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Office Hours: M, Th 1:00pm–2:30pm
or by appointment

Rel 268-01: Islam and Gender
Fall 2023

Course Description:

This course explores Islamic discourses about wo/men and gender in Islam, focusing attention on the processes by which the Muslim community has articulated and policed gender-specific ideals over time, particularly as they relate to: community identity, conceptions of cultural authenticity, the interpretation of the foundational sources of Islam, and legal traditions. We will give significant attention to these issues as they pertain to 19th and 20th century debates about "re-forming" Muslim women.

Course Objectives:

On one level, the objectives of this class are to help us question our ideas of "gender," "sex," and "sexuality." We will do this through a discussion of theoretical reading that question what these terms mean, what they have meant, and how they came to be. We will also, however, do this through analysis of the ways that gender, sex, and sexuality have been experienced historically. On another level, this class is focused on helping us all become better critical readers. Critical reading is a highly active and engaged practice. To this end, our class discussions and our assignments will all challenge us to better engage with the material we are reading.

Learning Outcomes:

- Gain an understanding of different approaches to the academic study of gender.
- Apply particular theories of sex and/or gender to a variety of historical and contemporary issues.
- Articulate appropriately specific research problems or questions.
- Improve their written communication by crafting essays and responding to instructor feedback.
- Develop critical thinking skills related to how communities construct religion and religious traditions and how scholars relate to these communities.
- Think through and engage complex and theoretical scholarly arguments.

Grading:

• Assignment One (10%)	[Sep. 13]	100–94 = A
• Assignment Two (10%)	[Nov. 17]	93–90 = A-
• Final Project Scaffolding (15%)		89–87 = B+
• Final Project (30%)	[Dec. 15]	86–84 = B
• Reading Reflections (20%)		80–83 = B-
• Participation (15%)		

Course Requirements:

This is a seminar course. It is imperative that each student carefully reads all of the assigned readings on time and comes to class ready to participate in class discussion. Class preparedness and participation is a major factor in the final grade and unexcused absences will count against this final grade. You may not pass this class if you miss more than 35% of the class sessions. The course is based entirely around our class sessions.

Assignment One: Understanding Gender (3pp.).

As we progress through our class, we will see just how malleable the concept of gender has been. In order to maximize what we learn from this class, we all need a strong, theoretically-informed understanding of gender. The first readings in this class will get us started down this road, and this paper will solidify our initial understanding. In this assignment, you should carefully review the readings and your notes to write a three-page discussion of how best to understand gender. (Be sure to base your paper only on what we have read in class. You should not use outside sources. This assignment will require an engaged reading with the class texts.)

Assignment Two: Book Review (3pp.)

Good reading is thoughtful reading. This means not only understanding the text, but how each section relates to each other, how each chapter relates to each other, and maybe even how the text relates to other things that have been written. For this assignment, you must write a review of Afsaneh Najmabadi's *Professing Selves*. A book review demonstrates your thorough reading of the book in that it discusses the main argument of a book, follows this argument through the individual chapters, and talks about how the book relates to other literature. It also, often, has an evaluation of the book. You might want to look at other academic book reviews as models. (For this assignment, you should contextualize the book within the other literature that we have read for this class.)

Weekly Reading Reflection (~450 words).

As part of our engagement with class material, you should submit a reflection on our readings and class discussion. This should be a thoughtful reflection that engages in some way with what we have covered in class. This may be an extended piece on one thing, or a broader discussion of various things. On occasion, I may give a more detailed prompt for the weekly reflections. If there is a prompt, it will be distributed via e-mail on Wednesdays after class. Reflections are due by e-mail every Sunday at 4:00pm. There is **no reflection** due the weeks that assignments are due. The final reflection is due May 2.

Final Project.

We will talk about the final project in more detail soon. Your final project should address the themes of our course in some way. It is up to you to decide what course materials to base your final project on. The final project may take a variety of forms, including, but not limited to: a 10-minute film, an interactive website, a short play, a podcast episode, a lengthy piece of creative writing, or a more traditional 2,000–2,500-word research paper. Students must submit a final project proposal on October 6th 2023, and rubrics for evaluating different project types will be distributed the week following the submission of the proposal. Students may change their proposal after receiving the rubric, but only in consultation with me and no later than two weeks after the initial proposal. In addition, you will have an annotated bibliography due on November 3 and conduct a peer review by November 22. You will present your project in class during the final week of class. We will discuss these requirements in detail later in the semester.

Course Policies:

- The Religious Studies Department prioritizes belonging and generosity in our learning spaces. For both teachers and learners, this means respecting and remaining curious about others' individual experiences, traditions, and ideas; working toward critical distance from aspects of our own experiences; and maintaining openness to being unsettled by perspectives and experiences different from our own. We ask that all members of our course communities consider equity of access in the ways we speak and engage others, share materials for exploration and discussion, and use examples when contributing to class conversation.
- You are expected to attend every class. Two or more unexcused absences will have a negative impact on your final grade. Grinnell College offers alternative options to complete academic work for students who observe religious holy days. Please contact me within the first three weeks of the semester if you would like to discuss a specific instance that applies to you. If you miss a class, make sure you do the assigned readings and get notes from a classmate. Class preparedness and participation is a major factor in the final grade and unexcused absences will count against this final grade. Missing more than 30% of the classes with unexcused absences will result in a failing grade.
- Please send all e-mail to sabaelia@grinnell.edu. In an attempt at work-life balance, I do not have access to my e-mail on my phone nor do I check e-mail after 8:00pm. During the work week, I will respond to within 24 hours. It may take longer to respond during the weekend. Feel free to send any questions you may have about the course, although I rather discuss substantive issues in person rather than via e-mail.
- Breaches of academic integrity will result in an official disciplinary process guided by the Dean's office. If you have questions about the Academic Honesty policy, the College's Academic Honesty policy is located in the Student Handbook available online [[link](#)]. The College expects that students are aware of and meet the expectations of this policy. Assignments in this course are not collaborative. You **may not** use "AI" chatbots or

other Large Language Models for any assignment in this class. If you have any questions, please see me before you turn in your work.

