

MULOSIGE Modules:

Multilingual perspectives on gender in world literature

**Course Description**

In her “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, Joan Scott (1986) called for a constant interrogation of historical gender relations and identities, as well as of particular gender symbolic invocations (which, how, in what context, and by whom these were made). Following this insight, this course aims at exploring gender representations, themes and debates in the multilingual literatures of India, the Horn of Africa, and the Arab world. Gender, as a primary socio-cultural category, in relation to class, religion, sexuality, and race, is critical in shaping many aspects related to world literature and its study. World literature has not fully explored the gendered nature of canon formation, literary historiographies, and translation practices. Access to education, free time, and financial resources has often been more restricted for women, and that has influenced in the way in which women and men could participate in literature as writers, readers, translators, critics – even as characters. Besides, as certain genres were more contingent on education than others, genre and gender could be conceived as connected. Thus, considering female authors may influence well-established notions of literary history and literary networks, and it can feminise the still overwhelmingly male canon of world literature. Yet gender does not only affect women, despite the widespread tendency to approach male authors and characters as if they were a-gendered. For that reason, the course pays attention to notions of masculinity, and how they played out in different types of literary works. What are the understandings of what it means to be and act as a man or a woman in the literary traditions of these regions of the Global South – or are gender binaries not present, or irrelevant? And what significant geographies can we trace in the literatures that discuss or represent gender, both in the local and the translocal realm? What are the new perspectives on gender that emerge when we take multilingualism as our main analytical framework?

This syllabus developed out of the one-day workshop [“Comparative perspectives on gender in the (post)colonial literatures of North India, the Horn of Africa, and the Arab world”](https://www.soas.ac.uk/cclps/events/20mar2018-comparative-perspectives-on-gender-in-the-postcolonial-literatures-of-north-india-the-horn.html) (SOAS, 20 March 2018) organised by Dr Itzea Goikolea Amiano.

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# Week 1 - Histories of gender I: Gender in multilingual literary histories

In this first lecture, we will address how multilingual approaches in world literature shed light on the history of gender ideologies and gendered construction of the “world”. The femininity and masculinity models that emerged from within nineteenth- and twentieth-century reformist trends often drew on ‘classical’ figures (positive religious characters, rulers; and negative ones, such as the ‘omni-sexual women’, so prolific in Islamicate and Indian literatures). Resistance to the imposition of colonial knowledge and science was often put in the form of cultural authenticity, frequently associated with women and the feminised realm. In the 1930s and 1940s in the Maghreb women’s bodies became the locus of a struggle between colonial and indigenous sources of authority. More broadly, in times of pronounced socio-political historical change, gender has symbolically marked and reshaped anxieties related to shifts in power, but it has also set the path for the emergence of subversive ideas. What genres were conceived to be more suitable to convey such notions?

#### Readings

Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A useful category of historical analysis”. *The American Historical Review,* vol. 91, no. 5, 1986, pp. 1053-1075.

Chantal Zabus, “‘Writing with an accent’: From early decolonization to contemporary gender issues in the African Novel in French, English and Arabic”, in Simona Bertacco (ed), *Language and translation in postcolonial literature: Multilingual contexts, translational texts*, NY & London, 2014, pp. 32-47.

Fatima Sadiqi, Chapter 1 “Gender and language in Morocco: Theoretical and political issues”, in *Women, Gender, and Language in Morocco*, Leiden & Boston, 2003.

Stephanie Newell, Chapter 14 “Anatomy of Masculine Power: Three Perspectives on Marriage and Gender in Nigerian Non-Fiction”, in Stephanie Newell (ed), *Writing African Women: Gender, Popular Culture and Literature in West Africa*, London, 1997.

# Week 2 - Histories of gender II: Al-Andalus, the literary construction of a feminist chimera?

Al-Andalus (medieval Muslim Iberia) has long been a source of inspiration as an alternative model for multicultural citizenship and tolerance, and a foundation of cultural coexistence. From the 19th-century Muslim reformers from India to Morocco, to the Western post-9/11 Islamophobic literary reworkings, al-Andalus stands out as a repository for antithetical and polarised interpretations by a wide range of writers with different agendas, historical actors and actresses, and multilingual literatures concerned with interreligious and inter-gender relations, the role and presence of Islam and Judaism in the West, Islamic orthodoxy, Western colonialism, or the place of the Sephardic community in the Arab world as well as the State of Israel. Gender anxieties and desires have also widely been articulated through mystified literary retellings of al-Andalus. Indeed, several modern and contemporary feminist writers and scholars have praised Andalusi women’s learned condition and their openness to discuss (homo)erotic and sexual themes and have portrayed Andalusi men as ‘proto-feminists’. What are the invocations of al-Andalus in relation to gender that Arab and specifically Maghribi authors and texts convey? What is at stake in the literary construction of al-Andalus as a feminist chimera; and does this trope have a modern genealogy and multilingual underpinning?

