

Seminars in the Humanities
Co-sponsored with MEMEAC

*Dissections: New Directions in Research on the Middle
East and North Africa
2012-2013*

Attempts to understand the variant paths of modernity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and the relationship of the region to Europe and the United States, have produced a new body of scholarship focusing on the history of sexuality, gender, human rights, and related subjects. Intersecting with studies on religion and secularism, this seminar aims to provide an opportunity to share empirical research and theoretical framings in order to push forward scholarly debate on the MENA region.



Beth Baron (Professor of History at City College and The Graduate Center, CUNY) is editor of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. She authored *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (University of California Press, 2005) and *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (Yale University Press, 1994), and co-edited *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* (Yale University Press) and *Iran and Beyond: Essays in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie* (Mazda, 2000).



Melis Sulos is a doctoral student in History at the Graduate Center, CUNY

Friday, September 14, 2012

Presenter: Lila Abu-Lughod

Paper Title: “Authorizing Moral Crusades: Universal Rights and Literary Trafficking”

Discussant: Mandana Limbert, Professor of Anthropology at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

Description: What lies behind the new American common-sense that we should go to war for global women’s rights? This paper explores how two industries that we rarely think of together are authorizing the current moral crusade to save Muslim women: the international human rights regime and mass-market publishing, which has brought us a sordid genre of pulp non-fiction about Muslim women’s bondage and oppression. Drawing on her experiences in rural Egypt and urging us to think carefully about our own lives, Professor Lila Abu-Lughod offers an alternative way to think about the key terms of this crusade; choice versus force, freedom versus bondage.

Lila Abu-Lughod, Joseph L. Bottenwieser Professor of Social Science, teaches anthropology and gender studies at Columbia University where she also directs the Center for the Study of Social Difference and the Middle East Institute. Her scholarship, strongly ethnographic, focuses on three broad issues: the relationship between cultural forms and power; the politics of knowledge and representation of the Muslim world; and the dynamics of gender and the question of human and women’s rights in the Middle East. Her award-winning books include *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*; *Writing Women’s Worlds: Bedouin Stories*; *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*; *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*, and *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*. A leading voice in the debates about gender, Islam, and global feminist politics, her books and articles have been translated into 13 languages. Her research has been supported by many foundations including Carnegie, Guggenheim, SSRC and the American Council of Learned Societies. She has just completed a book, “Do Muslim Women Need Saving?” to be published by Harvard University Press.

Friday, October 5, 2012

Presenter: Joseph Massad

Paper Title: “The Democracy Offensive and the Defenses of Islam”

Discussant: Talal Asad, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the Graduate Center, CUNY

Description: British and US imperial policies included, in the case of the British since the nineteenth century and of the Americans since World War II, the production of certain forms of Islam that could be put in the service of colonial and imperial policies. This involved intermittently the imperial production of “liberal” forms of Islam, “Jihadist” forms of Islam, and then again a new “liberal-democratic” Islam, wherein the very relationship of “Islam” to “democracy” from the view of American and British imperialisms was being determined by these very policies. Concomitant with these policies, British and American liberal political doctrine would deploy explanations of both, the emergence of liberal “democracy” in the so-called “West,” and the persistence of despotism in the non-West, with particular attention to and focus on “Islam.” Much of this, Joseph Massad argues, is a projection of Western imperial commitments to despotism at home and abroad onto “Islam,” not only to showcase Western

cultural and political superiority ushered in by the age of secularism through a suspect claim to democratic governance, but also and more importantly to secure imperial aims in what came to be known and religiously defined as the “Muslim world.”

Joseph Massad teaches modern Arab politics and intellectual history at Columbia University. He is the author of *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (Columbia University Press 2001), *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and Palestinian Nationalism* (Routledge, 2006), *Desiring Arabs* (University of Chicago Press, 2007). His book *Desiring Arabs* received the Lionel Trilling Book Award in 2008. The seminar paper he will be presenting titled "The Democratic Offensive and the Defenses of Islam" is a chapter from his forthcoming book *Islam in Liberalism*.

Friday, February 15, 2013

Presenter: Sara Pursley

Paper Title: "The Stage of Adolescence: Anticolonial Time, Youth Insurgency, and the Marriage Crisis in Hashimite Iraq"

Discussant: Samira Haj, Professor of History at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

