ARAB341 Filming War Zones: Representations of Wars in Iraq & Chechnya

Winter 2015

When & Where:
Online (Canvas source site)

Course professor:
Valerie Anishchenkova  vani@umd.edu

Office hours:
Online

You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you.  

Lev Trotsky

Course Description and Goals

By the end of the 20th century, the discourse on war has become an integral part of our culture. Narratives of war circulate in countless forms – stories, images, sounds – and enter our daily life from everywhere: TV and computer screens, radio, newspapers, magazines, music, conversations with friends and colleagues, and so on. The reality is that modern war is inescapable. Nowadays, cultural representations of military conflicts in media, film, literature, and cyberspace have became as important as the war itself.

In this class, the focus is not on the historical and political aspects of war (i.e. what happened when and why): instead, we will investigate and discuss the ways in which modern wars are cinematically depicted, narrated, and mythologized in different sociocultural locations – the US, the Middle East, and Russia. Please note that you are expected to familiarize yourselves with the historical background using available sources online and at the library.
The main objective is to explore the anatomy of propaganda and to investigate how diverse political and cultural agendas of the late 20th – early 21st centuries construct a wide variety of what I call “war fictions”: that is, ideologically informed war narratives. To that end, we will be examining a number of American, Middle Eastern, Russian, and European films (mainly motion pictures, but also some documentaries and episodes from TV series), looking at both similarities and contrasts between war fictions circulating in these distinct cultural areas and traditions.

With regard to historical timeline, we will focus on two wars in Iraq (the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 Iraq War) and the two Chechen wars (1994 and 1999) – in other words, the military conflicts that the United States and Russia engaged in after the end of Cold War.

This course will focus on the following two thematic areas:

- National identity and ways in which it is articulated in war films through representations of the military;
- Enemy-making practices and the construction of Otherness in war films.

**Learning Objectives:**

- Learning about war propaganda and how it functions in different cultures and ideologies (the U.S., the Middle East, Russia);
- Learning how to read and interpret war films;
- Learning various ways of analyzing Iraqi and Chechen war mythologies as formulated in American, Middle Eastern and Russian cinematic discourses;
- Developing critical thinking skills, especially with regard to understanding global war discourses.

This class is designed for upper-level undergraduate students who are interested in the subject of war and its dissemination in different cultures and societies. All course materials and discussions are in English.

Please note that due to the subject matter of the class, a number primary sources contain explicit and graphic content

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**Course Materials and Format**

All course materials are available on Canvas. All films will be streaming on our Canvas site as well: please check the Pick-N-Play and Online Media Reserves modules. Please note that because of the copyright restrictions most films will be screening for the period of 2 weeks.
In addition to the main selection of films, there will be a number of additional movies related to weekly topics that you can see on your own and, if you wish, use for your short papers and your final paper.

### Grade Distribution

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogging</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short papers</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
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### Course Requirements and Components

- **Blogs:**

  In an online course, blogs are the main discussion medium meant to bring us together as a group and giving us an opportunity to exchange ideas and talk about the material.

  You are expected to always be prepared and to *actively* participate in blog discussions. Remember that this is a very important component of your grade. When contributing to blog discussions, be open to alternative views and be respectful of different opinions, however passionate you feel about the subject, and please restrain yourselves from personal attacks.

  Please write blogs in designated “time windows” whenever possible – **10:00 am to 10:00 pm** on the day of the assignment – to give the rest of us time to read, reflect and comment on your posts. Blogs are always due at 10:00 pm.

  Read *Blogging Guidelines and Rubric.*

- **Short Papers:**

  You will be asked to write several short analytical papers, reflecting on assigned films and readings. **Each short paper is expected to be 2-3 pages long (double-spaced, font 12).**

  Each paper **must** include proper citations. If you wish to use footnotes/endnotes, please choose the footnote format. For detailed citation guidelines please refer to the following
website: http://www.dartmouth.edu/%7Esources/contents.html. Papers where citations are not used correctly will receive significantly lower grades!

All assignments are to be submitted on due days and times. Late submissions will be automatically assigned a zero grade.

Please upload all papers on Canvas in Word format. I will be giving you feedback online.

Read Paper Self-Assessment Guide and Paper Rubric. Specific paper guidelines will be available in Assignments.

- **Final Paper:**

The Final Paper will be 10 pages long (double-spaced, font 12) on a topic of your choosing, related to subjects covered and discussed in class. You are expected to analyze one or more of the additional films available on Canvas, using the analytical methods and tools acquired throughout the course. Before you start working on your final paper, you are required to discuss the topic of your paper with me via email or chat.

The Final Paper has to include a bibliography (I prefer the author-date Chicago style) and proper citations.

Link to Chicago-style citation quick guide: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

- **Preparation for class:**

As you prepare for our film discussions and work on your papers, please read various film reviews both by film critics and individuals, blogs, interviews with film directors, producers and actors, and watch film trailers. Get an idea about the director’s/producer’s background. Think about how all this information about the film influences your perception of the film itself.

**Important Note! Students who joined the class at a later time are required to make up all missed work.**

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**University Policies**

- **Special Arrangements:**

If you have a registered disability and wish to discuss accommodations with me, please let
me know at the very beginning of the course. Disabilities can be registered through Disability Support Services (4-7682 or 5-7683 TTY/TDD).

