<http://www.globaled.org/issues/178F.pdf>
The Christian Science Monitor

The New York Times
The Wall Street Journal
The Washington Post
Encyclopedia of Islam
International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
Middle East Journal
Middle East Quarterly
Middle East Studies

<http://beirut2bayside.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.juancole.com/>

http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_ID=&article_ID=7391&categ_id=5

<http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/L/Joshua.M.Landis-1/syriablog/>

<http://www.meforum.org/article/130>

<http://www.geocities.com/martinkramerorg/ArabNationalism.htm>

History is the most dangerous outcome that the chemistry of the intellect has ever elaborated. Its properties are very well known. History creates mental images and illusions; it intoxicates peoples; it provides them with false memories; it exaggerates their reflexes; it sustains their old wounds; it torments their peace, it drives them into the ecstasy of grandeur or persecution, and it renders nations bitter, magnificent, obnoxious, and conceited.

History justifies whatever we instruct her to justify. Strictly speaking, history teaches us exactly nothing, because it embodies everything, and it provides models for everything.

Paul Valéry, *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Paris: Folio/Essais, 1945.)

I, Hasan the son of Muhammad the scale-master, I, Jean-Léon de Médici, circumcised at the hands of a barber and baptized at the hands of a pope, I am now called the African, but I am not from Africa, nor from Europe, nor from Arabia. I am also called the Granadan, the Fezzi, the Zayyati, but I come from no country, from no city, no tribe. I am the son of the road; a wayfarer. My homeland is the caravan; my life the most spectacular of pathways, the most riveting of travels...

My wrists have rubbed, in turn, against the caresses of silk, the chafings of wool, the gold of princes and the chains of slaves. My fingers have parted a thousand veils, my lips have made a thousand virgins blush, and my eyes have seen cities die and empires collapse.

From my mouth you will hear Arabic, Turkish, Castilian, Berber, Hebrew, Latin and Italian vulgari, because all tongues and all prayers belong to me. But I belong to none of them. I belong only to God and to the earth, and it is to them that I will one day soon return.

Amine Maalouf, *Léon l'Africain* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1987.)

I'm at a popular café in our street, the Nile Valley Street, which is a branch of the broad Arab League Avenue. I usually sit in this café sipping my coffee and playing the only game that suits me: the game of thinking. One night, the people around me were immersed in playing dominos, cards and backgammon while I was flying far away on a board of my thoughts. I was thinking that I love the sea, the Mediterranean, in Arabic the "white sea." It was close to me when I was a child in my hometown of Damietta. And I was close to it—only some kilometers away. I used to go to its shore with my friends on bicycle. Several times, we went there on foot. You may consider me one of its followers or disciples, and definitely I'm one of its residents. I still remember that I used to stare at its surface looking for the far horizon, as if I wanted to see my neighbors there, in Italy, Greece, Spain and France. They are Europe and I'm Africa. We are neighbors, separated by two continents, unified by one sea.

While I was flying above the clouds, he appeared in front of me. He was almost my age, but quite different. His face reflected deep feelings of piety and certainty, while my own betrayed puzzlement and fear of the unknown.

He said: "All the people around are engrossed in doing something useful, why do you sit around doing nothing?"

"I'm thinking, sir."

"Of what?"

"Of the sea, of the Mediterranean."

"Why don't you think of the Red Sea?"

"I don't know it. The few times I went there, I didn't feel any affection toward it. It's beautiful, however, yet something in it makes me feel desolate."

"But you feel affection for the Mediterranean?" he asked.

"Yes, it's one of the human rights to love the sea."

A cruel look crept upon his face, I felt restless. Once again he started asking questions:

"Do you feel that you belong to the Mediterranean?"

"Egypt itself is of the Mediterranean," I responded. "One day, thousands of years ago, this sea was just a lake, crossed by ships loaded by thoughts and art toward Greece, carrying the product of minds and souls, returning from there, loaded with other products of minds and souls."

"You didn't mention that you are an Arab," he pointed out.

*“The Arabs are my fathers, but the Egyptians are my forefathers; do you advise me to inherit from my fathers and ignore the treasures left to me by my forefathers?” **I asked him.***

*“I don’t advise you, I order you” **he said!***

Ali Salem, *The Odd Man and the Sea* (Beirut: The Beirut Daily Star, August 17th, 2004.)