

Iranian Cinema: Gender, Politics, and Religion

Spring 2022

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Office Hours: Williams 445, Weds., 1:30 – 3:00 PM
and by appointment (in person and/or on Zoom)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Iranian cinema is world-renowned not only because of its unique aesthetics, but also for its social commentary. In this course we explore various topics related to gender, politics, and religion in Iranian society through the medium of film. We watch acclaimed Iranian films made before and after the 1979 revolution, as well as a few films made outside of Iran. In order to be able to analyze the films' aesthetics, students learn basic cinema studies terminology. So as to be able to situate the films within their historical contexts, students learn about gender, politics, and religion in Iran, as well as about the history of Iranian cinema. Additionally, we treat other topics such as censorship, transnational film production, and the representation of women and minorities. Note: No prior knowledge about Iran or cinema is necessary. All films are subtitled in English.

COURSE MATERIALS

- Films, readings, and online resources available via Canvas
- Paid streaming memberships or online rentals for selected films:
Amazon Prime: *Three Faces*, *The Salesman*
IMVBox: *The May Lady*, *Facing Mirrors*

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

I.	Attendance:	15%
II.	Participation:	15%
III.	Responses:	35%
IV.	Quizzes:	15%
V.	Final Paper:	20%

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

I. Attendance: Regular, punctual attendance is expected. Plan to arrive early enough to be able to participate when class begins. Points are deducted for being late. If you arrive more than 20 minutes late you will receive a “zero” for attendance that day. Please notify me in advance (by email) if you are going to be absent. Your three lowest attendance grades will be automatically dropped. Daily attendance is measured on a three-point scale. Full credit for attendance is earned when you:

- i. read assigned texts/films in advance;
- ii. abide by the classroom policies;

- iii. and arrive to class punctually.

Classroom Policies:

- Silence and put away laptops, tablets, and phones during class.
- Do not bring food to class, but covered beverages are okay.
- Be respectful, and raise your hand to be called on to speak.
- Mask according to current University mandates.

II. Participation: As this seminar is based heavily on in-class discussions, active participation in those discussions is required. This portion of your grade is separate from attendance, and will be calculated cumulatively based on your participation in class discussions throughout the semester.

III. Responses: For each film, there will be a series of prompts to which you will respond. Your responses will be written and posted on the discussion forum on Canvas. Quality is more important than quantity; nonetheless, each prompt requires a fully formed paragraph. While you will post your response in the discussion board, each response is expected to be approximately the equivalent of one to two pages in length, double spaced, if composed in a word processor. You are encouraged to read the prompts before viewing the film, and make notes (mentally or physically) as you watch it. The purpose of response posts is not to get at a “right” answer, but to reflect on a film to think more deeply and *analytically* about the meanings, symbolism, and implications of a director’s work. To that end, while there are not necessarily “right” answers, responses will require you to reference specific elements of a shot or a scene to substantiate your claims with evidence from the work itself.

Note: You will need to include one embedded screenshot per answer in each response post.

You will receive a maximum of five points per response. For full points, you must:

- 1) Fully answer each question with a fully formed paragraph;
- 2) Use clear and concise prose (i.e., proofread and edit your work);
- 3) Cite specific scenes (with screenshots) to support your answers;
- 4) Use appropriate technical language to discuss the film elements;
- 5) Submit your posts on Canvas promptly, before the start of class.

Your three lowest response scores will automatically be dropped from the gradebook.

IV. Quizzes: For most required readings, as well as lectures based on those readings, there will be short multiple-choice quizzes. They are meant not only to ensure that you do the readings and listen to the lectures, but (more importantly) to give you feedback on your understanding of information.

Your lowest quiz score will automatically be dropped from the gradebook.