Description: From the foundation of Iraq under British Mandate rule in 1921 to the revolution of July 14, 1958 that toppled the British-backed Hashimite monarchy, Iraqi nationalist policymakers and intellectuals elaborated projects to insert Iraqi youth into certain temporal regimes of progress that would work on their everyday habits and routines. Their aim was to historically enact the nationalist dream of sovereignty without leading to uncontrollable sociopolitical disorder, and one of their means was to reconfigure Islamic ethical disciplines of self-formation into techniques for the production of sexual difference and heteronormativity. While many of the pedagogical theories these policymakers drew on were elaborated by intellectuals in Europe and the United States, the article challenges analytical models of dependency (first the West, then the rest), including those that trace changing conceptions of “youth” in the 20th-century Middle East to “Enlightenment” notions of progress. I consider such changes instead as effects first of local and global struggles over colonialism and decolonization and then of the dawning of the Cold War “age of development” after 1945, arguing that “youth” was not a politically thinkable category, anywhere in the world, in ways that could fully escape the terms of the dying European colonial system or the emerging Cold War order. This framework for the study of youth opens onto transnational historical questions in the global era of decolonization, including how certain aspects of the ambivalent 20th-century figure of the adolescent as a subject of political insurgency seem to have emerged in the Arab world in the 1920s and 1930s, decades before the 1950s debut of the celebrated American Cold War rebel epitomized by James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause*.

Sara Pursley is associate editor of the *IJMES* and received her PhD in Middle East history in 2012 from the CUNY Graduate Center. She is currently revising the article presented here for publication in a forthcoming special issue of *History of the Present*. She is also the author of “Daughters of the Right Path: Family Law, Homosocial Publics, and the Ethics of Intimacy in the Works of Shi’i Revivalist Bint al-Huda,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 8 (Spring 2012) and “Building the Nation through the Production of Difference: The Gendering of Education in Iraq, 1928-58,” in *Writing the History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political*

Challenges, ed. Riccardo Bocco, Hamit Bozarslan, Peter Sluglett, and Jordi Tejel (London: Imperial College Press, 2012). She is the winner of the 2012 Carolyn G. Heilbrun Dissertation Prize for outstanding feminist dissertation in the humanities from the Center for the Study of Women and Society, CUNY Graduate Center.

Friday, March 15, 2013

Presenter: Malek Abisaab

Paper Title: "Maronite Clerical Leadership and French Colonial Policies in Grand Liban, 1935: The Strenuous Partnership"

Description: Malek Abisaab's article sheds light on the development in the relationship between the Lebanese Maronite church and the French colonial authorities during the mid-1930s. It focuses on the confrontational stance of the church toward the French under the leadership of Patriarch Antoine `Arida (1863-1955). Abisaab delineates `Arida's resistance to the imposition of the tobacco monopoly, the Régie, and his diplomatic and political maneuvers, culminating with the 1935 popular uprising against the French, which cut across Muslim and Christian lines. Through the analysis of French archival documents and reports, he argues that the deterioration in Maronite-French relations was primarily caused by the colonial mapping of Grand Liban and its disruptive consequences for Mount Lebanon's leadership and economy. With the French imposition of the tobacco monopoly the conflict took the form of a nationalist resistance against the French. It sparked a critique of French colonial logic and encouraged the need to draw alliances with Syrian and Lebanese Muslim leaders. Ultimately, the Maronite community and the Church pursued a delicate balance between their local interests, their commitments to the French, and "partnership" with the Muslims.

Malek Abisaab is associate professor of history at McGill University, Montreal, Canada, where he teaches courses dealing with the social and political transformation of the Middle East and women in Islamic societies, exploring new conceptual tools and comparative frameworks for discussing gender, labor and the nation-state in the Middle East. He authored, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010); "Shi`ite Peasants and a New Nation in Colonial Lebanon: the *intifada* (uprising) of Bint Jubayl, 1936," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* (November, 2009); "Orientalism and Historiography of Arab Women and Work," *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* (HWWA) (Fall, 2009); "Contesting Space: Gendered Discourse and Labor among Lebanese Women," in Ghazi Falah and Caroline Nagel eds., *Geographies of Muslim Women* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2005), 249-274; and "'Unruly'" Workingwomen: Contesting French Colonialism and the National State in Lebanon, 1940-1946," *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 16, no. 3(2004): 55-82 and co-authoring with Rula Jurdi Abisaab, *The Shi`ites of Lebanon: Modernism, Communism, and Hizbullah's Islamists* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, Forthcoming).

Friday, April 12, 2013

Presenter: Emily Greble

Paper Title: "In Education Lies Our Only Survival": Islamic Education on the Front Lines against Secularism and Communism in Yugoslavia"

Discussant: Mandana Limbert, Professor of Anthropology at the Graduate Center, CUNY.

Description: From 1945 to 1949, Muslims in the Balkans waged war against the Communist regime, a war that reflected decades of domestic and international debates over the nature of Islam in modern Europe and the ways that Ottoman Muslims would be transformed into citizens—and minorities—of secular European states. Islamic education, the subject of this paper, was an essential component of this battle.

Emily Greble is Assistant Professor of History at the City College of New York. She is the author of *Sarajevo, 1941-1945: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Hitler's Europe* (Cornell, 2011) and is currently writing a book on a war between Muslims and Communists in Yugoslavia in the late 1940s.

