

Course Number: CCEA-UH 1077x

Muslim Popular Culture

Credits: 4

10:25 AM - 11:40 AM M W Location: A2-007

“The main arena for jihad today is culture, not combat”

--Egyptian-American playwright Youssef el Giundi

(qtd in *Rock the Casbah* by Robin Wright, p 214)

Professor Fawzia Afzal-Khan

No prerequisite

**** *this syllabus is subject to change***

Description:

As state apparatuses everywhere attempt to control their citizenry either directly (through force) or hegemonically (via consent of the governed), popular youth cultures become the ideological terrain on which battles for freedom of expression are fought. In the case of Muslim cultures, the contest is sometimes framed in terms of secular liberalism of thought and behavior, at others, in support of stricter religious orthodoxy even as the language and forms deployed are those of pop culture viz. “Islamic” fashion, music, comic books, film, theater, etc. This course will explore such tensions and the ethical challenges they pose in an increasingly global society through a variety of pop culture forms and subcultures from around the Muslim world. The challenge the course presents -- one that requires students to synthesize materials from many disciplines -- is to think through the ongoing battle for hearts and minds of Muslim youth around the world. This battle can be summed up through the competing ideologies of Islamism at one extreme and Islamophobia at the other. How do we steer a course between this contemporary Scylla and Charybdis? Herein lies the task.

We will read selections from various primary and secondary texts, watch and discuss singers and their music videos, feature films, satellite preachers, stand-up comics and the like—all with a view to understanding and analyzing the postcolonial historical and political contexts within which current debates about Muslim popular culture are best understood.

We will begin by asking general questions regarding the imbrication of concepts such as youth culture with ideology as a challenge to normative notions of citizenship which were raised by early Cultural Studies scholars such as Raymond Williams and Dick Hebdige in the context of England of the early 20th century, and study their usefulness and limitations for understanding and analyzing the hybrid identities and multiple forms of how pop culture might be understood in the context of Muslim (sub) cultures today.

Teaching Methodology:

This will be a discussion-based class, where assigned weekly readings will be discussed collectively in class. I will offer some initial comments and opening questions and then students are expected to respond to these and add their own questions and responses. Students will be put into pairs or small groups, which will be expected to lead class discussions for each unit, and provide Internet leads on topics/films/bands under consideration. Students will also prepare a short pop culture intervention of their own (see under **Assignments:**)

Course Materials and Selected Bibliography:

(we will read excerpted chapters from several of the following texts; students are expected to pick p those texts that ive ordered in the bookstore, except those that l've requested the library to acquire as indicated. Chapters from several texts will be excerpted and put online to reduce the number of books ordered):

Aidi, Hisham. *Rebel Music: Race, Empire and the New Muslim Youth Culture*. Pantheon: 2014. ISBN 978-0-307-27997-2

Ahmad, Salman. *Rock and Roll Jihad*. Free Press: 2010 ISBN: 978-1-4165-9767-4

Casey, Ethan. *Alive and Well in Pakistan*. London: Vision Books, 2004. (recommended)

Hammond, Andrew. *Popular Culture in the Arab World: Art, Politics and the Media*. American University in Cairo Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-977-416-054-7

Hasso, Frances S. and Zakia Salime, eds, *Freedom Without Permission: Bodies and Space in the Arab Revolutions*. Duke University Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8223-6241-8

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*. 1979. ISBN 0-415-03949-5

Khalid, Haroon. *In Search of Shiva: A Study of Folk religious Practices in Pakistan*. Rupa Publications, 2015. ISBN: 978-81-291-3743-2

Knight, Michael Muhammad. *The Taqwacores*. Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press, 2004. (recommended)
ISBN: ISBN 13 978-1-59376-229-2

Levine, Mark. *Heavy Metal Islam*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-307-35339-9

Moaveni, Azadeh. *Lipstick Jihad*. ISBN 978-1-58648-378-4

O'Brien, John. *Keeping It Halal the Everyday Loves of Muslim American Teenage Boys*. Princeton University Press, 2-17. (recommended)

