

## New Jersey Institute of Technology

### HIST 390:001 (Historical Problems Through Film)

#### Self-Depictions of the Middle East in Film

Fall 2025  
CULM LECT 1  
F: 1:00-3:50 pm

Professor Elektra Kostopoulou  
Email [ik74@njit.edu](mailto:ik74@njit.edu)

*Please email me via Canvas if you have any questions directly relevant to this class. I will be answering your class-related emails before each meeting.*

#### Communication

**Office** | #323 Cullimore Hall

#### Office Hours

Wednesdays: 12:00-3:00 pm

**Zoom** | For zoom meetings we will be using the link provided via Canvas.

#### Academic Calendar

<https://www.njit.edu/registrar/calendars>

Sep 2: First day of classes

Dec 11: Last day of classes

#### Brief Course Description

This course explores entangled representations of the Middle East as depicted in film. Throughout the semester we will watch together and discuss movies that engage with collective or individual stories; with diverse understandings of locality; as well as with the socioeconomic realities that have shaped their subjective lenses. Specific focus will be placed on political trajectories of conflict or co-existence and on the production of local culture. Together we will approach the region not as a monolith but as a matrix of diverse, at times clashing, paths and experiences.

Telling one cohesive story about the regions under scrutiny is not only challenging but also void of meaning, given that the “Middle East” is an ambiguous concept imposed on communities from without

and not a term that reveals internal agency. Hence, the stories the course engages with are chosen to bypass external academic and popular stereotypes while zooming in onto difficult internal questions and often uncomfortable choices. The course engages with conflict, trauma, agency, and equity as depicted in film in order not only to introduce but also to deconstruct the Middle East through reference to a range of experiences.



### Course Objectives

By taking this course, you will be able to:

Contextualize pressing contemporary developments in the Middle East as well as the interplay between regional and international trajectories.

Get an introduction to thinking critically about history as a social science and/or an endeavor in the humanities.

Familiarize yourselves with academic writing, secondary/ primary source analysis.

Explore the intriguing links between popular culture and science.

Get a better understanding of global diversity as manifested in film beyond the limitations and bias of the US-dominated film industry.

### Course Requirements

1. Attend all classes prepared for a critical discussion and do the weekly readings.
  2. Complete the weekly assignments.
  3. Submit a research paper analyzing a movie of your choice as a primary source. Your movie needs to be relevant to the regions discussed by the course.
  4. Complete a 5 min long oral presentation based on your paper.
- The paper should be 10 pages in length (not including a cover page and references).
  - You should use at least 5 peer-reviewed academic publications (secondary literature) in addition to your primary source, which will be the movie of your choice.

### Grading

1. Attendance/Class participation: 10%\*
2. Weekly Assignments: 40%
3. Oral Presentation: 10%
4. Research Paper: 40%

90-100%: Excellent Work (A)  
 85-89%: Very Good (B+)  
 80-84%: Good (B)  
 75-79%: Satisfactory Plus (C+)  
 70-74%: Satisfactory (C)

#### Academic Integrity:

Plagiarism is passing off someone else's work as your own and will not be tolerated. Students are expected to write their own original work and to give credit in the form of footnotes (i.e. citations) for any material that is not their own. Plagiarized papers will be given an automatic "F" with no possibility of a rewrite. This may result in a failing grade for the entire course. Violations will be brought to the immediate attention of the Dean of Students and adjudicated in accordance with the NJIT Honor Code. A copy of the Honor Code is available at [www.njit.edu/academics/honorcode.php](http://www.njit.edu/academics/honorcode.php) [Links to an external site.](#)

*\*As we are trying to make this course relevant to your interests and unfolding developments that may resonate with the main topic, some of the readings and assignments might change accordingly.*

### Generative AI:

- For this course, students are encouraged to engage with emerging technologies, including AI tools, as part of their learning experience. However, the use of AI-generated content (e.g., text, code, images) in assignments, projects, or any form of assessment must be approached with caution and integrity.
- It is crucial that AI tools are used as supplementary aids and not as replacements for original thought or individual effort.
- Before incorporating AI tools into your work, you are required to consult with the course instructor to ensure that such use aligns with the academic objectives and integrity standards of this course. Unauthorized or inappropriate use of AI tools may be considered academic misconduct and subject to disciplinary action.
- Students are encouraged to develop their own analytical and critical thinking skills and to use AI tools in a manner that supports, rather than undermines, their educational growth.

- The goal of this policy is to foster a learning environment that promotes critical thinking, originality, and ethical engagement with technology. Always prioritize your understanding and skill development, and use AI tools to complement, not replace, your efforts.

## Course Schedule

### Week One | Introduction

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- ❖ **Introduction:**  
History on Film/Film on History, the debate.
- ❖ **Suggested Readings:**
  - Rosenstone, Robert A. *History on Film/Film on History*. 2 edition. London & New York: Routledge, 2012, 1-17.
  - Engelen, L. "Back to the Future, Ahead to the Past. Film and History: A Status Question." *Rethinking History* 11, no. 4 (01 2007): 555–63.

## Theme A Childhood and Infantilization

### Week Two | Capernaum

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- ❖ **Film Screening**
  - <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/feb/20/capernaum-review-nadine-labaki-zain-al-rafeeq>
  - <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/14/movies/capernaum-nadine-labaki.html>
- ❖ **Required Readings**
  - Sim, Amanda, Fazel, Mina, Bowes, Lucy, and Gardner, Frances. "Pathways Linking War and Displacement to Parenting and Child Adjustment: A Qualitative Study with Syrian Refugees in Lebanon." *Social Science & Medicine* 200 (March 1, 2018): 19–26.
  - Najem, Tom. *Lebanon The Politics of a Penetrated Society*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012, introduction.
- ❖ **Primary Source**
  - Pell, Claiborne. *Lebanon and the Prospects for Peace in the Middle East a Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1982.

