Women, Gender, and Islam
CAS RN 435, GRS RN 735, STH TX 836
Prof. Kecia Ali
Spring 2013

Mondays 3-6 p.m., Religion Department, 145 Bay State Rd. #404
Office hours: Monday 1:30-3 p.m. and Wednesdays 11-12:30 (145 Bay State Rd., #402)
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Email is the best way to reach me; I check it daily. For significant substantive queries, plan to come to office hours (first-come, first served) or make an appointment by email to meet at another time.

Women and gender are crucial to understanding the political, social, economic and intellectual life of Muslim communities from seventh-century Arabia to the present-day United States. This course will cover significant moments in the religious and intellectual history of Muslim societies and explore several modern cases. Through each, we will be asking several questions, including: How does gender structure authority within social, religious, and family domains? How does the tension between egalitarian and hierarchical ideals play out? What, if anything, is specifically “Islamic” about the situations under discussion? And how have scholars, both Western and non-Western, Muslim and non-Muslim, approached the study of these topics? Topics include Qur’anic revelations concerning women; the early life of the Muslim community; gendered ideals in the Sunni/Shi’i debates and conflicts over legitimate authority in the wake of Muhammad’s death; the “formation of the core discourses of Islam,” especially jurisprudence and Qur’an commentary; contradictory portraits of “Muslim women’s status” in struggles over colonialism and nationalism in Egypt. Several sessions will be devoted to questions surrounding feminism and equality, looking at women’s exegesis, women’s ritual practice, and female religious movements in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. We will read about Islamic masculinities and look at Islam in the U.S., addressing racial as well as gendered hierarchies. Throughout, we will address key theoretical questions: Are Western feminist theories are adequate to account for the variety of gendered experiences of life and religion? Are the presuppositions of much scholarship – that egalitarianism is desirable, that resistance to patriarchy is praiseworthy – relevant to (all) Muslim women’s lives? We will also look at the variety of methodological frameworks that have been used to approach Muslim women’s (and men’s) lives.
At the end of the semester, you will be capable of critically analyzing media and scholarly discussions of Muslim women and gender in Islam. You will have an understanding of the complex ways in which religious texts approach key issues surrounding women’s and men’s rights, roles, and responsibilities, and the diversity of perspectives that interpreters have brought to these questions through Muslim history. You will also have a framework for approaching the study of women in other religious traditions.

**Course Requirements and Grading:**

*There are four components to this course’s requirements: Class attendance and participation (25%), weekly response papers (20%), a book review essay (15%), and a research paper (40%).*

1) **Class attendance and participation** are vital in a seminar setting, where much learning takes place in conversation with others. It is necessary that you attend each class session, having read the assigned text and being prepared to discuss it. Either individually or in pairs, depending on the number of students enrolled, you will also be required to prepare discussion questions for one week of class and distribute them by Friday evening prior to class via email. In our final meeting, you will make a presentation on your research project. Course participation will account for 25% of your grade, with 5% (of your total grade) based on your project presentation.

2) **Weekly response papers, one single-spaced page, on that week’s assigned reading.** These should not just be summaries of the reading. They should contain a brief (no more than one-third page) summary of the essential arguments of the reading but also raise key questions, comparative issues, and address your reflections on the text. They should be submitted to Blackboard’s dropbox the night before class at the latest (so, except for BU Mondays, 11:59 p.m. Sunday) so that I can read them before class time. LATE RESPONSES WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED FOR CREDIT. If you use a Macintosh computer, please submit your documents in PDF format; if you use a PC, either Word or PDF is fine. Together, these responses will account for 20% of your grade.

3) **A critical review, 5-6 pages long (7-8 for graduate students), of a scholarly book** related to the course topic. More specific guidelines appear at the end of this syllabus. Students must submit the title of the book to be reviewed for approval by 2/19, but are encouraged to do so earlier, particularly if the book must be recalled or obtained outside of the BU library. The paper is due in hard copy at the beginning of class on 3/4. This paper will account for 15% of your grade.

