

# 2023 Summer Fellows Roundtable: Film in the Language / Culture Curriculum

## Nathalie Khankan (Arabic)

**Film** *Wajib* (Annemarie Jacir, Philistine Films, 2017)

### Clip Description

- Time stamp: 00:17-02:56 (“Two men get in car and drive off”)
- The clip includes the opening shot and credits. The audience sees a car and hears radio sounds. One main character, a son, joins the other main character, his father, who was waiting in the car and both drive off.

**Activity Objectives:** To explore and reflect on the act and skill of listening to a cinematic text

### Activity

In conjunction with, before and after, focused listening to the soundscape of the opening scenes of *Wajib* by Annemarie Jacir:

- Brief in-class listening exercise. Open the windows of our classroom. What do you hear? Describe and catalog sounds. What words can we use to describe sound?
- At-home listening exercise. Sit outside on your street and note its soundscape. Focused listening for 30 minutes. Describe and catalog sounds. What sounds were consistent, faded in and out, or occurred only once? What was the loudest thing you heard? The faintest?
- Homophonic translation of the refrain of Arabic song from Audio-Visual Syllabus. A homophonic translation is a translation from one language to another according to *sound* rather than meaning. *Pretend to translate*.
- Reflection: What did you discover about your listening capacities from these exercises? What does listening beyond semantics and comprehension offer?

## Myrna Douzjian (Armenian)

**Film:** *Calendar* (dir. Atom Egoyan. Zeitgeist Films, 1993)

### Clip Description:

- Time stamp: 28:25-30:42 (“More money”). A photographer and his wife visit Armenia to shoot photos for a calendar of churches. In this scene, they visit Garni, a third-century pagan temple. As their local driver describes the significance of the site, the photographer interrupts him to ask if he expects additional monetary compensation for the unsolicited information he’s been providing. The driver takes offense at this suggestion.

### Activity Objectives

- Students discuss the cultural differences at play in the scene. Specifically, they learn about assumptions surrounding hospitality in Armenian culture and the terms used to describe it, and they compare these assumptions with their notions about hospitality in all of the cultures they identify with, including American culture.

- Students assess the driver’s reaction to the photographer’s question and what the question itself says about the photographer.

### Activity

1. In groups of three or four, students discuss the following questions: 1. Why does the driver get so offended at the suggestion that he might be expecting financial compensation for providing the historical background to each of the sites they visit? 2. Do you think that the driver’s heated reaction is warranted? Why or why not?
2. As groups share their responses with the whole class, the instructor provides additional information about norms and terms involving hospitality in Armenian culture. During the discussion, the instructor asks students to consider how their own/American expectations about hospitality informed their attitudes toward the driver’s reaction. To conclude, the instructor asks students to evaluate whether the photographer’s attitude is an exaggeration of the “typical” American attitude. The instructor provides historical context about the stereotyping of Americans as excessively materialistic in post-Soviet portrayals of the US.

## David Kyeu (Swahili)

**Film:** *Chumo* (dir. Jordan Riber, Media for Development International, 2011)

### Clip Description:

- Time stamp: 1.21 - 1.53 (“Storytelling”). The movie focuses on the heterosexual relationships between Amina and her two male suitors.

### Activity Objectives

- Enhance critical thinking around the area of diversity and inclusion in Swahili speaking East and Central Africa, specifically given that Tanzania as a country doesn’t recognize the LGBTQ+ spectrum, and people have been arraigned in court and jailed for engaging in non-binary unions.

### Activity

- Students engage in a class debate concerning the director’s choice of only having characters Amina and Juma representing heterosexual relationships throughout the film. After the debate, students will also be asked to work in groups of three to rewrite the content of the clip in a manner that enhances diversity and inclusion of all genders.

## Ambika Athreya (German)

**Film:** *Almanya: Willkommen in Deutschland* (dir. Yasemin Şamdereli, 2011)

### Clip Description:

- Time stamp, clip 1: 6:18-7:58 (“Deutsche Leitkultur”)
- Time stamp, clip 2: 39:17-40:09 (“Ambivalence about naturalization”)
- In the first clip, Hüseyin has a nightmare about requirements to follow the German “Leitkultur” after naturalization. His wife, Fatma, is less concerned. In the second, Hüseyin, sleepless in the middle of the night, gets up and looks at his new passport silently.

### Activity Objectives

- Students start thinking about what constitutes a “Leitkultur” (dominant culture), both in the film, and in through comparisons to the US (or other places with which they may identify).

