



2200 North Squirrel Road  
Rochester, Michigan 48309-4401

**REL 300/WGS 301: Women and Islam**  
**Winter 2012**  
**Tuesday, 6:30pm – 9:50pm**  
**Room: 366 SFH**

Instructor: Soraya (Layla) Saatchi  
**Office Hours: By Appointment**  
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### **Overview and Purpose:**

The field of women in Islam is arguably one of the more controversial available for study. There are few (if any) students who will come to this course without some preconceived notions of Islam and Muslim women. Because of the prevalence of narrow and bias sources and viewpoints, both approving and disapproving, this course aims to take an innovative approach to the subject. In addition to reading analyses of Muslim women, you will also be studying works by Muslim women. This will help you situate yourself as the objective observer, allowing you the intellectual freedom to explore the field of Islamic women's studies through the eyes of women themselves. With this freedom, however, comes the challenge of interpreting your subject in *their* religious, political, geographical, economic, cultural, and historical contexts.

We will begin with Islam. Although you will have the opportunity to gain a deep understanding of the basic tenets of the Islamic faith, these will be explained in the context of Islam's organic development and its prospects for continued evolution as it faces modern challenges. We will explore definitions of Shari'a, but more particularly, the historical evolution of Islamic family law and its current manipulations by various authority figures, and how these interpretations and manipulations have effected and continue to effect women's public and private rights and identity.

Muslim women, similar to women in all cultures, act as a moral barometer of their communities. We will ask the difficult question of why the 14<sup>th</sup> century work of a fringe scholar in a Syrian prison who wrote in favor of stoning women as a way of upholding and purifying Islam, is used as a reliable source of emulation by, but not limited to, the Afghan Taliban in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Are there overlapping social, political, and economic factors that act as a conservative filter, making narrow interpretations more palatable than others? Indeed, you will examine classical and medieval connections with contemporary authorities as a product of mutual and necessary exchange facilitated by political, social, and economic realities. Then, how are women responding to Islamic fundamentalism and various revivalist movements that espouse these conservative and literal interpretation of Islam? How effective is women's resistance and activism?

Following this historical overview of Islam and analysis of contemporary women's activism, we will then turn to Muslim women's work and production – their interpretation of Islam, their status within the tradition, and their understanding of Islamic law's relevance and efficacy for regulating public and/or private spaces in a modern state and society. For this purpose, you will be exposed to various works, including films, poetry, and journalism. You will also be engaging in various learning environments beyond lecture. We will have at least one guest speaker, and there will be group discussion sessions/debates.

Readings marked with an asterisk (\*) are available on Moodle.

### **Required Textbooks:**

Coleman, Isobel. *Paradise Beneath Her Feet: How Women are Transforming the Middle East*. Random House, 2010.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *Islam: An Introduction*. SUNY Press, 1992.

Tucker, Judith. *Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

***We will be covering a large amount of material in a short time, therefore keeping up with the reading is critical.***

### **Recommended List of Supplemental Reading:**

Afzal-Khan, Fawzia (Ed.) *Shattering the Stereotypes: Muslim Women Speak Out*. Interlink Publishing, 2005.

Ahmed, Leila. *A Quiet Revolution*. Yale University Press, 2011.

Cleveland, William and Martin P. Bunton. *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Westview Press, 2009.

Esposito, John. *Who Speaks for Islam?* Gallup Press, 2008.

Friend, Theodore. *Woman, Man and God in Modern Islam*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011.

Meriwether, Margaret and Judith Tucker (Eds.) *Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East*. Westview Press, 1999.

Moghissi, Haideh. *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Post-modern Analysis*. Zed Books, 2002.

Quraishi, Asifa and Frank E. Vogel. *The Islamic Marriage Contract*. Harvard Law School, 2008.

Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam and Modernity*. University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books (Random House), 1979.

Shirazi, Faegheh. *Velvet Jihad: Muslim Women's Quiet Resistance to Islamic Fundamentalism*. University Press of Florida, 2009.

Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. *Women and the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

Wadud, Amina. *Inside the Gender Jihad*. Oneworld publications, 2006.

Webb, Gisela (Ed.). *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America*. Syracuse University Press, 2000.

