

## HNR 350-01: Honors Junior Seminar, Winter 2021

### The Western Mediterranean: The World's Deadliest Border for Migrants and Refugees

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#### Content of this asynchronous online section of HNR 350

This three-credit Honors junior seminar has an international and comparative focus. It will explore the causes, character, and consequences of undocumented seaborne migration across today's Mediterranean Sea, a global sub-region that Italian anthropologist Maurizio Albahari has dubbed "the world's deadliest border." The course will focus on two of the Western Mediterranean's principal sites of clandestine passage, the Strait of Gibraltar and the Strait of Sicily. Specifically, we will examine several literary texts, artworks, and films whose central theme is undocumented migration across these channels. Our engagement with these items will be informed by readings drawn from a variety of disciplines that have shed light on this phenomenon, such as anthropology and sociology. We will also consider today's illegalized mobility across the Mediterranean in relation to the sea's long history as a medium for cultural interaction and cross-fertilization. Along the way we will grapple with such issues as the role of nation-state borders in our time and the ethical principle of mobility as a human right. By the end of the semester, you will have delved deeply into the most consequential chapter in what has become one of the main global stories of our times: the attempt by millions of people all over the world to cross the borders of nation-states without authorization in a determined effort to find refuge and remake their lives.

#### *The Greater Mediterranean Region*



#### Specific Course Objectives for HNR 350-01

After successful completion of the course the students will be able to:

1. Illustrate understanding of the topic or theme of the class from an interdisciplinary perspective.
2. Demonstrate the skills needed to function in a diverse global community (including inquiry, integrity, inclusion, interdisciplinarity, innovation, internationalization, and critical thinking).
3. Describe argumentative strengths and weaknesses across a range of ethical theories.
4. Describe connections between ethical issues across complex situations.
5. Illustrate through oral or written communication the connections between complex issues, themes, or problems.

**Assigned Books**  
(Listed in the order in which we'll read them)

Below you'll find the titles of the two books you'll need to purchase or otherwise obtain copies of for HNR 350-01. **Please make sure to obtain copies of both texts promptly. Failure to complete an assignment on time on the grounds that you lack a copy of the relevant book will not be excused.**

***For the Strait of Gibraltar***

- *Welcome to Paradise (Cannibales)*, by Mahi Binebine [E-book editions available]

***For the Strait of Sicily***

- *The Optician of Lampedusa*, by Emma-Jane Kirby

**Note:** I will be providing you with copies of, or access to, various other texts that you'll also need to read. Also, in addition to reading a variety of creative and critical texts, in this course you'll be looking at various photos and artworks. You'll also be watching documentary and feature films.

**HNR 350-01 and the Honors College's Five "I's"**

**Honors junior seminars are intended to promote what the College refers to as 'The Five "I's": inclusion, integrity, inquiry, interdisciplinarity, innovation, and internationalization. Here's an overview of how HNR 350-01 will foster and practice the pursuit of these values and goals.**

**Inclusion:** Since migrants and refugees are among the most demonized as well as among the most vulnerable social groups in many parts of our contemporary world, including in Western countries like the United States, this particular "I" is key to the ethos of the course, which will practice and model inclusion in two main ways. First, it will do so by providing you (through course readings, films, and other mediums) with the perspectives of migrants and refugees themselves, as well as the perspectives of scholars, activists, and policy-makers who advocate for their rights. Second, while the course's ethos is diametrically opposed to migrant-phobic viewpoints, the possible expression of such views will be handled with respect for the dignity of the person who might express them. On that note, please consult the Dean of Students' statement on expressive activity at GVSU, which includes class discussion: <https://www.gvsu.edu/dos/context-for-expressive-activity-8.htm>

**Integrity:** This course will cultivate integrity in two main ways. In the first instance, it will do so by familiarizing you with the perspectives of persons of integrity; such as the testimonies of survivors of sea-crossings, of religious and other officials who work with migrants and refugees, of journalists who cover the issue impartially, and so on. (If time permits, we may also analyze demagogic declarations about migrants by politicians and others, in order to critically engage what lack of integrity looks like.) The other way in which the course will cultivate integrity is by asking you to read and reflect upon the sections of the Student Code that explain the virtues of academic integrity, and to read and reflect upon the consequences of flouting its protocols.

