

Berlin in Migration Cinema: From Migrant Ghettos to Culturally Hybrid Urban Districts

Summer Semester 2026: 13 April– 17 July 2026

CATEGORY

Literature and Film

COURSE STRUCTURE

4 contact hours à 45 min bi-weekly

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Time

Day: Friday, 14:00-18:00 c.t. (14:15 pm–17:45 pm)

There will be **six four-hour sessions**:

17 April, 15 May, 29 May, 12 June, 26 June, 10 July 2026
(1 May: no class/holiday)

Place

Room: 0323-26, Hausvogteiplatz 5-7

COURSE LANGUAGE

This interdisciplinary English-German bilingual course is explicitly designed for students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The course targets non-native English and non-native German-speaking students as well as native speakers. The aim is to foster a creative exchange of ideas and analytical perspectives across any linguistic 'barrier' to enable more fruitful discussions and research outcomes. The course discussions and group presentations will be in English and German. A short translation will be provided for those who have difficulty understanding the language used or following the debate. The reflection papers on films can be written in English or German. However, the language in class will be mainly English, and a good standard of academic English (B2 level) is recommended. The films will be in German with German or English subtitles and in Turkish with English or German subtitles. Some basic German (A1 level) is also recommended.

Language requirements (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

English B1 / German A1

TARGET GROUP

International exchange students of all subjects with a strong interest in the course topic. Berlin Perspectives courses are designed for undergraduate students. Master students may participate if their home university agrees. Regular degree-seeking students can select the course within the elective part of their study program (überfachlicher Wahlpflichtbereich üWP).

Prior knowledge in migration studies and film studies is not required. However, an interest in migration-related issues and media representation is an advantage. This course primarily targets students from social sciences and humanities but is also open to students from other disciplines interested in the topic. The course is suitable for students from 2nd year of studies upwards. Berlin Perspectives courses are designed for undergraduate students. Master students may participate if their home university agrees.

CREDITS = 5 ECTS

The Berlin Perspectives courses are offered by the Career Center as part of the elective program üWP. Registration takes place via Agnes.

All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The labour migration from Southern European countries to Germany, which began in the mid-1950s, had significant socio-economic and socio-cultural impacts on the societies of these countries and influenced their film cultures. German filmmakers began depicting the struggles of guestworkers in films like Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Katzelmacher* (1969). In the 1990s, second- and third-generation Turkish-German directors such as Fatih Akin and Thomas Arslan marked the end of what was called 'guestworker cinema' and started creating a transnational and diasporic cinema that showcased a culturally diverse and hybrid Germany. Berlin (especially Kreuzberg) has always been a popular setting in all of these migration movies. The transformation of Berlin's first 'Guestworker Ghettos' to culturally hybrid urban districts over the course of 60 years is very well reflected in all of these cinema cultures.

This interdisciplinary course crosses and connects the academic fields of migration studies, film studies, and cultural studies. In the first part of the course, we will examine how migration, immigrants, and diasporas are portrayed in cinema. The second part then becomes more specific as we focus on the depiction of Berlin in these migration films.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this interdisciplinary course, students will examine how the socio-political and socio-cultural phenomenon of Turkish immigration to Germany has shaped the cinemas of both countries from the 1960s to the present day. They will trace the narrative and aesthetic transformations in the cinematic representation of migration, diaspora, culture, and identity that have taken place over the past six decades.

The course focuses particularly on the social and urban transformation of Berlin into a culturally hybrid capital and investigates how this evolution is reflected in German and Turkish migration cinema. Through film screenings, theoretical readings, and practical exercises, students will develop a critical understanding of film as both an artistic and socio-political medium. They will gain insight into Germany's labor migration history and its impact on society and cinema, and learn to recognize how Berlin's changing urban and cultural landscape is mirrored in diverse film cultures.