### **Important Databases and Sources (see Blackboard/Content for more):**

Journal of Middle East Women's Studies: JSTOR

International Journal of Middle East Studies: JSTOR

Middle East International

Feminist Yearbook: JSTOR

Karamah.org (Muslim women lawyers)

Human Rights Watch

Gender and Development: JSTOR

## **EVALUATION:**

### **Attendance and Participation (15%):**

**If you arrive later than 15 minutes to class, you will be counted as absent for that day.** The first 15 minutes of each lecture will be spent answering a series of discussion questions posted on blackboard for that week and related to that week's reading. These discussion questions will also act as review for your exams. You will not be required to hand in your answers, but I expect that you will be prepared to share with the class, individually or as a group. Asking questions and participating in discussions are integral to your success in this course. In this way, I will take note of your attendance. ***Only 2 excused absences are acceptable***, each subsequent absence will have a detrimental impact on your grade.

### **Examinations (55%):**

There will be two standard exams for the course: A midterm (see schedule for exact date) worth 25% and a final exam (see schedule for date and time) worth 30% of your final grade.

### **Thought Papers (10%)**

You will be required to complete and hand in ***two thought papers, each worth 5%*** of your final grade. Each paper should be between 2-3 pages double-spaced. See schedule below for the weeks and topics for each thought paper.

### **Term Paper (20%):**

You are responsible for completing one term paper between 5-7 double-spaced pages using a 12-point, Times New Roman font. The topic is up to you, but you must clear it with me by the end of week four (4). See me if you have difficulty arriving at a topic. ***A rough draft of your paper is due by the end of week six (6), and your final paper is due in class by the end of week fourteen (14).***

The following are important points to keep in mind in the paper:

1. *Argument.* Your research paper should be attempting to make some kind of a point. It should not merely be a review of what is in the various books that you have looked at on the subject, but should demonstrate that you have thought about the material and have your own opinion that you wish to present. That being said, your paper should not be one long "rant." It must be well referenced and well sourced. Avoid emotional argumentation. Pretend as if you were arguing in front of a judge in court; your goal here is to prove your point in a reasoned, logical, and consistent way. You will *not* be graded on whether or not I agree with your point; you will be graded on how well you have made your case. As such, a well-argued point of view that I disagree with will receive a high-grade; *a poorly argued point of view that I happen to agree with will not.* You must keep your paper focused on the argument and not get sidetracked.
2. *Proper referencing.* Research papers of this nature require the student to go to a wide variety of sources. As such, I will expect at least 2 books and 2 academic articles from peer-reviewed journals (ask me if you do not know what this means) to be referenced in the Works Cited page of the paper. *Citations should be made as much as possible; the more references, the better.*
3. *Avoid quotations.* Do not quote things from your sources unless it is absolutely necessary for the structure of your argument. Quotations will not be counted towards the required number of words.
4. *Language.* Avoid using personal, conversational type language such as "I think." A good rule of thumb is to try and avoid using the first person "I" as much as you possibly can. Always be as clear as possible. Remember, you are trying to present an *argument* here. Using vague, informal,

conversational language will not help advance your point. Avoid run-on sentences. Make your paragraphs moderate length; not too short and not too long.

5. *Structure*. Your paper should have an **introduction**, where you will lay out what it is you are going to talk about. Then you should have a main body, where you present your case, your arguments, and your sources. Finally, you should not introduce any new arguments or evidence in your conclusion. Avoid digressing into other areas.
6. *Layout*. Please justify the margins of your paper. Indent each paragraph. Double-space and use 12-point Times New Roman font.

**\*\* Late assignments will be reduced by 2% for every day they're late (see internet usage laws below).**

### **Final Grade Scale:**

Your final letter grade will be determined according to the following percentage scale:

|          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 100-95=A | 79-76=C+ |
| 94-90=A- | 75-73=C  |
| 89-86=B+ | 72-70=C- |
| 85-83=B  | 69-65=D+ |
| 82-80=B- | 64-60=D  |
|          | 59-0=F   |

### **Internet Usage:**

**Do not** send me your assignments by way of electronic submission (email, websites, peer to peer, or any other protocol) unless you clear it with me first.

This is not a distance education class; therefore attendance, participation, and bringing your *printed* assignments to lecture are necessary for the successful completion of this course.

### **Recommendations for Success:**

- ⇒ ***Primarily***, success in this course depends on reading the assigned sections of the text(s) *prior* to attending the lectures. Many of the names of people and places will be unfamiliar and/or strange, so reviewing these names and familiarizing yourself with the general topic under discussion will make for a more comprehensible lecture.
- ⇒ ***Familiarize yourself with the geography of the modern Middle East*** through such sources as the Atlas of the Middle East published by Cambridge University Press, the Atlas of Islam by Harvard University, of the Historical Atlas of Islam by Brill. Comprehensive answers to exam questions will reflect an understanding of the physical aspects of the studied areas.
- ⇒ Make it a habit to **log on to Moodle** on a regular basis. I will post announcements and/or supplementary documents.

