

ISLAM AND GENDER
HIS-REL 268-01 (SPRING 2015)
GRINNELL COLLEGE

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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 foundational sources of Islamic devotional traditions, including the Qur’an and *sunnat al-nabi* (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad), and explores the different ways that Muslim communities have engaged with those sources, such as scriptural commentary and Islamic law. 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 we will work with are the voices of contemporary Muslims, some 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 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

Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*

Aysha Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*

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

Carolyn Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*

Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law*.

These texts form the backbone of our course, but throughout the semester we will also be working with articles or excerpts from books. Some of these readings are accessible via “Library Resources” on our Blackboard course site, in which case they will have an “R” next to them on the syllabus, or on the course site itself, in which case they will have “pweb” next to them.

You can read scholarly sources 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 or chapters 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 her or his argument?
- How does the reading relate to the broader questions we discussed at the beginning of the course?

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 her or his purpose in so doing?
- What is the larger relevant context? (Beware of anachronistic analysis!)
- What is the author’s relative position of power in the context of the document’s production?
- How does this document support or call into question claims made by the authors of our secondary sources?

From a skill-building perspective, then, **two important 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 develop contextually sensitive understandings of primary source documents.

COURSE EVALUATION AND POLICIES

Engagement: 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 communication.) Chronic tardiness will not help your cause, either. However,

participation includes much more than attendance. Your participation grade is a reflection of your *engagement* with the course. I understand that not everyone chooses to speak in each class. There are lots of other ways to show engagement: Make eye contact during lecture; when I request that you post to the course site, do so thoughtfully and punctually; come by office hours now and then—even if you don't have a particular agenda; be sure you proof-read and edit *all* your written work carefully—the quality of your efforts in this regard plays a role in your participation grade, too. At the same time, nothing illustrates engagement like a willingness to be a vocal participant in our course. In the end, your (individual and collective) engagement with the course will be a significant determinant of what kind of experience we have together.

Individual Treatment: 5%

Early in the semester, you will write a treatment of a course reading. Your treatment should identify the thesis, provide an overview how the author supports her/his argument, and provide a question that remains for you about the work in question. This assignment will provide you with an opportunity to work on course learning goals relating to reading scholarly sources. At two pages in length (double-spaced), success on this assignment depends very much on concise writing and sound organization. This assignment will push you to work on the first two skill-based learning goals I note above.

Short Essay: 15%

Toward the end of the semester, you will identify two articles from reputable news sources about marriage, family, or sexuality in Muslim communities and/or Islamic devotional traditions and in three double-spaced pages explain how these stories relates to our course. How do the materials we have read help you understand these particular stories? What kinds of questions can you ask of the stories based on the work we have done together? Do the stories raise questions for you about the materials we have read/discussed as a class?

The format of this essay should be as follows: One single-spaced paragraph summarizing the two articles, followed by approximately three pages of double-spaced analysis.

Group Project Portfolios: 35%

Over the course of the semester, you will work as part of a group to foster engagement with course themes outside of class. Beginning with “Contested Foundations,” your group will be responsible for producing 750-word treatments on each unit that draw on course readings and discussion. Each group member will have to identify one topic from the week that s/he thinks is especially important. As a group, you will select two of these topics—either through a process of elimination or a process of combination—and explain why your group has identified them as particularly significant to the investigation of gender in Muslim communities and/or Islamic traditions of devotion. Together, you will also identify one question for further reflection for each topic. Twice during the semester you will collect these treatments into portfolios, at which time you will (as a group) also

prepare and explain an assignment prompt that draws together the material from each of the units (500 words). The first portfolio will constitute 15% of your final grade, while the second portfolio will constitute 20% of your final grade. To ensure that your group makes steady progress, you will need to post drafts of your treatments within one week of unit completion. You can do so using your group's discussion board. Simply create a new thread for each unit. Failure to do so will affect your course engagement grade.

The group project provides us with our **third skill-related learning goal**: cultivating the ability to work successfully with a team on a long-term project. Collaborating is hard work, and beyond engaging the content of the course this assignment will put a premium on managing group dynamics and workflow. By the end of the semester, you will have accrued significant experience in a kind of work valued across professional settings.

Discussion Leadership: 15%

We will close out the semester with student led class sessions. Each group will be responsible for leading class for one session, drawing on their weekly treatments to (1) present their own understanding of the main themes of the course, (2) to discuss how the material for that day fits into the course as a whole, and (3) to present three questions that will serve as the basis of class discussion for that day.

Final Reflection: 10%

Reflecting the larger liberal arts and humanistic settings for the course, this final three-page assignment provides you with an opportunity for more personal reflection about how the course may or may not have affected the way you think about questions of gender.

