

**REL 465/626:
Muslim Women:
Behind and Beyond the Politics of the Veil**



Professor: Tazim R. Kassam
Office Hrs: Wed 1:00-2:00 pm
Or by appointment

Class Time: Mon 3.45-6.30 pm
Classroom: Smith Hall 227
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Muslim women are typically identified with the veil and Islam, their religion, as the cause of their oppression. What is the basis of this stereotype? Beginning with the sacred texts of Islam we will pursue this question by examining constructions of gender, male and female, and study how women's status, place and roles have been scripted in religious, legal and theological works including the Qur'an and Hadith. We will also examine how Muslim women are challenging patriarchal structures of authority through their own scholarship, writings, and activism while at the same time critiquing Western feminism.

As Muslims spread to various parts of the world, culturally specific norms and practices of gender evolved. Through anthropological studies of Muslim women in different contemporary contexts, we will discuss how their experiences and expectations have been shaped by their cultural, historical, political, geographical and economic settings and in turn, how Muslim women themselves are questioning and reshaping them. We will analyse the intersection of religion and politics in a globalized world, and the many ways that the very bodies of Muslim women have become signifiers of conflict between Western and Islamic values.

The central goal of the course is to position yourselves in such a way that the knowledge, skills and understanding gained through the class are made meaningful beyond the classroom and prepare you to work productively within the complex, inter-twined, and globalized world in which we live. To do so requires intelligence, imagination, engagement and industry.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- T.J.Winter and John A.Williams, **Understanding Islam and the Muslims** (Fons Vitae: 1999).
- Tamam Kahn, **Untold: A History of the Wives of Prophet Muhammad** (Monkfish Book Publishing: 2010).
- Fatima Mernissi, **The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam** (Basic Books: 1992)
- Amina Wadud, **Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective** (Oxford University Press: 1999).
- Arlene Elow Macleod, **Accommodating Protest: Working women, the New Veiling and Change in Cairo** (Columbia University Press: 1993).
- Nilufer Gole, **Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling** (University of Michigan Press: 1997).
- Sadaf Ahmad, **Transforming Faith: The Story of Al-huda and Islamic Revivalism Among Urban Pakistani Women** (Syracuse University Press: 2009).
- Marnia Lazreg, **Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women** (Princeton University Press: 2011).
- Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, **In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India** (Indiana University Press: 2009).
- Any additional readings on the syllabus are available on Blackboard (BB).

EVALUATION**Summary:**

Attendance and Class Discussion	25%
Outlines and Reflection Papers	50%
Book Review / Essay and Oral Report	25%

Course evaluation will be based on regular attendance and active participation in class discussions (25%); weekly outlines and reflection papers (50%); and a final book review and oral report (25%).

Attendance Policy: Attendance is mandatory. This course meets only 14 times over the semester and each session will cover a significant amount of material. Absences will only be excused in documented cases of emergency or illness. Each absence will decrease the grade by 3%.

Note to Graduate Students: *For your final project, you must write an original, analytical and well-documented research paper on a topic related to the course. Please see me before September 15th with a list of topics you are interested in together with a short annotated bibliography.*

Deadlines: Extensions for Blackboard assignments and final papers may be allowed in unique circumstances, however, they will not be eligible for full marks.

COURSE EVALUATION:

Summary:

Attendance and Discussion	25%
Outlines and Reflection Papers	50%
Book Review/Essay & Oral Report	25%

Attendance and Discussion**25%**

Attendance is mandatory. As this seminar meets only once a week, even one absence means you have missed quite a lot of material. Except for medical or family emergencies verified by a note from your doctor or advisor, *every class missed will incur a penalty of minus 3%*. This can make a big difference if your final grade is hovering between an A- and B+. In addition, you are expected to speak up at least once during each seminar. Participation is essential to the success of the class and will be evaluated based on its frequency, quality and contribution.

Weekly Outlines and Reflection Papers**50%**

You are required to do all the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss them in sufficient detail. To make it easier for you and to ensure that you keep up with the required readings, you will work collaboratively with another student. It will help you to focus, reflect upon and analyze their content, and be better prepared for class discussion.

