

**RLST 164**  
**Engendering and Experience: Women in the Islamic Tradition**

RLST 164  
Pearsons 101  
Wed. 7-10 pm  
Spring 2005

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**Course Description:**

How have the sources of authority in the Islamic tradition constructed theories of gender? How have these determined the role, status and expectations of women in Islamic societies? What has been women's experience of these social, legal and scriptural norms? Is there a relationship between the religion of Islam and cultural codes of behavior? Does one influence and express the other? How have Muslim women themselves sought to articulate their realities and their visions for what it means to be a Muslim woman? Is the recent wave of Islamic revivalism a step forward for women's rights or not? What are some of the "hot button" issues pertaining to Muslim women?

In order to address questions such as these, we will examine texts that discuss the theoretical underpinnings of gender construction in Islamic societies and we will trace the historical development of such paradigms, beginning with the Qur'an, the sacred scripture of Islam. We will look at the interpretations of the Qur'an, the Traditions (*hadith*) and Islamic institutions such as the law. We will also look at theoretical analyses of different Muslim societies and at writings detailing women's current experience in these societies to investigate whether there are certain features of gender construction and women's experience that are common to all Muslim societies, or whether cultural differences play a role. As we read accounts of women's experiences, we will want to ask whether women have attempted to subvert dominant gender paradigms or uphold them. This will take us to a reading of women's activities in the literary, theological, legal, economic and social spheres. We will thus want to examine the diverse voices of Muslim women activists and investigate their methods of analysis, interpretation and activism. Finally, we will look at changes implemented in Muslim societies through development efforts.

**Course Goals**

The goals of this course are:

1. To identify theoretical frameworks enabling us to understand gender issues.
2. To become aware of issues of orientalist scholarship towards Islam in general and gender issues in particular.
3. To examine key foundational and authoritative texts for Muslim views on gender.
4. To investigate the role and status of women in Muslim societies today in order to identify the intersection between religiously derived codes and norms of behavior and expectation, economic realities, the role of the state, and social institutions.

5. To hear from Muslim women through the lens of literary writings regarding how they articulate their own experiences and views, how they name the challenges they face.
6. To engage a variety of Muslim feminist/woman-centered perspectives in order to examine how each of these activists addresses the issue of gender equality.
7. To study key “hot button” issues to reveal the complexities of the relationship between religion, culture, social organization, economic development and state intervention.
8. To examine instances of how change is effected through development efforts.

### **Required Texts:**

Leila Ahmed. Women and Gender in Islam.

Asma Barlas. “Believing Women” in Islam.

Barbara Stowasser. Women in the Quran, Traditions, and Interpretation.

Valentine M. Moghadam. Modernizing Women.

Carolyn Rouse, Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam

Therese Saliba, Carolyn Allen, and Judith A. Howard, eds. Gender, Politics, and Islam.

All the above should be available for sale at Huntley Bookstore, on reserve at Honnold library and at Pearsons Library.

In addition, there are readings placed on e-res (password protected) that you can access at:

<http://eres.claremont.edu/>

Full publication details for these readings can be found at the end of this syllabus.

### **Course Assignments**

1. By Sunday midnight, a web-ct posting in response to the readings for that week. Read the responses before yours and include your response to at least one of these in addition to the points you would like to make. Plan to spend between half an hour and forty-five minutes on this activity.
2. Write a 5 to 7 page paper on the status of Muslim women in any country of your choice. Utilize Moghadam’s work as a starting point. **Due Feb. 9.** Please post your paper on webct. Please do some additional research to uncover their legal status and any major issues that women might face in that country. You may not include Europe and North America.
3. Write a 5 to 7 page paper on an issue facing contemporary Muslim women. **Due Mar. 2.** Please post your paper on webct.  
Examples of topics you might consider:  
European bans on the veil in public schools  
Female genital surgery  
Honor killings  
Women’s reinterpretations of the Qur’an

Women and the Economy, or Women and the Law, or Women and Political Participation

