

ISLAM AND GENDER

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OFFICE HOURS: M, 10-11 & TH, 12:45-2:05

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In recent years, the status of women in Islam has been at the center of debates — in both the West and Muslim-majority societies — about the prospects of reform in Islamic traditions. These debates are merely the latest manifestation of a phenomenon with deep roots in encounters between modern Western powers and Muslim-majority societies that began with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. Since that time, the status of women has animated Western calls for the re-formation of Islam and of Muslim societies. It has also been at the center of debates within the Muslim community about law and its relationship to the modern state, cultural and religious authenticity, and identity that began in the early part of the nineteenth century and that continue today.

This course provides you with the background to contextualize these contemporary debates in several ways. First, it examines the place of women, men, gender, and sexuality in the foundational sources of Islam, including the Qur'an and *sunnat al-nabi* (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), Islamic legal traditions, and Islamic traditions of historiography. Second, it introduces you to the historical investigation of gender in the Muslim community, particularly insofar as it bears on cross-cultural analysis.

Of particular importance in the materials with which we will work are the voices of contemporary Muslim feminists, many of whom argue that Muslims must fundamentally reinterpret significant elements of Islamic traditions with an eye toward gender justice, or gender equality. At the same time, we will examine voices — those of men *and* women — that will challenge the very heart of emerging Muslim feminist claims about the nature of Islam. Working with a broad range of perspectives will provide us with insight into different ways in which Muslims understand what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman, how men and women should relate to one another, and how men and women understand and nurture the individual's (and society's) relationship with God.

COURSE TEXTS AND LEARNING GOALS

Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Amin, Qasim. *The Liberation of Women and the New Woman: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian Feminism*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000.

Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*.

Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite*. New York: Perseus Books, 1991.

Spellberg, D.A. *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Tucker, Judith. *In the House of the Law*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

We will use these and other scholarly and primary sources to inform our discussion of Islam and gender. While the specific questions we will consider from class to class will change, you can prepare for class effectively by reading with the following questions in mind.

As you complete the reading for each scholarly or secondary source, please always read for argument. You can do so with a few questions in mind:

- Can you identify a sentence or sentences that constitute the thesis statement?
- Can you state the author's thesis – even regarding a single chapter or article – succinctly in your own words?
- If part of a larger work, how does a particular chapter fit into the bigger picture? If a stand-alone piece, can you relate this reading to another that we have completed in the course?
- Can you identify at least two examples the author uses to support their argument?

As you read the primary documents with which we will work, please keep the following questions in mind:

rests in being prepared for class, which to my mind consists of having both a direction in mind

Second, the success of the course Wquires that you fulfill your Wsponsibilities. This means that you come to

Participation: 20%

As the weighty percentage indicates, I consider your participation in this course to be anessential component

This assignment will provide you with anopportunity to work on course learning goals relating to reading sec

in our course). This assignment will pu

This essay (3-4 pages) constitutes your mid-term assignment. Unlike other assignments, I will provide you w

Debate: 10%

Debate Essay: 15%

This 4-5-page essay will grow out of your work on the Qasim Amin debate.

Discussion Leadership: 15% As with your writing work, this assignment will help you cultivate close reading

In the House of the Law; Fatima Mernissi, The Veil and

the Male Elite; or Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*. You should bring your own questions to discussion, no matter how small. If you have these questions chances are so do many of your colleagues. You are required to meet with me before leading discussion.

Final Paper: 15%

The final paper (10-12 pages) will consist of an essay response to a prompt I provide. You will use course resources to complete this assignment.

A note about written work: In all cases, unless otherwise noted, you are to use normal margins, 12-point font, and double spacing. In text (parenthetical, with author and page number) citation is acceptable when accompanied by a works cited page. Please include a minimal header – your name, the course name and, if you choose, a title. All papers should be double-sided and should have page numbers.