Students will acquire the ability to conduct textual and contextual analyses of films and to engage with key scholarship on transnational cinema and Turkish-German migration films. They will further strengthen their academic and transferrable skills by critically reflecting on theories of migration, culture, and transnationalism, selecting and applying relevant theoretical and methodological approaches, and articulating complex ideas in intercultural discussions.

By the end of the course, students will be able to analyze and interpret films with theoretical precision, collaboratively research and present a topic within a group setting, and write and structure a screenplay for a short film that demonstrates an understanding of migration narratives and cinematic storytelling. In doing so, they will develop both their analytical and creative capacities while deepening their awareness of the interrelation between cinema, culture, and social change.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

Knowledge

- Understand the history of labor migration to Germany and identify its social, cultural, and cinematic impact.
- Explain and critically reflect on the social and cultural transformation of Berlin and how this development is represented across different film cultures.

- Apply textual and contextual approaches to film analysis.
- Recognize and engage with key scholarship on transnational cinema and Turkish-German migration films.
- Understand the practical aspects of filmmaking and the process of producing a short film that reflects migration narratives and urban-cultural transformations.

Academic and Transferrable Skills

- Analyze and critically evaluate selected theories of migration, culture, and transnationalism.
- Identify and apply appropriate theoretical frameworks and methodological tools for the analysis of migration films and transnational cinema.
- Communicate and discuss key concepts related to migration cinema and transnational cinema in academic and intercultural contexts.
- Plan and execute a short film project, integrating theoretical insights into practical creative work.

Competencies

- Analyze and interpret films using appropriate critical and theoretical approaches.
- Collaboratively develop, present, and discuss a research topic in a group setting.
- Write, structure, and shoot a screenplay for a short film that demonstrates an understanding of migration narratives and cinematic storytelling.

READINGS

Please review the weekly sessions for the required readings.

ASSIGNMENT INFO

Workload and assignments

In order to be granted 5 ECTS, participants will be asked to

- actively attend all sessions (a minimum of 75% attendance is required for classroom and online sessions)
- prepare and revise the classroom/online sessions
- hand in the following **assignments**:
 - 1. weekly reflection papers

- 2. one individual or group presentation
- 3. final film project **or** final term paper

Failure to fulfil one of the mentioned components results in failure of the class.

Assessment Components

- The final grade will be based on:
 - participation in class and reflection papers (25% of the final grade)
 - presentation (25% of the final grade)
 - final film project **or** final term paper (50% of the final grade)

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Deniz Güneş Yardımcı is a visiting research fellow at the University of Osnabrück, where she is conducting the DAAD-funded project "Migration, Diversity and Soft Power: Cultural and Educational Policies in German-Turkish Relations." Since 2019, Yardımcı has taught the Berlin Perspectives module at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and also teaches in the Department of International Relations at Istanbul Bilgi University. Trained as a sociologist and media/film scholar, she focuses her research on Turkish-German relations, European migration, cultural identity, and the cinematic representation of migration, refugees, and diasporas. Yardımcı holds a PhD in Media Arts from Royal Holloway, University of London, and a double degree in Sociology (Diplom) and Media and Film Studies (Magister) from Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. She previously served as a co-principal investigator on the bilateral DAAD-TÜBİTAK project "Distant Neighbors: Exploring Political Narratives and Visual Culture in Turkish-German Relations" and is currently finishing her monograph, *Culture and Identity in Turkish-German Cinema*.

