

# Gender and Religion: Women in Islamic Civilization

RELIGST 3FF3

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Days: Tues/Friday 9:30 a.m.-10:20 a.m.

Office Hours: Friday 11:00a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Tutorial 01: Thursday, 11:30 a.m.-12:20 p.m.

BSB 105

Tutorial 02: Thursday, 2:30 p.m.-3:20 p.m.

BSB 105

## **Course Description**

This interdisciplinary course explores how women in the Islamic world have lived and defined themselves, through religion, politics, family, medicine, literature, and art. We begin with the Islamic religious texts and move to the relationship between religious texts and society—how do texts produce social reality, and how do social realities shape the interpretation and implementation of religious texts? How have women defined themselves in and with Islam? How do we think about gender and feminism in the Islamic world? The course covers the time period from the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (late sixth century A.D.) to the present and focuses on women's voices and women's experiences.

In the early period, we consider: Women in the Qur'an, women in the life of the Prophet Muhammad, women in Islamic law, feminist critiques of Islamic scholarship, women in literature, and the harem as a locus of political power and family.

For the modern period, we consider a history of feminism in Islamic countries, women as nationalists, the European colonial encounter, and women's agency in medicine, politics, and the Islamic revival.

Classes will be both lecture and discussion formats. Course materials include primary historical sources, secondary texts, anthropology, sacred texts, film, comics, art, novels, videos, and other digital resources.

## **Learning outcomes:**

In this course, students will gain the following:

- Familiarity with Islamic texts, including the Qur'an and Hadith, familiarity with Islamic sciences of textual analysis (*tafsir*, *ijtihad*), Islamic mysticism (Sufism), and Islamic modernism.
- The ability to construct an argument and use textual evidence systematically, demonstrating both in a classic five-paragraph essay format.
- Knowledge of topics in women's history and feminism in the Islamic world.
- Knowledge of modern politics and history in the Middle East and North Africa.
- Familiarity with contemporary women's issues in politics, art, music, medicine, and culture in the Islamic world.

### **Required Texts:**

**Coursepack:** A Coursepack of articles is required and must be downloaded from the A2L site for this class. You must bring the articles to class, be ready for discussion.

### **Books:**

**The following books are required** and available at the McMaster University Campus Store, Tel: 905-525-9140 Extension 24751

The Qur'an, English translation by Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall

Year of the Elephant: A Moroccan Woman's Journey, Leila Abouzeid

Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood, Fatima Mernissi

Persepolis, Marjane Satrapi

### **Assignments:**

The course assignments are as follows:

**One formal paper, 3 pages.** Hard copy only.

**6 short comment papers (1-2 pages)** on readings, films, and other class activities. They cannot be turned in late, because the purpose is to prepare you for discussion.

**A final exam reflection comment paper (4 pages)** to be submitted to A2L.

### **Grading Policy:**

Assignments for the course and respective weights in the total grade are as follows:

Participation

(in-class discussion, attendance in lecture and tutorial) 15%

Comment papers (6 comment papers, 1-2 pages) 40%

Formal paper (3 pages) 30%

Final exam comment paper (4 pages) 15%

### **Course Policies:**

\*You must bring the readings with you to class.

\***All written work must be word-processed**, in 12 point font, double-spaced in hard copy. No assignments can be accepted over email. Submit the final to A2L.

\***Late policy** If the formal essay is turned in after the due date, it will be graded down 1 letter grade. Comment papers cannot be accepted late.

\*For the formal essay format, consult the **Guidelines for Writing History Essays** on A2L. For any further questions, consult The Chicago Manual of Style.

\*Participation and attendance are part of the grade. This means one must bring the reading to class and come prepared for class discussion. Students can have two unexcused absences from class and one from tutorial without impact to participation grade. After that, absences lower the participation grade.

### **Muslim Studies/Arabic/ Jewish Studies**

You may wish to consult the Department of Religious Studies, which offers interdisciplinary minors in Muslim Studies and Jewish Studies, Biblical and Modern Hebrew and Modern Standard Arabic (*fusha*).

*Schedule of Topics and Readings*

*The Early Period: Women in Religious Texts and the Law*

**Tuesday, January 7            Women and Islam, an Overview, and Lalla Essaydi**

Handout in class: Interview with Amina Wadud, “Islam Belongs to All Its Believers,” from *Qantara.de*.

**\*There is no tutorial this week\***

**Friday, January 10    Introduction to Qur’an and Tafsir (and Gender)**

**\*\*Be sure to bring your Qur’an to class.**

**Reading due:**    \*Barbara Stowasser, Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation p. 13-16, 20-24 (coursepack).