### Week Three | A Touch of Spice

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❖ **Film Screening**

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2007/jun/22/dvdreviews.worldcinema>  
[https://www.adrianmartinfilmcritic.com/reviews/t/touch\\_of\\_spice.html](https://www.adrianmartinfilmcritic.com/reviews/t/touch_of_spice.html)

❖ **Required Readings**

Örs, İlay Romain. "Beyond the Greek and Turkish Dichotomy: The *Rum Polites* of Istanbul and Athens." *South European Society and Politics* 11, no. 1 (2006): 79–94.

Stamou, Anastasia G., and Kornilia P. Petraki. "Istanbul Greek Identities in Film Discourse." *Popular Communication*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Apr. 2022): 77–90.

❖ **Primary Source**

<https://ojs.lib.uom.gr/index.php/BalkanStudies/article/view/2328>

## Week Four | Wadjda

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❖ **Film Screening**

<https://www.npr.org/2013/09/12/221436419/from-a-saudi-director-a-familiar-story-made-fresh-again>  
<https://www.womeninislamjournal.com/articles/2019/8/4/wadjda-a-film-review>

❖ **Required Readings**

Hudson, Valerie M., and Leidl, Patricia. *A Conspicuous Silence : American Foreign Policy, Women, and Saudi Arabia A Selection from The Hillary Doctrine: Sex and American Foreign Policy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Al-Sudairy, Ziad. "The Constitutional Appeal of Shari'a in a Modernizing Saudi State." *Middle East Law and Governance* 2, no. 1 (2010): 1–16.

❖ **Primary Source**

U.S. Congress. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. *Saudi Arabia and Syria*. Congressional Publications, 2010. <https://search.proquest.com/congressional/view/app-gis/cisindex/2010-s382-10>

## Week Five | Discussion Session

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**Theme B**  
**War and Peace (but mostly War)**

**Week Six | Bekas**

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❖ **Film Screening**

[https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/d74x5z/these-filmmakers-risk-their-lives-to-keep-iraqs-movie-industry-independent](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/d74x5z/these-filmmakers-risk-their-lives-to-keep-iraqs-movie-industry-independent)

❖ **Required Readings**

Leaman, George. "Iraq, American Empire, And The War On Terrorism." *Metaphilosophy* 35, no. 3 (April 2004): 234–248.

Esmier, Samera. "The Violence of Non-Violence: Law and War in Iraq.(Democracy's Empire: Sovereignty, Law, and Violence)." *Journal of Law and Society* 34, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 99–115.

**Week Eight | In Syria**

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❖ **Film Screening**

<https://variety.com/2014/film/festivals/cannes-film-review-silvered-water-syria-self-portrait-1201183212/>

❖ **Required Readings**

Martínez, José Ciro, and Eng, Brent. "The Unintended Consequences of Emergency Food Aid: Neutrality, Sovereignty and Politics in the Syrian Civil War, 2012–15." *International Affairs* 92, no. 1 (January 2016): 153–173.

Mann, Joseph. "Syria, Precipitator of the Six Day War." *Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 4 (July 1, 2013): 547–562.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00263206.2013.798306>.

❖ **Primary Source**

Khālīdī, 'Anbarah Salām., Warner, Marina, and Khalidi, Tarif. *Memoirs of an Early Arab Feminist : the Life and Activism of Anbara Salam Khalidi* London: Pluto Press, 2013.

## Week Nine | No Other Land

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❖ **Film Screening**

<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2025-02-07/no-other-land-review-palestinian-israeli-conflict-oscar-nomination>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/3/5/why-is-america-afraid-of-no-other>

❖ **Required Readings**

Khalidi, Rashid. *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History Of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt, 2020.

Bashir, Bashir, and Amos Goldberg Foreword by Elias Khoury Afterword by Jacqueline Rose, editors. *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History*. Columbia University Press, 2018.

❖ **Primary Source**

Albert Einstein et all, *Letter to the New York Times* (Dec. 2, 1948)

[Proquest: University Microfilms.](#)

## Week Ten | Discussion

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## Theme C Distant and Universal

### Week Eleven | Distant

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❖ **Film Screening**

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/distant-2004>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/18/movies/nuri-bilge-ceylan-distant.html>

❖ **Required Readings**

Jacoby, Tim. "Turkey and Europe: Culture, Capital and Corruption." *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 3 (July 1, 2010): 663–684.

Eldem, Edhem. "Ottoman and Turkish Orientalism." *Architectural Design*, vol. 80, no. 1 (2010): 26–31.

### Week Twelve | A Separation

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❖ **Film Screening**

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/jun/30/a-separation-review>

[https://theindependentcritic.com/a\\_separation](https://theindependentcritic.com/a_separation)

❖ **Required Readings**

Karami, Ronak. "Mr. Hashemi and Family Dynamics in Iran." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Feb. 2020): 387–98.

Houssni, Joseph. "Image and Word: Islam and Film Form in the New Iranian Cinema." *Religion and the Arts*, vol. 27, no. 3 (June 2023) pp. 367–83.

❖ **Primary Source**

Foreign Correspondence NEW York Times.F. Diodati Thompson. "AMERICAN INTERESTS IN OTTOMAN EMPIRE." *New York Times (1857-1922)*. New York, N.Y.: New York Times Company, June 3, 1900. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/96006979/>.

### Week Thirteen | Discussion | Oral Presentations

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### Week Fourteen | Oral Presentations/ Conclusion

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