

Twentieth Century Middle Eastern History through Graphic Novels

Sara Rahnama / Morgan State University / Spring 2020

Course Description

This course explores the recent history of conflicts in the Middle East through graphic novels. It asks what fictional stories can tell about history, particularly when these stories are told in visual ways. Students will be responsible for reading the graphic novels, as well as additional primary and secondary source material before class. Students will learn to analyze them as secondary sources. Students will explore themes including war, empire, gender, and sexuality. The course moves chronologically through several key conflicts of the twentieth century Middle East including early anti-colonialism in colonial Algeria, the Palestinian refugee crisis, the Lebanese Civil War, the Iranian Revolution, Libya under Muammar Gaddafi, and finally the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Most weeks the course will include one class period of lecture that will help contextualize the graphic novels and one period of class discussion about the week's reading.

Course Goals

- Develop an understanding of how graphic novels offer particular depictions of history. Analyze how these versions of history affect contemporary readings of past events.
- Examine how graphic novels can be used by historians as primary and secondary sources.
- Analyze the limitations of graphic novels as a genre for historical understanding.
- Practice interpretive and analytic historical work by analyzing primary source documents.
- Actively engage in learning by not worrying about being correct.

Course Expectations

- Attend every class, do all required reading, and participate in discussion.
- Ask questions when you do not understand what is discussed in class or in readings.
- Show respect for the questions, viewpoints, and opinions that your fellow students offer in class, although it is in no way expected that you will necessarily agree with them, or with the instructor.
- Do not use cell phones in class. Use of laptops must be limited to note-taking and/or course-related objectives.

Books

- Joann Sfar, *The Rabbi's Cat* (2005)
- Leila Abdelrazaq, *Baddawi* (2015)
- Zeina Abirached, *A Game for Swallows: To Die, to Leave, to Return* (2012)
- Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (2004)

- Riad Sattouf, *The Arab of the Future: A Childhood in the Middle East, 1978-1984* (2015)
- Sherine Hamdy and Coleman Nye, *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* (2017)

If the cost of these books is prohibitive, please contact me.

Grading

Students will be evaluated on their attendance and participation, written assignments and document responses, a midterm and a final exam. For every late assignment handed in, 5% will be deducted for every day the assignment is late (unless the delay is excused in advance). For every unexcused absence, 5% will be deducted from your attendance grade. Students with perfect attendance will receive an additional 4% added to their overall grade. An overview of each specific assignment will be provided in class. The grade breakdown is as follows:

Attendance	15%
Participation	20%
In-Class Writing Assignments	15%
Presentations	25%
Final	25%

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at Morgan State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, the University's Code of Conduct states that all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception.

Any student who is found to have engaged in academic dishonesty (including but not limited to cheating and plagiarism) shall fail the assignment for which the student cheated and may be subject to more severe penalties.

Course Policies and Procedures

Attendance is mandatory. Participation is vital. Please come to class consistently ready to discuss the readings and documents and to participate in classroom conversations. If you cannot attend a class meeting because of an illness, an emergency, a personal matter or an official extra-curricular activity, please notify me by email. After two unexcused absences points will be deducted from your participation grade.

Please turn in work on time. One half grade per day will be deducted from all late assignments (i.e. A to A-).

I will hold office hours weekly. My door will be open unless meeting with another student. Come on by! You can also email me in advance to schedule a time to meet with me during office hours or during an alternate time if you are unavailable during the regularly scheduled office hours.

Sexual Misconduct Statement

Morgan State University is committed to maintaining an academic environment where all individuals feel safe and are free to develop intellectually, professionally, personally, and socially. Morgan State University strictly prohibits any acts of sexual misconduct by students, faculty, or staff—including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you have experienced any of these, contact University Police at 443-885-3103, the Title IX Coordinator at 443-885-3559, or the Office of Student Rights & Responsibilities at 443-885-3527.