COURSE SCHEDULE

4 hours à 45 min bi-weekly

Session 1 // 17.4.2026

Introduction to Course

- Introduction to the course and required assessments, forming the presentation groups
- Introduction to final film project
- Introduction to the topic: 'Characteristics of Migration and Diasporic Cinema'

Migration Movements in Germany

- Immigration history of Germany from the 1960s until the present
- Contemporary migration to Germany

Assignment until next session:

- Watch *Katzelmacher* (1969, Rainer Werner Fassbinder)
- 1-page reflection paper on *Katzelmacher* (1969, Rainer Werner Fassbinder)

Friday, 1.5.2026 (no class/holiday)

Session 2 // 15.5.2026

First Phase of German Migration Cinema ('The Cinema of Duty' 1960-1990)

- Group Presentation 1: Defining 'Guestworker Cinema', 'Cinema of the Affected' and 'Cinema of Duty'
- Group presentation 2: 'Guestworker Cinema from 1960s - 1970s – Analysis of *Angst essen Seele auf/Fear Eats Soul* (1974, Rainer Werner Fassbinder)'
- Required reading 1: HAKE, Sabine and Mennel, Barbara (eds.) (2012b) 'Introduction' in *Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium: Sites, Sounds and Screens*. Oxford: New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 1-18.
- Required reading 2: BERGHAHN, Daniela and Sternberg, Claudia (eds.) (2010c) 'Locating Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe' in *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 12-49.

Kreuzberg becomes Multicultural: Representing Early Guestworkers' Lives in Berlin

- Group Presentation 1: 'Cinematic Representation of Early Guestworkers in Berlin – Analysis of: *Almanya Aci Vatan/ Germany Bitter Homeland* (1979, Şerif Gören)-
- Group Presentation 2: 'Cinematic Representation of Early Guestworkers in Berlin – Analysis of: *Polizei/Police* (1988, Şerif Gören)

- Required reading 1: BURNS, Rob (2012) 'From Two Worlds to a Third Space: Stereotypy and Hybridity in Turkish-German Cinema' in Karanfil, Gökçen and Şavk, Serkan (eds.) *Imaginarities Out of Place: Cinema, Transnationalism and Turkey*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 56-88.
- Required reading 2: GÖKTÜRK, Deniz (1999) 'Turkish Delight – German Fright: Migrant Identities in Transnational Cinema' in Working Paper for the ESRC Transnational Communities Programme Working Paper Series 99(1), pp. 1-14.

Assignment until next session:

- Watch *Angst essen Seele auf/Fear Eats Soul* (1974, Rainer Werner Fassbinder) and write a 1-2 page reflection paper
- Work on your film on 'Migration and Diasporas in Berlin'

Session 3 // 29.5.2026

Second Phase of German Migration Cinema ('Transnational Cinema' 1990-Present)

- Group Presentation 1: Defining 'Transnational Cinema', 'Diasporic Cinema' and 'Accented Cinema.'
- Group presentation 2: 'Characteristics of Diasporic and Transnational Cinema – Analysis of *Gegen die Wand/ Head On* (2004, Fatih Akin)'
- Required reading 1: HIGBEE, Will and Lim, Song Hwee (2010) 'Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies' in *Transnational Cinemas* 1(1), pp. 7-21.
- Required reading 2: HIGSON, Andrew (1989) 'The Concept of National Cinema' in *Screen* 30(4), pp. 36-46.

Berlin in Transnational Cinema 1: Transnational Social Spaces, Youth Cultures and Music

- Group Presentation 1: 'Hip Hop in Berlin – Analysis of *Liebe, D-Mark und Tod/ Love Deutschmarks and Death* (2022, Cem Kaya)
- Group Presentation 2: 'Hip Hop in Berlin – Analysis of *Status YO!* (2004, Till Hasteiter)
- Group Presentation 3: 'Hip Hop in Berlin – Analysis of *Alltag* (2003, Neco Celik)
- Group Presentation 4: 'Hip Hop in Berlin – Analysis of *Urban Guerrillas* (2004, Neco Celik)
- Required reading 1: FAIST, Thomas. (2009). Making and Remaking the Transnational: Of Boundaries, Social Spaces and Social Mechanisms. *Spectrum: Journal of Global Studies*, 1(2), 67-89.
- Required reading 2: FAIST, Thomas. (2010). Diaspora and Transnationalism: What Kind of Dance Partners? In R. Bauböck and T. Faist (eds.). *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 9-34.
- Required Reading 3: KAYA, Ayhan (2007). German-Turkish Transnational Space: A Separate Space of Their Own. *German Studies Review* 30(3), 483-502

