

## ANT/WMS366.01 Beyond the Veil: Gender in the Islamic World

Spring 08 TTh 9:45 - 11.15 C003 Cooper

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**Gender** — especially the status of women — is and has been one of the chief preoccupations of Westerners when they think about Islam and Muslims. From 19<sup>th</sup>-century paintings of barely-clad women in the harem, to CNN clips of veiled women in Afghanistan, the idea that Muslim women are oppressed and that Muslim men are their lascivious oppressors has long been an important element in the way we imagine the Islamic world generally.

**Islam:** But what is the reality for men and women in the Islamic world? Is being born female and Muslim automatically a life sentence to social and sexual servitude? What does it mean to wear the veil, and if you're a man, what does it mean when your wife or mother or sister wears it? What is life like in a gender-segregated society, and does it mean you naturally long to live in a world where men and women mix freely? And most important of all: to what extent can we generalize about the whole Muslim world in considering questions like these?

In this course, we will study the religious and cultural ideologies that shape the lives of women and men in the Islamic world and the diverse ways in which these ideologies play out in different geographic, historical, cultural and economic contexts. We will look at the historical developments and textual foundations which guide Muslims in understanding gender, as well as some responses to these sources that affirm them and others that reject or seek to reinterpret them. Along the way, you will be challenged both to step into the shoes of the men and women we meet and to compare their paths in life to your own. Some of your beliefs about gender in Islamic society will be challenged; others will be confirmed. But by the end you will learn about the roots, forms and applications of gender ideology in the Islamic world, and so will have a more complex and intellectually informed view of how the religion and its related cultural discourses shape the ways men and women think of themselves and their relationships to one another.

### Readings:

This course involves a substantial amount of reading. While some weeks' readings may look like a lot, there will be ample time for discussion and amplification of the important themes and examples. If you make the effort to at least get through the material, you will have plenty of help understanding it. Moreover, **you will need to be very familiar with the readings in order to succeed on the examinations.**

The following books are required for the course:

Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam*

Nikki Keddie's and Beth Baron's *Women in Middle Eastern History*

Barbara Freyer Stowasser's *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretation*

Amina Wadud's *Qur'an and Woman*

Leila Abouzeid's *The Year of the Elephant*

Veronica Doubleday's *Three Women of Herat*

We will cover *Women and Gender* almost completely, using it as a rough map to the various topics in the course, and will read substantially from Stowasser and Wadud. Abouzeid's short but powerful novella will take us inside the heart of one Moroccan woman coming to grips with change in her life; and *Three Women* offers a view into pre-Soviet Afghanistan through the eyes of a sympathetic Western traveler.

In addition a number of articles and book chapters are posted on ANGEL. Go to the course home page and click on the "Lessons" tab. Some weeks also have recommended readings, which are not required, but which offer significant insight into the week's topic and certainly are fair game for written assignments. Among these, Marshall G.S. Hodgson's *The Venture of Islam* and Daisy Dwyer's anthology, *Law and Islam in the Middle East* are both on reserve at Drake.

### **Lecture, Discussion, Reaction:**

Tuesday of each week will be devoted to lecture on the week's topic. You will have the chance to raise questions about the readings. On Thursday, we will have discussion of the readings. **Teams** of two or three jointly will **lead one discussion** of a week's readings. In addition, individually each team member will produce a **written summary** of them. Non-presenting students will fill out evaluation sheets, awarding the team from 1 to 3 points based on specific criteria. (The average of these evaluations will be one component of the team's grade.) All individuals in the class will have a week to write a **short (about 3 pages) paper** reacting to the lecture, readings and/or discussion for that week. Reaction papers may reflect personal opinions, experiences, feelings and/or beliefs, but should engage course materials in the process. Team summaries and evaluations are due on discussion day; reaction papers will be due on the *following Thursday*. All writing assignments are to be word-processed on double-spaced pages; electronic submissions (in .doc or .pdf format) will be accepted.

### **Exams:**

There will be a **midterm** exam covering readings and lecture — a combination of short-answer and essay questions. The **final exam** will be a take-home essay, in which you will have about a week to develop and write an extended argument on one question chosen from two or three options, making liberal use of examples drawn from the course readings.

## Grading:

Your grade will be the result of the number of points you accumulate for the various tasks:

Teamwork:		15 pts.
- Presentation	10 pts.	
- Reading summary	5 pts.	
Reaction Paper Journal		15 pts.
Midterm		30 pts.
Final Exam		40 pts.

