UW in Paris
Spring 2023
UW Faculty-in-Residence Course Descriptions

Representation of Islam in French Literature and Pop Culture
Instructor: Professor Nevine El Nossery
Block 1
UW Equivalents: French 361, 3 credits
Through a wide range of texts, movies, songs and pop culture (advertising, media, comics, etc.), we will examine how Islam and the Islamic world are depicted in French artistic expressions, to understand the complex history of Western perceptions of Islam, taking France as a model. We will also read articles from the press to understand the place of Islam and the Muslim community in France today. Moreover, we will focus on contemporary debates related to immigration and the secular values of the Republic. We will read some excerpts from French literature: Montesquieu, Hugo, Houellebecq. We will see movies like: Monsieur Ibrahim, Persepolis, Divines. And we will listen to singers as: Diam's, Khaled, Cheb Mammi and stand-up comedians, such as Djamel Debouzze and Gad Elmaleh. Our approach will be chronological and thematic. After a brief overview of the Crusades, within which the choc of civilizations starts to emerge and influence the history of the relationships between the Muslim World and the West, we will tackle the colonial period, the migration phases, the “Beur” movement, and the debates around secularism and the values of the republic from the 90s to the present.

Several guest speakers will join us, and we will also visit local Islamic venues and attend cultural events related to the Muslim community in Paris. By exploring the long history of representations of Islam and Muslims in Europe and the West, this course will offer students a comparative perspective with which to apprehend attitudes toward Islam in the contemporary, global context.

Discovering Cosmopolitan Paris
Instructor: Nevine El Nossery
Block 2
UW Equivalents: French 362, 1 credit
Unlike how Paris is often depicted in pop culture, the city is not just croissants and berets. Through this 1-credit out-of-classroom activity, we would explore Paris beyond the classroom, so you become intellectually engaged with the city. We will discover some Parisian sites and neighborhoods that are characterized by the colorful mix of ethnicities from as far as Asia and Africa. We will explore different multicultural sites such as la Maison de la Culture du Japon, the Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA), the Grand Mosque of Paris, the American church of Paris, the Picasso museum, and many other places. We will also walk through ethnic neighborhoods and will enjoy the blend of North African couscous in Belleville, Jewish high-end boutiques in Le Marais, West and sub-Saharan markets in Little Africa, and the Parisian Chinatown.

In Sum, we will discuss the beauty and challenges of preserving multicultural heritage in the context of a modern and Cosmopolitan city such as Paris. At the end of the class, students will give an oral presentation on how their exploration of the city from its multicultural nature helped them appreciate diversity and inclusion, challenging their own cultural stereotypes and prejudice regarding the “Other”, therefore expanding their intellectual horizons.
This Mosque is situated, not in the Middle East, but at the heart of Paris! La Grande Mosquée de Paris was built in the 1920’s! The Mosque serves as an important symbol of France’s multicultural nature and a reminiscence of the long and complex history between France and the Arab/Muslim world.

The story behind this mosque perfectly reflects my way of being-in-the-world and my teaching methodology. Given the multiple layers of my identity (I love in Arabic, think in French, live and work in English, and sometimes dawdle in Spanish), my scholarship and my teaching explore the various interstitial spaces where languages, cultures and viewpoints intertwine, reflecting the (im)balance of power that can exist between societies and people in postcolonial settings. I bring these ideas to the classroom, a place I conceive as a space where all differences can be discovered, excavated, and come to the forefront. For the last twenty years of my life, I have been bringing students into the worlds of Francophone and Arabic literatures and cultures. The material I teach take the students to unfamiliar places, show them different ways of living and even dreaming. These experiences, both distinct from their own and yet, similar, enhance their ability to bridge cultures and to go beyond trivial differences. But it also allows them to better understand and discern the world that surrounds us, and to look anew at it with fresh eyes. Reading foreign works can expand their horizons of thinking and fill the void when answers are evasive; it brings nuances to their perspectives, might alter their views, and challenge the ideas they take for granted. At the end, my Wisconsin students become global citizens who can recognize and respect differences rather than seek sameness.