

**The Cinemas of the Middle East and North Africa**  
ASIA 435; Spring 2013  
Yaron Shemer

**Time:** T/Th 3:30-4:45, Film Screening: T 5-7  
**Place:** Genome Sciences Bldg., Rm 1374  
**Office:** New West 109  
**Office hours:** T/Th 2-3pm  
**Contact information:** email–[yshemer@email.unc.edu](mailto:yshemer@email.unc.edu); phone– 919/962-5428

**Course description:**

The course is aimed at undergraduate students of Middle Eastern cultures and languages, Film/Media Studies, and all students interested in the cinematic expression of national, religious, and ethnic identities in the Middle East and North Africa (ME/NA). *The Cinemas of the Middle East and North Africa* will explore the social, cultural, political, and economic contexts in which films are made and exhibited. The course will employ a variety of film theories, including postcolonial, feminist, and Third Cinema, to provide the analytical tools for critical analysis.

The course will attend to the diversity within ME/NA and hence the “cinemas” of the course title. But this course is also designed to explore shared intra-regional cinematic trends pertaining to discourse, aesthetics, production, and distribution. Similarly, the course will explore “national cinema” vis-à-vis intra-national religious, ethnic, and linguistic differences, on the one hand, and transnational/global media forces, on the other hand.

*The Cinemas of the Middle East and North Africa* is designed 1. to enhance students’ acquaintance with the regional affairs as expressed in cinema, i.e., to learn from the films; 2. to enhance students’ command of film language, aesthetics, and discourse, i.e., to learn about film; 3. to appreciate the different ways not only of making films but also of seeing them, i.e., to encourage critical viewing of films; 4. to provide students with a better understanding of the multilayered contexts and perspectives within which we can situate national cinemas; 5. to expand cultural appreciation of people and groups whose traditions and beliefs might differ from our own; and 6. to have students accustomed to discussing these matters in an informed and respectful manner.

- ◇ Fourteen feature-length narrative films and several shorts will be screened during the semester.
- ◇ All films have English subtitles.
- ◇ Classes will include discussions over Sakai with filmmakers whose works we will screen in class. One guest filmmaker will also discuss her film in class.
- ◇ This course meets VP, BN, and GL requirements.

**Note:** Students enrolling in this class are not expected to have previous knowledge of film theory and criticism. The first few classes should provide students with sufficient knowledge needed for our film analyses.

### **Arabic Languages Across the Curriculum Discussion Section**

Students enrolled in this course are eligible to take a supplementary discussion section in Arabic (Wednesdays 5:00-5:00pm), linked to ASIA/RELI 181, ASIA/HIST 276, ASIA 435, and ASIA 452. The Arabic LAC section will enable you to use your language skills to explore the modern Middle East in greater detail, using a wide variety of materials about a wide range of ideas, countries, historical periods, and central figures. There is no strict language prerequisite for enrolling in LAC, but it is generally recommended that students have already completed four semesters of language study (i.e. ARAB 203). Students who participate in this LAC section to receive one credit hour in the target language (ARAB 308). If you are interested in enrolling, contact the instructor, Mohamed Hamed at [mseoud@email.unc.edu](mailto:mseoud@email.unc.edu).

For more information on the LAC program, visit <http://areastudies.unc.edu/lac>.

### **Course requirements and grading:**

#### Grade summary:

Class presentation: 10%  
Reaction papers: 12%  
Critical film reviews: 18%  
Final exam: 25%  
Participation: 7%  
Term paper: 28%

- ◇ Class presentation (groups of two): (10%) - Student will present one topic from a list which would be provided at the beginning of the semester. Presentations, preferably using Power Point, should include relevant bibliography. Student will post their presentation on Sakai.  
[Seven minutes]
- ◇ Reaction papers: (2x6%=12%) – Two reaction papers to the assigned or optional readings. Students need to submit the reaction papers when the class assigned reading is due (see class schedule below). When the assigned reading consists of more than one article, students may choose to write about one article only or any number of them.  
[One page for each reaction paper. At least one reaction paper should be submitted by Thursday, March 7.]