Omidvar, Iraj and Anne Richards, eds. *Muslims and American Popular Culture*. Praeger, 2014. library acquisition: ISBN-13: 978-0313379628 OR
ISBN-10: 0313379629

Satrapji, Marjane. *Persepolis*. New York: Pantheon, 2003. ISBN: 978-0-375-71483-2

Schade-Poulsen, Marc. *Men and Popular Music in Algeria*. UT Press, 1999. ISBN: 0-292-77740-X

Sharma, Sanjay et al, eds. *Disorienting Rhythms: the Politics of the New Asia Dance Music*. 1996 (recommended). ISBN: 1 85649 470 5

Shirazi, Faegheh. *Brand Islam: the Marketing and Commodification of Piety*. UT Press: 2016
(recommended)

Stratton, Allegra. *Muhajababes*. Brooklyn: Melville House, 2008 (first published 2006) ISBN:
9781933633503

Weintraub, Andrew. *Islamic and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia*. Routledge: 2011.
Library acquisition: **ISBN-13**: 978-0415565189. OR **ISBN-10**: 0415565189

Wilson, Willow, G. *Ms Marvel : Kamala Khan*. 2014-16
Vol 1 ISBN: 13: 9780785190219
Vol 2: ISBN: 13: 9780785190226
Vol 5: ISBN 0785196110 (ISBN13: 9780785196112)

Wright, Robin. *Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World*. Simon and Schuster,
2011. ISBN: 978-1-4391-0316-6

Films (Fawzia's collection):

A Jihad For Love. Dir. Parvez Sharma, 2007 (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia)

The Closed Doors. Dir Atef Hetata, 1999. (Egypt)

Khuda Kay Liye (In the Name of God) Dir Shoaib Mansoor, 2007. (Pakistan)

No One Knows About Persian Cats. Dir. Bahman Ghobadi, 2009. (Iran)

Satin Rouge. Dir Raja Amari, 2002 (Tunisia)

NOTE: Essays/Chapters from Books not available at bookstore are either posted on NYU Classes
(Resources section of our course) OR YOU need to go make copies from books placed on closed reserve
in the library.

NOTE: YOU CANNOT CHECK OUT ANY OF THE BOOKS ON RESERVE FOR THIS CLASS.

Assignments:

Attendance: 5%

- if you are absent more than twice during the term, you will forfeit 5% of your grade automatically

Class Participation: 15%

Grading Rubric:

- Each student must speak/intervene at least 3-4 times in each class period;

- students are expected to lead class discussions in assigned pairs/groups OR individually, posing questions that provoke discussion;
- student pairs/groups/individuals must provide Internet leads on materials discussed in class;
- students are also expected to bring in new materials to add to our storehouse of knowledge.

Each of these activities will contribute to the overall participation grade.

Written Assignments:

- 1) Annotated Bibliographies (egs will be provided). Each student is responsible for compiling a 15-page annotated bibliography covering 15 works (5 of which should be films, 5 music videos or info on bands or other pop culture items like blogs etc; 5 should be books and articles. This should all be material that is not listed in our course readings)= 30%
- 2) A midterm essay (take-home question) = 25%
- 3) One 2-3 minute pop culture intervention, (this could be a song, a skit, a comic strip, stand-up, an idea/eg for a blog with entries, etc etc)--recorded and uploaded onto a google drive to be shared and responded to by members of the class during exam week = 25%. This is in lieu of a final exam

** Please note: everyone will be graded on two aspects: a) the quality of your "pop skit" as well as how intelligently and carefully you critiqued/responded to/judged your peers' contributions.