- **Religious Observances:**

  The University System of Maryland policy provides that students should not be penalized because of observances of their religious beliefs. Students shall be given an opportunity, whenever feasible, to make up within a reasonable time any academic assignment that is missed due to individual participation in religious observances. *It is the responsibility of the student to inform the instructor in writing* of any intended absences for religious observances at least two weeks in advance.

- **Code of Academic Integrity:**

  The University has approved a [Code of Academic Integrity](#) which prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. Plagiarism policy: all quotations taken from other authors, including from the Internet, must be indicated by quotation marks and referenced. Paraphrasing must be referenced as well. The following [University of Maryland Honor Pledge](#) has been proposed by the Council and approved by the University Senate: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination." This pledge should be handwritten and signed on the front page of all papers, projects or other academic assignments submitted for evaluation in this course.

- **Class Schedule:**

  Weekly class schedule is available on Canvas (see Modules).
## Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mon 1/5</td>
<td>The Art of Propaganda</td>
<td><em>Fahrenheit 9/11</em> (Michael Moore, 2004, 122 min)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tue 1/6</td>
<td>The Art of Propaganda</td>
<td><em>Celsius 41.11</em> (Citizens United, 2004, 71 min)</td>
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<td>Thu 1/8</td>
<td>Wars in Iraq and Chechnya: Background</td>
<td>PowerPoint: Chechen Wars</td>
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### Readings:

1) Terry Christensen and Peter Haas, “True Lies: The Rise of Political Documentary”
2) Bill Nichols, “Types of Documentary”


**Blog 1**

**Paper 1**
**Fri 1/9**

**Military and the Nation: the U.S.**

*Jarhead* (Sam Mendes, 2006, 123 min)
*Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 2000, 115 min)
*Generation Kill* – Episode 1 (David Simon and Ed Burns, HBO, 2008)

Readings:
1) Brenda Cromb, “War Films Without War: The Gulf War at the Movies.”
2) “Flirting with Hollywood: Interview with David O. Russell”
3) "Beyond the Choir: An Interview With David Simon"

**Blog 2**

**Weekend 1/10-11 Assignment**

**Military and the Nation: Russia**

*War/Voina* (Alexei Balabanov, 2004, 120 min)

Readings:
1) Louis Menashe, “Patriotic Gauze, Patriotic Gore: Russians at War”
2) From *Insiders and Outsiders in Russian Cinema* (Stephen Norris and Zara Torlone, 2008):
Oleg Sulkin, “Identifying Enemy in Contemporary Russian Film”; Anthony Anemone “The Vigilante Hero in Balabanov’s Films”

**Blog 3**

**Mon 1/12**

**Master Narratives: American Identity**

*The Manchurian Candidate* (John Frankenheimer, 1962, 127 min)
*The Manchurian Candidate* (Jonathan Demme, 2004, 130 min)

**Blog 4**

**Tue 1/13**

**Master Narratives: Post-Cold War Post-9/11 American Identity**

*Homeland* – Season 1 Episodes 1-2 (Alex Ganza, Showtime, 2011)

**Paper 2**
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wed 1/14</td>
<td>Master Narratives: Russian Identity</td>
<td><em>The Prisoner of the Mountains/Kavkazkiy Plennik</em> (Sergei Bodrov, 1996, 99 min)</td>
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<td>Readings:</td>
<td>1) Lev Tolstoy, “A Prisoner in the Caucasus” (short story)</td>
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<td>2) Alexander Pushkin, “Prisoner of the Caucasus” (poem)</td>
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<td>3) Bruce Grant, “The Good Russian Prisoner: Naturalizing Violence in the Caucasus Mountains”</td>
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<td>Thu 1/15</td>
<td>Nation as a Madhouse</td>
<td><em>House of Fools/Dom Durakov</em> (Andrei Konchalovskiy, 2002, 108 min)</td>
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<td>Readings:</td>
<td>Alina Birzache, “In Search of Cinematic Holy Foolishness as a Form of Orthodox Peacemaking”</td>
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<td><strong>Blog 5</strong></td>
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<td>Fri 1/16</td>
<td>The Other and Post-Soviet Russian Identity</td>
<td><em>Aleksandra</em> (Alexander Sokurov, 2007, 92 min)</td>
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<td><strong>Paper 3</strong></td>
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<td>Assignment</td>
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<td><em>The Dreams of Sparrows</em> (Hayder Daffar, 2005, 75 min)</td>
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<td><em>Voices of Iraq</em> (Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2004, 80 min)</td>
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<td><strong>Blog 6</strong></td>
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<td>Mon 1/19</td>
<td>Martin Luther King Day</td>
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<td>Tue 1/20</td>
<td>Constructing Otherness and Enemy-Making</td>
<td>Take another look at previously watched films and analyze the enemy-making practices in American and Russian war films.</td>
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<td><strong>Deadline to discuss/email your ideas for the Final Paper</strong></td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<td>Wed 1/21</td>
<td>The Iraq War: A Third Perspective</td>
<td><em>The Tiger and the Snow/La Tigre e la Neve</em> (Roberto Benigni, 2005, 110 min)</td>
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| Thu 1/22 & Fri 1/23 | Hollywood Stereotyping: Reversing the Roles | *Valley of the Wolves Iraq/Kurtlar Vadisi Irak* (Serdar Akar, 2006, 118 min)  
*Excuse Us/Maalesh Ehna Binitbahdal* (Sherif Mandour, 2005, 104 min) |
| Sun 1/25 | Final Paper is due              |                                                                          |