

Course Syllabus

NELC 118: Iranian Cinema: Gender, Politics and Religion

University of Pennsylvania

(Cross-listed with ComLit, Women's Studies, Religious Studies, Cinema Studies)

Mondays and Wednesdays

2:00-3:20

Taught by: Dr. Pardis Minucheer

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-3

Office Location: Williams Hall, Room: 838

Course description: In this course, we will examine the distinct characteristics of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema. Discussion will revolve around major themes such as gender politics, family relationships and women's social, economic and political roles, as well as the symbolic language of modern Iranian cinema.

Students are responsible to write a short response paper (1-2 pages in length) after every film screening.

Wednesday, September 9: **Introduction** (Excerpts from Mohsen Makhmalbaf's Salaam Cinema)

MONDAY, September 14: Screening of "**Ten**" directed by Abbas Kiarostami.

Whether in terms of camera techniques or style, Kiarostami's "Ten" is experimental in many ways. How does this experimental technique affect the representation of its subject matter? Give some examples. How does the film "Ten" depict gender relationships" and especially the "family chemistry", and how is it different from other similar films about women's issues. What is the relationship between the protagonist and faith/religion, and how is this relationship different from that of other women in the movie?

WEDNESDAY, September 16: Discussion on Ten

MONDAY, September 21: Screening of "**The Moment of Innocence**" directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf.

How do different locations in this film determine the narrative space? Give some examples. This film is directed with multiple narrators. What is the significance of this technique and how effective is it? What is the role of the female characters in the film's narrative? Are they supportive of the men or are they the "voice of

reason"? Give some examples. This film is an autobiographical recounting of the past. Notice how the past is retold and narrated by different characters. Do you think this is a truthful account of the past, or not? Give some examples in support of your argument.

WEDNESDAY, September 23: Discussion

MONDAY, September 28: Screening of "**Close-Up**" directed by Abbas Kiarostami.

How is reality and fiction blurred in this documentary? Why do you think Hossein Sabzian decides to deceive the Iranian family? Do you think justice is served properly in the documentary?

WEDNESDAY, September 30: Discussion

MONDAY, October 5: Group Project
Discussion on all articles related to Kiarostami in the Bulkpack

WEDNESDAY, October 7: Group Project
Discussion on all articles related to Makhmalbaf in the Bulkpack

MONDAY, October 12: Screening of "**The May Lady**" directed by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad

How does The May Lady's protagonist negotiate her role in family and in society at large? One of the main male characters in this film is depicted only in his voice. Why does the director choose to do so? In the May Lady, we notice an ongoing generational conflict. How does the director represent this conflict? Throughout this film, we view clips of different documentary footage. How is this footage embedded in the film and why?

WEDNESDAY, October 14: Discussion
Readings: Hamid Naficy, "Veiled Voice and Vision in Iranian Cinema: The Evolution of Rakhshan Banietemad's Films"
Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Negotiating the Forbidden: On Women and Sexual Love in Iranian Cinema"

MONDAY, October 19: Fall Break

WEDNESDAY, October 21: Group Project (Mid-term paper due)
Readings: Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa, "Location (Physical Space) and Cultural Identity in Iranian Films"

Agnes Devictor, "Classic Tools, Original Goals: Cinema and Public Policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979-97)

MONDAY, October 26: Screening of "**The Hidden Half**" directed by Tahmineh Milani

In the filmic structure of the Hidden Half, there are many flashbacks to the past from the present. How does the director use this and other cinematic techniques? The Hidden Half is yet another example of a woman protagonist in search of an "identity". How is her circumstance different or similar to the characters in other movies? What is the role of Rouzbeh Javid? And how does his reappearance at the end provide a resolution? How do the motifs of "judges/justice/judgment and judgmental" interact in the film? And how do they affect the fate of the women in the film?

WEDNESDAY, October 28: Discussion

Readings: Norma Claire Moruzzi, "Women's Space/Cinema Space: Representations of Public and Private in Iranian Films"

Norma Claire Moruzzi, "Women in Iran: Notes on Film and From the Field"

MONDAY, November 2: Group Project

Reading: Afshin Molavi, "A Tale of Two Women"

WEDNESDAY, November 4: Screening of "**Transit Café**" directed by Kambozia Partovi.

In this film, the traditional and the modern are juxtaposed against each other. Could you give some examples. What is the role of "food" in this movie, and can you compare it with other similar movies. How would you evaluate the family dynamic in this borderline village?

MONDAY, November 9: Discussion

Reading: Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Iranian Cinema: Art, Society and the State"

WEDNESDAY, November 11: Screening of "**The Lizard**" directed by Kamal Tabrizi.

Compare and contrast this film with the narrative and cinematic techniques of other films by Kamal Tabrizi. Explain how the portrayal of religion and religious institutions could be interpreted in this film. Give examples of how social and familial attitudes toward gender roles are criticized in this film, How are authority figures, religious and law enforcement, represented in this film and why?

MONDAY, November 16:

WEDNESDAY, November 18: Discussion
Reading: Hooman Majd, "Pride and Humility"

MONDAY, November 23: Group Project
Reading: "Perspective on Recent (International Acclaim) for Iranian Cinema"

WEDNESDAY, November 25: Thanksgiving holiday

MONDAY, November 30: Persian Documentary

WEDNESDAY, December 2: Discussion
Reading: Sussan Siavoshi, "Cultural Policies and the Islamic Republic: Cinema and Book Publication"

MONDAY, December 7: Group Project
Reading: Hamid Naficy: "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran"

WEDNESDAY, December 9: Final wrap-up session

Course Requirements

Every session students are responsible for a 1-2 page response paper immediately following each film screening.

Participation and Attendance: Attendance is required at all classes. Beyond physical presence, students are expected to participate in the class discussion through questions, opinions, and observations on the texts, themes and historical periods. They are also expected to participate on online discussions and postings through the Blackboard site for this course (see description below). All readings must be done before the session for which they are assigned. (25% of the grade)

Group Presentations: Students must sign up for topics on a certain period or theme to give a group presentation in class. All group presentations will be posted on blackboard. The number of presentations will depend on class size. (25% of the grade).

Papers: Two (5-8 page) papers will be written for the class; one for mid-term and one as a final paper.

The deadline for the mid-term paper is Monday, October 21, 2009.

The deadline for the final paper is Wednesday, December 9, 2009.

The topics of these papers are open. We will discuss them in more detail as the semester progresses. No late papers will be accepted. (50% of the grade)

Evaluation of the papers is based upon:

Content and style; Clear articulation of the idea; Carefully constructed argument and/or analysis; Appropriate use of examples from the texts and/or secondary sources (i.e., not used superfluously, but to underscore the argument); Correct and proper use of citations; A well-edited paper (i.e., free of typos, run-on-sentences, missing punctuation, grammatical errors, etc.); A proper bibliography, if applicable.

Additional comments: Using secondary sources is recommended, but not necessary. Please feel free to ask for help in finding appropriate sources. Please be careful of using the Internet as a source or citation in your papers. Only use credible academic or historical sources. Not all information out there is accurate, and some of it is even plagiarized. If you are unsure of a site's credibility, don't use it. Citations must follow standard usage. Please refer to the MLA or Chicago Manual of Style.