## **Schedule of Lectures & Corresponding Readings:**

### Week 1: Jan. 10

- Reading: \* Said; *Orientalism*, Introduction  
\* Afzal-Khan; *Shattering the Stereotypes*, Foreword and Introduction  
\* *Ali & Nino* (excerpt)  
Schimmel, Introduction  
Topic: *Introduction: Gender, Islam and Muslims (us and them/east and west)*

### Week 2: Jan. 17 (Jan. 16, Martin Luther King Jr. Day)

- Reading: Schimmel, pp. 7 – 57  
Film: PBS, *Empires of Faith*  
Topic: *Genesis of Islam and its traditions*

### Week 3: Jan. 24

- Reading: Schimmel, pp. 59 - end  
Topic: *Theologians, Philosophers and Sufis; Modern developments*

### **First Thought Paper Due – January 24:**

*What would you like to learn during this course? Recall Said's challenge on page 24: "Perhaps the most important task of all would be to undertake studies in contemporary alternatives to Orientalism, to ask how can one study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or nonrepressive and nonmanipulative, perspective?" What specific obstacle(s) and opportunity(s) can hinder or help you achieve your learning goal(s) for this course congruent with Said's ideal?*

### Week 4: Jan. 31

- Reading: Tucker: Chpts 1 & 2  
\* Sonbol; *A History of Marriage Contracts in Egypt*  
Recommend: Friend: *Woman, Man & God in Modern Islam* (Introduction)  
Topic: *Islamic law & women: Historical evolution of family law & marriage*

### **Term Paper topics finalized**

### Week 5: Feb. 7

- Reading: Tucker: Chpts 3 & 4  
\* Messick; *Interpreting Tears: A Marriage Case from Imamic Yemen*  
Topic: *Islamic law & women: Divorce and gendered legal rights*

### Week 6: Feb. 14

- Reading: Tucker: Chpts 5 & 6  
Recommend: Stowasser: *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretations*  
Topic: *Islamic law & women: Gendered space & conclusion*

### **Second Thought Paper Due – February 15:**

*How does classical and pre-modern Islamic jurisprudence differ from modern/contemporary jurisprudence? According to Tucker, why does this transformation take place? Give 2 specific examples of family law in practice and/or legal opinions that illustrate this transformation and their impact on women.*

### Week 7: Feb. 21

**No Class: Winter Break!**

### Week 8: Feb. 28

- Reading: Film: Mosaic News (12/30/2011) – LinkTV  
Topic: *Midterm Review*

### **Midterm Exam**

Week 9: Mar. 6

Reading: Coleman: Introduction and Part 1  
\* Webb: *May Muslim Women Speak for Themselves, Please?*  
\* Shaaban; *The Muted Voices of Women Interpreters*  
Recommend: Moghissi: *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*  
Topic: *What is Islamic feminism and why is it important?*

Week 10: Mar. 13

Reading: Coleman: Chpts 3, 4 & 5  
Recommend: \* Mir-Hosseini; *A Woman's Right to Terminate the Marriage Contract*  
Topic: *Women's activism in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan*

**Paper Rough Draft Due – March 13**

Week 11: Mar.21

Reading: Coleman: Chpts 6, 7 & 8  
Recommend: \* Wynn; *Marriage Contracts and Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia*  
Topic: *Women's activism in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. What can we conclude?*

Week 12: Mar. 28

Reading: \* Wadud: *Alternative Qur'anic Interpretation and the Status of Women*  
\* Barazangi: *Muslim Women's Higher Learning as a Human Right*  
Topic: *Women's views on Qur'an, theology and education*

Week 13: Apr. 3

Reading: \* Shattering the Stereotypes: Part 4  
Film: \* *The Socratic Sheikha* (LinkTV)  
Topic: *Muslim Women's Religious Discourse*

Week 14: Apr. 10

Reading: \* Shattering the Stereotypes: Part 5  
Guest Speaker(s): TBA  
Topic: *War, Migration and Identity*

**Term Paper Due**

Week 15: Apr. 17

Reading: Nothing additional required  
Film: *Bridge to Iran: We are Half of Iran's Population*  
(<http://www.linktv.org/programs/we-are-half-of-irans-population>)  
Topic: *Final review*

**END OF CLASSES**

**Final Exam: Take Home April 17,  
DUE April 24 midnight by email  
Final Grades will be posted on pipeline by April 27**