V. Final Paper: You will write a paper (six to seven pages in length) about one film and its socio-political commentary. In addition to some research on secondary literature about the film and the issues addressed therein, this paper will entail critical interpretation by means of film analysis. A rubric, prompts, and detailed instructions will be made available to you on Canvas. **You must email me a topic proposal by Friday, March 18, a brief annotated bibliography by Monday, April 4, and submit your final paper using the Turnitin feature on Canvas by Tuesday, April 26.**

GRADING POLICIES

Number/letter grade equivalents are:

Number	Letter	Number	Letter	Number	Letter	Number	Letter
> 99	A+	88 – 89	B+	78 – 79	C+	68 – 69	D+
93 – 98	A	83 – 88	B	73 – 77	C	63 – 67	D
90 – 92	A-	80 – 82	B-	70 – 72	C-	60* – 62	D-

*below 60 = F

- Grades on the border between two letter grades (89.9% for instance) may or may not be rounded up to the higher letter grade, at the instructor's discretion.
- Auditing is not permitted.

IMPORTANT UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Code of Academic Integrity: The Penn Code of Academic Integrity is in effect in this class. Submitting any assignment or exam that is not your own, or that you did not participate fully in doing, is a violation of that code. While collaborative study is permitted, you may not copy one another's work. For more, please see: <http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/>

Disabilities: All students with disabilities who seek an accommodation at Penn have the responsibility to identify themselves to Student Disability Services. Identification may take place at admissions or at any time during the student's course of study. All students with disabilities have the responsibility to provide documentation at their own expense in order to be considered for accommodations. After documentation of disability has been approved and accommodations have been proposed, students must give permission for letters to be sent to all instructors in whose classes accommodations are being requested. Instructors review the proposed accommodations. After there is agreement on the appropriate accommodation, students are encouraged to introduce themselves to professors directly and to initiate a dialogue about their particular needs.

Religious Holidays: Students who wish to observe religious holidays (other than Christmas, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, the first two days of Passover, and Good Friday) must inform their instructors within the first two weeks of each semester of their intent to observe the holiday even when the exact date of the holiday will not be known until later so that alternative arrangements convenient to both students and faculty can be made at the earliest opportunity.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

Thursday, January 13: Introduction to the Class

Reading: The Syllabus

WEEK 2

Tuesday, January 18: Introduction to Iranian Cinema

Film: *Iran: A Cinematic Revolution* (2007), Nader T. Homayoun

Thursday, January 20: Pre-Islamic Persia and Shi'i Islam

Readings:

- Nikki Keddie, "Main Trends in Iranian History and Culture," pp. 1–13
- Entezari, "The Pre-Islamic Past in Modern Iranian Culture," pp. 34–37, 39–42

WEEK 3

Tuesday, January 25: Gender and Sexuality in Modern Iran

Readings: Janet Afary, "Introduction" and "Conclusion" of *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*

Thursday, January 27: Iranian Politics and Cinema

Readings:

- Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, "State Control of Iranian Cinema," pp. 30–54
- Ibid., "Transnational Circulation and National Perceptions," pp. 138–139, 146, 152
- Michelle Langford, "Iranian Cinema and Social Media," p. 252

WEEK 4

Tuesday, February 1: Introduction to Film Analysis

Reading: *Film Analysis* (<http://filmanalysis.coursepress.yale.edu>)

Film: *The House Is Black* (1963), Forugh Farrokhzad

Thursday, February 3: Pre-Revolutionary Iran

Film: *Brick and Mirror* (1965), Ebrahim Golestan

Reading: Somy Kim, "Mapping Dystopia in Golestan's Mud Brick and Mirror," pp. 51, 65–66

WEEK 5

Tuesday, February 8: Pre-Revolutionary Iran (cont'd)

Film: *Qeysar* (1969), Masoud Kimiai

Thursday, February 10: Pre-Revolutionary Iran (cont'd)

Film: *The Cow* (1969), Dariush Mehrjui

WEEK 6

Tuesday, February 15: The Iran-Iraq War

Film: *The Marriage of the Blessed* (1989), Mohsen Makhmalbaf

Thursday, February 17: The Iran-Iraq War (cont'd)

