

# **Gender Politics in the Arab World**

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## **Course Description**

The topic of ‘women in the Middle East’ is probably one of the most prevalent themes in popular culture. The image of Arab women as the victims of Arab men is only one of many images to which most people have become accustomed through the media. Meanwhile, there is widespread ignorance in the West concerning the lives, struggles and achievements of Muslim/Arab women. This course examines what this obsession with Arab/Muslim women tells us about current politics and power relations. We also study how the images of Arab/Muslim women are used to justify certain policies and maintain certain discourses and truths not only about these Arab/Muslim women, but also about other women: Western women.

Thus this course has three components: theoretical, historical, and political. During the seminars students will learn about Middle Eastern history in relation to gender. We will cover early Islamic, Ottoman, colonial and recent histories. In addition, students will study the relationship between national and Islamist movements and gender. Furthermore, we will examine key current issues. A major component of the seminar will be theoretical. One of the main aims of this course is to enable students to use theories to understand current trends in politics. The seminar will focus on the postcolonial theories of Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. In addition, Foucault’s concept of discourse and power/knowledge, as well as Gramsci’s concept of hegemony will be briefly introduced. In addition standpoint feminism, feminist ethics, postmodern and postcolonial feminist critique will be examined. These theories will help students pay attention to power relations not only between genders, but also in analyzing how gender functions in different knowledge/power structures and discourses.

## **Learning Objectives**

The aim of this class is 1) to introduce students to some of the key debates in the field of Middle Eastern Gender and Women’s Studies, 2) to give an overview of the role of gender relations and women in Islamic and modern Middle Eastern history, 3) to teach students to become aware of their own subject positions, and 4) to introduce them to some theoretical approaches from feminist and postcolonial theories to allow them to engage in critical analysis.

## **Course Prerequisites**

There are no prerequisites for this course, other than the ability to write clear research papers and finish the weekly reading load.

## **Methods of Instruction**

This course is taught primarily through seminars which are based on class discussions and short lectures to explain some of the more complicated theoretical concepts. We will also have a couple of guest lecturers. In addition, some of the reading material will be supplemented with films.

### **Assessment and Final Grade**

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|---|-----|
| 1. Reading and Self-Reflection Journal: | 15% |
| 2. Participation and Attendance:        | 10% |
| 3. Midterm paper:                       | 25% |
| 4. Final Paper presentation:            | 10% |
| 5. Final Paper:                         | 40% |

### **Course Requirements**

You are expected to read all the required readings before each class. Please also watch all of the films. Not all the reading material is in your course packet. Make sure that you know ahead of time which reading material you are responsible to find yourself.

All papers and assignments you submit should have a title, be double-spaced, and include endnotes/footnotes and a bibliography. Remember to only include in the bibliography anything you have cited in the text. In addition, make sure that you provide citation for any piece of information you give me or any opinion which is not your own. Maps, tables, diagrams, and quotations must be referenced properly.

Please both email me a copy of any assignment that you have as well as hand in a hardcopy to the department by noon of the due date. The hardcopies will stay at the department office as proof that you have submitted your paper. **You need to submit both the electronic and paper copy.**

5% of your grade will be deducted for each day that the paper is late without a valid excuse (providing a supporting statement from the department). Any paper submitted after a week will only qualify for 50% of the grade. Any paper submitted more than 10 days after the due date will not be marked and will automatically be given a zero.

**MAKE SURE THAT YOU READ THE REQUIREMENTS FOR EACH ASSIGNMENT CAREFULLY BEFORE COMPLETING THE ASSIGNMENT.**

### **EVALUATION BREAKDOWN**

***Reading and Self-Reflection Journal (15%)***

The purpose of the reading and self-reflection journal is twofold. On the one hand, it is an exercise in developing your critical understanding and analysis of the texts covered. On the other hand, the journal aims to help you raise self-awareness of your subject position in relation to your reading and stay in Jordan. Thus this journal will help you develop the skills necessary to become a self-reflexive researcher.

In this journal I would like you to reflect on –at least- one of your readings per class. Briefly (in one or two sentences) describe the author’s main argument, or one argument that you found especially intriguing, interesting or problematic. Then discuss your reaction to the reading. Do you agree with the author? How does the argument you are examining make you feel? Why do you think you reacted this way? Have you ever encountered anything similar? Does your personal experience confirm or contradict what the author argues? You might also want to reflect on an event that happened outside class, which touches upon one of the themes that we discussed in class. While this is not a diary, one of the main aims of the journal is to connect the reading to your personal life, both in your home country and in Jordan. The journal is thus a critical reflection both on the reading, but also on yourself in relation to the reading.

Please make sure that you send me all your journal entries in one word document.

After you write your final journal entry please add an additional section of no more than 500 words in which you describe your journey throughout the semester (until this point) and reflect on the journal you have written.

***Midterm Paper: 1,500-2,500 words (25%)***

For your midterm answer the question listed under midterm paper below. It is not enough to only cite the literature discussed during our seminars. Please draw on all the readings covered in class in addition to other relevant literature on the subject. You will be marked on your ability to demonstrate understanding of the relevant literature, the various readings, connecting these readings to relevant theories, having a clear argument, structure and bibliography. In addition, since you will be discussing the concept of Orientalism, it is necessary that you demonstrate a clear understanding of the term. Please provide a section in which you clearly define and discuss the concept based on re-reading the work of Said and his critiques and not just in class discussion. Then provide a thorough review of a theme of your choosing discussed in the media. Again, make sure you cite all your media sources.

***Final Paper Presentations (10%)***

80% of this grade will be based on your 15 minute presentation and 20% on your interaction and discussion of your fellow student presentations. Try to provide constructive criticism to your class mates. Think about what might strengthen the paper? What are the major weaknesses in the presentation that your classmate should be careful to avoid? What could she/he add? Is her structure clear?

