This interdisciplinary course focuses on the representation of women in modern-day literary, scholarly, and visual "texts," produced by both men and women in Muslim-majority countries and their diasporas in the West. It covers a wide range of geographical regions and treats a variety of literary texts (novels, short stories, poetry), as well as other art forms (painting, photography, film). Thematicall, its main goals are two: a/ To explore issues of gender, as reflected in the selected sources, and to discuss the factors which affect the perception of gender roles and the representation of women in a given cultural setting; b/ To acquaint students with authors of international renown, whose work reflects important cultural, ideological, and aesthetic trends in modern Muslim societies and communities.

Students are invited to consider the extent to which religion shapes the creative choices of the authors. Is the dominant mode of women’s representation typified by Islamic values and ideals? Or is there an array of associations and images of women that stem out of different cultural, political, and aesthetic sensibilities? How is the female body, behavior, sexuality, and identity at large constructed in reference to literary, cultural, and societal norms? What is the relationship between text and context? How do historical circumstances, “the spirit of the times”, and the priorities of the moment affect the representation of women, and the issues which authors choose to highlight? In addressing these topics, the course explores--and in part problematizes--the term "Islamic literatures/cultures" when used as a common denominator for a host of creative activities that transcend purely religion-oriented behavior and experience. It also tests the conventional polarities between tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, East and West.

All course materials are read in English/translation. As part of their course work, students are welcome to introduce other relevant texts and stories, especially oral narratives that they may be familiar with, but which do not exist in English translation.

Course Director: Marta Simidchieva
E-mail: msimid@yorku.ca
Office Hours: Thursdays, 13:00—14:00
**REQUIRED READING:**

**Course Kit**

**Fatima Mernissi. The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam.** [E-book], 1991


**Shahrnush Parsipur (b. 1946-) Women Without Men (novel, pub. 1989, Tehran)—108 pp. (available also as an E-book through Scott Library, but only to be read online, by one person at a time)


**Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006; Nobel prize for literature 1988), The Day the Leader Was Killed (pub. 1983, Cairo)—102 pp.


**Tayeb Salih (1929-2009), Season of Migration to the North (novel, pub. 1966, Beirut)— 169 pp.

**NOTE SYMBOLS:**

** - REQUIRED

* - RECOMMENDED

COURSE ASSESSMENT:

10% – Review of a scholarly article: due by November 5, 2014. You can choose to review any scholarly article from the Required and Recommended readings of the First term, with the exception of the ones for the Panel Discussion 1 on Islamic Feminism

20% – One Research Paper (ca. 10-12 pages):
   a) 5% – PROJECT OUTLINE AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: due by January 28, 2015 (The proposal can be submitted and evaluated earlier.)
   b) 15% – FINAL DRAFT: due by March 25, 2015 (The project can be submitted earlier, but all marks will be released at the end of the academic year)

40% – Two Term Tests held in class
   a) TT1: December 3, 2014 (worth 20%)
   b) TT2: April 1, 2015 (worth 20%)

16% – 2 Panel Discussions (Group project): (8% each: 5% group mark + 3% individual assessment):
   a) Nov. 12, 2014 – “Feminist scholarship on Islamism and gender: Can we speak of Islamic Feminism?”
   b) March 4, 2015-- “Muslim Women and the New Media”

14% – Participation

= 100% of FINAL GRADE

**Secondary E-Resources (E):**


**Articles listed on the course website.

**Films viewed and discussed in class sessions:

**RECOMMENDED READINGS:** *Books on course reserve; *E-resources (E), to be used as starting point in research, for mini-lectures, and enhancing discussions. The recommended readings are listed on the Moodle website and in the expanded online version of the syllabus.

**PLEASE NOTE:** This course is cross-listed by the undergraduate PROGRAM OF SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES, housed in the Division of Social Sciences at the Faculty of Arts. To have the course count towards their major, students from this program are advised to select their presentations and research-paper topics from the thematic units pertaining to South Asia and its diaspora.

**FALL TERM**

1. **September 10:** Introduction: Islamic societies today: Spotlight on women :

**REQUIRED VIEWING (in class):**

*Film: “THE SECRET BALLOT”, dir. Babak Payami, (Iran, 2001; 105 min)

**RECOMMENDED VIEWING:**

* “Our Times” dir. Rakhshan Banietemad (Iran, 2001, 75) DVD 8620

2. **September 17:** The historical context. The faith, the lands, and the peoples. Issues of women’s history and traditional perceptions of gender roles.