\*Qur’an:

Sura 96: The Clot (*Al-‘Alaq*).

Sura 7: The Heights (*Al- A’raf*): Verse 189.

\*Amina Wadud, “Alternative Qur’anic Interpretation and the Status of Muslim Women,” from Windows of Faith, p. 3-21. (coursepack).

**Tuesday, January 14            Women Figures in the Qur’an: Mary, Queen of Sheba, Eve, Hagar, Sara**

**Reading due:**

\*Stowasser “The Chapter of Eve” p. 25-38, “The Women of Abraham” p. 43-49, “The Chapter of Bilqis” and “The Chapter of Mary,” p. 62-82, from Women in the Qur’an, (coursepack).

\*Qur’an

(Mary)

Sura 19: Mary

Sura 3: The Family of Imran, Verses 33-70.

Sura 22: The Pilgrimage, Verses 89-94.

(Queen of Sheba)

Sura 27: The Ant, Verses 15-44.

(Hagar)

Sura 14: Abraham, Verse 37.

(Sara)

Sura 11: Hud, Verses 69-72.

Sura 51: The Winnowing Winds, Verses 24-29.

**Tutorial this week—Discuss Stowasser readings and Qur’anic verses from Tuesday, Jan. 14.**

**Friday, January 17 Qur’an and Women’s Status, Global Examples.**

**\*Bring your Qur’an to class and Wadud from last week!**

Reading due:

\*Qur’an:

Sura 4: Women (*An-Nisa’*): Verses 1-45, 127-130, 177.

Sura 2: The Cow (*Al-Baqarah*), Verses 221-223, 226-237.

Sura 65: Divorce (*Talaq*)

Bring reading from previous week: \*Amina Wadud, “Alternative Qur’anic Interpretation and the Status of Muslim Women,” from Windows of Faith, p. 3-21. (coursepack).

**Assignment for Tutorial, January 23: Comment paper #1.**

--Choose one chapter from the hadith of Bukhari to read (visit this website):

<https://sunnah.com/bukhari>

On this website, there are 93 different thematic chapters listed. Choose one. In your chapter, pay attention to women as narrators, subjects, the themes of gender, and the Prophet’s words related to women.

--In a 1-2 page comment paper, answer the following question:

Based on your reading of the Hadith (Prophet’s reported speech), what is your evaluation of the Prophet’s relationship to women and gender?

Provide specific examples from the text.

**Tuesday, January 21 Life of the Prophet Muhammad and Intro to Hadith**

Reading due: \*Martin Lings, Muhammad, p. 32-36, 43-45, 105-107, 163-166, 270-273, 274-279, 337-341 (coursepack).

**Tutorial this week: Discuss Jan 21 readings and Comment Paper #1.**

**Friday, January 24 The Prophet’s Wives, Mothers of the Believers**

Reading due: \*Stowasser, “The Mothers of the Believers in the Qur’an,” from *Women in the Qur’an*, p. 85-103 (Coursepack).

\*Qur’an:

Sura 33: *The Clans*

**Tuesday, January 28**

**Islamic Law and Women, A Historical Overview**

**Reading due:** \*Leila Ahmad, Women and Gender in Islam, p. 41-87. (coursepack).

\*Susan Spector, "Introduction," from *Women in Classical Islamic Law*, pp. 1-3. (coursepack)

\*"Compilation of 'Abd Allah b. Ahmad b. Hanbal, The Book of Marriage," from Chapters on Marriage and Divorce, p. 91-97 (coursepack).

**Assignment: FORMAL Paper, due in class Friday, February 7**

Compose a 3-page essay in response to the following question. For format, consult the instructions for formal essays on p. 2 of the syllabus, and Guidelines to Writing History Essays on A2L. Paper must be hard copy.

**Question:** In Women and Gender in Islam, Leila Ahmed suggests that Islam as an ethical religion empowers women. She writes that male authorities have interpreted Qur'an and Hadith to deprive women of their rights, and misogynist cultural forces have become a permanent part of Islamic law.

What is Ahmed's argument about women in Islam and do you agree or disagree with it? What is the place of women in Islam?

Use at least 3 class readings in your answer.

**\*\*Tutorial this week: Discuss Jan. 24 and 28 readings.\*\***

**Friday, January 31**

**Lecture and Discussion: Sufism**

**Reading due:** \*Selected Poems from Rumi, (coursepack).

\*"Going Home," "The Enraptured Ones," from Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure, p. 51-52, 44-45. (coursepack).