**Inquiry:** This seminar will cultivate inquiry in several ways. First of all, at the start of the semester I will explain how the study of contemporary forms of human migration is a major new concern among several disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, such as anthropology, sociology, and critical geography. I will also explain how migration has not just impacted different kinds of academic inquiry, but also a variety of cultural forms and practices, as the films, songs, and literary texts that we will examine in HNR 350 also make clear. Further, throughout the semester I will ask you to reflect on the course's interdisciplinary character and on the virtues of interdisciplinary methods. Finally, I will encourage you to regard yourselves as agents of inquiry, whose own native intelligence and intellectual curiosity will in part shape the nature of our time together.

**Inter-disciplinarity:** HNR 350-01 will consider its content from an interdisciplinary perspective in two main ways. On one hand, the course will navigate among the discipline-specific approaches that are needed in order to study the cultural objects on which it focuses. Thus, it will help you acquire or hone the tools of literary-, art-, or film-criticism, as needed. On the other hand, in leading you to a wider and deeper apprehension of the issues the assigned materials raise and grapple with, as well as the contexts from which they emerge, the course will also consider its primary contents from a variety of other disciplinary vantage-points, such as anthropology, sociology, and geography, among others. Throughout, I will explicitly emphasize the course's multi- and interdisciplinary character. I should note that my own academic training (both at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels) was interdisciplinary, and both the knowledge and the perspectives I bring to bear on my teaching (as well as on my scholarship, some of which you will read) give evidence of my interdisciplinary training, outlook, and preferences. In part, therefore, I will teach the importance of critical, interdisciplinary thinking by modeling it.

**Innovation:** This course will be innovative and encourage innovation in several ways. For one thing, the course itself is new, and part of a still expanding surge of interest in human migration across the humanities and social sciences, which itself is a response to developments in the lives of millions of people around the world. For another, the course's inter-disciplinary approach to migration is itself innovative, precisely because it encourages crossing borders between what are still primarily discipline-specific responses to the complexities of migration. (That is to say, anthropologists still mostly ground their work in the work of their disciplinary colleagues, literary scholars still mostly read what other specialists in literature have to say about literary representations of migration, etc.) Moreover, HNR 350-01 will not just bring to bear an interdisciplinary framework upon the subject of migration; it will also innovatively have seminar participants learn about migration in terms of different kinds of cultural and artistic responses to the phenomenon.

**Internationalization:** As a course that focuses on migration across the Mediterranean, the course's scope and mission are self-evidently international, insofar as they engage realities outside of the United States. The course's purview is also international inasmuch as the two Mediterranean sites on which it will chiefly focus--i.e., the Strait of Gibraltar and the Strait of Sicily--are bordered upon by six different countries and territories, i.e., Spain, Morocco, Gibraltar, Tunisia, Malta, and Italy. Further, the two straits play an important role in migration from and to many other countries, including nearby Algeria and Libya. Moreover, migrants and refugees who cross the Mediterranean at those sites come from not just from the nations of the Mediterranean Basin and their adjacent geographic zones but from other and remoter places, including countries as far away as Myanmar and Bangladesh. Finally, the course promotes internationalization by encouraging you to reflect on the ways in which the principal object of our study--migration across the Mediterranean--has many analogues across the globe, including migration from Central America to the United States. Thus, the seminar aims to get you to see how the issues it raises are not just relevant to people out there somewhere but to us all.

### **Personal engagement with faculty**

With its smaller classes, living/learning facilities, and emphasis on individualized advising, the Honors College seeks to offer students a more personal engagement with faculty. Because HNR 350-01 will be taught entirely online and asynchronously, it will obviously be much more challenging for me to create a personal learning dynamic with you than if we were meeting face-to-face. Nevertheless, I will frequently make clear to you in various ways that as much as possible I endeavor to relate to my students as persons, and not just as units to be processed through an academic mill. In assigning the intellectual autobiography, for instance, I will ask you to reflect on prompts that ask you about your personal predilections, experiences, and goals. I will point out that the autobiography is not solely an exercise in intellectual and academic stock-taking but also an occasion for you to present a picture of your evolving personhood to yourself, as well as to me, your professor. In addition, I will encourage you to take advantage of my virtual office hours, which we can use to talk about your work or about any issue we've touched on in class. To the extent that circumstances allow, I will also endeavor to provide you with individual oral feedback as well as with written feedback on your work.