- ◇ Critical film reviews: (2x9%=18%) - Students will write a critical analysis of two of the films screened in class. The analyses need to address more than simple content-related aspects. More on that at the beginning of the semester. Assignments are due the class meeting immediately following the screening. Students may not submit film reviews when the weekly screening precedes the class discussion of the film (see schedule below).  
Sample reviews are available on Sakai.  
[A page and a half for each review. At least one critical film review should be submitted by Thursday, March 7.]
- ◇ Final exam: (25%) **Tuesday, April 30, 4-7pm**  
The final exam is designed to assess your familiarity with and ability to synthesize materials covered in lectures, class discussions, and readings, and to relate these materials to the films watched in class.
- ◇ Participation: (7%)
- ◇ Term paper: (28%) – Choose one of the following topics:
  - In “The Politicized Landscape—why space matters” (chapter 1) of her book *Filming the Modern Middle East*, Lina Khatib writes, “Cinematic representation of space is here analyzed as an example of the exercise of power. The ways different cinemas understand space are different. While Hollywood seems to attempt to use space as the stage upon which political conflicts are fought, i.e., space as background, Arab cinemas pay more attention to the way space is part of political conflicts..., i.e., space as foreground” (15-16). Assess this statement in light of two films, at least one of which was not screened in class.
  - Choose two films (at least one of which was not screened in class) from two different countries. Discuss these films within the critical perspective which problematizes “national cinema.”
  - “The principal characteristic of Third Cinema is really not so much where it is made, or even who makes it, but rather the ideology it espouses and the consciousness it displays. The Third Cinema is that cinema of the Third World which stands opposed to imperialism and class oppression in all their ramifications and manifestations” (Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World*, pg. 2). Assess the usefulness and tenability of Gabriel’s definition and assertion in light of the cinemas of the Middle East in the past and present.
  - In her discussion of Turkish society Carol Delaney maintains that, oftentimes, not only in Turkey, “*women may symbolize the nation, but men represent it*” (“Father State, Motherland, and the Birth of Modern Turkey,” pg. 190). Examine issues of power relations, agency, stereotypes, cinematic roles, POV/focalization, language, and voice in probing into the dilemmas of gender and nation in the cinemas of the Middle East and North Africa.

Guidance and expectations for the term paper:

- Develop a clear argument or thesis about the topic of choice.
- Support your arguments.
- Cite your sources and provide a bibliography.
- In your analysis you should employ assigned readings, class lectures, and two academic sources (e.g., articles, book chapters) in addition to those already assigned.
- Make sure that your paper is free of grammatical and spelling errors.
- Sample papers are posted on Sakai.
- Length: six pages.

Grading Scale: A (94-100); A- (90-<94); B+ (88-<90); B (84-<88); B- (80-<84); C+ (78-<80); C (74-<78); C- (70-<74); D+ (68-<70); D (64-<68); D- (60-<64); Lower than 60=F.

An explanation of the university grading system is available at <http://registrar.unc.edu/resources/rpm24.php>.

**Required texts:**

- *Khatib, Lina. Filming the Modern Middle East: Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World.* I.B. Tauris, 2006. (Available at the UNC-Chapel Hill Student Store.)
- All other readings are available on Sakai. Students are expected to bring hardcopies of these materials to class or have access to them electronically.

Recommended reading for the term paper and class presentations is available on Sakai.

**Note the following procedures, policies, and guidelines:**

- You are allowed one unexcused absence. Unless justified by family or medical emergencies, missing or coming late to more than one class will count against your grade—one point for each occurrence. If you miss class, even with an excused absence, you are responsible for making up the missed work and keeping up with the schedule of assignments. Missing more than five classes will result in an F grade.
- Submit a hard copy of your assignments. Assignments should be turned in promptly by due date at the beginning of class. Two grade levels will be subtracted for each day of late submission (e.g., from B+ to B-). Assignments submitted over six days past the due date will automatically receive an F grade.
- Failure to submit the term paper will result in an F grade for the course. Paper proposal is due Tuesday, April 2. Proposal should include a title, one-paragraph description of your paper proposal where you state clearly and succinctly your thesis and list your primary (i.e., films) and secondary sources. My feedback to your proposal is meant to help you conceptualize your topic of interest and guide you in designing and completing a solid (albeit short) academic paper.
- Use a standard 12-point Times New Roman font with 1” margins and double space your text for all written class assignments.

- Read intently. It is recommended that you annotate assigned texts.
- Turn off your cell phone before class begins and do not use it until class is finished. Do not use your laptop during class unless it is part of an in-class activity. If the instructor notices that a student uses his/her computer for other purposes (e.g., Facebook), this student will no longer be allowed to use the computer in class.
- Inquiries about class discussions and papers should be handled during office hours, not by e-mail.
- When you send an e-mail to the instructor, put “Asia 150” and your name in the subject line. Allow 24 hours for a reply.
- You will receive a credit of a point and a half (added to the final grade) for each of the evening screening at the Varsity, 1/31 and 2/28, that you attend (see schedule below). Attending the screening at the Varsity on Tuesday, April 9, at 7pm is mandatory; no class screening that day.
- Changes to the syllabus, including due dates and test dates (excluding the officially scheduled final examination) may be revised when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible so that students can adjust their schedules.
- Familiarize yourself with the course page which our librarians are creating for this class.
- Accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, contact Disability Services. Students with special needs should advise the instructor at the beginning of the course. For information on UNC’s Department of Disability Services see <http://disabilityservices.unc.edu/>
- Become familiar with the terms of the Honor Code set out at <http://instrument.unc.edu>.
- Familiarize yourself with the UNC Policies and Guidelines for a Cooperative Learning Environment (<http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/procedures1.html>).