- *Every assignment including class participation will add up to a holistic final grade for the class. Failure to be an active class participant and hand in all assignments on time will jeopardize your final grade.*
- *Plagiarism is a serious offense; kindly use MLA or Chicago-style documentation for all sources. Failure to acknowledge sources properly will result in a failing grade.*

NYU Abu Dhabi expects its students to adhere to the highest possible standards of scholarship and academic conduct. Students should be aware that engaging in behaviors that violate the standards of academic integrity will be subject to review and may face the imposition of penalties in accordance with the procedures set out in the NYUAD policy:

<https://students.nyuad.nyu.edu/campus-life/student-policies/community-standards-policies/academic-integrity/>

Anticipated Learning Outcomes:

- Describe and analyze the connections between Muslim popular culture and its historical and political contexts.
- Critically examine how cultural and religious identities are defined by, and in turn, shape, popular cultural art forms.
- Formulate an interpretative level of analysis of the complexity of Muslim ways of life through a comprehensive understanding of its various pop cultural manifestations.
- Reflect through written, oral and creative assignments on various ways in which Islam is manifested, challenged, understood and communicated globally via popular

- culture.
- Analyze and critique the role of gender in Islamic contexts via pop culture

Weekly Schedule:

Note: EVERYONE IS EXPECTED to have viewed the films PRIOR to our class discussions as indicated on the syllabus.

**As indicated by asterisk—we WILL HOLD CLASS ON SEPT 12th!! THIS IS A MAKE UP CLASS IN LIEU OF SEP 24TH SO KINDLY MAKE ARRANGEMENTS TO BE IN CLASS THAT DAY*

Unit 1—Weeks 1-6: Terms of the Debate

Week 1

Day 1 Sep 3: **INTRODUCTIONS and Overview of Course;** Please have read for class discussion, introductory chapter from Hebdige’s book *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*.

Day 2 Sep 5: Come to class having read chapter 1 of Hammond’s *Popular Culture in the Arab World*. You DON’T have to pore over every word of this chapter! Just get a general sense—come with QUESTIONS. We will have a general discussion on the methodology and topics of concern for a Cultural Studies approach to Popular Culture, as applicable in the context of pan-Arabism and Islamism, and concerns around “high” vs. “low” culture etc

Homework: See the film *Satin Rouge* prior to next class along with assigned readings!

Week 2

Day 1: Sep 10: **STUDENT PAIR 1 POSES QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION** linking relevant points from previous week’s reading (Hammond) with the film, *Satin Rouge*, on Day 1. You are ALL expected to dig deeper into the article and tie its points to the film; Thus, EVERYONE SHOULD COME TO CLASS WITH AN EG TO ILLUSTRATE A QUESTION YOU HAVE FROM THE PREVIOUS READINGS, AS APPLIED TO THE FILM, INCLUDING (BUT NOT LIMITED TO): WHAT IS POP CULTURE AND HOW DO WE STUDY IT esp. in the context of Islamism vs islamophobia today within Muslim contexts and in the larger world? How does gender and sexuality enter into these debates? What is your personal stake in this debate? Do you have one? Should you have one?

Homework: See the film *Khuda ke Liye (In God’s Name)*, and Fawzia’s music videos prior to next class along with assigned readings below!

Here is my youtube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCteFM2u6AfL2iCegpibh-1A>

You can also look for music videos for Fawzia Afzal-Khan in youtube by typing:

Smokescreen Fawzia Afzal-Khan

Sacrifice Fawzia Afzal-Khan

Lahore Fawzia Afzal-Khan

***Day 2 Sep 12** Please have read my article on Postcolonial Desire (available on the intranet course site in Resources) and “Performative Interventions in the Body Politic of Pakistan” in *TDR*: 2010, 54:2, on Pakistani Music (available library reserve, please make your own copies of the article).
Students should come to class prepared to tie insights from these readings esp re gender/women in performance, to music videos of Fawzia, paying special attn. to Ahmed Naumann’s boxed excerpt in Afzal-Khan’s article, and also see how they shed light on the assigned film Khuda Ke Liye (For God’s Sake). Think about how the battle Between Islamism and Islamophobia is being portrayed in these videos and film.