Disability Accommodation Statement

If you know you have a disability or suspect you might, contact Student Disability Support Services (SDSS) by phone at 443-885-1719, by email at SDSS@morgan.edu, or in person in Rooms 131 or 132 in the Earl S. Richardson Library. If you need accommodations, please arrange to discuss your needs with me privately at the beginning of the semester.

Counseling and Psychological Services Statement

Many students face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including counseling. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation. A counselor is also available on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in case of emergency.

Counseling Services: Carter Grant Wilson, Room 202, 443-885-3130
Maryland Youth Crisis Hotline: 1-800-422-0009

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Graphic Novels as Historical Sources

- Lecture & Discussion: Graphic Novels and History
- Lecture: Fundamentals of Historical Analysis
 - o Map Quiz

- Michael Charney, “How to Read a Graphic Novel” (TedxTalk)
- Reading: [Alex Mangles, “Stitching Out a Life in Graphic Memoir”](#)

Unit 1: Interwar Algeria

Week 2:

- Lecture: French Colonialism in Algeria, 1830-1920
- Reading: Joann Sfar, *The Rabbi’s Cat* (2005), 1-48

Week 3:

- Lecture: Religion in French Colonial Algeria
- Reading: Joann Sfar, *The Rabbi’s Cat* (2005), 49-142

Unit 2: The Palestinian Refugee Crisis

Week 4:

- Lecture: Palestine, from the British Mandate to the Creation of the State of Israel
- Reading: Leila Abdelrazzaq, *Baddawi* (2015), 16-68

Week 5:

- Lecture: The Palestinian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon
- Reading: Leila Abdelrazzaq, *Baddawi* (2015), 69-116

Unit 3: The Lebanese Civil War

Week 6:

- Lecture: French Colonialism in Syria and Lebanon
- Reading: Zeina Abirached, *A Game for Swallows: To Die, to Leave, to Return* (2012), 8-101

Week 7:

- Lecture: The Lebanese Civil War
- Reading: Zeina Abirached, *A Game for Swallows: To Die, to Leave, to Return* (2012), 101-188

Week 8:

- Presentations on [American University of Beirut, “Lebanese Civil War: 1975-1991”](#) archive
- Presentations (continued)

Unit 4: The Iranian Revolution

Week 9:

- Lecture: The Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War
- Reading: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (2004), Part One

Week 10:

- Lecture: Contemporary Representations of Iran
- Reading: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (2004), Part Two

Week 11:

- Presentations on Contemporary Representations of Iran
 - o Adam Johnson, "Please Stop Using 'Woman in Chador Walks By Anti-US Mural' Stock Photo For Every Article About Iran"
 - o Instagram accounts: @EverydayMiddleEast @EverydayIran
 - o [A. Abbas, "Iranian Revolution 20 Years" on Magnum Photos](#)
- Presentations (continued)

Unit 5: Libya in Conflict Under Muammar Gaddafi**Week 12:**

- Lecture: Italian Colonialism in Libya
- Reading: Riad Sattouf, *The Arab of the Future: A Childhood in the Middle East, 1978-1984* (2015), 3-62

Week 13:

- Lecture: Libya Under Muammar Gaddafi
- Reading: Riad Sattouf, *The Arab of the Future: A Childhood in the Middle East, 1978-1984* (2015), 63-153

Unit 6: The Egyptian Revolution**Week 14:**

- Lecture: Pan-Arabism, Gamel Abdel Nasser, and Anwar Sadat
- Reading: Sherine Hamdy and Coleman Nye, *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* (2017), 17-134

Week 15:

- Lecture: The Arab Spring and the Egyptian Revolution
- Reading: Sherine Hamdy and Coleman Nye, *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* (2017) 135-235

Week 16:

- Final project presentations
 - o [Al Jazeera, "Timeline: Egypt's Revolution"](#)
 - o [Vox Populi: Tahrir Archives](#)
- Presentations (continued)