**REQUIRED READINGS:**

**NOTE SYMBOLS:**

** - REQUIRED

* - RECOMMENDED
3. September 24: **Islamic models of ideal womanhood: The women of Muhammad’s household. Traditional views and modern reinterpretations (Sunni and Shi’a perspectives)**

**REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED READINGS:**

**IBN S’D (ca. 784-845):** Selections from THE WOMEN OF MADINA (Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir, vol.8) (KIT)

**FATIMA MERNISSI (b. 1940):** Chapter 6 “THE PROPHET AND SPACE” pp. 115-140, in The veil and the male elite: a feminist interpretation of women’s rights in Islam (E)

**Barbara Stowasser:** “The Mothers of the Believers in the Hadith” in Women in the Quran, Traditions, and Interpretation. (E). Oxford University Press, 1996


4. October 1: **IRAN and SOUTH ASIA: Images of women in court literature and art, and the transformations of modernity.**

**REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED READING AND VIEWING:**

**Afsaneh Najmabadi:** “Part I: Beauty, Love and Sexuality”(pp. 11-63) in Women with mustaches and men without beards: gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity.

*Milo Cleveland Beach, The new Cambridge history of India. I.3, Mughal and Rajput painting [required for students from the South Asian Program]*

*Nikki Keddie, “Women in Medieval Muslim Societies”, pp. 29-31 and “Ottomans and Safavids”, pp. 53-57, and “Change in the Long 19\textsuperscript{th} c.—1798-1914” pp. 60-68 in: Women in the Middle East: Past and Present (E):*

**VISUALS POSTED ON THE COURSE WEBSITE: View all visuals and select the image(s) you would like to comment upon in class:**

**ARTWORK:** Medieval miniatures (Safavid and Mughal); Qajar paintings:

**PHOTOGRAPHY:**
--Qajar photography
  Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1831-1896) photos of his harem: Antoin Sevruguin (1830s-1933), official photographer of the Imperial Qajar court of Iran:

--Contemporary Iranian photography:
  Shadi Ghadirian (b. 1974— Iranian photographer
  Shirin Neshat (b. 1957--) Iranian-American visual artist
  Soody Sharifi (b. 1955)—Iranian-American visual artist
5. October 8: **IRAN: Woman as the Muse in the Surreal World of Sadeq Hedayat’s *The Blind Owl*.

REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED READING:

**SADEQ HEDAYAT (1903-1951), *The Blind Owl*, (pub. 1937, Bombay)**

*Nikki Keddie, “Iran” pp. 84-88 and 108-117 in: *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present* (E)


REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED READING:

**PARVIN E’TESAMI (1907-41):** Body and soul--The needle and the thread--God's weaver-- The golden cage--Iranian women--A woman's place--The helpless hens--The tree of hope (KIT)

**FORUGH FARROKHZAD (1933-67):** Captive --Those days—The wind-up doll—My lover—I'll be greeting the sun again—Another birth—I pity the garden— Union--Let us believe in the oncoming season of cold—The voice alone is left. (KIT)

**SIMIN BEHBAHANI (1927--):** Dancing girl (pp.72-74)--You Won’t Believe It—Twelve Fountains of Blood—Gypsiesque—Wine of Light-- I will rebuild you my homeland (p. 25)—Banu, Our Lady (website) (E)

These poems of Simin Behbahani are found in *Iranian Studies: Special Issue on Simin Behbahani, 41:1,2008*, in the following three articles: 1. Mahdi Tourage, “Text and the body in a poem by Simin Behbahani” ; 2. “Eight poems by Simin Behbahani”; 3.Kamran Talattof: “I will rebuild you my homeland: Simin Behbahani’s work and the socio-political discourse”)


* Farzaneh Milani: *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*, pp. 100-176; 231-240 (E)

“Part Two: From Tahereh to Tahereh: The Poets”
5. Revealing and concealing: Parvin Etessami”;
6. “Unveiling the Other: Forugh Farrokhzad”
7. “Negotiating Boundaries: Tahereh Saffarzadeh”

“Part Four: Voices Through the Veil:
10. “The Birth of Neotraditional Feminism”

7. October 22: **IRAN: Magical realism as a tool of social commentary in the novels of Shahrnush Parsipur (b. 1946):**

REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED READING:

**SHAHRNUSH PARSIPOUR (1946-), *Women Without Men* (novel; pub. 1989, Tehran)

8. **OCTOBER 29—NOVEMBER 2: CO-CURRICULAR WEEK**

9. **November 5: IRAN: Women in the eye of the camera—Invite Khatereh Sheibani**

**REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED VIEWING AND READING:**

**ASGHAR FARHADI (b. 1972):** Film: “A SEPARATION” (released 2011; 2012 “Oscar” for best foreign-language film; 126 min.)


**REVIEW DUE**

10. **November 12: PANEL DISCUSSION: Feminist scholarship on Islamism and gender: Can we speak of Islamic Feminism?**

**First stage (Groups 1-2-3—conducted online):** All students read the article of Heba Raouf Ezzat, noting the specifics of her writing and ideas. Students from the three groups read the two articles listed under each group (you may divide the task amongst yourselves) and sum up the specifics of the authors’ approaches and what are the main points they make. How do their views relate to Heba Raouf Ezzat’s writings?