### The relationship between the course schedule and Blackboard announcements

On pages 8-10 of this syllabus you will find a schedule for the course that lists tentative due-dates for the major course assignments, i.e., your video self-introductions, your autobiographical essay, other written course work, and your end-of-semester oral presentation. Note that the main purpose of the schedule is to give you an approximate idea at the start of the semester of the shape of course. **If last semester is any guide, the schedule will need to be modified soon enough. That is one reason why you need to get into the habit of keeping up with all announcements from the very outset.** As from the second week of the semester, the up-to-date information that I will supply in the announcements will take precedence over what the schedule states. Thus, **as from the second week of the semester you should not rely on the course schedule to find out where precisely we're at in the course or to find out what assignment is due and when. Consult the announcements instead.** They will provide you with the ongoing real-time schedule that you need to be aware of at all times.

The announcements will either themselves contain or will readily direct you to all of the course materials (instructions, guidelines, heuristics, rubrics, etc.) that you will need for any given week. I will endeavor to keep the announcements as brief as possible, although at times they may have to be substantial in length. For the most part, they will direct you to the appropriate folder on BB's menu bar. At other times, they will provide you with reminders about due-dates or other requirements. Since the menu bar folders contain most of the information that you will need in order to successfully complete your tasks for the course, it is very important that you acquaint yourselves with them early on and that you learn how to navigate them readily. Note that one of those folders is entitled "Reflections on course content" and will feature brief videos or written reflections in which I will explain key features of the texts or contexts that you will be studying in any given week.

Be aware that the class will proceed through the semester sequentially and as a cohort. Thus, although you're welcome to read the assigned materials in advance and to re-read them if possible (the more times you're able to read them, the better), you must complete tasks and submit assignments in synch with the schedule that the announcements will establish. In other words, you may not request to be given assignments in advance of when the class as a whole will be tackling them.

### Coursework and Assignments

Now that you've read about the challenge that HNR's status as an asynchronous course may present, and now that you've learned about how HNR 350 will fulfill the different learning objectives of the Honors College, it's time to discuss the different kinds of work you'll be doing for this course, as well as the assignments that are linked to them. The three main strands of work can be summarized as follows: reading, writing, and presenting.

Let me briefly discuss these three kinds of work, as well as the assignments that correspond to them. But before I do so, please note that while this only happens rarely, I may need to modify the assignments or substitute alternatives for them in response to the evolving needs of the course or in response to larger circumstances.

#### *Reading*

Throughout the semester, you'll be reading different kinds of material. The most demanding reading that you'll be engaging in after you carefully read this syllabus is the careful, critical reading of the literary texts and contextual items that I've assigned for the course. You'll also be reading various other items, including detailed guidelines for assignments. Although the amount of reading you'll have to do for HNR 350-01 will vary from week to week, and although its degree of difficulty will also differ, you should expect to be reading for the course virtually every week of the semester and you should expect to undertake reading that may at times be quite challenging. Skimming these materials will not yield a good grasp of their content, and without this grasp you will not do well in the course. Thus you should do everything in your power to avoid leaving the reading

for the last minute and skimming it. More positively, make sure to reserve sufficient time in which to carefully work your way through all of the reading for the course.

### ***Written Communication***

Although all of the written work you do for the course is important, some of the writing (i.e., your structured journal reflections on the assigned texts) will be *relatively* low-stakes. (Note the adverb “relatively.” Cumulatively, those journal reflections will count for a good chunk of your overall course grade.) However, two of your writing assignments will be high-stakes, with the second of them accounting for 30% of the overall course grade. These assignments are the autobiographical essay, and the critical analysis, which will be on either one of the main two assigned texts, i.e., *Welcome to Paradise* or *The Optician of Lampedusa*. Note that your critical analysis will have to incorporate some discussion of the items tagged as “contexts” in the course schedule as well as discussion of other sources that you will research. Note too that just as you should avoid skimming the assigned reading, you should also avoid dashing a piece of writing off at the last minute. Such writing is almost invariably shoddy and will not serve you well. Instead, make sure to give each piece of writing its due, whether it be your autobiographical essay, or one of the regular reflections you’ll be penning, or the research-based critical analysis. If you don’t, your performance in the course will inevitably suffer, perhaps to the point of failing it.