**Comment Paper #2. Due in Class Tuesday, February 4.** Write 1 page in response to the following question:

Sudanese-British Rania has traveled to a clinic in the United Arab Emirates from the UK, to obtain artificial reproductive technologies (IVF) and have a child.

Consider her personal journey—what factors influence her decision to seek treatment? How do you evaluate her decision to become a mother?

**Tuesday, February 4**

**Islamic Law in Classical Sources and Today:  
Assisted Reproductive Technologies and Bioethics**

**Reading due:** \*"Prologue: Rania's Reproductive Journey," from Marcia Inhorn, *Cosmopolitan Conceptions: IVF Sojourns in Global Dubai*, p. xi-xxviii (coursepack).

\*OPTIONAL: "Assisted Reproductive Technology: Islamic Perspective" from M.A. Al-Bar and H. Chamsi-Pasha, *Contemporary Bioethics: Islamic Perspective*, p. 173-186. (coursepack)

\*OPTIONAL: Ellen J. Amster, "Global IVF, Infertility, and Emergency Contraception in the Middle East and North Africa," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, p. 343-347. (coursepack)

**Due in class:** Comment paper #2

**Tutorial this week: Discuss readings in preparation for formal essay due Feb. 7.** Astará will hold tutorial to answer your questions. You can also see her in office hours.

## *The Medieval Period: Harem Life, Literature, Politics*

### **Friday, February 7                      Sufism and Women's Spirituality**

**Reading due:** \*Selections from Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, from trans. Charles Upton, *Doorkeeper of the Heart*, (coursepack).

**Due in Class: FORMAL Paper.**

### **Tuesday, February 11                      The Arabian Nights, Lecture and Discussion**

**Reading due:** \*No reading due but  
\***OPTIONAL:** Selection from A Thousand and One Nights, (coursepack), p. 47-123.

**This week, tutorial will have the in-class "Paper Grading Assignment,"** an essential part of Formal Paper #1. You will receive instructions in tutorial.

### **Friday, February 14                      Lecture: The Abbasid and Ottoman Harems**

**Reading due:** \*Start reading Fatima Mernissi, Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood, p. 1-91.

**Assignment for Tuesday, February 25: Comment Paper #3.**

Write a 1-2 page paper in response to the following question:  
What does "harem" mean to Fatima Mernissi in this memoir, and why does she spend so much time as a child thinking about it?

\*\*\*\*\*SPRING BREAK, FEBRUARY 17-23\*\*\*\*\*

**Tuesday, February 25**      **The Muslim Home in the Past and Discussion, Fatima Mernissi, Dreams of Trespass**

**Reading due:**              Fatima Mernissi, Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood, p. 1-91. (finish the reading assigned).

**Due in class: Comment paper #3**

**\*\*No Tutorial Meeting this Week \*\***

*The Modern Period: Women in Colonial and National Politics*

**Friday, February 28**      **Lecture: European Colonialism, Opportunities and Limitations**

**Reading due:**              \*No reading due.

**Tuesday, March 3**              **European Orientalism and Women, Image and Politics (Do Muslim Women Need Saving?)**

**Reading due:**              \*Edward Said, Orientalism, p. 1-9, 31-41. (coursepack).

**Tutorial this week: Discuss Orientalism (March 3 reading), and bring computer or tablet (you will work with images).**

**Friday, March 6**      **Lecture: Feminism in the Islamic World, an Overview**

**Reading due:**      \*Qasim Amin, "Introduction," *The Liberation of Women*, p. 3-34 (coursepack).

**Assignment due in Tutorial Next Week (March 12): Comment Paper #4**

Compose a 1-2 page comment in response to the following question:

The March 10 readings (Graham Brown) describe Muslim women's experiences with education and politics. Choose two women whose experiences you find striking and tell us about them. Who did you choose and why?

**Tuesday, March 10**              **Women's Education and History of Feminists—Is Education the Key to Women's Empowerment?**

**Reading due:** \*Graham-Brown, “The Spread of Education,” and “Campaigning Women,” from Images of Women, p. 192-238 (coursepack).

**\*\*Due in Tutorial:** Comment Paper #4. **Tutorial this week, discuss Graham-Brown reading and--**Contemporary Muslim women in Music exercise (bring computer or tablet, instructions will be given in tutorial).

**Friday, March 13** **Film: A Voice Like Egypt, Um Kulthum**

**Reading due:** \*Mernissi, Dreams of Trespass, 113-134.

\*OPTIONAL: Graham-Brown, “Women in the Public Eye,” from Images of Women, p. 170-191 (coursepack).