## The Cinemas of the Middle East and North Africa Class Schedule

- Thursday, Jan, 10: Class introduction & Film aesthetics and criticism
- Tuesday, Jan 15: Film aesthetics and criticism (cont.)  
**Screening** "The Battle of Algiers" ("La battaglia di Algeria," Gillo Pontecorvo, Algeria/Italy, 1966)
- Thursday, Jan, 17: Contextualizing early Middle Eastern and North African cinemas:  
 Colonialism, nationalism, modernism, and Orientalism  
**Reading** *Filming the Modern Middle East*, 1-13, (Khatib)  
 "The History of Arab Cinema," 9-33, (Shafik)
- Tuesday, Jan 22: Contextualizing early Middle Eastern and North African cinema cinemas:  
 (cont.)  
**Reading** "Cinema under Colonialism," 22-35, (Malkmus & Armes)  
**Screening** "Alexandria ... Why" ("al'Iskanderiya... leh," Youssef Chahine, Egypt, 1979)
- Thursday, Jan, 24: Discourses on national cinema  
**Reading** "Framing National Cinemas," 88-102, (Hayward)  
 "The Concept of National Cinema," 36-46, (Higson)  
 "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema," 63-73, (Higson)
- Tuesday, Jan 29: Situating ME/NA cinemas in the context of Third Cinema  
**Reading** *Third Cinema in The Third World*, "Preface" & "Introduction," xi-4, (Gabriel)  
 "The Third Worldist Film," 248-255 & 285-291, (Shohat & Stam)  
**Screening** "Journey to the Sun" ("Günese yolculuk," Yesim Ustaoglu, Turkey, 1999)
- Thursday, Jan, 31: Overview: Contemporary Egyptian, Lebanese, Iranian, North African, and Turkish national cinemas  
**Reading** "Creative Responses to Conflict," 1-21, (Gugler)  
*Filming the Modern Middle East*, 134-163, (Khatib)  
 "Arab Cinema Today," 215-231 & 238-257, (Shafik)  
 "Turkish Cinema," 533-546, (Erdogan & Gokturk)  
 [Optional: "Deep Nation," 203-221, (Robins & Aksoy)]
- [Optional extra-credit—Screening tonight, 1/31, 7pm, Varsity Theater:  
 "Turkey's Tigers," (Turkey, 2006)]
- Tuesday, Feb. 5: Overview: Contemporary Egyptian, Lebanese, Iranian, North African, and Turkish national cinemas (cont.)  
**Reading** *The New Iranian Cinema*, "Introduction," 1-25, (Tapper)  
 "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran," 26-65, (Naficy)  
**Screening** "Chronicle of a Disappearance," (Elia Suleiman, Palestine, 1996)

- Thursday, Feb. 7: Overview: Israeli and Palestinian national cinemas  
**Reading** *Filming the Modern Middle East*, 121-134, (Khatib)  
 “Israeli Cinema Engaging the Conflict,” 154-165, (Gertz & Munk)  
 “A Chronicle of Palestinian Cinema,” 187-197, (Gertz and Khleifi)  
 [Optional: “Chronicle of a Disappearance,” 169-178, (Bresheeth)]
- Tuesday, Feb. 12: Overview: Israeli and Palestinian national cinemas (cont.)  
**Reading** Excerpt from “Post-1948: The Heroic-Nationalist Genre” (*Israeli Cinema*), 57-76, (Shohat)  
*Dreams of a Nation*, “Introduction,” 7-22, (Dabashi)  
 “Is There a Palestinian Cinema?” 150-172, (Alexander)  
**Screening** “Hill 24 Doesn’t Answer” (“Giva’ a esrim ve’arba eina ona, Thorolod Dickinson, Israel, 1955)  
 [Note: screening will precede class discussion]
- Thursday, Feb. 14: Stereotyping and otherization  
**Reading** Excerpts from “Reel Bad Arabs” and “West Bank Story”  
 “Stereotype, Realism and the Struggle over Representation,” excerpts from pages 178-219, (Shohat & Stam)
- Tuesday, Feb. 19: Voice and agency  
**Reading** Excerpts from pages 5-32 of “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” (Alcoff)  
**Screening** “Raging Dove” (Duki Dror, Israel/Palestine, 2001)  
 Skype discussion with filmmaker Duki Dror will follow the screening.
- Thursday, Feb. 21: Voice and agency (cont.)
- Tuesday, Feb. 26: The Burden of Representation  
**Reading** “The Burden of Self-Representation: Reflections on Shḥur and Its Legacy for Contemporary Mizrahi Films in Israel,” (Shemer).  
**Screening** “Sh’hur” (Hanna Azoulai-Hasfari, Israel, 1995)  
 [Note: screening will precede class discussion]
- Thursday, Feb. 28: The politics of language in cinema  
 [Optional extra-credit—Screening tonight, 2/28, 7pm, Varsity Theater: “A Separation,” (“Jodaeiye Nader az Simin,” Asghar Farhadi, Iran, 2011)]
- Tuesday, March 5: Class and ethnic dilemmas in Middle Eastern and North African cinemas  
**Reading** “Kurdistan” (from “Creative Responses to Conflict”), 29-30, (Gugler)  
 “The Pain of Giving Birth to Kurdish Cinema,” 56-58, (Kutschera)  
**Screening** “Turtels Can Fly” (“Lakposhtha hām parvaz mikonand,” Bahman Ghobadi, Iran/Iraq/Kurdistan , 2004)
- Thursday, March 7: Class and ethnic dilemmas in ME/NA cinemas (cont.)

