

## WOMEN IN ISLAMIC SOCIETY HISTORY 462

Spring 2012  
TR 12-1:15pm  
Nguyen Eng. 1107

Dr. S. Hamdani  
RB 347, 3-1250  
shamdani@gmu.edu  
Office hrs: W 4-5pm

This course surveys the history of women in Islamic society (the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia in particular) from the rise of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the present-day. The first half of the course will examine the historical processes that impacted women's roles, and the ways in which women reacted to, negotiated and subverted them in their own interest. The second half of the course will focus on specific topics such as work, war, the veil, etc., around which issues of gender status and identity have come into play, especially in the modern period.

By the conclusion of the course, students should have a grasp of the major chronology of changes in the status and role of women in Islam, as well as the debates surrounding specific issues affecting Muslim women in the present. They should also have the ability to demonstrate the continuities and connections as well as departures the status and role of Muslim and non-Muslim women. Students will be expected to demonstrate these outcomes through essay exams, a final research paper and oral presentations, that will involve evaluating the sources, both primary and secondary, textual and other, used in providing explanations and interpretations of women and gender in Islam.

Course requirements consist of attendance and participation, a midterm and final exam, and a research paper. Readings will be varied and will include selections from normative and prescriptive texts (such as religious literature), as well as literary, political, historical and biographical works. An effort has been made to privilege the voice of Muslim women as much as possible. Readings are challenging and so completing them before class, and attending and participating in class are strongly recommended. The midterm and final will consist of identifications and essays, and the research paper will involve the further exploration of topics relating to Muslim women. Study guides, instructions and possible research topics will be provided for exams and research paper at the appropriate times.

### Grade Distribution:

Participation 15%  
Midterm exam 25%  
Final Exam 25%  
Final paper 35%

### Required Texts:

- L. Ahmed, Women and Gender in Islam, Yale 1992
- B. Baron and N. Keddie, Women in Middle Eastern History, Yale 1990
- J. Tucker ed., Women and Family and Gender in Islamic Law, Cambridge 2008
  
- A. Djebar, Fantasia, Heinemann 1993
- U. Khan, Trespassing, Picador 2005

R. Jebreal, Miral, Penguin 2010  
Satrapi, The Complete Persepolis, Pantheon 2003

Course Reader (selections designated below by #)

ADDITIONAL ISSUES:

Students are not allowed to eat or text in class. And students are not allowed to use laptops for any purpose other than taking notes. Cell phones must be turned off. Walking in late is not only rude and disruptive, but will adversely affect your grade. Walking out during class for a bathroom break, etc., is equally disruptive. If a student is not prepared to participate, it is better not to attend, as attendance of warm bodies alone does not qualify as participation.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

Disabilities and Academic Accommodations: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism: This class and all of your work as an undergraduate are governed by GMU's Honor Code: "Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work."

Plagiarism is presenting another person's words, ideas, or sequence of arguments as your own without attribution. We will discuss what constitutes plagiarism and how to cite sources properly in this course. It is my duty to report all violations of the Honor Code. To read more about the Honor Code, the Honor Committee, and its procedures, see go to <http://honorcode.gmu.edu>.

Last Day to Add Classes: 1/31/2012

Last Day to Drop Classes: 1/31-2/24/2012

Selective Withdrawal Period: 2/27-3/30/2012

## Tentative Reading and Assignments Schedule

### Week 1 *Introduction*

T: Introduction, #B Melosh on Culture and Gender

R: #Tucker, Introduction to Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East

**Written Assignment:** *Which ultimately determines women's roles, their culture or their gender?*

### Week 2 *Eastern Women through Western Eyes*

T: #Said, selection from Orientalism

R: #Melman, "Harem Literature".

**Written Assignment:** *Which orientalist legacy has endured longer, the Orient as woman, or the obsession with women of the Orient? Why?*

### Week 3 *The Rise of Islam*

T: Ahmed, ch. 3

R: Ahmed, ch. 4, #Stowasser, "The Status of Women in Early Islam"

**Written Assignment:** *Did Islam initially reform or repress the role of women? Why and How?*

### Week 4 *Tradition and Transition in the Medieval Period*

T: Ahmed, chs. 5, 6

R: Petry, "Class Solidarity vs. Gender Gain"; Berkey, "Women and Islamic Education", Women in Middle Eastern History

**Written Assignment:** *To what extent did the reality of women's roles coincide with the theory about them in the medieval period of Islamic history?*

### Week 5 *Harem and Household in the Ottoman Empire*

T: #Pierce, The Imperial Harem, pp. 119-149

R: #Zarinebaf-Shahr, "Women, Law, and Imperial Justice in Ottoman Istanbul in the late Seventeenth Century", Quatert, "Ottoman Women, Households, and Textile Manufacturing", in Women in Middle Eastern History.

**Written Assignment:** *How exceptional was the power of women in the Ottoman imperial harem? Why?*

### Week 6 *Modernize and Colonize: Egypt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*

T: Ahmed, ch. 7

R: Ahmed ch. 8: #Amin, Liberation of Women

**Written Assignment:** *How did Nationalism change the discourse about women in the Middle East?*

### Week 7 *Midterm Exam*

T: Review for the Midterm

R: MIDTERM EXAM

SPRING BREAK

**Week 8 Nationalism or Feminism?**

T: Ahmed, ch. 9;

R: Nelson, "Biography and History" in Women in Middle Eastern History.

**Written Assignment:** *Was Feminism in the Middle East a Western or an Eastern invention? Why?*

**Week 9 Women and War**

T: Fleischman, "The Other Awakening" in Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East

R: Jebreal, Miral

**Written Assignment:** *Does war create only oppression or certain opportunities for women? Why and How?*

**Week 10 Women and the Veil**

T Ahmed, ch. 10 and Conclusion; # "The Veiled Medical Student" in The New Arab Social Order, A. Najmabadi, "Feminism in an Islamic Republic".

R: Satrapi, Complete Persepolis

**Written Assignment:** *Is the veil tradition or innovation? Why?*

**Week 11 Women and Work**

T #Moghadam, "Introduction"; Cairoli, "Girl but Not Woman"

R: Danielson, "Artists and Entrepreneurs" in Women in Middle Eastern History; Film: Umm Kulthum

**Written Assignment:** *Is the increasing involvement of women in the workplace a good thing? Why or why not?*

**Week 12 Women and the Law/Custom**

T: Tucker, Intro and Ch. 2

T: Khan, Trespassing

**Week 13 Conclusions**

T: Djebar, Fantasia

R: Fantasia Continued

**Week 14**

T: Review for Final

R: Internet Assignment  
Final Paper Due