**Streaming the Middle East: history, politics, and identity in two popular Netflix series**

**ASC1138.\*\*, First Year Seminar**

**Autumn 2021**

**1 credit**

**Day, time, place TBA**

**Instructors:** Dr. Johanna Sellman ([sellman.13@osu.edu](mailto:sellman.13@osu.edu)) and Dr. Danielle V. Schoon ([schoon.2@osu.edu](mailto:schoon.2@osu.edu))

**Office Hours:** by appointment

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**Course Description:** What can two acclaimed Netflix series from the Middle East teach us about the history, politics, and social issues of the region? What might we discover if we took the time to slowly unpack the aesthetic, ethical, and narrative choices being made in these series? In this First Year Seminar, we will watch and discuss the Turkish series *Ethos* (2020) and the Egyptian series *Paranormal* (2020). Turkish television is known for its soap operas, which have a following throughout the Middle East and beyond. The mini-series, *Ethos* (*Bir Başkadır)*, is just as popular but has a unique, fresh premise. It takes place in Turkey’s capital, Istanbul, and follows the intersecting lives of several contemporary characters whose very different class, religious, sexual, and ethnic identities reveal deep social divides, but also create the conditions for reimagining them. The Egyptian horror series, *Paranormal* (ما وراء الطبيعة), is based on a book seriesby the prolific sci-fi writer, Ahmed Khaled Tawfiq (1962-2018), and is Netflix’s first original Egyptian series. It takes place in the late 1960s, a period seen as a golden age. Its lovable antihero, Dr. Refaat Ismail, battles supernatural creatures while navigating age-old conflicts between science and superstition, logic and the supernatural. As we discuss the first seasons of these two popular TV-series, we will consider the wide range of ideas and topics that they evoke, including modern Turkish and Egyptian history, music, food, nostalgia, folklore, competing perspectives on politics and national identity, gender, and the meaning of solidarity.

**Course Objectives:**

1. To develop critical tools to analyze visual and story-elements of narrative
2. To learn about Turkish and Egyptian history, society, politics, and visual culture
3. To participate in a supportive community of shared inquiry
4. To introduce students to the field of Middle Eastern Studies

**Required Materials:**

* Links and articles provided in our CarmenCanvas course page
* Netflix basic subscription ($8.99/month)

**Grading Basis: Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U)**

* A C- grade or higher is considered Satisfactory; a D+ grade or lower is considered unsatisfactory.
* You will earn credit hours for a grade of S, no credit for a grade of U. Neither grade will be counted in your GPA.
* According to [Ohio State bylaws on instruction](https://go.osu.edu/credithours), 1 credit hour shall be assigned for each 3 hours per week of the average student's time, including class hours, required to earn the average grade of "C" in this course.

**Course Policies:**

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend class regularly. One absence will be excused. Any further absences must be discussed with the instructors.

**Participation:** Students are expected to participate in the seminar discussions and in-class activities. This will sometimes include graded in-class writing assignments.

**Assignments:**

1. Students are expected to watch 1 episode of the assigned TV show on Netflix before coming to class (40-60 minutes each).
2. Short readings will be assigned for each class session and students are expected to read before class (est 20 minutes each).
3. Students are expected to complete short (1-page) reflections on each TV episode, submit them to our CarmenCanvas page, and bring them to class to be used in discussions and activities.
4. At the end of each of the two TV series, students may write a short (2-3 page) summary of what they learned.

**Grade Breakdown:**

Attendance: 13 classes x 1 point = 13 points (includes 1 excused absence)

Participation: 13 classes x 3 points = 39 points (includes 1 excused absence)

Assignments: 14 reflections x 2 points = 28 points

2 Summary Papers: 1 midterm paper + 1 final paper x 10 points each = 20 points

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**TOTAL: 100 points possible; Points needed for a C- (S grade): 70 points**

**Academic Misconduct**

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

**Students with Disabilities**

**Students with disabilities (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions) that have been certified by the Office of Student Life Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office of Student Life Disability Services is located in 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue; telephone 614- 292-3307, slds@osu.edu;** [**slds.osu.edu**](http://slds.osu.edu/)**.**

**Instructor Information**

Johanna Sellman is Assistant Professor of Arabic Literature in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC). She received a PhD in Comparative Literature from UT Austin. At OSU, she researches and teaches in the fields of modern Arabic literature, migration, translation, and Arab diasporic theatre. In NELC, she teaches courses in modern and medieval Arabic literature, translation, and cultural studies. Her current book project *Speculative Belongings: 21st Century Arabic Literature of Migration in Europe* analyzes the transformations of Arabic migration literature in an era of mobility, displacement, and globalization.

