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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

Narratives of Middle East

Course Code: ENG5EJ304(2) • Module 2 Notes

Unit 5: Nothing of Note – Mostafa Ibrahim

Mostafa Ibrahim and the Poetics of the Egyptian Revolution

Mostafa Ibrahim is one of Egypt's most prominent contemporary colloquial Arabic (*Aamiya*) poets. Emerging as an iconic voice during the January 25, 2011 Egyptian Revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak, Ibrahim's verse gave rhythmic expression to the euphoria of Tahrir Square, followed swiftly by the agonizing disillusionment that accompanied military retrenchment and the restoration of authoritarian rule.

The Agony of the Mundane: Deconstructing "Nothing of Note"

In "Nothing of Note" (translated into English via the Poetry Translation Centre), Ibrahim crafts a masterpiece of tragic understatement. The title suggests complete domestic normality, yet the poem pulses with deep subterranean grief. The speaker moves through routine, mundane tasks—drinking morning coffee, smoking cigarettes, observing the city noise, checking the news—while an unspeakable national trauma hangs heavily in the air. The friends who marched alongside him in Tahrir are now either buried in unmarked graves, languishing in military prisons, or forced into silent conformity. Ibrahim illustrates how state violence operates by forcing citizens to internalize terror, pretending that "nothing of note" has occurred while an entire generation's dreams of freedom have been crushed.

Unit 6: Unknown Bedouins – Khalid Albudoor

Khalid Albudoor and the Bedouin Soul of the Emirates

Khalid Albudoor (born 1961) is a seminal Emirati poet and cultural archivist celebrated for pioneering modern free verse in the United Arab Emirates while safeguarding the oral memory, music, and Nabati poetic traditions of Bedouin culture. Writing in the shadow of towering glass skyscrapers and high-speed highways, Albudoor acts as a poetic bridge between ancient desert cosmology and oil-fueled hyper-modernity.

The Vanishing Sands and the Nomadic Spirit

In "Unknown Bedouins," Albudoor pays tribute to the forgotten nomadic ancestors whose footprints in the shifting sands have been buried beneath asphalt and concrete. The poem evokes the desert not as an empty, hostile wasteland, but as a vast, sacred ocean of spirit, silence, and profound survival wisdom. The Bedouins are depicted as noble, solitary wanderers who read the stars, understood the whispered language of the wind, and lived in deep ecological harmony with the arid wilderness. Albudoor laments the rapid amnesia of consumerist urban life, urging modern Emiratis not to lose their spiritual anchor in the rush toward material opulence.

Unit 7: Those Not For Me – Hamda Khamis Ahmad

Hamda Khamis Ahmad and the Bahraini Feminist Vanguard

Hamda Khamis Ahmad (born 1946) is a trailblazing Bahraini poet, essayist, and journalist who broke rigid cultural barriers to become one of the first women in the Arabian Gulf to publish modern free verse. Her poetry is defined by fierce existential independence, an unyielding critique of patriarchal domesticity, and a celebration of female emotional autonomy.

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Refusal of Conformity and the Sacred Solitude of the Self

In "Those Not For Me," Ahmad articulates a courageous poetic manifesto of refusal. The speaker systematically enumerates the societal expectations, hollow flatteries, and conventional patriarchal alliances that she rejects: she turns away from men who seek a submissive ornament, from hypocritical moralists who demand female self-erasure, and from a society that polices women's desire. Instead, Ahmad embraces an austere, sacred solitude. Her soul belongs only to those rare spirits who recognize woman as an equal, sovereign, intellectual being. The poem is a declaration of feminist liberation across the conservative landscapes of the Gulf.

Unit 8: Gone With the Gunpowder – Mosab Abu Toha

Mosab Abu Toha and the Living Archive of Gaza

Mosab Abu Toha (born 1992) is a visionary Palestinian poet, scholar, and librarian from the Jabalia refugee camp in the besieged Gaza Strip. Founder of the Edward Said Public Library in Gaza, Abu Toha's debut poetry collection *Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear: Poems from Gaza* (2022) won the American Book Award and garnered international acclaim for chronicling life under continuous military siege, blockade, and devastating aerial bombardment.

"Gone With the Gunpowder": The Erasure of Civilian Memory

In "Gone With the Gunpowder," Abu Toha confronts the catastrophic physical and psychic violence inflicted upon Gaza's civilian population. The poem documents the sudden, horrific obliteration of daily life by modern industrial warfare: in a single thunderous airstrike, an entire family home—containing decades of wedding albums, children's schoolbooks, antique porcelain, hand-knit blankets, and laughter—is instantly vaporized into a cloud of toxic gray gunpowder and ash. Abu Toha’s verse refuses sensationalism; his power lies in precise, heartbreaking domestic details—a child's bicycle mangled under concrete slabs, or a library of books buried under rubble. Poetry emerges not merely as an aesthetic creation, but as a vital act of human witnessing, proving that Palestinian memory cannot be extinguished by bombs.

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Middle Eastern Geopolitics & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 1)

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The literary and cinematic narratives explored in this course operate as powerful acts of epistemic counter-insurgency. By centering local voices, regional historical memories, and intricate domestic realities, writers like Jokha Alharthi, Abdul Rahman Munif, and filmmakers like Scandar Copti and Dania Bdeir shatter orientalist hegemony. They reveal a region pulsating with internal ideological contestations, where subaltern subjects continuously resist both domestic authoritarianism and external imperial interference.

2. Petrofiction, Neoliberal Urbanism, and Ecological Displacement

The discovery and extraction of petroleum remains the single most transformative and traumatic geopolitical event in modern Middle Eastern history. As theorized by Amitav Ghosh and developed in the literary scholarship on "petrofiction," the transition to an oil-dominated economy disrupted millennial-old agrarian rhythms, sustainable nomadism, and communal social structures. The resulting wealth did not democratize the region; rather, it consolidated rentier state monarchies, subsidized authoritarian surveillance apparatuses, and fostered speculative neoliberal urbanism built upon the hyper-exploitation of disenfranchised migrant laborers.

In literary works such as Munif's *Cities of Salt* and anthropological analyses like Ahmed Kanna's study of Dubai, petro-modernity is unmasked as an ecological and social catastrophe. Ancient oases and desert coastlines are replaced by fragile, unsustainable "salt cities" characterized by deep social apartheid and precarious migrant servitude. Literature emerges as an indispensable ecological archive, documenting the irreversible loss of ancestral landscapes while mourning the displacement of indigenous wisdom by corporate transnational capitalism.

3. Gender, Bodily Sovereignty, and Subaltern Transgressions

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Middle Eastern Geopolitics & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 2)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Middle Eastern Geopolitics & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 3)

1. Orientalism, Imperial Epistemologies, and the Subversion of the Western Gaze

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Middle Eastern Geopolitics & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 4)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Middle Eastern Geopolitics & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 5)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Middle Eastern Geopolitics & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 6)

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Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 2 Middle Eastern Geopolitics & Decolonial Hermeneutics (Extension Cycle 7)

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