**Tuesday, March 17** **Women in Nationalist Struggles: Egypt 1914-1952**

**Reading due:** \*“Huda Sha’rawi, Founder of the Egyptian Women’s Movement,” p. 193-200, Middle Eastern Women Speak. (coursepack).

**Comment paper #5, due Tuesday, March 24:**

Write a 1-2 page response to the following:

In the novella Year of the Elephant: A Moroccan Woman’s Journey Toward Independence, Zahra the narrator observes:

“In the beginning of the Resistance, we believed the struggle would wash away all spite and malice, just as we thought that Independence would relieve our cares and heal our sores like miracle cures sold in the market.

In fact, we loaded Independence down with a burden it could not bear...”

**Answer the following question:**

What does Zahra mean by this quote? Relate this specifically to her life story and the situation she sees in Morocco after independence.

**\*\*Tutorial: Watch Film, “The Battle of Algiers.”**

**Friday, March 20** **Women in Nationalist Independence Struggles: Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco**

**Reading due:** \*Leila Abouzeid, Year of the Elephant: A Moroccan Woman’s Journey Toward Independence, p. 1-42. (be sure to read the novella only, not the introduction or short stories).



**Tuesday, March 24 Discussion: Year of the Elephant (Nationalist Revolution as Liberator, or New Patriarchy?)**

**Reading due:** Finish the novella, Leila Abouzeid, Year of the Elephant.

**Due in class: Comment Paper #5.**

**\*\*Tutorial on Thursday: Bring Friday March 27<sup>th</sup> readings, even if you haven't read them yet. We will work on them together.**

**Comment Paper #6, due Friday, March 27 in class:**

Answer the following question in 1-2 pages: Sayyid Qutb describes how to create social justice through Islam. What does he say about women, and what are the implications of his vision for women?

*Women in the Postcolonial Era—Secularism, Women's Rights, and the Islamic Revival*

**\*Everything from now to the end is needed for the take-home final exam\***

**Friday, March 27 Political Islam (the Muslim Brothers) and Women**

**Reading due:** \*Sayyid Qutb, Social Justice in Islam, p. 51-53, 73-78, 261-263, 303-313 (coursepack).

\*An Islamic Activist: Zaynab al-Ghazali," in Fernea, Women and the Family in the Middle East, p. 233-254, (coursepack).

**Due in class: Comment Paper #6.**

**Tuesday, March 31 The Arab Spring Revolutions (2011) and Women**

\*No reading due but it is recommended to start Persepolis.

**\*In Tutorial watch:** "A Revolution in Four Seasons." This is about the Arab Spring in Tunisia and its aftermath. (you need this film for the final comment assignment).

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1ld2yS0U58&fbclid=IwAR1hKakgiu4iFiXbsIUN\\_bIF\\_XH2llRIhrs\\_r8C\\_vYAEJ-cWHeFQkjIMRc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1ld2yS0U58&fbclid=IwAR1hKakgiu4iFiXbsIUN_bIF_XH2llRIhrs_r8C_vYAEJ-cWHeFQkjIMRc)

**Friday, April 3 A (Brief) History of Modern Iran**

Reading due: \*Marjane Satrapi, Persepolis (read as much as you can)

**Tuesday April 7 Conclusion, *Persepolis*, and final take-home exam**

**Final Exam Comment (4 pages), due April 16, submitted to A2L. You will receive the question on April 7.**

This is final reflection essay, and engagement with specifics from the film and *Persepolis* will make for a stronger final. The final exam must be submitted digitally through A2L by 11:59 PM on April 16.

Have a great summer!

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**University and Departmental Policies**

Staff in the office of the Department of Religious Studies will not date-stamp or receive papers and other assignments.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

**AVENUE TO LEARN**

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

**ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca). For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

### **POLICY FOR MODIFYING A COURSE**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check her/his McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

### **E-MAIL COMMUNICATION POLICY**

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

### **MCMASTER STUDENT ABSENCE FORM**

The McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF) <http://www.mcmaster.ca/msaf/> is a self-reporting tool for Undergraduate Students to report MEDICAL absences that last up to 3 days and provides the ability to request accommodation for any missed academic work (less than 25% of course grade). Please note, this tool cannot be used during any final examination period. You may submit a maximum of ONE MSAF request per term. It is your responsibility to follow up with your instructor immediately regarding the nature of the accommodation. If you are absent more than 3 days, exceed one request per term, are absent for a reason other than medical, or have missed work worth 25% or more of the final grade, you must visit your Faculty Office. You may be required to provide supporting documentation.

### **ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)**

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow procedures set out in the RISO policy. Students requiring a RISO accommodation should submit their request to their Faculty Office normally within 10 working days of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.