Accordingly, every week you will *partner with another student* to decide the section that each of you will be responsible for outlining. (You must partner with different students each week.) After doing your part of the assigned reading you must post a reasonably detailed outline of it on Blackboard by **Thursday midnight**. Your outline must be done in such a way that your partner will be able to benefit from it. After submitting the outline, print your partner's outline and use it to help you do the rest of the reading. After making sure you have grasped the central issues and know what content the readings cover, write a reflection paper and post it on Blackboard by **Sunday 5.00 pm**. Further details on outlines and reflection papers are given below and will also be discussed in class.

Important: *You must bring a printout of your outlines and reflection papers to class.*

The outline and reflection paper counts for a total of 4%. ***They must be posted on time.*** Except when permission is given, late posts will not get any marks.

Outline the reading in any way that you are familiar with but keep in mind the following: it should (a) show the overall structure; (b) capture 2-3 key issues; (c) index basic content; and (d) highlight sections that are most important. The length should be between 2-3 pages. Keep in mind two important goals: outline in order to aid your own learning and comprehension; and to give your reading partner a good idea of the section you have read so that s/he can get through the reading quickly.

The Reflection Paper must include the following: (a) A brief synopsis: e.g. "I recommend this reading because it..." (~100 words); (b) A discussion of a key concept, object, image, paragraph, place, problem, etc *that intrigues you*. Find a specific sentence (or two) that captures it and specify the page number (~250 words); (c) One or two questions related to the reading that you feel the class must discuss and why (2-3 sentences). As the semester progresses, make connections to the readings you have already done.

Book Review Essay and Oral Report 25%

For your final project, you will write a detailed review essay of one of the books listed below and present an oral report. Most of the books have been published in the last decade and represent the latest scholarship on gender in Islam. Some cover topics on gender that we have not been able to cover in the course. With the background you have acquired, you will be better able to appreciate and critique them.

The criteria for your review essay are as follows. It should include

- a substantial description of the book's content;
- analysis of the author's thesis or principal arguments;
- understanding of his/her theoretical position and/or method of approach;
- assessment of the evidence that he/she presents in support;
- and discussion of how it relates to the other readings in the course.

The analysis must be both constructive and evaluative; that is, it must present both the strengths and weaknesses of the study. Your review essay *must engage all or most of the texts we have read in the course*. That is, your analysis and assessment must draw upon the scholarship and research that you have already studied, and you must compare, contrast, and illuminate the key issues with this background in mind.

The review essay must be presented as a formal piece of writing and include such elements as title page, proper references and citations, footnotes, bibliography etc. Note: if you make use of any additional materials including book reviews, you must cite them and include them in your bibliography. Your analysis, however, *must reflect your own thinking*. It should not mimic the evaluation or assessment of any other scholars except to note agreement or otherwise.

Each student will pick a different book to review. Take some time to research the books and post your choice on Blackboard under "Book Review" on a first come first serve basis.

1. Saba Mahmood, The Politics of Piety (Princeton: 2005).
2. Leila Ahmed, A Quiet Revolution (Yale: 2011)
3. Margot Badran, Feminism in Islam (Oneworld: 2009).
4. Kecia Ali, Sexual Ethics and Islam (Oneworld: 2006)
5. Sadiyya Shaikh, Sufi Narratives of Intimacy (UNC Press: 2012)
6. Katherine Bullock, Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil (IIST: 2002)
7. Sherine Hafez, An Islam of Her Own (New York Univ Press: 2011)
8. Madawi al-Rasheed, A Most Masculine State (Cambridge Univ. Press: 2013)
9. Asma Barlas, Believing Women in Islam (University of Texas Press 2002)
10. John Bowen, Why the French Don't Like Headscarves (Princeton: 2007)
11. Elora Shehabuddin, Reshaping the Holy (Columbia University Press: 2008)
12. Clinton Bennett, Muslim Women of Power (Continuum: 2010)
13. Karen G. Ruffle Gender, Sainthood and Everyday Practice (UNC Press: 2011)
14. Lila Abu-Lughod, Remaking Women (Princeton: 1998)
15. Fereshteh Nourale-Simone, On Shifting Ground (Feminist Press: 2005)
16. Judith Tucker, Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law (Cambridge: 2008)
17. Maria Ebrahimji & Zahra Suratwala, I Speak for Myself (White Cloud Press: 2011)
18. Anne Roald, Women in Islam: The Western Experience (Routledge: 2001)
19. Annemarie Schimmel, My Soul is a Woman (Continuum: 2003)
20. Amina Wadud, Inside the Gender Jihad (Oneworld: 2006)

