

Comparative South Asian and West Asian American Literatures & Films

Instructor: Amir Aziz

Level: 3-credit undergraduate/graduate seminar; meets twice a week

Targeted enrollment size: 20-30 students

Keywords: Ethnic Studies; Asian American Studies; Gender & Women's Studies; Cultural Studies; Comparative Literature; Film & Media; South Asian American Studies

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In recent years, South Asian and West Asian Americans have become an increasingly visible presence in US media, literary, and cultural productions. In particular, various literary, cultural, and visual productions have highlighted the mutual intersections and co-constitutions in literary text, activism, culture, and historical experiences of South Asian and West Asian Americans, challenging the broader tendency to separate them as discrete, disparate, and mutually-exclusive categories.

In this course, we will consider how South Asian and West Asian American authors, poets, artists, filmmakers, and other makers have explored complex questions of belonging, desire, diaspora, migration, and selfhood, in tandem with considering the interplay of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, and nationality with those assemblages. Ultimately, this course aims to emphasize the pluralities of South Asian and West Asian American subjectivities and experiences, as well as their intertwining and shared historical and cultural continuities within Asian America.

This course is highly collaborative, discussion based, and reading intensive. The majority of the work in this course will be conducting close reading and analysis, as well as participating in discussion during class. The syllabus may change throughout the course of the semester.

COURSE ASSESSMENT

(1) Short Writing Assignments (25%): 500-word responses on the weekly readings, due at the beginning of class. These assignments will help you engage with the readings and concepts using a specific prompt.

(2) Write-Up of Event (15%): During the semester, you will be required to attend one event (book reading, film, theater, performance, etc.) on or near campus relevant to the course's themes. You will write up a 600-word essay of the event, in tandem with a critical discussion of the relationship to course readings and themes. The assignment must be turned in within 2 weeks of the event.

(3) Midterm Exam (20%): The take-home midterm will include short essay questions, passage identification and short essays. The exam will require you to engage directly with the course readings and discussions, as well as identify similarities and distinctions in themes.

(4) Final Research Paper (30%): Students are expected to write a 6-8 page-long research paper as a final project. In it, they will analyze and compare two literary texts and/or cultural productions (one West Asian American, the other South Asian/South-Asian American). A list of more specific prompts will be provided early in the semester to aid students in developing their paper.

(5) Participation (10%): Each student is expected to complete the assigned reading for each 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.

GENDER, QUEER & TRANS-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

Just as misogynist language excludes women's experiences, non-gender-inclusive language excludes the experiences of transgender, intersex, gender non-binary, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming individuals, language should be gender- and sex-inclusive when we use words that recognize and affirm how people describe, express, and experience their gender, sex, sexuality, and embodied identities.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 – Introductions and Course Expectations

WEEK 2 - Traversals

Tuesday

- Suheir Hammad, *Born Palestinian, Born Black & the Gaza Suite*
- Glenn Omatsu, "The Four Prisons and the Movements of Liberation," from *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader*

Thursday

- Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem*
- Sabeen Sandhu, "Instant Karma: The Commercialization of Asian Indian Culture" in *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity and Ethnicity*.

WEEK 3 – Expanse

Tuesday

- Sunaina Maira and Magid Shihade, "Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies: Thinking Race, Empire, and Zionism in the U.S."
- Nadine Naber, "Introduction: Arab Americans and U.S. Racial Formations" in *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*

Thursday

- Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*
- Seema Sohi, "Repressing the "Hindu Menace": Race, Anarchy, and Indian Anti- Colonialism"

WEEK 4 – Home/land

Tuesday

- Watch (in class) *Salt of this Sea* (2010) by Annemarie Jacir

Thursday

- Randa Jarrar, *A Map of Home*
- Discuss *Salt of this Sea* (2010) by Annemarie Jacir

WEEK 5 – Seismos

Tuesday

- Watch (in class) *A Dream in Doubt* (2007) by Tami Yeager

Thursday

- Sunaina Maira, Excerpts from *The 9/11 Generation: Youth, Rights, and Solidarity in the War on Terror*
- Discuss *A Dream in Doubt* (2007)

WEEK 6 – The New Afghans

Tuesday

- Watch (in class) *The Swallows of Kabul* (2019)

Thursday

- Zohra Saed, *Drop by Drop We Make a River*
- Discuss *The Swallows of Kabul* (2019)

WEEK 7 – Sermon

Tuesday

- Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz*
- Hirsh Sawhney, *South Haven*

Thursday

- Ayad Akhtar, *Disgrace*
- Leila Abdelrazaq, *Baddawi*

WEEK 8 – Re(naissance)

Tuesday

- Collective Brainstorming Session for Final Research Paper

Thursday

- Tarfia Faizullah, *Registers of Illuminated Villages*
- Excerpts from *Grape Leaves*

WEEK 9 – Queer Divine

Tuesday

- Gayatri Gopinath, “Communities of Sound: Queering South Asian Popular Music in the Diaspora” in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*
- Charlotte Karem Albrecht, “The Possibilities of Peddling: Imagining Homosocial and Homoerotic Pleasure in Arab America” in *Possible Histories: Arab Americans and the Queer Ecology of Peddling*

Thursday

- Tanwi Nandini Islam, *Bright Lines*
- Alok Vaid-Menon, *Your Wound / My Garden*

WEEK 10 – Midterms

WEEK 11 – Polyester Blues

Tuesday

- Mohja Kahf, *The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf*

Thursday

- Kareem Khubchandani, “Critical Aunty Studies: An Auntribution”
- “Sari” music video by LaWhore Vagistan

WEEK 12 – Mythmaker

Tuesday

- Hayan Charara. Excerpts from *Inclined to Speak: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Poetry*
- Fatimah Asghar, *If They Come for Us*

Thursday

- Safia Elhillo, *The January Children*

WEEK 13 - Soundscape

Tuesday

- Sunaina Maira, "Henna and Hip Hop: The Politics of Cultural Production and the Work of Cultural Studies"
- Hisham Aidi, Excerpts from *Rebel Music: Race, Empire and the New Muslim Youth Culture*

Thursday

- Sohail Daulatzai, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom Beyond America*

WEEK 14 – Care

Tuesday

- Stephen Karam, *Sons of the Prophet*

Thursday

- Presentation of Research Paper Topics

WEEK 15 – Work on Final Research Paper