<b>Spring break March 11-17</b>
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Tuesday, March 19: Women in Middle Eastern and North African cinemas  
**Reading** "Veiled Voice and Vision in Iranian Cinema," 37-53, (Naficy)  
**Screening** "Bashu, The Little Stranger" ("Bashu, garib-e kuchak," Bahram Bayzai, Iran, 1986)

Thursday, March 21: Gender and nation  
**Reading** *Filming the Modern Middle East*, 81-104, (Khatib)  
*Gender & Nation*, 1-25, (Yuval-Davis)  
"Marking Gender and Difference in the Myth of the Nation," 238-253, (Rahimieh)

Tuesday, March 26: Gender and nation (cont.)  
**Screening** "Yacoubian Building" ("Imarat Yacoubyan," Marwan Hamed, Egypt, 2006)

Thursday, March 28: Jewish and Islamic terrorism  
**Reading** *Filming the Modern Middle East*, 165-173 & 183-200, (Khatib)  
"The Hilarity of Evil: The Terrorist Drama in Israeli and Palestinian Films," 40-44, (Shemer)

Tuesday, April 2: Home/Homeland  
Diasporic and exilic cinema  
**Reading** "Telling the stories of *Heim* and *Heimat*, Home and Exile," 24-39, (Bresheeth)  
"Between Rocks and Hard Places," 125-147, (Naficy)  
**Screening** "West Beyrouth" (Ziad Doueiri, Lebanon, 1998)

**Due: Term paper proposal**

Thursday, April 4: Trauma, history, and memory  
Short film: "After-Shave," (Hany Tamba, Lebanon, 2004)  
**Reading** "Lebanese Cinema and the Representation of War," 134-145, (Khatib).  
"Bleeding Memories," 105-112, (Gertz & Khleifi)  
"West Beirut," 191-198, (Deeley)

Tuesday, April 9: Jewish and Islamic Terrorism (conclusions)  
Home/Homeland: Diasporic and exilic cinema  
Trauma, history, and memory

**Screening at 7pm, Varsity Theater: "Cairo 678" (Mohamed Diab, Egypt, 2010)**

Thursday, April 11: Trauma, history, and memory (cont.)  
State-regulated and self-imposed censorship  
The politics of interruption  
**Reading** *Filming the Modern Middle East*, 201-209, (Khatib)  
"Classic Tools, Original Goals," 66-76, (Devictor)

“Censorship,” 33-36, (Shafik)  
“Political Film in Egypt,” 228-251, (Armbrust).

Tuesday, April 16: Space, borders, and identity  
Class visit: Prof. Zvi Ben-Dor, NYU  
**Reading** *Filming the Modern Middle East*, 15-61, (Khatib)  
“Location and Cultural Identity in Iranian Films,” 200-214, (Saeed-Vafa)  
**Screening** “Salata Baladi” (Nadia Kamel, Egypt, 2007)

Thursday, April 18: Skype discussion with filmmaker Nadia Kamel (Peabody 08f)  
Hybrid cinema and cinema about hybridity  
Transnational trends: cinema across territorial, national, and lingual boundaries

<b>Due:</b> <b>Term Paper</b>
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Tuesday, April 23: Cinema and electronic media  
**Reading** “Diversification in the Satellite Era,” 43-45, (Shafik)  
“By the Bitstream of Babylon,” 213-232, (Shohat)  
**Screening** “The Wedding Song” (“Le chant des mariées,” Karin Albou, Tunisia/France, 2008)

Thursday, April 25: Final discussions

<b>Final: Tuesday, April 30, 4-7pm</b>
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