Classroom Etiquette:

You are encouraged to bring your laptops, iPads, and Tablets to class. However, you may only use them with permission for taking notes or when instructed by the professor for doing group-work and other exercises. Cell phones must be turned off. If you are caught whispering, texting, twittering, e-mailing and surfing you will be asked to stand up for two minutes. :)

Academic Integrity:

Syracuse University believes that promoting academic honesty is the responsibility of everyone in the Syracuse University community. We expect all students enrolled in Syracuse University programs to adhere to standards of academic integrity. All cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the relevant Dean in the home College or School for that given course. Penalties will be dependent upon the seriousness of the infraction, and can be appealed to the relevant College/School Academic Integrity Committee. To learn more: <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

My version: Essentially, plagiarism is a combination of stealing and lying. Don't do it. The penalty for plagiarism is an F grade. It's simple: don't copy and paste, don't quote or paraphrase without giving full credit. Familiarize yourself with what it means practically speaking. Visit the Writing Center: <http://wc.syr.edu/>.

Disability:

Syracuse University is committed to full compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Our community values diversity and seeks to promote meaningful access to educational opportunities for all students. Students seeking disability-related services must contact the Office of Disability Services at Syracuse University, Room 309, 804 University Avenue, Syracuse, New York 13244-2330 for an authorization letter.

My version: I would like to support you in your learning and provide a positive learning environment. If you have a disability, it is important for you to register with the Office of Disability Services (315-443-4498). Please submit an ODS letter so that you can be provided with appropriate accommodations.

Religious Observances:

Students who cannot submit assignments, meet deadlines or take tests due to religious holidays are required to notify the professor *within two weeks* of the beginning of the semester. Please provide this request to be excused in writing so that any necessary arrangements can be made. Requests made after the two-week deadline will not be accommodated.

Blackboard & SU's Library:

Students are expected to know how to use Blackboard. Please take a tutorial to familiarize yourself with its features. Visit Syracuse University's Library home page and explore its collection, electronic databases, periodicals etc. Check the subject guides for [Religion and Middle Eastern Studies](#). To learn more, go to: <http://researchguides.library.syr.edu/>. There is an ever-expanding range of publications, online materials, news items on Islam and Gender. In addition to the library databases, please begin to explore the Internet to locate credible websites. If you find additional sites with videos, image banks, links, exhibitions, and other relevant materials, please share them in the Resources folder.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

PLEASE NOTE: This is a tentative listing of readings and topics. The schedule may be adjusted and changes will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard. There is no class on Labor Day but you are required to do the readings and assignments for Wk 2. If any reading listed below as BB is not on Blackboard, read whatever is posted but let me know.

Wk 1 / Aug 26 Introduction to Course

- Azim Nanji, "Islam" in **The Religious World: Communities of Faith** (MacMillan) 311-329. BB
- Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Need Saving?" in **American Anthropology** 104 (3) 783-7. BB
- Tazim Kassam, Response to Margaret Miles "Feminist Religious History" in **Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion**, Spring 2006, 22 (1) 59-67. BB
- T.J. Winter and John A. Williams, **Understanding Islam and the Muslims** (Fons Vitae: 1999).

Wk 2 / Sept 2 Problematizing the Veil: The Trouble with Patriarchy

- Schmidt, A. J. "Ch 1 "Culture: The Hidden Dimension" in **Veiled and Silenced: How Culture Shaped Sexist Theology** (Mercer University Press: 1989) 1-18. BB
- El Guindi, "Preface," "Introduction," "The Veil in Comparative Tradition" in **Veil Modesty, Privacy and Resistance** xi-22. BB
- Farzaneh Milani, "The Concept of Veiling" in **Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers** (Syracuse University Press: 1992) 19-45. BB
- Katherine Bullock, "Multiple Meanings of Hijab" in **Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes** (Vine House Distribution: 2007) 85-121. BB