#### Primary Readings

Zakia Iraqui-Sinaceur and Moha Ennaji, “‘Al-fatat’, On Young Women’s Education”, in Fatima Sadiqi, Amira Nowaira, Azza El Kholy, and Moha Ennaji (eds), *Women Writing Africa: The Northern Region*, New York, 2009, pp. 144-146.

Fatema Mernissi, Chapter 1 “How does one say ‘queen’ in Islam?”, in *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*,; Minneapolis, 1993 [French original 1990], pp. 9-25.

Hasna Lebbady, “Introduction: From Memory to History”, in *Feminist Traditions in Andalusi-Moroccan Oral Narratives*, New York, 2009, pp. 1-28.

#### Secondary Readings

Ibtissam Bouachrine, Chapter 1 “Dangerous Myths: Muslim Women Before the Age of Orthodoxy”, in *Women and Islam: Myths, apologies, and the limits of feminist critique*, Plymouth, 2014 pp. 14-38.

Christina Civantos, Chapter 6 “Scheherazade: Al-Andalus as Seduction and as Story”, in *The Afterlife of al-Andalus: Muslim Iberia in Contemporary Arab and Hispanic Narratives*, New York, 2017, pp. 267-282.

# Week 3 - Changing masculinities I: Intergenerational tensions and the crisis of masculinity in 1960s Ethiopian theatre

In his Amharic play *Ṭälfo Bäkise*(“Marriage by Abduction” 1968/69), the celebrated playwright Mängəstu Lämma satirises the disorientation and insecurity of young Ethiopian men, at a time when the Ethiopian project of hybridising modernity was perceived to have failed. Mixing the best elements of Western civilisation with the best elements of the Ethiopian tradition, as the five protagonists set out to do at the beginning of the play, turns out to be much harder than expected.  Mängəstu contrasts the confusion of 'modern' generations with the confidence of their elders, who aren't anyways spared their share of derision. The paper analyses how Mängəstu relates the crisis of masculinity to modern education, and how *Ṭälfo Bäkise*contributes to the heated debate of the late 1960s on "hyphenated intellectuals".

#### Primary source

Menghestu Lemma. 2009. Marriage of Unequals and Marriage by Abduction: Two comedies. Addis Ababa: Arada Books.

#### Secondary readings

Jane Plastow, Chapter 3 “Theatre in Liberation Struggles”, *African theatre and politics: the evolution of theatre in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe*, Amsterdam & Atlanta, 1996

Donald N. Levine, “The Concept of Masculinity in Ethiopian Culture”, *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1966, pp. 17-23.

Ivy Wilson, “‘Are You Man Enough?’: Imagining Ethiopia and Transnational Black Masculinity”, *Callaloo*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2010, pp. 265-277.

# Week 4 - Changing masculinities II: Masculinity and conflict in Arabic fiction and the ‘67 divide

Notions of gender and identity are constructed in relationship to political currents. This class examines the shifts in masculine identity amid a shift in political discourse in the Arab world before and after 1967. Two primary models of masculinity prevailed: that embodied by Egyptian leader Gamal Abd Al-Nasser (standing up to imperialism, modernization, secularization, nationalization, wearing a nice suit) and the emerging figure of the Palestinian resistance fighter (underground, self-made, anti-imperialist through not modernization but radical resistance, a rugged beard and a kuffiyeh muddied during battle). When Israel conquered the Sinai, the generalization goes, it defeated Egypt’s Pan-Arab icon Gamal Abd Al-Nasser and with him the last real hope for Arab victory. With Pan-Arabism largely dead in deed (if not in thought and word), mechanisms for resistance had to be re-aligned. The same pan-regional consensus has yet to recur, and along with it has gone the figure of the ‘successful’ man. The only figure that survived the ‘Naksa’ (setback) of 1967 (and only then partially) has been the ‘hero fighter’ that crystalized in the Palestinian guerrilla. In Iman Humaydan’s B as in Bayt, as in Beirut (1997) we see the figure of the hero as he was constructed in the late 60s utterly dismembered, and subtly reconstructed to adapt to the realities of Civil War Beirut.

#### Primary Source

Iman Humaydan Younis, *B as in Bayt, as in Beirut* (1997; trans Max Weiss2004 *B as in Beirut*)

#### Secondary Readings

Hoda El Sadda, Chapter 6 “Defeated Masculinities” in *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel: Egypt 1892-2008*, Edinburgh, 2012.