## Teamwork guidelines:

The discussion team is expected to cover the main points in the readings and then to encourage comment and discussion. This can be organized in any number of ways, but I will be looking for at least three main things for each reading:

*Thesis* — What is the author's main point? What is she or he on about?

*Argument* — How does he or she support the thesis? Is there some logic to the discussion? Does it hold water?

*Evidence* — What kind of evidence does the author use? Where does it come from — ethnography? case studies? statistics? historical or religious text? Is the evidence sufficient to support the thesis?

I prefer you not simply report on the readings but also help us *engage* with them, so the more efficiently (and accurately) you guide the class through these basic points, the more time we will have to talk about whatever you find especially interesting in them.

Remember: this is a team assignment. I need to hear from everyone on the team, in a well-coordinated tour of the readings. You will need to meet outside class to organize yourselves so that it is clear that all team members contributed to the result. I will model some techniques in the first few class meetings. I do not expect you to be expert at this at the drop of a hat: it is an art that must be cultivated.

The criteria for full credit (10 points) are:

- organization — team members coordinate their efforts and the discussion flows smoothly; all team members participate 3 points
- completeness — the discussion covers the readings, with the three main points above emphasized 3 points
- timeliness — all the required readings are covered within the time allowed in class. 1 point
- evaluations by your fellow classmates 3 points

If this seems like a lot, don't worry: you have some leeway. If, for example, a lively discussion happens and we do not cover all the readings completely, the "completeness" requirement can flex a little. The sure way for your group not to get full credit is if you make a serious blunder (showing up unprepared, missing the point of the readings completely, that sort of thing). The primary goal is that we all come to understand what the authors are saying, and then use that as a basis for intelligent, stimulating conversation.

### **Reading summary guidelines and grades:**

The summary of your team's readings is just that — an abstract that addresses each article or book chapter using the thesis-argument-evidence model presented above. You must show me in coherent, well-organized English that you have got the gist of all the readings that week. This is not a team assignment. If you cover all the readings correctly, with the *thesis-argument-evidence* format emphasized, you can expect to do well on this assignment.

### **Reaction paper journals:**

This is a major component of your work. It is also your easiest task, as long as you're honest with yourself and keep up with it. Some weeks, you may not have much to say; on those occasions, write a page or two about what you thought was important in the week's topic. Other times, something in the class will stir you up; on those occasions, let it all hang out. Good grammar, composition and cleverness are helpful but not the most important considerations. You will not be graded on those things (of course, I do have to be able to understand what you're saying!). It is important mainly that you show me you have thought about the course materials, and that they have made some kind of impression on you — emotional, intellectual, spiritual, whatever. (You can also revisit/reassess reactions from previous weeks, if that is what comes up for you.) I will collect a Reaction Paper from you each week. Usually I'll just tick it off, showing that I've read it. Sometimes, I may include a comment for you to consider for the future. (I may collect your journal at midterm, just to spot check your progress.)

On the last day of class (Thursday, May 8) you will give me all your Reaction Papers for the semester (the originals, not reprints!) in a folder or binder and in addition you must **write a conclusion to your journal (3-4 pages)**, reflecting on what you have learned in the course generally and/or from writing the Reaction Papers themselves. I will grade your journal and return it to you during finals week. To get full credit for this task (15 points) you must

- give me a reaction paper each week of the course (12 in all)
- engage course materials in at least a general way most of the time
- show me in your conclusion that the course has touched you in some way

A note about privacy: Your Reaction Papers and Journal will be kept in strict confidence. You may write anything you like (I have a thick skin and don't hold grudges). I may, however, share short selections with the class. Authors will not be identified.

### **Discussion and reaction guidelines:**

No opinion, thoughtfully expressed, is automatically out of bounds in this class. On the contrary: expressing your opinions is essential to success in this course. But it is also important to do so through reasonable, respectful discussion. If you want to wave a flag (or religious icon), please be gracious about it. If you are Muslim or have some personal connection with Islam or Muslims, these are valuable experiences for all of us in the class, and I hope you will feel free to share them. If on the other hand you are only looking for evidence to validate some stereotype, whether positive or negative, you will find this course challenging.

Remember: this is not a course about religion, but about the myriad ways in which one extremely important world religion shapes how people live within gendered realities in a universe that includes both mundane and supernatural phenomena. The only way to do this is to step back from our personal commitments and try to meet the material on its own terms. So in the anthropological tradition, we will strive for a balance between valid personal reactions to the material and an intellectual view that sees our subject in an inclusive and relativistic light. This may be a delicate dance at times, but in the end you will find it rewarding.

