Middle East Media and Cultural Politics
NYU, Spring 2008

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Catalogue Description:
Examines developments of culture, politics and media in contemporary Middle East through an historical and cultural lens. Course is organized by theoretical themes and geographic locations, and addresses culture as a site of struggle; the impact of globalization on Arab mass media; the connections between modernity, democracy and Islam; gender, national and diasporic identities; and spatial reconfigurations in virtual and urban settings.

Course Description:
With the recent rise, and fear, of a ‘fundamentalist’ Islamic response to a post-9/11 world and the growing globalization of mass media in the Middle East, this is a pertinent time to investigate the explosion of media and cultural production in the region. Over the course of the past decade, the media landscape in the Middle East has been transformed: televised discussions of gender and sexual issues; song-writers and musicians whose material challenge received traditions; bloggers who use the Internet to criticize governments and write love poetry; talk shows that practice the fine art of live antagonistic debate; ‘fundamentalist’ groups who create videogames; Islamic televangelists and pop stars using Western marketing techniques; performance artists developing new hybrid forms of political art; women promoting a new ‘enlightened’ Islam through fashion and advertising; and of course the phenomenon called Dubai.

This course will look at these developments through a critical lens by examining the interplay of culture, politics and media in the contemporary Middle East. Theories, media forms and geographic/national foci will be presented through readings and audio-visual materials. This course should be of interest to any graduate student interested in the modern Middle East, the Arab world, and/or in contemporary issues of media and globalization.

Course Objectives:
• To expose students to current research and theory drawn from inter-disciplinary sources in Middle Eastern and cultural studies
• To provide students with an understanding of contemporary media products and trends in the Middle East
• To provide students the theoretical tools to assess the role of media and culture in Middle Eastern politics and societies.
• To engage students to make connections between intellectual developments and emerging social, political and religious issues in the region.
• To encourage students to undertake cultural, economic, historical and/or comparative research in this field of study.
Assignments and Grading: Students Choose either Option A or B.

**Option A – Research Paper Option**
- 20%  Best 6 of 8 Reading Responses.
- 20%  Leading Class Discussion and in-Class Participation
- 10%  Abstract and Short Annotated Bibliography for Research Paper
- 50%  Final Research Paper 20-30 pages + bibliography and appendices

**Option B – Exam and Review Papers Option**
- 20%  Best 6 of 8 Reading Responses.
- 20%  Leading Class Discussion and in-Class Participation
- 30%  Best 3 of 4, 4-6-page review papers based on weekly readings
- 30%  Take-Home Final Exam: 3 Essay Questions

**Tentative Schedule**

**Class 1 – Introductions**
Culture in/and the Middle East, redrawing the regional map.

**Class 2 – The Clash of Civilizations or Rhetorics?**
Western Rhetoric vs Bin Laden’s Rhetoric, similarities at the extremes

**Class 3 – God and the Political Planet: Islam and Globalization, Part 1**
Media Globalization and Critiques of Culture Talk

**Class 4 – Middle East Political Culture**
Hegemony, ideology, politics and democracy in the Middle East

**Class 5 – National / Religious / Masculine Identities on Television**
Mass media history, cultural identity, and modernism, in Egypt, Jordan and Syria

**Class 6 – Postcolonial Cinema**
National vs third cinema vs third world cinema in North Africa

**Class 7 – Rap Music and Nationalism**
Contentious songs and contentious nationalisms in Israel and Palestine
Class 8 – Rise of Satellite TV
From Al Jazeera to Al Hurra, the new public spheres of the Middle East

Television addicts in the Arab world, and the rise of Islamic media

Class 10 – Islamist New Media
Hizballah takes on technology: television, videogames and revisiting the ‘modern’

Class 11 – Urban / Virtual Non-Spaces
Redefining Spaces of Resistance in the Palestinian Territories

Class 12 – Arab Frustrations
Political failures and literary victories, Lebanon

Class 13 – Jewel in the Gulf
Development and fantasy in Dubai

Class 14 – Towards ‘Prada Islam’?
Women, fashion, advertising and ‘Islam 2.0’