Wk 3 / Sept 9 The Gaze: Colonialism, Orientalism, and Feminism

- Minou Reeves, "Fantasies of Sensuality and Cruelty" in **Muhammad in Europe** (New York University Press: 2000) 203-240. BB
- Fadwa El Guindi, Ch 3: "Ideological Roots to Ethnocentrism: Harem - Fact or Fantasy" in **Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance** (Berg Publishers: 2003) 23-46. BB
- Hoda Hoodfar "The Veil in their Mind and on Our Heads" **Women, Gender and Religion** ed. E. Castelli, (Palgrave: 2001) 307-321. BB
- Said's "Orientalism" (definition of terms) 1-2. BB
- Rassam, Amal & Ross Chambers, "Comment on Orientalism: Two Reviews," **Comparative Studies in Society & History**, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Oct 1980), 505-508. BB
- Rita Gross, "Defining Feminism, Religion, and the Study of Religion", in **Feminism & Religion** (Beacon Press: 1996) 16-28. BB

Wk 4 / Sept 16	Muhammad is Chosen God's Messenger: <i>Rasul Allah</i>
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- Colin Turner, Ch 1 "The Messenger," **Islam: the Basics** (Routledge: 2011) 1-39. BB
- Tamam Kahn, **Untold: A History of the Wives of Prophet Muhammad** (Monkfish Book Publishing: 2010) 1-48.
- Fatima Mernissi, "Introduction," Ch 2, 3, 4 in **The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam** (Basic Books: 1992) 1-11, 25-81.

Wk 5 / Sept 23	Muhammad is Challenged: Perils of Prophethood
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- Fatima Mernissi, Part II "Medina in Revolution: The Three Fateful Years" in **The Veil and the Male Elite** 85-195.
- Tamam Kahn, **Untold** 49-100.
- Leila Ahmed, "Early Islam and the Position of Women: The Problem of Interpretation" in **Women in Middle Eastern History** ed. Nikkie Keddy & Beth Baron (Yale: 1993) pp. 58-73. BB

Wk 6 / Sept 30	Receiving the Qur'an: God Speaks to both Men <i>and</i> Women
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- Colin Turner, Ch 2 "The Message," **Islam** 41-70.
- Amina Wadud, **Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective** (Oxford University Press: 1999) ix - 43.
- Barlas, Asma, Ch 1 "The Qur'an and Muslim Women: Reading Patriarchy, Reading Liberation" in **Believing Women in Islam** (University of Texas Press 2002) xi - 30.

Wk 7 / Oct 7	Interpreting the Qur'an: Gender Justice in God's Message
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- Amina Wadud, **Qur'an and Woman** 44-105.
- Roald "Feminist Reinterpretation of Islamic Sources" in **Women and Islamization** ed. K. Ask and M. Tjomsland (New York: Berg, 1998) pp 11-25.
- Hassan, R, "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam" in **After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions** edited by P. Cooley, W. R. Eakin and J. B. (Orbis Books: New York, 1991) pp. 39-64. BB

Wk 8 / Oct 14	A Woman's Voice: Sacred Words that Heal
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- Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, **In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India** (Indiana University Press: 2009) pp. 1-167.

Wk 9 / Oct 21 Veiling as Protest: Women and the Workforce

- Arlene Elow Macleod, **Accommodating Protest: Working women, the New Veiling and Change in Cairo** (Columbia University Press: 1993).

Wk 10 / Oct 28 Women's Body: Modernization vs. Islamization

- Nilufer Gole, **Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling** (University of Michigan Press: 1997).

Wk 11 / Nov 4 Purity and Piety: Women Islamizing Women

- Sadaf Ahmad, **Transforming Faith: The Story of Al-huda and Islamic Revivalism Among Urban Pakistani Women** (Syracuse University Press: 2009).

Wk 12 / Nov 11 Contestations over the Veil: Liberation or Oppression

- Marnia Lazreg, **Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women** (Princeton University Press: 2011).

Wk 13 / Nov 18 Islamic Feminism: Gender Justice or Oxymoron?

- Jasmine Zine, "Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: The Politics of Muslim Women's Feminist Engagement" in **Muslim World Journal of Human Rights** 3 (2006): 1, Article 5, 1-26.
- Valentine Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Towards a Resolution of the Debate" in **Gender, Politics, and Islam** Therese Saliba, Carolyn Allen, Judith A Howard eds. (University of Chicago Press: 2002) 15-51.
- Roxanne D. Marcotte, "Muslim Women's Scholarship and the New Gender Jihad" in **Women and Islam** ed. Zayn Kassam (Praeger: 2010) 131-162.
- Margot Badran, 2002. "Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?" *Al-Abram Weekly*, 17 Jan. 2002.

Wk 14 / Nov 25 Thanksgiving Break**Wk 15 / Dec 2 Oral Report & Review Essays Due**