A statement of the general policies and other information relevant to your performance in this course has been posted to ANGEL. **You should read it carefully: it explains important policies, including those governing attendance, late work and so on.**

## Topics and Reading Schedule

### Unit 1: The scholarly study of gender in Islamic cultures — Part 1

#### Week 1 Gendered anthropology and the Orient

T 1/29 Lecture: "Introduction to the course (and a brief history of Islam)."

Th 1/31 Lecture-Discussion: "Gendered anthropology and the Orient"

Readings:

Arebi: "Gender Anthropology in the Middle East..."

Soraya Altorki: "The Anthropologist in the Field..."

Leila Ahmed: "Western Ethnocentrism..."

☞ Please listen to the Leila Ahmed interview (posted under the Lessons tab on ANGEL)

Recommended Reading:

Janet Abu-Lughod: "Anthropology's Orient..."

### Unit 1: The scholarly study of gender in Islamic cultures — Part 2

#### Week 2 Contested turf

T 2/5 Lecture: "Contested turfs"

Th 2/7 Discussion Team #1 — first Reaction Paper due

Readings:

Richard Antoun: "On the Modesty of Women..."

Nadia Abu Zahra: "On the Modesty of Women...a Reply"

from Fatima Mernissi: *Dreams of Trespass*, Chapters 1, 3 & 10

Leila Ahmed: *Women and Gender...* (Intro & Chapter 2)

### Unit 2: Birthing Islamic Discourses — Part 1

#### Week 3 Muhammad, women and the evolution of Islamic society through the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century.

T 2/12 Lecture: "Society in the early Islamic period"

Th 2/14 Discussion Team #2 — Reaction Paper 2 due

Readings:

from Karen Armstrong: *Muhammad* (Chapter 4)

from Fatima Mernissi: *The Veil and the Male Elite* (Chapter 8)

Ahmed: *Women and Gender...* (Chapters 3 & 4)

from Wadud: *Qur'an and Woman* (Introduction)

Recommended Readings:

Nadia Abbott: "Women and the State in Early Islam"

## **Unit 2: Birthing Islamic Discourses — Part 2**

### **Week 4** “Textual Islam”

**T 2/19** Lecture: “The textual foundations of gendered discourses”

**Th 2/21** Discussion Team #3 — Reaction paper 3 due

Readings:

selections from *The Holy Qur’ân*

selections from *Sahih Muslim*

from Stowasser: *Women in the Qur’an* (pp. 20-24, Chapters 7, 8 & 9)

from Wadud: *Qur’an and Woman* (Chapter 2)

## **Unit 3: Women in Medieval Islamic society through the 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century.**

### **Week 5**

**T 2/26** Lecture: “Women in Medieval Islam”

**Th 2/28** Discussion Team #4 — Reaction Paper 4 due

Readings:

Bürgel: “Love, Lust and Longing...”

*selections of medieval poetry about and by women*

Lachiri: “Andalusian Proverbs on Women”

Ahmed: *Women and Gender...* (Chapters 5 & 6)

Recommended Reading:

Hodgson: *The Venture of Islam...* v.1 (pp. 241-314)

Garulo: “Women in Medieval Classical Arabic Poetry”

## **Unit 4: Identity and “Islam”**

### **Week 6**

**T 3/4** Lecture: “Gender and class; geography and history; urban and rural”

**Th 3/6** Discussion Team #5 — Reaction Paper 5 due

Readings:

Petry: “Class Solidarity vs. Gender Gain...”

*(Women in Middle Eastern History)*

Quataert: “Ottoman Women, Households and Textile Manufacturing”

*(Women in Middle Eastern History)*

Friedl: “The Dynamics of Women’s Spheres of Action in Rural Iran”

*(Women in Middle Eastern History)*

Killoran: “‘Good Muslims’ and ‘Bad Muslims’...”

Recommended Readings:

vom Bruck: “Elusive Bodies...”