<https://nelc.osu.edu/people/sellman.13>

Danielle V. Schoon is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC), where she teaches undergraduate courses in Turkish Studies. She is also a lecturer in the departments of Sociology and Political Science, where she teaches courses on immigration. Schoon received a dual PhD in Middle Eastern Studies and Anthropology in 2015 from the University of Arizona. Her research interests are in minority politics and identity in contemporary Turkey and she has done the majority of her ethnographic research with Roma (“Gypsies”) in Istanbul.

<https://nelc.osu.edu/people/schoon.2>

**Course Content and Schedule: Aug 24 - Oct 11**

(2x/week for 55 minutes, 7-weeks, 1st session, AU21)

**Part I: *Ethos***

Week 1

Tuesday: Introductions

* Watch *Ethos* episode 1 in class
* Assignment: Reflection 1 in class

Thursday: Encountering Difference in Turkey

* Watch *Ethos* episode 2 before class
* Reading: “Introduction” in *Angry Nation: Turkey since 1989* by Kerem Oktem (pgs. 1-13)
* Assignment: Reflection 2 due (date)

Week 2

Tuesday: Eat, Pray, Love

* Watch *Ethos* episode 3 before class
* Reading: “Turkish Culture”: Core Concepts <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/turkish-culture/turkish-culture-core-concepts#turkish-culture-core-concepts>
* Assignment: Reflection 3 due (date)

Thursday: “Go like water, come like water”

* Watch *Ethos* episode 4 before class
* Reading: “Turkish Culture”: Religion, Family, Etiquette <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/turkish-culture/turkish-culture-core-concepts#turkish-culture-core-concepts>
* Assignment: Reflection 4 due (date)

Week 3

Tuesday: Culture of Masculinity

* Watch *Ethos* episode 5 before class
* Reading: “The Military and Turkish Society”
* Assignment: Reflection 5 due (date)

Thursday: Soundscapes

* Watch Episode 6 before class
* Reading: Introduction to “Arabesk Culture: A Case of Modernization and Popular Identity” by Meral Özbek <https://hakanyucelgsu.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/arabesk-culture.pdf>
* Assignment: Reflection 6 due (date)

Week 4

Tuesday: Melancholy and Nostalgia in the City

* Watch *Ethos* episode 7 before class
* Reading: excerpt from *Istanbul: Memories and the City* by Orhan Pamuk
* Assignment: Reflection 7

Thursday: Beginnings and Endings

* Watch *Ethos* episode 8 before class
* Reading: TBA
* Assignment: Reflection 8

**Part II: *Paranormal***

Week 5

Tuesday: Authorship and Genre / Ahmad Khalid Tawfiq

* Watch Episode 1 of *Paranormal* before class
* Reading: Read tributes to Ahmad Khalid Tawfiq: <https://arablit.org/2020/11/05/ahmed-khaled-tawfik-and-paranormal/> and article on the series <https://amroali.com/2020/10/paranormal-activity-inside-netflixs-first-egyptian-arabic-original/>
* Assignment: Reflection 9

Thursday: The Golden Age, 1960s Egypt

* Watch Episode 2 of *Paranormal* before class
* Reading: “Gamal Abdel Nasser” by Khaled Fahmy in *Global Middle East: Into the Twenty-first Century* eds. Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera
* Assignment: Reflection 10

Week 6

Tuesday: A Nahda Narrative

* Watch Episode 3 of *Paranormal* before class
* Reading: Excerpt from Rasheed El-Enany’s *Representation of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Literature*
* Assignment: Reflection 11

Thursday: Folklore and Gender

* Watch Episode 4 of *Paranormal* before class
* Reading: Explore this [list of supernatural creatures](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_legendary_creatures_by_type#Water)
* Assignment: Reflection 12

Week 7

Tuesday: Aesthetics of horror and the global gothic

* Watch Episode 5 of *Paranormal* before class
* Reading: Excerpt from Haytham Bahoora’s article “Writing the Dismembered Nation: The Aesthetics of Horror in Iraqi Narratives of War”
* Assignment: Reflection 13

Thursday: Conclusions

* Watch Episode 6 of *Paranormal* before class
* Conclusions