- A central message in this film is that one does not have to have only one identity, but that there are administrative hassles in the maintenance of multiple. They are also encouraged to think about how to maintain multiple identities, and how this is presented in the film.

### Activity

- *Before* viewing the clips, the instructor provides some background about what students are about to view.
- Then Clip 1 and 2 are watched, in succession. After watching, in small groups, students answer a series of questions, ranging from “yes/no—why?” to more complex ones, that involve comparisons to the United States or other contexts.
  1. Is there such a thing as a ‘Leitkultur’ in the US, or other places you know? What might be some features of this ‘Leitkultur’?
  2. Which of the two, Hüseyin or Fatma, is more excited to obtain German citizenship?
  3. Does Hüseyin want to have a German passport? Does the passport determine identity?
- Instructor facilitates discussion, in particular by providing target language input/vocabulary that could be useful. At the end of the discussion time (10-15 minutes), we talk about citizenship and language requirements in the US and European contexts.

## Oksana Willis (Russian)

**Film:** *An Ordinary Miracle / Mosfilm*, USSR (directed by Mark Zakharov, 1978)

### Clip Descriptions

- Time stamp: 00:25-03:30 (“To live like everyone else”) This clip introduces the main characters – Magician (host) and his wife (hostess), and constructs the magical cinematographic space. Hostess reminds her husband that he promised to live like everyone else.

### Activity Objectives

- Discuss the elements of familiar fairy tales.
- Notice visual, audio and cinematic nuances in the clip, and provide explanation of their significance.
- Practice vocabulary to describe living spaces and discuss desirable improvements in students’ homes.

### Activities

1. Students discuss several illustrations of famous fairy tales and answer questions regarding fairy tales’ characters, plots, magic elements and the differences between fairy tales for various age categories.
2. After students watch the clip they discuss the following: 1) they describe the Magician’s estate; 2) they discuss the role of the cinematic devices such as camera movement, slow focus on the blurred objects, music, voice behind the screen and delayed speech of characters, ekphrasis and others in the defamiliarization of the cinematographic space; 3) they select three objects or images and discuss their symbolic meanings.
3. Students discuss the meaning of the expression “To live like everyone else” and share their perspective on order, obedience, risk taking, and creative work.
4. In a paragraph, students describe their living spaces, discuss possible improvements to their dwellings, and practice defamiliarization by assigning magical / poetic properties to mundane objects.

## Natalya Nielsen (Swedish)

**Film:** *Hva vil folk si* (directed by Iram Haq, original Norwegian production company: Mer Film, Norwegian release date: 2017; USA release date: 2018)

### Clip Description

- Time stamp: 15:24-20:20 (“Nisha interacts with Norwegian Social Workers”)
- After an incident of violence between her father and boyfriend, Nisha meets with child protective services/social workers about the incident. Communication between Nisha, the social workers, and her father is unsuccessful on multiple planes.
- The clip (and film) complicates and contrasts different aspects of growing up between and through two different cultures. As a Pakistani-Norwegian, Nisha’s relationship with both her family of origin and white Norwegian culture is messy and complicated, and the film does not create simple answers or binaries.

### Lesson Objectives

- Consider how the film problematizes commonly held binaries such as this culture vs. that culture, right vs. wrong, these values vs. those values, a so-called “immigrant” vs. a so-called “native” Norwegian, etc.
- To collectively explore how an examination of sexism cannot be truly efficacious without a thorough examination of the forces and narratives of racism. This will be done by understanding more about the concept of “femonationalism.”

### Activity:

- Students watch this clip as well as two others before coming to class and consider some pre-discussion questions, such as the following:
  - Do you think the film sets up a binary between Pakistani-Norwegian and white Norwegian culture? Why or why not? What are the complicating moments?
- Students read an article in preparation for in-class discussion called “The Disturbing Rise of Femonationalism” from *The Nation* as well as an interview with the director.
- After rewatching the clip together, the teacher guides an in-class discussion:
  - What are the power dynamics of the film? What is different about Nisha’s interactions with her family versus her interactions with the social workers?
  - What do you think Nisha is feeling as she navigates her different worlds and contexts? What are the values of each so-called “group” and where do they converge and diverge? Do you think Nisha sees herself more as so-called “Norwegian” or so-called “Pakistani” or somewhere in between? Do you think Nisha is forced in the narrative of the film to choose between her two worlds?
  - Based on the article on femonationalism you read, what do you understand the concept to mean? How do you understand the idea of femonationalism in connection to this film and its potential reception?
- After discussion, students write a short 2-page reflection at home.