Reading: Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, "Iran, the Vatican of Shi'ism?" pp. 40–43 (optional)

Film: *Bashu, the Little Stranger* (1986), Bahram Beizai

WEEK 7

Tuesday, February 22: Multiculturalism

- Readings:
- Kaveh Bayat, "The Ethnic Question in Iran," pp. 42–45
 - Michelle Langford, "Iran and its Others: Locating Cultural Diversity in Iranian Cinema," pp. 151–156
 - Hamid Naficy, "Imperial Nostalgia and Multiplexity," pp. 233–237

Thursday, February 24: Multiculturalism (cont'd)

Film: *The White Balloon* (1995), Jafar Panahi

WEEK 8

Tuesday, March 1: Multiculturalism (cont'd)

Film: *Taste of Cherry* (1997), Abbas Kiarostami

Thursday, March 3: The Afghanistan Crisis

- Readings:
- Fariba Adelkhah & Zuzanna Olszewska, "The Iranian Afghans," pp. 137–143

SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9 (FINAL PAPER TOPIC DUE FRIDAY, MARCH 18 BEFORE MIDNIGHT)

Tuesday, March 15: The Afghanistan Crisis (cont'd)

Film: *Baran* (2001), Majid Majidi

Thursday, March 17: The Afghanistan Crisis (cont'd)

Film: *Kandahar* (2001), Mohsen Makhmalbaf

WEEK 10

Tuesday, March 22: The Afghanistan Crisis (cont'd)

- Readings:
- Kamran Rastegar, "Global Frames on Afghanistan," pp. 145–163
 - Mark Graham, "Land without Images: Kandahar," pp. 59–84

Thursday, March 24: Women's Issues

Reading: Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, "Women's Films," pp. 104–110

Film: *Two Women* (1999), Tahmineh Milani

WEEK 11

Tuesday, March 29: Women's Issues (cont'd)

- Reading: Norma Claire Moruzzi, "Women's Space, Cinema Space: Representations of Public and Private in Iranian Films," pp. 52–55
- Film: *The May Lady* (1999), Rakhshan Bani-Etemad

Thursday, March 31: LGBT Issues

- Readings:
- Katarzyna Korycki & Abouzar Nasirzadeh, "Desire Recast: The Production of Gay Identity in Iran," pp. 57–61
 - Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Transing and Transpassing across Sex-Gender Walls in Iran," pp. 23–25, 32–37
 - Pardis Mahdavi, "Passionate Uprisings: Young People, Sexuality and Politics in Post-Revolutionary Iran," pp. 445–457 (optional)

WEEK 12 (BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE MONDAY, APRIL 4 BEFORE MIDNIGHT)

Tuesday, April 5: LGBT Issues (cont'd)

- Film: *Facing Mirrors* (2011), Negar Azarbayjani (available on IMVBox)

Thursday, April 7: The Iranian Diaspora

- Film: *Persepolis* (2007), Marjane Satrapi & Vincent Paronnaud
- Reading: ● Hamid Naficy, "Iranian, but with a Different Accent: A Cinema of Displacement or a Displaced Cinema?" pp. 392–400 (optional)

WEEK 13

Tuesday, April 12: The Iranian Diaspora (cont'd)

- Film: *My Tehran for Sale* (2009), Granaz Moussavi

Thursday, April 14: Modernity and Tradition

- Film: *A Separation* (2012), Asghar Farhadi

WEEK 14

Tuesday, April 19: Modernity and Tradition (cont'd)

- Film: *The Salesman* (2016), Asghar Farhadi (available on various platforms)

Thursday, April 21: Modernity and Traditions (cont'd)

- Film: *Three Faces* (2018), Jafar Panahi (available on various platforms)

WEEK 15 (FINAL PAPER DUE TUESDAY, APRIL 26 BEFORE MIDNIGHT)

Tuesday, April 26: Conclusions