4) **An independent research paper, 15-20 pages (undergraduates) or 25 pages (graduate students)** on a topic selected in consultation with me. Topics are to be selected by 3/18, though earlier selection is strongly encouraged; an outline is due on 4/18. Fuller guidelines appear at the end of this syllabus. The paper is due in hard copy in my box by 5 p.m. on Friday 5/3. The research paper, including all preparatory work, will be worth 40% of the final grade.
Policy on Late Work and Incompletes:

Late work will be penalized up to one complete letter grade for each day overdue (including weekends and holidays). As noted above, late weekly response papers will not be accepted for credit. Paper extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances, and never after the original deadline has passed. Students who anticipate difficulty in meeting deadlines should contact me as far in advance of the due date as possible. A course grade of incomplete will only be granted in cases of documented medical emergency or for an equally compelling reason.

Disabilities:

In accordance with University policy (see http://www.bu.edu/disability/policies/index.html), a student who requires accommodation for a documented disability of any type should see me immediately to discuss appropriate modifications to course requirements.

Academic Integrity:

Every student is expected to be familiar with and comply with the BU policy on academic integrity, which can be found at: http://www.bu.edu/cas/undergraduate/conductcode.html. I will refer any suspected case of academic misconduct to the Dean’s Office. Any assignment judged, after a hearing by the Academic Conduct panel, to be plagiarized will receive a grade of “0.” We will discuss plagiarism and independent work in class. Helpful resources about proper use of sources can be found many places online. The materials available at Dartmouth College’s page on source usage (http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sources/contents.html), especially “What is plagiarism?” (http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sources/about/what.html), are a good place to begin. For guidance as to how best to use sources during your writing, see the Harvard University guide to “Writing with Sources” (http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources/) and the Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) guide to “Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing” (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_quotprsum.html). Both will be especially helpful during the writing of your research papers.

Course Texts:

Books are available for purchase at the bookstore. Copies are also on reserve at Mugar library. Articles are available on Blackboard.

Although I have made an effort to include only books available in paperback for a reasonable price, the total cost of these texts may be prohibitive. I urge you to seek out used editions (several of these titles should be widely available), to purchase them from alternate sources, or to use library reserves (but be sure to take good notes).


8. Selected articles on pious Muslim women’s activism - Blackboard


Course sessions

1. M 1/28 Introduction; *The Light in Her Eyes*
2. M 2/4 Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*
3. M 2/11 Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*
4. W 2/20 Shatzmiller, *Her Day in Court*
5. M 2/25 Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*
6. M 3/4 Kholoussy, *For Better, for Worse*
   Book review due
7. M 3/18 Peletz, *An Islamic Modern*
   Research topic and preliminary bibliography due
9. M 4/1 *Selected articles: Islamist women*
10. M 4/8 Inhorn, *New Arab Man*
11. Th 4/18 Hammer, *American Muslim Women*
12. M 4/22 Ali, *Women in Muslim Religions* (Manuscript to be distributed in class)
   Research paper outlines due
13. M 4/29 Research presentations; wrap-up
14. F 5/3 Research papers due 5 p.m., Prof. Ali’s box, 2nd floor Religion Dep’t
Critical book review guidelines

The ability to read critically is perhaps the most important skill for a student and scholar, not to mention an educated citizen. The aim of this assignment is to sharpen your analytical reading skills and provide you with the tools necessary for assessing sources for perspective, thoroughness, use of evidence, and coherence of argument.

Your book review should be 5-6 double-spaced pages long (7-8 for graduate students), is worth 15% of your grade, and is due at the beginning of class on 3/4. Book titles must be submitted for approval by 2/19. By the time you have submitted a title, you should have already have the book in hand or determined that you will be able to obtain it rapidly. Should you need to change titles for some reason, let me know immediately.

Your review should contain the following:

- **Complete bibliographical information on the book:** author(s), title, publisher, and place and date of publication.

- **Where available, a brief summary of the author's background and qualifications for writing the book.** It may be helpful to do a library database search to see if the author has written other related books, or an internet search for information such as institutional affiliation. This should usually be a few sentences at most.

- **A summary of the contents of the book.** A review should not be primarily a summary; the summary’s purpose is to preview the contents sufficiently that someone who has not read the book will be able to understand your analysis and critique.