## Week 7

T 3/11 Review of the foundations of gendered discourses in early Islam

Reading:

Doubleday: begin *Three Women of Herat* (Part 1)

Th 3/13: **Midterm Exam** — Reaction Paper 6 due

## Week 8 — Spring break, no classes

### Unit 5: *Shari'a* — gender as a legal phenomenon

## Week 9

T 3/25 Lecture: “The foundations of Islamic law”

Th 3/27 Discussion Team #6

Readings:

Gamal Badr: “Islamic Law and the Challenge of Modern Times”

R. Khalidi and J. Tucker: “Women’s Rights in the Arab World”

Baron: “The Making and Breaking of Marital Bonds...”

(*Women in Middle Eastern History*)

Doubleday: *Three Women...* (begin Part 3, pp. 155-176)

Recommended Readings:

Esposito: *Women in Muslim Family Law* Ch. 3 (Reserve @ Drake)

### Unit 6: “Legitimate” roles

## Week 10

T 4/1 Lecture: “History and harem, *mûlid* and mysticism”

Th 4/3 Discussion Team #7 — Reaction Paper 7 due

Readings:

from Fariduddin Attar: *Muslim Saints and Mystics*

Kashani-Sabet: “Who is Fatima?”

Tapper: “Ziyaret...”

Doubleday: *Three Women...* (Part 3, pp. 177-203)

Recommended Readings:

Jamal: “Mosques, Collective Identity and Gender...”

Margaret Smith: *Rabi'a*, Chapter 12 (Reserve @ Drake)

## Unit 7: “Illegitimate” roles

### Week 11

T 4/8 Lecture: “Music and film, war and governance”

Th 4/10 Discussion Team #8 — Reaction Paper 8 due

☞ Video Presentation: *Umm Kalthoum: A Voice Like Egypt*

Readings:

Spellberg: “Political Action and Public Example...”

(*Women in Middle Eastern History*)

from Mernissi: *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Chapters 1 & 3)

Virolle: “The Role of Women in Raï Music”

Doubleday: *Three Women...* (Part 3 contd. & Epilogue, pp. 204-222)

Recommended Readings:

van Nieukerk: “An Hour for God...”

## Unit 8: Reflecting on the colonial encounter — Part 1

### Week 12

T 4/15 Lecture: “The colonial encounter and changes in gender roles”

Th 4/17 Discussion of *Three Women of Herat* — Discussion Team #9 —

Reaction Paper 9 due

Readings:

Ahmed: *Women and Gender...* (Chapter 7)

Alam: “Women in the Era of Modernity...”

Haj: “Palestinian Women and Patriarchal Relations”

Hegland: “Flagellation and Fundamentalism...”

Recommended Reading:

Voll: “Fundamentalism in the Sunni Arab World.”

## Unit 8: Reflecting on the colonial encounter — Part 2

### Week 13

T 4/22 Lecture: “Accommodation and resistance”

Th 4/24 Discussion Team #10 — Reaction Paper 10 due

Readings:

from Qutb: *Milestones* (Introduction & Ch 1)

Rozario: “Community and Resistance...”

Lila Abu-Lughod: “The Romance of Resistance...”

Haddad and Smith: “Women in Islam...”

Abouzeid: *The Year of the Elephant* (pp. 1-21)

Recommended Reading:

Azm: “Islamic Fundamentalism Reconsidered...”

## Unit 9: “The Veil”

### Week 14

T 4/29 Lecture: “The veil: forms, religious discourses and cultural meanings”

Th 5/1 Discussion and Presentation: “Reading the veil” — Discussion Team #11

Reaction Paper 11 due

Readings:

Ahmed: *Women and Gender...* (Chapter 8)

Bartkowski and Read: “To Veil or Not to Veil?...”

Brenner: “Reconstructing Self and Society...”

Shavarini: “Wearing the Veil to College...”

Abouzeid: *The Year of the Elephant* (pp. 22-40)

Recommended Reading:

El Guindi: “Veiling Infitah...”

MacLeod: “Hegemonic Relations and Gender Resistance...”

## Unit 10: “Feminism” and responses to the modern era

### Week 15

T 5/6 Lecture: “Islamic feminism?”

Th 5/8 Discussion of *The Year of the Elephant* — Discussion Team #12

☞ 12<sup>th</sup> Reaction Paper and Reaction Paper Journal due

Readings:

from *Feminisms in the Muslim World Leadership Institutes* (pp. 21-24)

Ahmed: *Women and Gender...* (Chapters 9 & 10)

al-Sharki: “An Unveiled Voice” (*Opening the Gates*)

El Guindi: “Feminism Comes of Age...”

Abouzeid: *The Year of the Elephant* (pp. 41-72)

### Week 16

Final exam