

## **Prison Literatures of South-West Asia & North Africa**

**Instructor:** Amir Aziz

**Level:** 3-credit undergraduate or graduate seminar; meets once a week

**Targeted enrollment size:** 20-25 students

**Keywords:** Comparative Literature; Ethnic Studies; Women's Studies; Carceral Studies

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores contemporary prison literatures, writings, and cultural productions in the transcontinental region called South-West Asia and North Africa (SWANA). By looking at novels, non-fiction texts, poems, and memoirs, this course will span a wide breadth of texts and sources.

Particular emphasis will be placed on those written or produced by/about women, queer, transgender, and gender non-normative individuals of the SWANA region and diasporas. We will examine how tropes and realities of imprisonment are depicted, narrativized, and read across a variety of political and cultural settings, retelling how minoritized ethnic, gendered, and sexed groups encounter, challenge, and narrate imprisonment. Other than literature in prison settings, this course will also focus on how related issues such as detention, confinement, surveillance, migration, and torture are concomitantly written about, received, and read within the SWANA region.

### COURSE ASSESSMENT

Course assessment is based upon:

**Response Papers (30%):** Throughout the semester, students are required to submit three 4-page response paper (doubles-spaced) on the readings assigned for a class (that also includes the one response paper for the class presentation day). Students cannot write more than one response paper for the material for one class– the three papers must be from different class sessions. Students can opt to write about one text, or can discuss several together. Students must email this response paper before the start of class. This response paper should include: a summary of the text and an analysis of the text considering course themes. Personal reactions to the texts are also welcome.

**Class Presentation (20%):** Each student is expected to serve as a discussant during the semester on one or more of the texts/sources of a particular week. Students do not need to prepare PowerPoint presentations. They simply need to talk about: a) core themes of the selected material; b) close reading and key analysis of selected paragraphs relating to the week's theme; and c) several brief, thought-provoking questions to encourage discussion. The discussant role should last between 10-15 minutes. The discussant role is less a 'formal' presentation and more an informal role where you elaborate your thoughts, pose questions, and interact with classmates. There is no right or wrong method to carrying out the role of discussant. On the day of the presentation the student is required to submit one response paper.

**Class Participation (20%):** Each student is expected to complete the assigned reading course and actively participate in class discussion. Students should come to class with 2-3 questions about the readings for class discussion. Participation is measured through your active engagement during class time. This means offering your thoughts about course material during discussions, attentively listening to your classmates while they are speaking, and responding to them. Students are required to bring assigned readings with them to class.

**Final Exam (30%):** A final exam will be administered at the end of the semester during exams week. Out of 5 questions, students will respond to 2 of them, with each response essay of at least 400-words long.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### **WEEK 1 – Course Introductions**

### **WEEK 2**

- Nawal al-Sadawi, *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*
- Rajendra Chetty, “Women Warriors and Female Community in the Prison Writings of Fatima Meer and Nawal El Saadawi”

### **WEEK 3**

- Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Open Door*
- Marilyn Booth, “Women’s prison memoirs in Egypt and Elsewhere: Prison, Gender, Praxis”

### **WEEK 4**

- Maram al-Masri, *The Abduction*
- Shareah Taleghani, *Excerpts from Readings in Syrian Prison Literature: The Poetics of Human Rights*

### **WEEK 5**

- Malika Oufkir, *Stolen Lives: Twenty Years in a Desert Jail*
- Salah Moukhlis, “The Forgotten Face of Post-coloniality: Moroccan Prison Narratives, Human Rights, and the Politics of Resistance”

### **WEEK 6**

- Mohamedou Ould Slahi, Excerpts from *Guantánamo Diary*
- Marc Falkoff, ed, *Poems from Guantánamo*

### **WEEK 7**

- Aisha Odeh, *Dreams of Freedom*
- Samah Saleh, “Palestinian Women Prisoners: The Relational Politics of Incarceration, Marriage, and Separation”

### **WEEK 8**

- Nadia Hashimi, *A House without Windows*
- Lila Abu-Lughod, Excerpts from *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*

## **WEEK 9**

- Assia Djebar, *Vaste est la prison / Vast Is the Prison*
- Leila Djabali, “For my torturer, Lieutenant D...” in *The Heinemann Book of African Women’s Poetry*

## **WEEK 10 - BREAK**

## **WEEK 11**

- Souha Bechara, *Resistance: My Life for Lebanon*
- Elaine Scarry, Excerpts from *The Body In Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*

## **WEEK 12**

- Watch *Women’s Prison* (2002) by Manijeh Hekmat
- Marnia Lazreg, Excerpts from *Torture and the Twilight of Empire*

## **WEEK 13**

- Sahar Delijani, *Children of the Jacaranda Tree*
- Mino Moallem, “Universalization of particulars: The civic body and gendered citizenship in Iran”

## **WEEK 14**

- Buthaina al-Nasiri, *The Return of the Prisoner*
- Mehdi Husein, *Underground Rivers Flow Into the Sea*

## **WEEK 15 – FINAL EXAM**