

¡Critical Thinking Saves Lives!

The Middle East Through Cinema

NEAR E 386 | June 22–July 22, 2020 | Virtual

Mondays, 1:10 - 3:20 PM

Aria Fani | ariafani@uw.edu | 233 Denny Hall*

Office hours: Appointment via [Calendly](#)

* *Office moved to (virtual) living room until god knows*



“The door that opens to nowhere.” Image © Abbas Kiarostami, courtesy Magnum Photo Agency

In NEAR E 386, we will deepen our knowledge of contemporary Middle Eastern societies through the lens of cinematic production. Cinematic production provides us with a robust medium through which to critically identify and reframe a variety of questions central to the makeup of every society: national identity, representations of history, politics of language and religion, conflict, and dynamics of class, gender, and sexuality. We will delve into five feature films that are to varying degrees representatives of the cinemas of Egypt, Israel/Palestine, Iran, Turkey, and Afghanistan.

Each scholarly discipline consists of a distinct —albeit not self-contained— community of readers defined by a set of shared reading practices and a language to express their worldview. Scholars of cinema have their own specialized language with which they raise questions and invite different types of analysis. This class serves as a basic introduction to writing on Middle Eastern cinema for an academic audience. We will discuss each film in class and draw on analyses from scholarly writings in order to produce analytically clear and culturally sensitive film reviews. Together, we will work toward two main objectives: a critical introduction to Middle Eastern societies through their cinematic production and the cultivation of professional skills in the form of writing critical film reviews.

Prerequisites: Knowledge of Middle Eastern languages or cultures not required or assumed, but curiosity and empathy are desired.

Required materials: All films and readings will be provided online.

How's this course good for your life?

Universities in the U.S. used to be vehicles of upward mobility. Today, they increasingly behave like neoliberal corporations that prioritize their bottom line above the quality of students' education, a just treatment of educators, and the well-being of our warming planet. In light of growing student debt and income inequality, the American university is experiencing a crisis of credibility and moral deficiency on an institutional level. Any academic discipline that does not neatly fit the neoliberal commodified logic of value gets defunded and institutionally gutted. In a higher educational ecosystem that defines its worth according to measures set by mega-corporations and Wall Street, what would you get out of a course on Middle Eastern cinema?

We are not just studying a particular type of cultural production (film), focused on a specific cultural geography (the Middle East), we are also forming a small community centered around the shared goal of cultivating critical thinking skills. The most effective manner to develop critical thinking skills is through close engagement with the cultural and artistic specificity of the subject at hand—Middle Eastern cinema—and not treating it as an exotic backdrop against which we're learning how to think and express ourselves in an academic setting. As with all subjects in the humanities, the ultimate goal is to widen our range of understanding and empathy. We cannot afford to live in a world where such vital human qualities are relegated to the "miscellaneous skills" section of your resume.

Course breakdown	Active Participation	20%
	Discussion Questions	20%
	Critical Essay	20%
	Presentation	10%
	Film Reviews (4)	30%

Total	100%	

Participation: Show up and be present! Engage the course content by asking pointed questions and making meaningful comments. Any course, no matter how sexy or well planned in theory, will only be as good as the integrity and intellectual investment both the students and the instructor put into it.

Discussion questions: Each week, you will post a discussion question for the assigned film and address one of your peer's questions on Canvas. In certain weeks, I will ask you to write a post-discussion reflection. Please value the input of your peers by posting thoughtful comments.

Critical Essay: You will write one 4-6 page critical essay of a film of your choice that we've watched during the course. I will provide you with a detailed rubric.

Presentation: You will prepare a 4 minute oral presentation for class based on the film that you've selected to write your critical essay on. In it, you will present your main ideas and your peers will have the opportunity to ask you questions that will help you refine your critical review. I will provide you with a rubric.

Film Reviews: You will write four 1-1-½ page film reviews. See calendar below for deadlines. I will provide you with a detailed rubric.

Disability Resources for Students: If you need any type of accommodation, please contact the [Office of Disability Resources for Students](#). I am more than happy to work with Disability Resources to provide appropriate accommodation for you.

Self-Care/Community-Care: There is no learning without self-care. It is important to care for our body, mind, and spirit while we are in school. Toward that end, there are many different kinds of support services on campus, including the Counseling Center, Hall Health, and the IMA. If you are concerned about yourself or a friend who is struggling, Safecampus, at 1-800-685-7233, is a very helpful resource to learn more about how to access campus-based support services.

Given the fact that many services on campus are not operative per usual due to Covid-19, please reach out about your personal needs. I will work with you to find a good method of accommodation. Ultimately, the best type of self-care is community care and our class will be your community this summer.

Religious Accommodation: It is the policy of the University of Washington to accommodate student absences to allow students to take holidays for reasons of faith or conscience or for organized activities conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or religious organization, so that students' grades are not adversely impacted by the absences. Click [here](#) to read further.