Course Policies:

- I will return your e-mail within 24 hours whenever possible. If you have questions about finding material, etc., you can always check with a colleague first (to likely receive a more immediate response).
- Know that I am pre-disposed to saying no to requests for extensions. I provide plenty of notice for each of the assignments – it is your responsibility to plan your time accordingly. That said, please do not be shy about approaching me for an extension if you have extenuating circumstances. As I mention above, it is essential to keep lines of communication open.
- If you are involved in an extra-curricular activity that will take you away from campus be sure to let me know beforehand. Regardless of the reason (except for dire family emergency, hospitalization), if I do not hear from you *before* you miss class I will assume you are simply skipping class.
- Breaches of academic integrity will result in automatic failure of the course in addition to whatever sanctions fall from the administrative processes set in place by the college. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism I suggest you consult the Student Handbook immediately.
- It is essential to me that everyone in the class has the same opportunity to thrive. Please let me know of any particular learning needs you have (assuming they are on file with the college) and we will work together to make sure that you get the most out this learning experience.

COURSE SCHEDULE

BACKGROUND

JANUARY 21:

- Introduction

JANUARY 23:

- Leila Abu-Lughod, “The Muslim Woman.” (pweb)
- P-Web Post: Is a universal definition of agency possible? Please post by Tuesday, January 22, by 9 pm.

JANUARY 25:

- [Joan Scott, “Gender, A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.”](#) (R)

JANUARY 28:

- Talal Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam.” (pweb)

GENDERING HISTORY

JANUARY 30:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 1-38.

FEBRUARY 1:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 39-78.

FEBRUARY 4:

- SHORT ESSAY DUE IN CLASS
- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 79-124.

CONTESTED FOUNDATIONS OF GENDER

FEBRUARY 6: Modeling Gender

- Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an*, 1-9, 13-24, 85-103 (pweb)

FEBRUARY 8: Modeling gender in history

- D.A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, pp. 1-26.

FEBRUARY 11: Modeling gender in history

- D.A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, pp. 27-60.

Al-Tabari, *Bodies of Knowledge: A History of Islamic Thought*, D.A. Spellberg, ed., (Al-Tabari, *BD*)

FEBRUARY 20: Gender after the modernist turn

- Muhammad Qutb, “Women and Islam.” (R)

LIVING GENDER TRADITIONS

FEBRUARY 22: LAW

- Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law*, pp. 1-36.

FEBRUARY 25: LAW

- Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law*, pp. 37-77.

FEBRUARY 27: LAW

- Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law*, pp. 78-112, 179-186.

MARCH 1: LAW

- [Ziba Mir-Hosseini, “Muslim Women’s Quest for Equality.”](#) (R)

MARCH 4: LAW

- Discussion of Ziba Mir-Hosseini’s *Divorce Iranian Style*

MARCH 6: WORK DAY: TAKE HOME ESSAY DUE BY 5 PM

MARCH 8: SEXUALITY

- Whitaker, “A Note on Terminology.” (pweb)
- Khaled El-Rouayheb, “Introduction” and “Conclusion,” *Before Homosexuality in the Islamic World*. (R)
- Scott Kugle, “Introduction,” *Homosexuality in Islam*. (R)

MARCH 11: SEXUALITY

- Discussion of Nefise Ozkal Lorentzen’s *Gender Me*

RE-FORMING

APRIL 3: SPECIAL GUEST, FARID ESACK

- [HTTP://WWW.UJ.AC.ZA/EN/FACULTIES/HUMANITIES/RESEARCHCENTRES/COD/ABOUTUS/STAFF/ASSOCIATES/PAGES/PROFFARIDESACK.ASPX](http://www.uj.ac.za/en/faculties/humanities/researchcentres/cod/aboutus/staff/associates/pages/proffaridesack.aspx)

APRIL 5:

- Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women*.

APRIL 8: The Liberation of Women? A debate.

APRIL 10: The Liberation of Women? A debate.

APRIL 12:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 169-188.
Huda Sha'rawi (pweb)
Zaynab al-Ghazali (pweb)

APRIL 15:

- DEBATE ESSAY DUE IN CLASS
- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 189-208.
Nawal El Sadawi (pweb)

PERSPECTIVES ON AGENCY AND TRADITION: CASE STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY DEBATES

APRIL 17:

- Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, pp. 1-48.

APRIL 19:

- Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, pp. 49-84.

APRIL 22:

- Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, pp. 85-114.

APRIL 24:

- Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, pp. 115-140, 180-188.

APRIL

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