Laleh Khalili, Chapter 6 “Guerrillas and martyrs: evolution of national 'heroes'” in *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration*, Cambridge, 2009.

# Week 5 - Women and orality I: Dialogic gender narratives in Oromo orature

This lecture and the next focus on orature as a way to challenge Mikhail Bakhtin’s assumption that only the novel is able to promote the liminal voices in “low culture”. According to Bakhtin (1981), poetry is monologic and has no quality of presenting alternative voices to that of the authoritative “high culture”. World literature has tended to neglect oral literature, sometimes programmatically. Prendergast (2004), for example, explicitly excluded unwritten verbal arts from the domains of world literature. Yet, what happens from the point of view of gender if we open world literature to the oral? The participation of women in the practice of written Ethiopian literature is very low. Oromo oral poetry is used by women to amplify their voices and this shows that oral poetry can be as dialogic as the novel. However, women voices are significantly alive in Somali and Oromo orature. Viewed from Bakhtin’s concept of carnival, for example, Oromo Borana oral poetry permits women to ridicule the superiority of men. This aspect of oral poetry highlights oppositional construction of alternative gender ideologies in a patriarchal society.

Oromo literature had remained entirely oral up the 1970s and this was mainly caused by the Ethiopian monolingual language policies (Zelealem, 2003). Ethiopian literary studies have tended to promote the supremacy of written literature in Geez, the liturgical language of the Orthodox Church, and Amharic, the national/official language of the country. As a consequence, literary studies have marginalised literatures in other Ethiopian languages as well as oral literature. We will read some works on the representation of gender in the Oromo society through different oral genres of orature and how women use different elements of orature to subvert patriarchal oppressions. Jeylan Hussein (2004) and Kuwee Kumsa (2004) argue that the oppression of Oromo women has been exacerbated following the forceful incorporation of the Oromo under Ethiopian empire in the 19th century. Abram Alemu (2006) shows how oral narratives are used to consolidate the subordination of women. Contrarily, Fugich Wako (2003) indicates that how Oromo folksongs grant women a cultural license that enable them transcend patriarchally imposed restrictions and defend their rights. Fugich’s article traces how “qoosaa-tapha”, jocular folksong, helps women in the Borana to challenge the supremacy of men over women by showing how women use “qoosaa-tapha” to expose and ridicule men’s weaknesses in public. Through this lecture, we will address the following questions: How Oromo orature can be used to empower women and help them bring their concerns to public attention? How a multilingual approach through the valorisation of orature helps us figure out the history of gender ideologies and the dynamics in the construction of these ideologies in Oromo society?

#### Readings

Abraham Alemu, “Oral Narratives as an Ideological Weapon for Subordinating Women: The Case of Jimma Oromo”. *Gender Issues Research Report Series* (OSSREA), no. 23, 2006.

Fugich Wako, “Contesting Marginality in Jest: The Voice of the Borana Women in Oral Tradition”. *Journal of Oromo Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1&2, 2003, pp. 91-118.

Jeylan Hussein, “A Cultural Representation of Women in the Oromo Society”. *African Study Monographs*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2004, pp. 103-147.

Kuwee Kumsa, “The Siiqqee Institution of Oromo Women”. *Journal of Oromo Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1&2, 1997, pp. 115- 152.

# Week 6 - Women and orality II: Being heard as Somali women

Oral poetry has been the core form of cultural expression in Somali society for as long as we know. In earlier days, Somali poetry was considered mainly a man’s domain. If a poem was composed by a woman, it could not go past a close circle of female friends and relatives. Women’s voices are heard through poems of a relatively lower status, such as dance songs, work songs and *buraambur*, the special female style of poetry which is not considered serious enough for the taste of the nomadic man. However, Somali women can make serious points in their poems. Issues such as marriage, womanhood and concerns of a nomadic mother are frequently addressed. For example, in a lullaby song, a Somali mother sings to her infant girl: “in a dwelling where there isn’t a woman, no camels are milked.” Nowadays, Somali women, especially those in the diaspora, have had more opportunities to be heard. In new languages and new forms, what it is to be a woman remains a predominant topic discussed by the contemporary Somali women poets. Hence, women’s poetry has witnessed how gender is represented in different periods of time and provides us with a lens to explore the reasons and modalities of the changes.