**Note: All writing for the course, including the autobiographical essay, is to be submitted in a readily readable 12-point font (e.g., Garamond) and double-spaced and must either be saved as an MS Word or as an RTF (Rich Text Format) file, with the exception of the reflections, which will be posted directly onto Blackboard. I will not accept files submitted as PDFs or as Pages documents, nor files submitted via Google Drive or Microsoft Drive. Also, please note that unless you can provide documented evidence of a medical emergency or a bereavement I will not accept any late submissions of any written or oral work.**

### ***Oral communication***

In this online section of HNR 350, you will regularly be practicing your oral communication skills, typically by video. The first time you will address me and your peers by video will be at the start of the semester when you will be introducing yourself to the class via Flipgrid. In addition, you’ll periodically be posting oral responses to the assigned reading, so you’ll have several chances to practice your oral communication skills before you give the end-of-semester oral presentation. Note that I may assign other (and relatively low-stakes) opportunities for you to present to your peers or to practice oral communication, but in any event the end of semester presentation will be the most substantial of all and therefore the one that will carry the largest share of the course grade, i.e., 20%. Your end-of-term presentation will be on whichever of the two main assigned texts you don’t write about for your research-based critical essay assignment. As with the essay, the presentation will have to feature some discussion of the contextual sources that are identified as such in the course schedule.

### **Critical viewing**

Another strand of work for the course will be critical viewing of documentaries and feature films, or excerpts thereof. Some of the oral and written journal reflections you’ll be submitting will be on these visual items.

### **Course Evaluation**

**First of all please note that in order to get credit for the course you must complete all of the reading assignments, submit all of the written assignments, and post all of the oral assignments. Unless I’ve formally excused you from doing so, to get credit you must also submit and post all course assignments--written and oral--on time every time.**

As soon as I grade your assignments, I will enter grades on Blackboard. In the case of letter grades, BB will automatically handle their numerical computation. Blackboard will also assign an overall grade for your

performance in the course based on the information I enter into its grading system. The chart below details what percentage of the total grade the various assignments are worth.

- Autobiographical essay: 10%
- Oral reflections x 4: 4 x 5 = 20%
- Written reflections x 4: 4 x 5 = 20%
- Research-based critical analysis 30%
- Oral presentation: 20%

**NB: Failure to post an oral reflection or to submit a written one will entail the loss of twice the percentage points that is allotted to the assignment.** So, for instance, if you do not submit a reflection on *The Optician*, you will lose  $5\% \times 2 = -10\%$ . Since BB cannot compute minus points, the missing entry will show up as a 0. Your final grade for the course will be the letter equivalent of the total number of points that you will have obtained for all assignments. The following schema shows how points are translated into an overall letter grade:

- A = 94 +            A- = 90-93
- B+ = 87-89        B = 83-86            B- = 80-82
- C+ = 77-79        C = 73-76            C- = 70-72
- D+ = 67-69        D = 63-66
- F = 0-62

**NB:** At the end of the semester, whatever overall grade you receive for the course should more or less reflect one of the following sets of written criteria:

- **A:** Grades in this category (A- or A) represent *excellent or outstanding participation* in all course activities *throughout the entire semester*; all assigned work completed on time, with *excellent to outstanding quality* in all work undertaken and produced for the course.
- **B:** Grades in this category (B-, B, or B+) represents *quite good, good, or very good participation* in all course activities *throughout the entire semester*; all assigned work completed on time, with *consistently quite good, good, or very good quality* in course work.
- **C:** Grades in this category (C-, C, or C+) represent *very weak, weak or fair participation* in all course activities *throughout the entire semester*; all assigned work completed on time, with *weak to fair quality* overall in course work.
- **D:** Grades in this category (D or D+) represent *very poor or poor or highly uneven participation* in course activities; some gaps in assigned work completed or occasionally tardy submission, with *very poor, or poor, or highly inconsistent quality* in course work.
- **F:** Represents *minimal participation* in course activities; serious gaps in assigned work completed or consistently tardy submission, with *unacceptably low quality* in course work. An F is usually also assigned in cases of **plagiarism**.

**NB: Please note that since an “A” represents the production of excellent to outstanding work, as well as excellent to outstanding participation throughout the entire semester, an “A” is by definition hard to get.**

**NNB: Please also note that if by mid-term you doing very poorly in the course (for whatever reason), if circumstances allow I will most likely recommend that you withdraw from it.** Students who are already struggling mightily by midterm virtually always end up failing, and the F they end up getting represents a considerable waste of time, resources, and money, one that negatively impacts their morale as well as their GPA. And note that while I am committed to trying my best to ensure that all of my students succeed, the

demands on my time are so stringent that I may not be able to actively attend to my struggling students. **In any case, you are ultimately responsible for how you fare in this course, hence the importance of ensuring that you be self-disciplined, self-motivated, and highly organized, and that you practice good time-management skills.** The English word “student” ultimately derives from Latin words meaning “applying oneself to” and “painstaking application.” If you apply yourself painstakingly and consistently you should do well in HNR 350-01.