ASSIGNMENT#1: ATTEND THE CONCERT by RAYESS BEK (LOVE AND REVENGE) IN THE EVENING.

WRITE A 2 PAGE RESPONSE TO IT THAT REFLECTS SOME OF THE ISSUES WE HAVE DISCUSSED IN CLASS THUS FAR. IT SHOULD BE SUBMITTED IN HARD COPY TO ME IN THE NEXT CLASS

Week 3: STUDENT PAIR 1 continues to pose questions and take the lead in discussion:

Day 1 SEP 17: Chapters 4, 5 and 6 from *Rock and Roll Jihad*; plus Chapter on Pakistan from *Heavy Metal Islam*. **Pair 1** should find and share some concert footage etc of Junoon
Band+ tie in to discussion of *Khuda Ke Liye* from previous week

Film to watch for next class: *Four Lions*.

Day 2 SEP 19: Ch 4 of *Disorienting Rhythms* and Ch 4 of *Rebel Music*; **TIE TO FILM: Four Lions**

Week 4: Fawzia away

Day 1 SEP 24: **No Class.**
Watch prior to next class, music video of Laal Band of Lahore, “*Deshatgardi Murdabad*” (Death to Extremism).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y57eLLCPFQ4>

Day 2 Sep 26: Islamism vs Islamophobia discussion via chapter 2 “The Counter Jihad” in Robin Wright’s book, *Rock the Casbah*, as well as in reference to Laal band video;
Skype session with Taimur Rahman of Laal Band in Lahore during class time if I can arrange it; otherwise another professor will come to class

Week 5: Student Group 2 continues:

Day 1 Oct 1: Introduction and Chapter 1 from Karima Bennoune's book, *Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here*

Day 2 Oct 3: we will watch excerpts from Ajoka's *Burqavaganza* (I will also try to line up a skype chat with Shahid Nadeem, playwright of *Burqavaganza*—if so; we will revisit and recalibrate our syllabus)

Week 6: STUDENT PAIRS 1 AND 2 COLLABORATE ON PROVOCATION QUESTIONS:

Day 1 Oct 8: Transnational affiliations: Chapter 7 "In Trance We Trust" on Moroccan Sufi music, from *Rebel Music*.

from *In Search of Shiva*, chaps. 4 and 5—on Sufi mysticism in shrine culture of Pakistan (online in course site).

Day 2 Oct 10:

Students: Find Out About Pappu Saeen, (dhol-player), shrines of Lahore,

Unit #2: Arab, Arab American and Iranian/Muslim Pop Culture:

A reference guide for this unit will be Prof John O'Brien's book *Keeping It Halal the Everyday Loves of Muslim American Teenage Boys*; we will also try to schedule a visit by Prof O'Brien to our class sometime during this unit.

Weeks 7-14: STUDENT GROUP 3 COVERS MATERIALS THROUGH END OF WEEK 10.
STUDENT GROUP 4 LEADS FROM WEEK 11-14.

Weeks 7 and 9 : 4 Class Sessions: STUDENT PAIR #3 LEADS: Deepen your questions re: Islamism vs Islamophobia in the context of Empire vs the Postcolonial nation-state (Politics of Reception)

Week 7

Day 1 Oct 15: from: *Muslims in American Pop Culture:*

Chapter, "Marked Off: Hollywood's Untold Story of Arabs, Muslims, and Camels" by Waleed. F. Mahdi, pp. 147-67.

Day 2 Oct 17: We will watch excerpts from *Reel Bad Arabs* (based on book by Jack Shaheen and directed by Prof Sut Jhally, 2006) and *Edward Said on Orientalism* narrated by Sut Jhally (*In-class*) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd_Z_g and excerpts From first Muslim Comedy Tour in the USA, *Allah Made Me Funny* (2005): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGRtzqgTeZw> (*in-class*)

Week 8 Oct 22, 24: Fall Break

Week 9

Day 1 Oct 29: Reading from *Rock the Casbah*, chap 9, "The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour." Watch/discuss in class: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5NXkeK7B6w>

Day 2 Oct 31: Is this comedy from Turkey? Or something sinister? “Inside the Weird World of an Islamic Feminist Cult” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bH21w2R0hc>
PLUS

Watch and discuss Stand-Up female comics Pakistani-British Shazia Mirza (*in-class viewing of videos from youtube*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIsY6z8FmF8>
And Iranian American Zahra Noorbakhsh
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCwXYtXAicc> ---what are the similarities and differences?