Assignment until next session:

- Watch *Auf der anderen Seite/ The Edge of Heaven* (2007, Fatih Akin) and write a 1-2-page reflection paper
- Work on your film on 'Migration and Diasporas in Berlin'

Session 4 // 12.6.2026

Excursion to Kreuzberg

Assignment 1 until next session:

- Choose one location, building, or street in Kreuzberg that captured your attention. Explain how it reflects Berlin's history of migration, social change, or cultural hybridity. Include personal observations, feelings, and questions it raised.

Excursion to Film Museum Berlin

Assignment 2 until next session:

- Choose one exhibit or film clip that caught your attention. Discuss how it represents migration, cultural hybridity, or urban change in Berlin. Include personal observations and any questions it raised.

Session 5 // 26.6.2026

Berlin in Transnational Cinema 2: Culture Clash Comedies

- Group Presentation 1: 'Stereotypes in Cultural Hybridity in Comedies – Analysis of *Evet, ich will/Evet, I do* (2008, Sinan Akkuş)
- Group Presentation 2: 'Stereotypes in Cultural Hybridity in Comedies – Analysis of: *Türkisch für Anfänger/ Turkish for Beginners* (2012, Bora Dağtekin)
- Required reading: STEWART, Lizzie (2015) 'Turkish-German Comedy Goes Archival: *Almanya - Willkommen in Deutschland* (2011)' in Osborne, Dora (ed.) *Edinburgh German Yearbook 9: Archive and Memory in German Literature and Visual Culture*. Rochester; New York: Camden House, pp. 107-122.

Berlin in Transnational Cinema 3: Thomas Arslan's Berlin Trilogy

- Group Presentation 1: "Diasporic Cinema and Accented Cinema – Analysis of *Der Schöne Tag/A Fine Day* (2001, Thomas Arslan)'
- Group Presentation 2: "Diasporic Cinema and Accented Cinema – Analysis of *Geschwister/Brothers and Sisters* (1996, Thomas Arslan)
- Required reading: MENNEL, Barbara (2002): 'Bruce Lee in Kreuzberg and Scarface in Altona: Transnational Auteurism and Ghetto-centrism in Thomas Arslan's "Brothers and Sisters" and Fatih Akin's "Short Sharp Shock"' in *New German Critique* Special Issue on Postwall Cinema 87, pp. 133-156.
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Assignment until next session:

- Watch *Evet, ich will/Evet, I do* (2008, Sinan Akkuş) **or** *Türkisch für Anfänger/ Turkish for Beginners* (2012, Bora Dağtekin) and write a 1-page reflection paper
- Work on your film on 'Migration and Diasporas in Berlin'

Session 6 // 10.7.2026

Reflection on the Topic 'Migration, Cinema and Urban Berlin'

- Examine how films represent migration and shape societal perceptions, with Berlin as a case study.
- Analyze the interplay between cinematic narratives, migrant experiences, and urban-cultural transformation.
- Reflect on insights from the Kreuzberg excursion, film museum visit, and course materials to connect cinema, society, and politics.
- Finalize your film on 'Migration and Diasporas in Berlin.'

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Registration on Moodle (HU's e-learning platform)

in case of online sessions

- Fully functional device (laptop, tablet, PC)
- Stable internet connection
- Software: Zoom (video/audio)
- *Recommended* hardware: external headset for better sound quality

EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Preparation for lively discussions: be on time, have at least the required readings completed, and points in mind for discussion or clarification.

Assignments: complete all assignments according to the specified requirements on the schedule including handing them over to the lecturer.

Commitment: pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions in this international classroom.

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies. Plagiarism in even a small assignment will result in failing the entire course.

Attendance policy: Students must contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the lecturer.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: 14 January 2026