## Schematic Schedule of Assignments and Due-Dates

Please note that this schedule only indicates in general terms what you're going to be working on from week to week and when the due-dates for major assignments are likely to be due. **The precise schedule that we'll be following in this course will be regularly announced through Blackboard's Announcements page, so make sure to follow those announcements very carefully indeed.** Please also note that **I may provide you with substitutes for some of the contextual items listed below.** Finally, please further note that **due-dates may change according to class needs, yet another reason why you must make sure to promptly attend to all BB announcements.**

### Week One: 1/19-1/22: Introductions and finding our bearings

- Welcome to HNR 350-01!
- The importance of the syllabus and of following BB announcements
- The demands of asynchronous online learning
- The importance of correct email netiquette
- Course theme: the Mediterranean as the world's deadliest border
- How to record a Flipgrid introduction
- How to write the autobiographical essay

### Week Two: 1/26-1/29: Contemporary unauthorized migration across the Mediterranean Sea. First setting: the Strait of Gibraltar

- Watch Francis Alÿs's, "Don't cross the bridge before you get to the river"
- The Strait of Gibraltar: a multidirectional Mediterranean contact zone
- Morocco and Spain and the historical and contemporary connections between them
- The Schengen Accords and the reinforcement of Mediterranean Europe's external borders
- Contexts: Álvarez: "The Strait of Gibraltar" (encyclopedia entry)
- How to read literary texts
- The oral and written reflections
- **Flipgrid introduction and autobiographical essay due**
- **T 1/26 = Last Day to Add**
- **F 1/29 = Last day for Cr/NC Changes**

### Week Three: 2/1-2/5: Undocumented migration and the shores of southern peninsular Spain

- Undocumented migration across the Strait in Spanish cultural production
- Contexts: *The shipwreck: 30 years of submerged history* (documentary film)
- Contexts: Strait crossings in Spanish photo-journalism
- **Oral reflection due**

### Week Four: 2/8-2/12: The Strait of Gibraltar as seen from Spanish shores

- Texts: "Punta Marroqui" by Nieves García Benito (short story)
- **Written reflection due**

### Week Five: 2/15-2/19: Undocumented migration and the shores of northern Morocco

- Undocumented migration across the Strait in Moroccan cultural production



- Introduction to Mahi Binebine
- Contexts: Álvarez: “Unstable vessels” (journal article)
- Contexts: *Harrugas* (feature film)
- **Oral reflection due**

**Week Six: 2/22-2/26: : The Strait of Gibraltar as seen from Moroccan shores I**

- Text: *Welcome to Paradise I* (novel)
- **Oral reflection due**

**Week Seven: 3/1-3/5: The Strait of Gibraltar as seen from Moroccan shores II**

- Text: *Welcome to Paradise II*
- **Written reflection due**

**Week Eight: 3/8-3/12: Contemporary unauthorized migration across the Mediterranean Sea. Second setting: the Strait of Sicily**

- The Strait of Sicily: a multidirectional Mediterranean contact zone
- Italy and Eritrea and the historical and contemporary connections between them
- Contexts: Lampedusa (documentary)
- Contexts: Pugliese: “Transnational carceral archipelagoes: Lampedusa and Christmas Island” (journal article)
- **Wednesday, March 10 = GVSU Break Day**

**Week Nine: 3/15-3/19: “Due sponde, un solo mare”/ “Two shores, a single sea”**

- Texts: “Haraga” and “Merchants in Venice,” by Ingrid de Kok (poems)
- **Written reflection due**

**Week Ten: 3/22-3/26: Reportage and/as literature I**

- Text: *The Optician of Lampedusa I* (creative non-fiction)
- **Oral reflection due**

**Week Eleven: 3/29-4/2: Reportage and/as literature II**

- Text: *The Optician of Lampedusa II*
- **Written reflection due**
- **Thursday, April 1 = GVSU Break Day**

**Week Twelve: 4/5-4/9: How to write the critical analysis**

- **F April 9 = Withdrawal Deadline**

**Week Thirteen: 4/12-4/16: Second to last week of classes**

- *Work on critical analysis*

**Week Fourteen: 4/19-4/23: Last week of classes**

- **Critical analysis due**
- How to deliver the oral presentation

**Week Fifteen: 4/26-4/30: Exam Week**

- **Oral presentations due**