Friday, May 3, 2013

Presenter: Nebahat Avcioglu

Paper Title: “The Modern and Contemporary Mosque: A Cross Cultural Analysis”

Discussant: Zeynep Celik, distinguished professor of architecture in the College of Architecture and Design at New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Description: Today many cities in Europe possess big and small purpose-built mosques, constructed in diverse styles and variety of locations. Making use of certain architectural features, such as domes and minarets, these structures strive towards establishing a visible presence of Islam appropriate to the diversity and growing Muslim population in the West. This desire for visibility underlines the political nature of mosque’s architecture. My book deals with the stylistic transformations of these mosques in response to the public, intellectual and aesthetic controversies surrounding them as well as focusing on the discursive roots of the refusal of the mosque in Europe, particularly the idea of the Islamic city vs the European city. By focusing on the relationship between the mosque and its urban context this book deals with the changing identity of the European city, and argues that the reasons behind conflicts, which are manifold, are as much to do with history and resistance to Islam as with the fear of a disappearing European city, a polemic which has been around since the beginning of the twentieth century. As the quintessential Islamic space, the mosque is seen as pivotal in drawing distinctions between *the* Islamic city and *the* European city – concepts that were in fact born out of Orientalism, in which the Islamic city is often invoked as a contrasting image of cities in the West – or between Islam and modernity. I argue that the appearance of the mosque on European soil both unsettles the key Orientalist principle, namely that the European city must preclude the mosque, and serves various imperial and later modern democratic ideologies. The book traces the ways in which this tension between mosque and city has been performed in the evolution of architectural forms since the early twentieth century.

Nebahat Avcioglu received her BA in Architecture from Istanbul Technical University, and her PhD from the University of Cambridge, Department of History of Art. She has held several Post-Doctoral and Research Fellowships. Before joining Hunter College in August 2011 she taught at the University of Cambridge, University of Manchester and Sciences-Po Paris, as well as at MIT as Visiting Professor. Prof. Avcioglu specializes in Islamic art and architecture with a particular

emphasis on Ottoman/European cultural encounters. Her publications include *Turquerie and the Politics of Representation, 1737-1876* (2011), *Globalising Cultures: Art and Mobility in the Eighteenth Century*, (ed. with Finbarr Barry Flood), *Ars Orientalis* vol. 39 (2011), and *Architecture, Art and Identity in Venice and Its Territories 1450-1750*, (ed. with Emma Jones), (2013). She is also the author of 'Istanbul: The palimpsest city in search of its architect', *RES*, 53/54(2008) and 'Form-as-Identity: The Mosque in the West' *Cultural Analysis*, vol. 6 (2008), as well as other articles appeared in *Art Bulletin* and *Muqarnas* dealing with dissemination and transformation of forms and cultures, theories of artistic contact, and socio-political aspects of the history of art and architecture. Currently she is preparing a critical reader on the Islamic city and planning an exhibition and a catalogue on costume albums in collaboration with students and colleagues.

Friday, May 17, 2013

Presenter: Hoda El-Sahakry

Paper Title: "The Poetics of Sufism: Reading the Literature and Criticism of Mahmud al-Mas'adi"

Discussant: Alexander Elinson, Associate Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at Hunter College and Director of the Hunter College Summer Arabic Program

Description: This paper examines the literary project of the renowned Tunisian intellectual Maḥmūd al-Mas'adī (1911-2004). He was a trade unionist, educator, Minister of Cultural Affairs, Speaker of Parliament, as well as the architect of Tunisia's educational policy following independence in 1956. In addition to a series of critical essays, al-Mas'adī wrote a number of short stories, novels and plays between 1938 and 1941. Due to the densely philosophical nature of his fiction and the absence of a transparent nationalist agenda, his work confounded Arab literary critics of the time who were preoccupied with the ideologies of literary commitment [*iltizam*] and Socialist Realism [*al-Wāqī'iyya al-Ishṭirākīyya*]. Crowned the founder of "Muslim Existentialism" by the Nahda intellectual Ṭaha Ḥusayn, al-Mas'adī's fictional and critical writings reflect a deep engagement with early Arab and Islamic thought, as well as existentialist philosophy and literature. This paper reads al-Mas'adī's critical works in dialogue with his novella *Mawlid al-Nisyān*[The Genesis of Forgetfulness], positing that the story enacts a Sufi poetics situated at the crossroads of existential and aesthetic concerns.

Hoda El Shakry is an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at The Pennsylvania State University. She is currently serving as an Assistant Professor, Faculty Fellow at The Gallatin School of Individualized Study at New York University. Her research and teaching interests lie in twentieth century literature, criticism and visual culture of the Middle East and North Africa. Her current book project examines Islamic discourses in relation to Arabophone and Francophone literature of the Maghreb. She is the author of "Revolutionary Eschatology: Islam & the End of Time in al-Ṭāhir Waṭṭār's al-Zilzāl" in *Journal of Arabic Literature* (42.2-3: 120-147) and "Apocalyptic Pasts, Orwellian Futures: Elle Flanders' Zero Degrees of Separation," in *GLQ* (16.4: 611-621).