- **Discussion of the theoretical framework, if any, used by the author to explain the phenomenon s/he discusses.** What biases does the author have (e.g., assumptions about Islam/Muslims/Islamic law/the authorship of the Qur'an and prophethood of Muhammad/women's "roles") that color her/his analysis of the topic at hand? What effect do these presumptions have on the work?

- **A description of the intended audience for the book.** Is it aimed at academics, students, the general public, Muslims living in the West, etc.? How does this affect the style, tone, and other aspects of the work?

- **An assessment of the evidence used by the author.** Does s/he rely on other secondary sources or do original research? With published data or manuscript or other archival evidence? What methods does s/he use - participant observation, textual analysis, etc.? What language skills have been used in the course of the research? Would the study have been different if the author were more qualified to read materials in Arabic, for example?

- **An assessment of the author's arguments.** What points is s/he trying to make? Are they made convincingly? Does the evidence support the arguments or suggest other conclusions? Does
the author use the evidence to its best advantage? What did you accept on the basis of this book? What were you unwilling to accept and why?

- *Where appropriate, a comparison of this book with other works on the subject.* Does it agree with other things you've read on the topic of women and gender in Islamic thought and Muslim societies Does it disagree? How?

**Notes:**

1) These guidelines are drafted with the review of secondary sources in mind. If you intend to review a primary text for this assignment, which may be helpful for your research paper, please see me to discuss your approach. For instance, more detailed author information may be relevant in such a case.

2) You need not keep these elements in the same order I have them here.

3) Any quotations from the reviewed book must be put in quotation marks. Instead of footnoting, the relevant page numbers may simply be included in parentheses - e.g., (35). Take care to also include page numbers after references to particular arguments or points made by the author, even if you do not actually quote the text. If you refer to other works in the body of your paper, be sure to give complete citations, either in footnotes or in parenthetical citation, with a list of cited works at the end.

4) Reviews of other books, such as those published in academic journals, may be consulted to get a sense of how scholars generally approach the review process. Do not, however, read other reviews of the work you have chosen for your essay.

5) Keep in mind the syllabus statements governing late work and academic integrity.

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Research paper guidelines

You will be writing original research papers of 15-20 pages (undergraduates) or 25 pages (graduate students) on a topic selected in consultation with me. This paper, including all preparatory work, will be worth 40% of your final grade (and your presentation on it, in our final session, will be worth 5% of your grade, as part of your class participation). See me as early as possible if you would like to combine work on this paper with a thesis or other ongoing project. Topics are to be selected by 3/18, though earlier selection is strongly encouraged; an outline is due on 4/22; and the final paper will be due 5/3.

As you work on your paper, keep in mind proper procedures for note-taking, quotation, and attribution of information using sources; the lessons learned about critical evaluation of secondary sources from your book review; and BU’s policy on academic integrity. If you have any questions about what constitutes independent work, please don’t hesitate to ask.

This assignment has four stages:

1. A topic sentence and a preliminary bibliography of secondary sources, due 3/18. It is to your advantage to begin to think about a topic and locate materials well in advance of this date, especially if they must be recalled or requested from another library. See me during office hours or by appointment to discuss your topic. I will gladly accept this portion of your project early and return it with comments so that you can proceed.

2. An outline is due 4/22. This can be either in bullet form or a series of topic sentences. Should show the main subsections of your paper, and outline your argument, so far as you have developed it. What are you attempting to show, and what evidence have you marshaled in support of your position? The more detailed your outline is, the more effectively you will be able to complete your rough draft and, eventually, your final paper. Again, you may submit this early.

3. Optional: I am willing to look at rough drafts, if they are substantially complete by the last week of April; contact me if you would like to arrange this. I also encourage you to utilize the resources of the university’s writing center to help you polish your work.

4. A printout of the final paper is due in my box in the Religion building by 5 p.m. on Friday 5/3. (Please note that the building is locked at 5 p.m. and won’t be open again until Monday morning; you may want to review the syllabus policy on late work.) Paper must cite all sources in a recognized and consistent format and include a bibliography.

If you will be leaving campus before the paper is due, you must either complete and submit your paper before departure or make arrangements to get a printed copy in by the deadline. Please do not ask for exceptions to this rule, which exists so that department resources are not strained by printing thousands of pages of student work each term.

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