

Women and Gender in Islam
(REL 370)
S-course

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Office hours: TR 9:00-10:00, 1:00-2:00 or by appointment

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TR 2:20-3:50
211 Emison

Description

In this course, we will examine women and gender in the Islamic tradition and Muslim societies. Our concern here is to understand 1.) the history of women in Islam, 2.) the impact of the tradition on women and gender categories, and 3.) the efforts of modern Muslims to challenge traditional gender definitions and create a useable past. We begin by looking at women on the eve of Islam in Arabia and then trace out the way in which Islam transformed their social status. Islam, of course, is a generic term that encompasses both foundational teachings (located in the Qur'an, sunna and other textual sources) and a way of life. Thus our task is to examine how the classical tradition portrayed women and how women actually lived and interacted in medieval Muslim society. We will also explore the Islamic tradition's views of sexuality and gender, both to gain a better understanding of women and to see that women were part of a larger gendered matrix of socialization. In the modern period, Muslim societies have undergone dramatic social, political and economic changes; and women have both contributed to and been affected by these changes. Drawing on several case studies, we will examine the issues that have shaped modern Muslim societies in general and Muslim women in particular, such as development, the western impact, colonialism, nationalism, modern education, the struggle for women's rights, Islamism and democratization. We will focus, then, on the challenges that have confronted modern Muslim women and the ways in which they have drawn on and reinterpreted their tradition to face these challenges.

Conflict Studies, Women's Studies and Ethics

Women and Gender in Islam is not a new course for me, but I have redesigned it to address the intersecting thematic concerns of Conflict Studies, Women's Studies and the Janet Prindle Ethics Institute. Religion, of course, is at the root of this course, and religions are well known for advancing ethical views. Religion, however, is always located in a social context, and social contexts are informed by dynamics of power and authority, along with the contestations that arise over them. Thus to understand the place of women and gender in Muslim societies, we must come to understand social norms, power structures and Islam's contribution to both. Muslim women are cast into a mold within the Islamic tradition, just as Muslim men are. This mold is an ideal informed by ethics and enforced by social expectations and institutions. Ethics, then, are part of a complex social matrix—one not easily examined through simplistic questions of right and wrong. Ethics are also behind the modern Muslim desire to reinterpret the place of women in Muslim societies, for the search for new models of Muslim women are rooted in concerns for social, political, economic and spiritual justice. And it should come as no surprise that the search for identity and justice is fraught with conflict. One final note: while the study of Muslim women may seem to be a study of something foreign, the "other," one of the objectives of this class (and

an ethical one at that!) is the realization that in learning about Muslim women we actually learn about ourselves.

Class Expectations

As a 300-level S-seminar, this course will approach its subject material primarily through discussion. This means that each student is responsible for the upkeep and the success of the class. Thus preparation and participation are essential. For each class meetings, there will be a moderator (discussed below). Everyone will serve in this role numerous times during the semester. For most of the sessions, I will be a discussant, though one with a more informed critical voice. The tendency in such situations is to defer to the one with knowledge/authority, so we need to establish a comfortable relationship—one in which each of you feels empowered to wrestle with the challenging material presented in the class, while at the same time recognizing your limitations. My goal is that we will all learn from each other.

Discussant: This is the role you will have most of the time in class. As a discussant, you should:

1. make sure you are prepared by having read the material in an active manner, making connections with the overall topic and direction of the class, and bring the assigned reading material to the session
2. come to class each session with at least three questions or points of interest that you would like to put before the group
3. provide textual evidence for your comments and opinions
4. watch for articles in magazines, newspapers or material from other media that pertain to the topic and bring them to class

Moderator: The moderator's job is to help with the "flow" of the discussion. This means that you may want to:

1. prepare a set of questions for the material. Make sure that the questions ask for topics that can be discussed rather than questions that only require someone to read from a book
2. ask specific people to contribute, perhaps the ones who are the quietest (given number 2 above, students will always have things to say)
3. mediate any "heated" exchanges
4. refer to sections in the readings that might help clarify a point
5. make sure everyone's comments are included and respected
6. take sides in any exchange, even playing devil's advocate if you think it useful
7. develop a scenario that can be used as a catalyst for discussion
8. set-up applied situations from the material for discussion

Absences

Because your participation is so essential for the seminar style of learning, any unexcused absences, especially on the day(s) that you will be moderator and referent, will negatively impact your grade. I can overlook two "cuts," only on days when you are a discussant, but after that each absence will potentially deduct two percentage points from your final grade. Finally,

entering class late or leaving early communicates a disregard for the subject, your classmates and me—all things you no doubt want to avoid. While I hesitate to emphasize such basic etiquette, past experience tells me it's wise.