Week 10

Day 1 Nov 5: *_Ms Marvel* and *Burqa Avenger* (online, youtube)—*Comic Book Heroines*.

(Additional Background reading: “The Influence of Muslims and Islam in Science Fiction, Fantasy and Comics” pp.323-49, from *Muslims in American Popular Culture* (on course site or get from library reserve)

Day 2 Nov 7: Intro and Chs 10-15 of *Muhajababes*.

Week 11: Student Pair # 3 continues to lead discussion

Day 1 Nov 12: The Enchanted Mooress from Aidi’ book *Rebel Music*

Day 2 Nov 14: “Cautious Enactments: Interstitial Spaces of Gender Politics in Saudi Arabia” from *Freedom Without Permission*. Watch and Discuss the Hwages Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rUn2j1hLOo>

Week 12: (Student Group #4 will lead through the end of term)

Day 1 Nov 19: “Arab Cinema and the Dream of Modernization” (137-159) From Hammonds’ *Popular Culture in the Arab world*

Day 2 Nov 21: “Politics in the Digital Boudoir: Sentimentality and the Transformation of Civil Debate in Egyptian Women’s Blogs.”

You are expected to have watched for this week’s discussions, the Egyptian film, *Closed Doors*.

Week 13:

Day 1 Nov 26: Film to watch prior to next class: *Satin Rouge*

Reading: From Hammonds’ *Popular Culture in the Arab world*: “The Belly Dance: A Reinvented Arab Groove” (pp 187-205).

Day 2 Nov 28: Chaps 6 and 7 of *Men and Popular Music in Algeria* (online in course site). Students: Find some Rai music to share with class!

Week 14:

Day 1 Dec 3: Ch 6, “Street Politics” from Pascal Menoret’s book, *Joyriding in Riyadh*.

Day 2 Dec 5: Read and discuss, *Persepolis*.

Week 15:

Day 1 Dec 10: Discussion of a few chapters from *Lipstick Jihad* (Chps. 1-3, and pp. 224-end).

Film for this unit: *No One Knows About Persian Cats*. (About underground music scene in Iran—discussion on Day 1 of week 14)

Day 2 Dec 12: US Jazz ambassadors/Randy Weston etc from Aidi’s book (*Rebel Music*)—interface with Gnawa, Sachal ensemble from Pakistan etc—building transnational bridges across the Muslim world and the West: *racism in the US and cold war politics*

Week 15: Conclusion revisiting Main theme of course

Day 1: from *Muslims and American Popular Culture*: “Cut From the Same Cloth: American and Palestinian Hip-Hop” pp 375-87 AND chapter 3 on Israel/Palestine from Levine’s *Heavy Metal Islam*
View/listen to/discuss Tupac Shakur, Lupe Fiasco—any others YOU can find for us to listen to/see on Youtube; And Shadia Mansour, who bills herself as “the first lady of Palestinian hip-hop.”

Day 2: Chapter, “Satellite Sheikhs and Youtube Imams” (pp176-88) from *Rock the Casbah*, and chapter, “The Internet, Cyber-Religion, and Authority: The Case of the Indonesian Liberal Islam Network” from *Islamic and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia (on course site or library)*

Course Wrap-Up

Students Hand in Final Assignment: Annotated Bibliographies, which will be graded for their depth and breadth; during finals week, **sharing of short pop culture videos with the class via a shared google drive folder**. This assignment will be graded for creativity and originality as well as for detailed critical commentary by each person on one other classmate’s intervention!