Women and Fundamentalism

4. Write a 5 to 7 page paper on a female Muslim author, if possible from the country on which you wrote your second paper. Contextualize the author's work in their geographical location, their biography, the issues raised in their novels or short stories or poetry, and please include secondary sources on the author in your discussion. Milani's work as well as Mernissi's should give you some pointers. **Due Mar. 23.** Please post your paper on webct.
5. Identify an issue found raised by the Qur'an or the Hadith in Stowasser and Barlas's work, using Leila Ahmed's work to place it in a historical context, and write a 5 to 7 page paper on the issue and how Muslim women have sought to deal with it. **Due Apr. 13.** Please post your paper on webct.  
Examples of topics you might consider:  
Essential characteristics of women  
Veiling and/or seclusion  
Working outside the home, or women's duties  
The female as a source of fitna, or social chaos  
Polygamy (also consider how contemporary Muslim-majority countries have sought to deal with this)  
Violence against women  
Women's legal rights regarding divorce, child custody, inheritance, the marriage contract  
Adultery and sexuality
6. Attend at least three lectures on gender issues and submit a web-ct posting on each.
7. Take home final. **Due April 27.** Please post on webct.

### Course Schedule

1/19 Introduction

Videos: Christian Science Monitor: Islam in the USA  
Leila Ahmed

1/26 Mernissi (eres), "Writing is Better than a Face Lift"

Lerner (on eres) "The Creation of Patriarchy"

Mohanty (on eres) "Under Western Eyes"

Video: In my Own Skin

Hatem (eres), "The Invisible American Half" in Shohat, ed., *Talking Visions*

Rouse, Chapter 1

Rouse, Chapter 2

Rouse, Chapter 3

2/2 Ahmed:

Ch. 1: Mesopotamia

Ch. 2: The Mediterranean Middle East

Ch. 3: Women and the Rise of Islam

- Piper (eres), "Passing for White" in Shohat, ed. *Talking Visions*  
 Rouse, Chapter 4  
 Rouse, Chapter 5
- 2/9  
 Ahmed:  
 Ch. 4: The Transitional Age  
 Ch. 5: Elaboration of the Founding Discourses  
 Mayer (on eres) "Aberrant 'Islams' and Errant Daughters"  
 El-Saadawi (on eres)  
 "She Was the Weaker"  
 "Woman at Point Zero"  
 Malti-Douglas (on eres), "The Physician and the Prostitute"  
 Majid, "The Politics of Feminism in Islam" in Saliba, ed.  
 Amireh, "Framing Nawal El-Saadawi" in Saliba, ed.
- 2/16 Ahmed: Ch. 6: Medieval Islam  
 Stowasser, pp. 3-38  
 Barlas, Chapter 4  
 Stowasser, pp. 39-82  
 Video: Beneath the Veil (Afghanistan)  
 Moghadam, *Modernizing Women*, Ch. 7
- 2/23 Mernissi  
 "A Tradition of Misogyny"  
 "The Prophet and Hadith"  
 Stowasser, pp. 85-118  
 Barlas, Chapter 1  
 Barlas, Chapter 2  
 Optional: Ba (eres), "Rejection"  
 Video: Barbara Walters Interview  
 Arebi (on eres), "Redefining the Issues"  
 Von Bruck, "Elusive Bodies" in Saliba, ed.
- 3/2 Barlas, Chapter 3  
 Ahmed, Chapter 7  
 Ahmed, Chapter 8  
 Stowasser, Chapter 10  
 Video: Iraqi Women or State Sponsored Torture in Iran  
 Moghadam, Chapter 3  
 Moghadam, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 are very helpful; please read on your own
- 3/9  
 Ahmed, Chapter 9  
 Ahmed, Chapter 10  
 Ahmed, Chapter 11 and Conclusion