**Second stage (Groups A-B-C—conducted in-class):** Groups 1-2-3 break up, and their members form new groups A-B-C, with at least one representative from the previous groupings taking part in the new circle. The A-B-C groups convene in reserved study spaces at Scott library during class time. Each member of the A-B-C groups explains to their colleagues what the works s/he read in the 1-2-3 group were about. After the break, all gather in the classroom, and a general discussion follows. Pre-registration into the 1-2-3 groups required.


**Group 1:**
**HAIDEH MOGHISSI: “Islamic Feminism and Its discontents”** (KIT)

**Group 2:**

**NAYEREH TOHIDI:** “Islamic Feminism: Perils and Promises” (2001-2) (Website)

**MERVAT HATEM.** “Gender and Islamism in the 1990s” Middle East Report, No. 222 (Spring, 2002), pp. 44-47. (E)

**Group 3:**


1. **November 19: SOUTH ASIA: The Motherland is a Woman**

REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED READING:

**AHMED NADEEM QASMI (1914--2006), “Countrywoman” (KIT)**

**FARKHANDA LODHI (1937--2010), “Pieces of Flesh” (KIT)**

**SAADAT HASAN MANTO: “Khol Do” (“Open up”)— Uploaded on the website as Word document**

*Ayesha Jalal: “South Asia” in Encyclopaedia of Nationalism: (Website) (articles on partition?)

11. **November 26: SOUTH ASIA: Women on the Crossroads**

REQUIRED VIEWING AND RECOMMENDED READING:

**Film: “ISLAM & FEMINISM” / South Productions for Channel Four in association with RTVE (Spain) and SBS (Australia) ; written & directed by Nighat Said Khan. (1991, 25 mins. DVD 3629)**

*Amina Jamal, “Transnational Feminism as Critical Practice: A Reading of Feminist Discourses in Pakistan” Meridians, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2005), pp. 57-82

12. **December 3:**

Term Test 1

1. **January 7: CENTRAL ASIA: Muslim women in the Soviet and post-Soviet space.**

REQUIRED READING:

**CHINGIZ AITMATOV(1928 Kyrgyzstan—2008 Germany), “JAMILA”, Mother Earth and**
**Other Stories.** Tr. James Riordan. London and Boston: Faber and faber, 1989. 106-149 (KIT)


2. January 14: **SOUTH ASIA Afghanistan beyond the Taliban: --Invite**

**REQUIRED VIEWING:**


**REQUIRED READING:**


**REQUIRED READING:**

**LATIFE TEKIN (b. 1957).** Dear Shameless Death. (novel, pub. 1983)

**RECOMMENDED READING**


*Nikki Keddie, “Turkey”, pp. 81--84 and 119--121 in: Women in the Middle East: Past and Present (E):

4. January 28: **BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA: Civil War and After**

**REQUIRED VIEWING:**
**“GRBAVICA: THE LAND OF MY DREAMS”**


**RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**

5. **February 4: THE ARAB WORLD: History as a context: Naguib Mahfouz and his novel The Day the leader was killed.**

**REQUIRED READING:**

**NAGUIB MAHFOUZ, THE DAY THE LEADER WAS KILLED.**


**Nikki Keddie, “Egypt”, pp. 89-95 and 121-127 in: Women in the Middle East: Past and Present**


**REQUIRED READING:**


**FEBRUARY 14—20: READING WEEK**


**REQUIRED READINGS:**

**KANAFANI: “ALL THAT’S LEFT TO YOU,” (KIT)**

8. **March 4: DISCUSSION: Muslim women and the new media (Bloggers, “netizens”, YouTube, new media networks, etc.):**

**Loubna H. Skalli. “Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere: Women and Information**
Technologies in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa). *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies, Vol. 2, No. 2, Special Issue: Women's Activism and the Public Sphere* (Spring 2006).

**Topic 1: The Social Networks, YouTube, and the Blogosphere**

**Topic 2: Mainstream press, periodicals, television shows, etc.**

**Topic 3: The international news networks based in the Muslim world:**

9. March 11: **SUDAN: Colonialism and its legacies:**

**REQUIRED READING:**

**TAYEB SALIH (b. 1929–2009, Sudan): SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH**

10. March 18: **FRANCE: “The diaspora writes back”: The émigré experience**

**REQUIRED READING:**

**MARJANE SATRAPI, PERSEPOLIS**


**REQUIRED VIEWING:**

**ZARQA NAWAZ: “LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE”**


Season 2: 2. “Ban the Burqa”

(RESEARCH PAPER DUE)

12. April 1: **TERM TEST 2**