S-Certification

Since this is an S-course, you will receive not only a regular grade but also a separate evaluation of your competence in oral communication. To earn S-certification, you must demonstrate a consistent ability to communicate your ideas and those of others in a clear, concise manner. Approximately 20% of your grade is based on S-assignments (ongoing participation in class discussion, serving as class moderator, and formal presentation of your research) that require some form of oral communication. Some of these assignments are ongoing and repetitive; others are one-time opportunities. All require preparation, but the latter demand it. I will be glad to meet with you individually or as a group to help you think through these assignments. You should also take advantage of the tutorial assistance available at the S-Center (2nd floor Harrison Hall). I will alert you as early as possible if I believe that you are in danger of not earning your S-certification.

Grading

Take home essays	40% (2 x 20%)
Research paper	40%
Participation	20%

The **take home essays** and **research paper** will be graded holistically, based on clarity, attention to details and intellectual insight. The grade for **participation** is based on your ability and willingness to fulfill the descriptions of discussant and moderator provided above under class expectations. You will also receive a grade for an oral presentation of your research paper. **All components of the course must be completed in order to receive a calculated course grade; failure to fulfill any of the class expectations or graded components will result in a course grade of "F."**

Academic Integrity Policy

I will observe DePauw's policy on academic integrity (i.e., cheating and plagiarism), as outlined in the *Student Handbook*. We will review this issue at the beginning of the class, but I encourage you to read the policy for yourself.

Required texts

Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (Yale)

Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women* (Syracuse)

Imam al-Ghazali, *The Proper Conduct of Marriage in Islam* (al-Baz)

Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero* (Zed)

Huda Shaarawi, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist* (The Feminist Press)

Pieterella van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qur'an in Indonesia* (Illinois)

Moodle: "Sex and Society in Islamic Popular Literature," James A. Bellamy

- “Love, Lust, and Longing: Eroticism in Early Islam as Reflected in Literary Sources,” J.C. Bürgel
- “The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Vice Lists,” Everett K. Rowson
- “Gendering the Ungendered Body: Hermaphrodites in Medieval Islamic Law,” Paula Sanders
- “When Modernity Confronts Traditional Practices,” Noor J. Kassamali
- “Reduce but Do Not Destroy,” Kecia Ali
- “An Islamist Activist: Zaynab al-Ghazali,” Valerie J. Hoffman
- “Crimes of Honor and the Construction of Gender in Arab Societies,” Lama Abu-Odeh

Course Packet: *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious* by Fatna A. Sabbah

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

8/28	Introduction Framework of study and methodological considerations	Moderators
The Rise of Islam and the Construction of a Gendered Tradition		
9/2	Women in early Islam Ahmed, 1-63	_____ _____
9/4	Founding Discourse Ahmed, 64-123	_____ _____
9/9	Sexuality and Eros “Sex and Society in Islamic Popular Literature” (Moodle) “Love, Lust, and Longing” (Moodle)	_____ _____
9/11	Gender Boundaries “The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity...” (Moodle) “Gendering the Ungendered Body” (Moodle)	_____ _____
9/16	Classical Marriage Ideal al-Ghazali, 5-41	_____ _____
9/18	Classical Marriage Ideal al-Ghazali, 42-95	_____ _____
Women and Gender in Modern Muslim Societies		
9/23	Video	

9/25	The Challenge of Modernity Ahmed, 127-207	_____
9/30	From Harem to Feminism Shaarawi, 1-61	_____
10/2	From Harem to Feminism Shaarawi, 62-137	_____
10/7	The Ideal Modern Woman Amin, 1-106	_____
10/9	The Ideal Modern Woman Amin, 107-205	_____
10/14	Islamism, Veiling and Agency Ahmed, 189-248 "An Islamist Activist: Zaynab al-Ghazali" (Moodle)	_____
10/16	Video: Four Women	
10/21,	Fall Break	
23		
10/28	Women and the Qur'an in Indonesia Van Doorn-Harder, 1-83	_____
10/30	Women and the Qur'an in Indonesia Van Doorn-Harder, 87-161	_____
11/4	Women and the Qur'an in Indonesia Van Doorn-Harder, 165-268	_____
11/6	Research day	
11/11	FGM "When Modernity Confronts Traditional Practices" (Moodle) "Reduce but Do Not Destroy" (Moodle)	_____
11/13	Crimes of Honor "Crimes of Honor and the Construction of Gender..." (Moodle)	_____
11/18	Cultural Discourse and Agency Sabbah, 3-59	_____

11/20 Cultural Discourse and Agency
Sabbah, 61-118

11/25 Literature and Agency
El Saadawi, 1-103

11/27 Thanksgiving Recess

12/2 Student Presentations

12/4 Student Presentations

12/9 Student Presentations

12/11 Wrap-up and Review

12/16 Final exam (1:00-4:00pm)
** Research Paper Due