- The College supports students' efforts to meet both class obligations and religious ones. If you plan to observe religious holidays that coincide with class meetings or assignment due dates, please meet with me during the first two weeks of classes so that we may reach a mutual understanding of how you can meet these obligations.
- I strive to create a fully inclusive classroom, thus I welcome individual students to approach me about distinctive learning needs. In particular, I encourage students with disabilities to have a conversation with me and disclose how our classroom or course activities could impact the disability and what accommodations would be essential to you. You will also need to have a conversation about and provide documentation of your disability to the [Coordinator for Disability Resources](#), located on the ground level of Steiner Hall (641-269-3124).
- If you have other needs not addressed above, please let me know soon so that we can work together for the best possible learning environment. In some cases, I will recommend consulting with the Academic Advising staff. They are an excellent resource for developing strategies for academic success and can connect you with other campus resources as well: <http://www.grinnell.edu/about/offices-services/academic-advising>. If I notice that you are encountering difficulty, in addition to communicating with you directly about it, I will also likely submit an academic alert via Academic Advising's SAL portal. This reminds you of my concern, and it notifies the Academic Advising team and your adviser(s) so that they can reach out to you with additional offers of support.

Textbooks:

- Ayesha Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Ibn al-Sā'ī, *Consorts of the Caliphs: Women and the Court of Baghdad*, trans. Editors of the Library of Arabic Literature (New York: New York University Press, 2017)
- Permillia Myrne, *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World: Gender and Sex in Arabic Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019).
- Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
- Ula Yvette Taylor, *Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2017).

Course Schedule:

AUG. 25:

- Introductions

SOME BACKGROUND ON GENDER

AUG. 30:

- Mari Mikkola, “Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-gender/>.

SEP. 1:

- Joan Scott, “Gender, A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” *American Historical Review* 91.5 (1986): 1053–1075. [[link](#)]
- Kelly Pemberton, “Gender” in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010). [[link](#)]

SEP. 6:

- Lila Abu-Lughod, “The Muslim Woman: The Power of Images and the Danger of Pity” *Eurozine*, 1 Sept., 2006, <https://www.eurozine.com/the-muslim-woman/>.
- Rafia Zakaria, “How the War on Terror Became America’s First ‘Feminist’ War” *Literary Hub*, 19 Aug., 2021, <https://lithub.com/how-the-war-on-terror-became-americas-first-feminist-war/>.
- Afsaneh Najmabadi “Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Historical Analysis?” *Journal of Women’s History*, 18.1 (2006), 11–21. [[link](#)]

ISLAM, MUHAMMAD, AND THE QURAN

SEP. 8:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 1–45. [[link](#)]

SEP. 13:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 46–64. [[link](#)]
- **Assignment #1 Due**

SEP. 15:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 65–109. [[link](#)]

SEP. 20:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 110–145. [[link](#)]
- *The Noble Struggle of Amina Wadud*, documentary via [YouTube](#).

SEP. 22:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 146–196. [[link](#)]

ELITE(?) WOMEN IN BAGHDAD

SEP. 27:

- Pernilla Myrne, Ch. 3, “A Jariya’s Prospects in Abbasid Baghdad” in *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in the Medieval Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) [[link](#)].
- Marina Warner, “Foreword” to *Consorts of the Caliphs: Women and the Court of Baghdad* (New York: New York University Press, 2017). [[link](#)]

SEP. 29:

- Ibn al-Sāʿī, *Consorts of the Caliphs: Women and the Court of Baghdad*, trans. Editors of the Library of Arabic Literature (New York: New York University Press, 2017). [[link](#)]

OCT. 4

- Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, 1–67.

OCT. 6:

- Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, 68–115.
- **Paper Proposal Due**

OCT. 11:

- Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, 116–173.

IRANIAN MODERNITY

OCT. 13:

- Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*, 1–37. [[link](#)]

OCT. 25:

- Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*, 38–74. [[link](#)]

OCT. 27:

- Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*, 75–119. [[link](#)]

NOV. 1:

- Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*, 120–163 [[link](#)]

NOV. 3: No Class – Middle East Studies Association

- Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*, 202–230. [[link](#)]
- **Annotated Bibliography Due**

NOV. 8:

- Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*, 230–274. [[link](#)]

NOV. 10:

- Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*, 275–302. [[link](#)]

ISLAM IN AMERICA

NOV. 15:

- Taylor, *Promise of Patriarchy*, 1–56. [[link](#)]

NOV. 17:

- Taylor, *Promise of Patriarchy*, 57–103. [[link](#)]
- **Assignment #3 Due**

NOV. 22: THANKSGIVING WEDNESDAY

No Class

Peer Review due by 10:00am.

NOV 29:

- Taylor, *Promise of Patriarchy*, 103–168. [[link](#)]

DEC. 1:

- Taylor, *Promise of Patriarchy*, 169–194. [[link](#)]

END OF TERM

DEC. 4: Final Presentations

DEC. 8: Final Presentations

Final Project Due Friday, December 15 @ 12 Noon!