

Between Fiction and Politics (Mis)Representations of the United Nations in literature and movies

Thursday 12.30-14.30

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▪ **Course description**

While everyone has heard about the United Nations, few people actually understand its functioning. Since 1945, the institution has the object of much criticism (naive idealism, paralysis, bureaucratization, power politics, etc.) which challenges its legitimacy. This course suggests re-visiting these criticisms not through the lenses of International Relations (IR) theories but from the perceptions of other groups that are contemporary of these institutions and form another part of “civil society” namely writers and movie directors. Through their professional activity and art, they have shared (often on a broader scale than academics) their representations of the United Nations. What are these representations? To what extent do they accurately reflect what actually happens within the United Nations and its field of action? How were these representations spread and received? How do these works articulate fiction with politics? While priority will be given to the analysis of a corpus of selected documents (books and movies), attention will also be paid to some theoretical works (in political science, sociology and history) in order to help us understand the way in which particular media may influence our own representations of international institutions.

This course is open to any student who has an interest for international politics, international organizations and media studies in general.

▪ **Assignments**

Final exam (100%): the final exam will take place in **January**. It will last 2 hours and consist in 4 questions (5 pts each) related to the books/movies under study as well as the **collective discussion** held for each session (see below). The questions will all combine both factual and analytical elements.

Collective discussion: during the first session, students are asked to constitute several teams. The teams will remain the same until the end of the semester. At the beginning of each class, each team will be provided a question to discuss for 15-20'. Each team then designate a spokesperson whose task is to sum up the discussion of the team in front of the other teams.

There should be different spokespersons each week so everyone gets a chance to speak in public.

The **readings** are **mandatory** for each session in order to prepare for both the collective discussion and the written exams. They will all be available online through the Chamilo platform.

PROGRAM

Session 1: Fiction, Science and The United Nations: A Short Introduction

- Q&A on the syllabus
- Constitution of the teams
- Introduction

PART I: LITERATURE

Session 2: From the League of Nations to the UN: depicting the international bureaucracy

Reading: Excerpts from **Albert Cohen**, *Belle du Seigneur*, Folio, 2012 [1968] [English version available under the title: *Her Lover*, Penguin]

Session 3: A diplomat-writer inside the UN

Readings: Excerpts from **Romain Gary** (Fosco Sinibaldi), *L'homme à la colombe*, Gallimard, 1984 [1958]

Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, « The Politics, Power and Pathologies of International Organizations », *International Organizations*, 53(4), 1999, p. 699-732.

Listening: Romain Gary, *Nuits magnétiques*, 17 avril 1978 (Podcast, Archives INA) **(only available in French, not mandatory)**

Session 4: The UN, Aid and Development in Haiti

Readings: Excerpts from **Mischa Berlinski**, *Peacekeeping*, New York, Sarah Crichton Books, 2016.

John Karlsrud, “Special Representatives of the Secretary-General as Norm Arbitrators? Understanding Bottom-up Authority in UN Peacekeeping”, *Global Governance*, 19, 2013, p. 525-544.

Session 5: The UN: diplomats versus activists?

Reading: Excerpts from **John Le Carré**, *The Constant Gardener*, 2001 & excerpts from the movie: *The Constant Gardener*, Fernando Meirelles, 2005.

PART II: MOVIES

Session 6 and 7: The UN and Peacekeeping: the Bosnian War, Part 1

Movie: Danis Tanovic, *No Man's land*, 2001 (98') (full movie)

Reading : Béatrice Pouligny, *Ils nous avaient promis la paix*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2002, p. 133-198 (English version available)

Session 8: The UN and Peacekeeping: the Bosnian War, Part 2

Movie: Peter Kosminsky, *Warriors*, 1999 (171') (excerpts)

Reading: Mateja Peter, "Between Doctrine and Practice: The UN Peacekeeping Dilemma", *Global Governance*, 21, 2015, p. 351-370.

Session 9: Judging War Criminals

Movie: Marcel Schüpbach, *Carla's list*, 2007 (95') (excerpts)

Reading: David Bosco, *Rough Justice: The International Criminal Court in a World of Power Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014 (excerpts)