Course Policies:

- Email policy part I: I am generally good about returning email in a reasonable amount of time. Please always reach out to your colleagues first with logistical questions about our course; you can do so via the email function on the course site. If no one can figure out the answer, then by all means get in touch. You can always ask in class, too, and you will find that I am quite accessible outside of class. I'd much rather meet you in person—and you can email to set up an appointment! [This policy does not apply to real emergencies.]
- Email policy part II: I encourage you to use email to share interesting news or course-related information you come across. This is actually a great way to help promote a collective learning experience.
- Unless I instruct otherwise, submit all written work to elfenbei.grinnell@gmail.com. Please be sure to submit all work as pdf. The subject heading of your submission should include "HIS-REL 268" and the name of the assignment. All work is due before the start of class.
- 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. It is essential to keep lines of communication open.

- If I suspect that you are using computers in class for anything other than note taking or document viewing, you will lose your computer privileges for the remainder of the semester. (If I suspect that you are texting in class I will ask that you leave your phone with me at the start of each class. Cell phones should be set on silent.)
- If you are involved in an extracurricular 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. An after-the-fact note from Health Services will not suffice.
- Breaches of academic integrity will result in an official disciplinary process guided by the Dean's office. Although I will inform you of any action I take, I will not negotiate with you privately about such matters. 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 of this learning experience.

COURSE SCHEDULE

BACKGROUND

JANUARY 21:

- Introductions

JANUARY 23:

- Leila Abu-Lughod, "The Muslim Woman" (pweb)
- Blackboard Post: In one paragraph, explain what you think it means to explore the question of Islam and gender from the perspective of humanistic inquiry.

JANUARY 26:

- [Joan Scott, "Gender, A Useful Category of Historical Analysis."](#) (R)
- Blackboard Post: In 100-150 words identify Joan Scott's thesis and describe one point in support of that thesis that you find particularly compelling.

GENDERING THE HISTORY OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

JANUARY 28:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 1-8; skim 25-38; 39-78

JANUARY 30:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 79-124

CONTESTED FOUNDATIONS

FEBRUARY 2: TWO-PAGE TREATMENT DUE

- Tamara Sonn, “Introducing,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (pweb)
- Selection from Tafsir ibn Kathir (14th century) (pweb)

FEBRUARY 4:

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

FEBRUARY 6:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 1-45

FEBRUARY 9:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 65-109

FEBRUARY 11:

- Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 110-122
- Amina Wadud, “What’s in a Name?” (pweb)

FEBRUARY 13:

- Herbert Berg, “Context: Muhammad,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (pweb)
- [Kecia Ali, “‘A Beautiful Example’: The Prophet Muhammad as a Model for Muslim Husbands” \(R\)](#)

LIVING GENDER TRADITIONS

FEBRUARY 16:

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

FEBRUARY 18:

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

FEBRUARY 20:

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

FEBRUARY 23:

- [Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality."](#) (R)

FEBRUARY 25:

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

RE-FORMING SOCIETY: SOURCES AND PROCESSES OF HISTORICAL CHANGE

FEBRUARY 27:

- Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 125-143.
- [Emily Jordan, "Making Good Wives and Mothers?"](#) (R)

MARCH 2:

- Lisa Pollard, "Learning Gendered Modernity." (R)

MARCH 4:

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

MARCH 6:

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

MARCH 9:

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

MARCH 11:

- Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution* (selections)

MARCH 13: NO CLASS (WORK DAY) GROUP PORTFOLIOS DUE BY 5 P.M.

FAMILY AND SEXUALITY

MARCH 30:

- Kecia Ali, "Marriage, Family, and Sexual Ethics" (pweb)
- Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law*, 148-178

APRIL 1:

- Kecia Ali, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Same-Sex Intimacy in Muslim Thought" (pweb)
- Khaled El-Rouayheb, "Introduction" and "Conclusion," *Before Homosexuality in the Islamic World*. (R)

APRIL 3:

- Scott Kugle, "Introduction" and "Islam on Trial: A Case Study," from *Homosexuality in Islam*. (pweb)

APRIL 6:

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

APRIL 8:

- RESEARCH DAY

APRIL 10: NO CLASS

- RESEARCH DAY

APRIL 13: NO CLASS

- WORK DAY

CASE STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITIES

APRIL 15: ESSAY DUE BY 5 P.M.

- Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 1-23

APRIL 17:

- Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 24-80

APRIL 20:

- Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 81-126

APRIL 22:

- Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 127-174

APRIL 24:

- Moxley Rouse, *Engaged Surrender*, 175-218

APRIL 27:

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

APRIL 29:

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

MAY 1:

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

MAY 4:

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

MAY 6:

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

MAY 8: DISCUSSION, WRAP-UP

MAY 10: WORK DAY

MAY 14: FINAL PORTFOLIOS AND FINAL REFLECTIONS DUE