#### Primary Sources

1. A lullaby song

*Gudooy weynoo gefeene*

*Ardaa aan gabadhi joogin*

*Gudooy, geel laguma maalo*

*Gammaan faras laguma raaco*

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*Oh Gudo, they have done wrong to us*

*A dwelling where a girl is not there*

*Oh Gudo, one doesn’t milk camels in it*

*One doesn’t accompany horses in it*

2. Dookh (Taste) by Caasha Luul Moxamed Yuusuf

Original text and English translation see: <http://www.poetrytranslation.org/poems/taste>

#### Secondary Sources

Amina H. Adan, “Women and Words”. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1981, pp. 115-142.

Zainab Mohamed Jama, “Fighting to Be Heard: Somali Women’s Poetry”. *African Languages and Cultures*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1991, pp.43-53.

Lidwien Kapteijns, *Women’s Voices in a Man’s World: Women and the Pastoral Tradition in Northern Somali Orature, c. 1899-1980*, Portsmouth (NH), 1999.

# Week 7 - Gendered violence I: Across the divide? Gender, violence and resistance in Hindi and Urdu fiction

How is gendered violence represented in literary fiction? How is resistance to this violence expressed? And how can these depictions help to contextualise, or contest, the ideologies of language, community and nation that dominate discursive formations of South Asia? In this session, the fictional works of the Hindi author Krishna Sobti and the Urdu writer Qurratulain Hyder are brought into conversation with one another, not only to expose some of the literary-historical tropes that undergird gendered violence in South Asia, but also to reveal how twentieth-century authors seek to contest these through their characters and narratives. Reading these texts together illuminates forms of resistance to gendered violence that are common to authors writing in Hindi and Urdu, while, at the same time, problematising the demarcation of Hindi and Urdu as diametrically opposed in the linguistic, religious and national-political spheres. Though the texts depict women of different time periods and socio-economic milieus, we see in the protagonists of Pasho and Sita a unity of resistance that transcends the dichotomisations of language.

#### Primary texts

Qurratulain Hyder, *Sita haran* in *Car Navilet* [Four Novellas], Lahore, 2000.

Qurratulain Hyder, *Sita Betrayed* in *A Season of Betrayals: A short story and two novellas*, trans. C. M. Naim, New Delhi, 1999.

Krishna Sobti, *Dar se bichuri,* New Delhi, 1992 [1958].

Krishna Sobti, *Memory’s Daughter*, trans. S. Bharti & M. Bharadwaj, New Delhi, 2007.

#### Secondary readings

Charu Gupta, “The icon of mother in late colonial North India: ‘Bharat Mata’, ‘Matri Bhasha’ and ‘Gau Mata’”. *Economic and Political Weekly*,vol. 36, no. 45, 2001, pp. 4291-4299.

Parvinder Mehta, “A will to say or unsay: Female silences and discursive interventions in partition narratives” in Amritjit Singh, Nalini Iyer, Rahul K. Gairola (eds), *Revisiting India’s Partition: New Essays on Memory, Culture and Politics*, London, 2016, pp. 35-52.

Deepti Misri, Chapter 2, “The violence of memory: Women’s re-narrations of partition”, in *Beyond partition: Gender, violence and representation in postcolonial India*, Urbana (IL), 2014, pp. 55-86.

# Week 8 - Gendered violence I: Reading & writing rape in contemporary Indian English literature

This lecture invites students to critically examine the intersection between feminism, writing and reading rape in contemporary Indian English literature, and its location within the parameters of world literature. Indian English women writers have been crucial in forming the domestic novel; narratives that are centred on the personal and the familial, and this lecture aims to consider how literary rape fits into this genre of fiction. The focus of this lecture will explore how the third wave of the Indian feminist movement, sparked by the 2012 Delhi gang rape, can help us read and reflect on new meanings of masculinity, femininity and rape that are emerging within both contemporary Indian English literature and contemporary India. The core reading is Meena Kandasamy’s 2017 novel *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*, a novel that that has been shaped by the current wave of Indian feminism, which, set in contemporary India, narrates the life of a woman writer who is trapped in an abusive marriage. This lecture will reflect on the current phase of the Indian feminist movement, by exploring the questions that are invested in reading and writing rape, and how this may shed light on new ways of thinking about transnational gender activism. This lecture will also invite students to critically analyse how Indian English literature, as a genre with its peculiar location within the language landscape of India, can be read as a suitable literary space to challenge constructions of gender and violence against women.

#### Primary source

Meena Kandasamy, *When I hit You: Or a Portrait of the Writer as a Young* Wife, London. 2017.

#### Secondary readings

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Chapter 3 “Life after Rape: Narrative, rape and feminism” in *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, London, 1993, pp. 64 - 82.

Priyamvada Gopal, *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration*, Oxford, 2009.

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