

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*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

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:

- Who is writing? What do you think was their purpose in so doing?
- What is the larger relevant context? (Beware of anachronistic analysis!)
- What is the author or collator's relative position of power in the context of the document's production?
- If dealing with scripture, do these same questions apply? What are the implications of how we answer that question?
- How does this document support or call into question claims made by the authors of our secondary sources?

From a skill-building perspective, then, the **first and second learning goals** of this course are (1) reading scholarly sources for argument and presenting that argument and exemplary evidence in succinct terms and (2) cultivating the ability to offer contextually sensitive readings of primary source documents of different kinds.

COURSE GRADING AND POLICIES

The success of this course ultimately depends on two things (in no particular order). First, that I fulfill my responsibilities. As I hope you see in the course outline below, I have assembled a combination of primary and secondary texts through which we will explore the issues that form the core themes of our course. The other part of my responsibility

rests in being prepared for class, which to my mind consists of having both a direction in mind *and* an openness to exploring questions I had not considered.

Second, the success of the course requires that you fulfill your responsibilities. This means that you come to class regularly and that you are prepared to participate in course discussion of both primary and secondary readings. I reserve the right to employ the Socratic method in class to remind you of your responsibilities.

Participation: 20%

As the weighty percentage indicates, I consider your participation in this course to be an essential component of its success. Participation includes regular attendance. In this vein, anything beyond two unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your participation grade. (I realize that things come up – the key to managing your various responsibilities is open and timely communication.) Chronic tardiness will not help your cause, either. However, participation includes much more than attendance. From the quality of your proofreading on assignments to speaking in class, there are myriad ways of showing that you are truly engaged with the course.

Short Essay: 10%

This assignment will provide you with an opportunity to work on course learning goals relating to reading secondary sources. At two pages in length (double-spaced), success on this assignment depends very much on a clear thesis, crisp organization, and concise writing (these skills also happen to constitute the **third learning goal** in our course). This assignment will push you to work on the first two skill-based learning goals I note above, too.

Take Home Essay: 15%

This essay (3-4 pages) constitutes your mid-term assignment. Unlike other assignments, I will provide you with the essay prompt three days before it is due.

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 skills as well as your capacity to organize and present material effectively (skills similar to those you need to write a good essay, no?). Beginning with the questions I pose above, you will work with a partner or two to plan class discussion (for one meeting) on one of the following texts: Judith Tucker, *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, *Biographies of the Prophet’s Companions* (selection). (pweb)

FEBRUARY 13: Modeling gender in history

- D.A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, pp. 151-191.

FEBRUARY 15: Gender after the modernist turn

- Amina Wadud, “The Qur’anic View of Woman in this World.” (R)

FEBRUARY 18: Gender after the modernist turn

- [Kecia Ali, “‘A Beautiful Example’: The Prophet Muhammad as a Model for Muslim Husbands”](#) (R)

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 SOCIETY

MARCH 13: HISTORICAL CHANGE IN THE MODERN PERIOD

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 125-143.

MARCH 15: HISTORICAL CHANGE IN THE MODERN PERIOD

- [Emily Jordan, “Making Good Wives and Mothers?”](#) (R)
- Lisa Pollard, “Learning Gendered Modernity.” (pweb)

APRIL 1:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 144-168.
- Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women*.

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 26:

- Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, pp. 1-39.

APRIL 29:

- Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, pp. 40-78.

MAY 1:

- Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, pp. 79-117.

MAY 3:

- Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, pp. 118-152.

MAY 6:

- Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, pp. 153-188.

MAY 8: DISCUSSION, WRAP-UP

MAY 10: WORK DAY