- Video: Conversations Across the Bosphorus  
Moghadam: Chapter 5
- 3/16 No Class—Spring Break
- 3/23 Milani, Chapter 5  
Milani, Chapter 6  
Milani, Chapter 7  
Video: Beyond the Veil  
Mir-Hosseini (eres), “Stretching the Limits”  
Moghadam, Chapter 6  
Moghadam: “Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents”, in Saliba, ed.  
Optional: Moghissi (eres), “Introduction/Oriental Sexuality”
- 3/30 Abu-Odeh (e-res), “Crimes of Honor”  
Hassan (e-res), “Rights of Women”  
Hassan (e-res), “Women in Islam”  
Video: ABC Nightline  
Video: Honor Killings in Jordan  
Shehabuddin, “Contesting the Illicit” in Saliba, ed.  
Barlas, Chapter 5  
Barlas, Chapter 6
- 4/6 <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGACT770182004?open&of=ENG-373>  
Video: The Planting of Girls  
Video: Warrior Marks  
Video: Fire Eyes  
Kassamali (eres), When Modernity Confronts Traditional Practices  
Gunning (eres) “Cutting Through the Obfuscation” in *Talking Visions*
- 4/13 Palestine/Israel  
Petet, “Icons and Militants” in Saliba, ed.  
Sharaoni (eres), “Introduction/Feminist Theory”  
Sharaoni (eres), “The Politics of Alliance”  
Video: My Home, My Prison  
Video: Hanan Ashrawi  
Gorkin and Othman (eres), “Introduction” and “Umm Abdullah and Samira”
- 4/27 Rouse, Chapter 6  
Rouse, Chapter 7  
Rouse, Chapter 8  
Rouse, Conclusion and Epilogue  
Shamsul Alam, “Women in the Era of Modernity”, in Saliba, ed.  
Khan, “Muslim Women”, in Saliba, ed.  
Mahmood (eres), “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent”  
Olmstead (eres), “Orientalism and Economic Methods” in *Postcolonialism*

**List of Readings:**

- Abu Odeh, Lama. "Crimes of Honour and the Construction of Gender in Arab Societies." In Mai Yamani, ed., *Feminism and Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 141-194.
- Arebi, Saddeka. *Women and Words in Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Literary Discourse*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Introduction and Chapter 4.
- Ba, Mariama. "Rejection." In Charlotte H. Bruner, ed., *Unwinding Threads* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1994), 34-41.
- El Saadawi, Nawal. "She Was the Weaker." In Charlotte H. Bruner, ed., *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Writing* (London: Heinemann, 1993), 152-156.
- El Saadawi, Nawal. *Woman at Point Zero*. London: Zed Books, 1975.
- Gorkin, Michael and Rafiq Othman. *Three Mothers, Three Daughters: Palestinian Women's Stories*. New York: Other Press, 1996.
- Gunning, Isabelle R. "Cutting through the Obfuscation: Female Genital Surgeries in Neoimperial Culture." In Ella Shohat, ed., *Talking Visions* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 203-224.
- Hassan, Riffat. "Rights of Women Within Islamic Countries." In *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme* 15 (2/3):40-44.
- Hassan, Riffat. "Women in Islam: Qur'anic ideals versus Muslim realities." Found at [http://www.oneworld.org/ippf/ppcnov\\_islam.html](http://www.oneworld.org/ippf/ppcnov_islam.html)
- Hatem, Mervat F. "The Invisible American Half: Arab American Hybridity and Feminist Discourses in the 1990s." In Ella Shohat, ed., *Talking Visions* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 369-390.
- Kassamali, Noor. "When Modernity Confronts Traditional Practices: Female Genital Cutting in Northeast Africa." In Herbert L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi, eds., *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity Within Unity* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 39-62.
- Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Introduction.
- Mahmood, Saba. "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." In *Cultural Anthropology* 16(2):202-236.
- Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. "The Physician and the Prostitute." Ch. 3 in Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Men, Women, and God(s): Nawal El Saadawi and Arab Feminist Poetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- Mayer, Ann Elizabeth. "Aberrant "Islams" and Errant Daughters." In
- Mernissi, Fatima. *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*. New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996. Ch. 1: "Writing is Better Than a Face-lift."
- Mernissi, Fatima. *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. Chs. 2, 3, 4.
- Milani, Farzaneh. *Veils and Words*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992.

- Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. "Stretching the Limits: A Feminist Reading of the Shari'a in Post-Khomeini Iran." In Mai Yamani, ed., *Feminism and Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 285-319.
- Moghissi, Haideh. *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis*. New York: Zed Books, 1999. Introduction and Ch. 1.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." In Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 51-80.
- Olmstead, Jennifer C. "Orientalism and economic methods: (re)reading feminist economic discussions of Islam." In Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin and S. Charusheela, eds., *Postcolonialism Meets Economics* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 165-182.
- Piper, Adrian. "Passing for White, Passing for Black." In Ella Shohat, ed., *Talking Visions* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 75-112.
- Sharaoni, Simona. *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Politics of Women's Resistance*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995.
- Wood, Mark D. "Religious Studies as Critical Organic Intellectual Practice." In *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69(1):129-162.