Academic Honesty: Students are expected to treat their fellow classmates and instructors with honesty and respect throughout the course. All exam answers and posters must reflect original work. No form of cheating is acceptable. The following [link](#) has information on academic honesty, plagiarism, and consequences. Students are expected to adhere to the University of Washington Code of Student Conduct which can be found at the following [link](#).

Civility for All: I am committed to creating a space that is inclusive to all. By all, I mean whoever may be reading this. The University of Washington is committed to fostering an environment where the free exchange of ideas is an integral part of the academic learning environment. Disruption of classroom discussions can prohibit other students from fully engaging and participating. Any student causing disruption may be asked to leave any class session, and, depending on the severity and frequency of that behavior, an incident report may be filled with Community Standards and Student Conduct. As a condition of enrollment, all students assume responsibility to observe standards of conduct that will contribute to the pursuit of academic goals and to the welfare of the academic community. For more detailed information on these standards, please visit [here](#).

Make-Up Policies: I am quite flexible as long as you communicate with me in advance.

Resources:

- **Scholarly source** on Middle Eastern cinema (posted on Canvas)
 - *A Short Guide to Writing about Film*-Pearson (2014)
 - *Historical Dictionary of Middle Eastern Cinema* (2010)
 - *Contemporary World Cinema Europe, the Middle East, East Asia and South Asia* (2006)
- How to write **film review** for an educated audience
 - *New York Times* [film reviews](#)
- Podcast on **contemporary Middle Eastern cultures & cinema**
 - *Kerning Cultures* (podcast), *Mizna* (on Arab cinema), *Jadaliyya* (critical analysis)
- In the **Pacific Northwest**
 - [Seattle International Film Festival](#) / [Iranian Film Initiative](#) in Seattle / [Vancouver International Film Festival](#)

Schedule

(tentative like everything else in life)

Week	Date	Film & Reading	What's due
<p>* You are to watch/read the assigned film/article <i>prior</i> to coming to class. We will not be watching any films during class. Items that must be completed before class appear in bold. Class time will be spent discussing films collectively and in smaller groups. On certain dates, guest speakers will also join our discussion! #NerdyJoys</p>			
1	June 22	<p>Meet & Greet</p> <p><i>Mini-lecture</i> (by instructor)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mapping the Middle East <p>Podcast</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “How To Watch A Film For A Course,” written by Dr. Alison Levine (on Canvas) <p>Film</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Kabuli Kid</i> (2008), in Dari: بچه کابلی (on YouTube) <p><i>Guest speaker</i> on Afghan cinema</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mithaq Kazimi <p style="text-align: center;">***</p> <p>Further exploration of Afghan cinema:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See this article 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete survey about your interests and background - Watch <i>Kabuli Kid</i> and listen to the listed podcast (Levine) prior to class.

2	June 29	<p>Film</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Asmā</i> (2006), in Arabic: أسماء (on YouTube) <p>Guest speaker on Egyptian cinema</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professor Terri DeYoung <p>Skim reference:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shafik, “Egyptian Cinema” selected from <i>Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film</i>, 2001) (on Canvas) <p style="text-align: center;">***</p> <p>Suggested documentary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Umm Kultbum, A Voice Like Egypt</i> (1996) (on YouTube) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First Film Review
3	July 6	<p>Film</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Lemon Tree</i> (2008), in Hebrew/Arabic: עץ לימון / شجرة ليمون (through UW link) <p>Handout</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Reading a Film Sequence” (on Canvas) <p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ben Zevi Morad, “The Evolution of the Portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in Contemporary Israeli Cinema,” In <i>Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion</i> (2012) (on Canvas) <p>Guest speaker on Israeli cinema</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ayelet Even-Nur <p style="text-align: center;">***</p> <p>Further exploration of Israeli cinema:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ella Shohat, <i>Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation</i> (I.B. Tauris, 2010) <p>*(Please don’t purchase books/anything on Amazon, see here for alternatives)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Second Film Review

4	July 13	<p>Film</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Where Is the Friend's Home?</i> (1987), in Persian خانه دوست کجاست؟ (through UW link) <p><i>Skim reference:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Naficy, "Iranian Cinema," <i>Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film</i>, 2001 (on Canvas) <p><i>Guest speaker</i> on Iranian cinema</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Golbarg Rekabtalaei <p style="text-align: center;">***</p> <p>Suggested documentary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Iran: A Cinematographic Revolution (On YouTube) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Third Film Review
5	June 20	<p>Film</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Yol</i> in Turkish (1982) in Kurdish: <i>Rê</i> (on YouTube) <p>Skim reference:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Erdoğan and Göktürk, "Turkish Cinema," <i>Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film</i>, 2001 (on Canvas) <p style="text-align: center;">***</p> <p>Other recommended Turkish films</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>The Edge of Heaven</i> (2007) - Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul (2005) - <i>Gönül Yarasi</i> (2005) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fourth Film Review - Student presentations (Instructions will be posted)
<p>Film Review Due on July 26 at noon NST</p>			<p>* Non-stretchable Time</p>