In your presentations pay attention to: the way you present (clarity of structure, voice projection, props used), the content: research question, key argument, clear structure and conclusion. Try to be both creative in your presentation, as well as clear.

You will also be evaluated on the familiarity you have with the topic. While the presentation is a time for you to get feedback on your final paper, you are expected to have conducted substantial research on the topic for this presentation. Just like in any research paper, you will be graded on your ability to demonstrate that you know the basic debates on your topic and that you have a clear argument.

The aim of the research presentations is to strengthen your presentation skills, and to get feedback on your final paper to help you improve your paper.

***Final Paper: 3,500-4,500 words (40%)***

For this paper, please answer one of the questions in the list below. In your paper clearly show what the main research question is which you are answering. Underline your basic argument, and how you are going to make your argument (the method you are using). In addition, clearly outline the structure of your paper in your introduction and your conclusion. Your ability to incorporate the feedback given to you on your presentation by fellow students and the instructor will also be marked. The requirements for the final paper will be discussed in more detail in class.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to email me. I am looking forward to working with you this semester.

**PAPER QUESTIONS**

**Mid-term paper**

- Analyze the media coverage of a current issue concerning the Middle East and gender in light of Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. What is Orientalism? Do you think Orientalism is still a relevant criterion of analysis? What does the existence or absence of Orientalism tell us about the international politics and the use of gender stereotypes? Try and find any alternative news coverage of this subject? Are there any voices/accounts that are completely missing? Which voices are absent? Why are they omitted? What do these silences tell us?

**Final Research Paper Questions**

*Please choose one of the following questions and answer it for your final paper*

- What groups of women have been absent from recent debates on women in the Middle East? What does this absence signify?
- “Colonialist [neo-colonial and imperialist] interventions had the result of transforming practices of abuse against women into ones identified with issues of nationalist resistance and the assertion of cultural right” (Young, 2001, 380). Discuss in light of historical and recent debates.
- Analyze US discourse on gender in the war on Afghanistan.
- Discuss some of the main contributions of Muslim feminist thought.
- What roles have female Islamists played in Islamic political parties?
- “Female Islamists are brainwashed tools in the hands of Islamic political parties.” Discuss this statement drawing on at least two cases.
- Discuss one of the main problems facing women in the Arab World and evaluate some of the solutions proposed.
- Discuss some of the main ethical considerations when conducting research on gender in the Arab world.

**Attendance and Class Participation (10%)**

You are expected to attend all the classes. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class and you will lose 5% for every session that you miss without a valid excuse, such as sickness (for which you have to give me either a doctor’s note or an official note from the department in the class following your absence). You are also expected to contribute actively to class discussions and not engage in any additional activities while in class like skyping, messaging, checking your emails, etc.

**Weekly Schedule**

**Course Outline**

<i>Class Title</i>
Introduction
<b>I) Theory</b>
Orientalism
Discourse and Power Relations
Discourse and Hegemony

Orientalism, Sexism, and the Subaltern
Orientalism and Homophobia/
Sexuality in Jordan/ Guest lecture by Medien Jazeera
<b>II) History</b>
Women in Islamic History I
Women and Islamic History II
How to write a paper
<b>No Class</b>
<b>No Class</b>
Colonialism I
Colonialism II
The Psychological Effects of Colonialism
Colonialism and Gender
Arab Feminisms in the first half of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century: Joining the Struggle
Gender and Nationalism
Gender and Nationalism: Examining Jordan
<b>III) Current Issues</b>
Women and contemporary approaches to the Qur'an/ Shadaab Rahemtulla, Guest Speaker
Women and Contemporary Islam
Personal Status Law
The Jordanian Women's Movement
Student Presentations and Feedback
Student Presentations and Feedback
Feminisms and Power Relations
Feminisms and Imperialism

**Class breakdown and reading lists**

**Seminar 1: Introduction**

Course Syllabus

**Seminar 2: Orientalism**

Sa'id, Edward, *Orientalism* (Penguin Books, 1978): 1-15; 25-28; 284-328.

Young, Robert, 2001, *Postcolonialism, An Historical Introduction* pp. 383-395

**Seminar 3: Discourse and Power relations**

Foucault, Michael (1978), *History of Sexuality I*, Penguin (p.81-102)

**Seminar 4: Discourses and Hegemony**

Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2007) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton Studies and Culture, Power, History (the introduction, chapter 1)

Dabashi, Hamid (2013), Can non-Europeans think?, Al Jazeera  
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/01/2013114142638797542.html>

**Seminar 5: Orientalism, Sexism, and the Subaltern**

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, “Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations of Widow Sacrifice” In *Wedge 7/8*, 120-130, can be found on <http://www.uni-graz.at/aya/archive/spivak%20-%20can%20the%20subaltern%20speak.pdf> or [http://www.maldura.unipd.it/dllags/docentianglo/materiali\\_oboe\\_lm/2581\\_001.pdf](http://www.maldura.unipd.it/dllags/docentianglo/materiali_oboe_lm/2581_001.pdf)

Guha, Ranjit and Spivak Gayatri Chakravorty (1988), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press) read the Foreword (v-x), Preface pp.35-37

**Seminar 6: Orientalism and Homophobia**

Massad, Joseph (2007), *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago University Press). Read Chapter 3, Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World pp.160-190

**Seminar 7: Sexuality in Jordan**

Guest Lecture by Medien Al Jazeera (Location to be decided)

**Seminar 8: Women and Islamic History I**

Ahmed, Leila (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, New Haven; London, Yale University Press (pp. 41-101)

Afsaruddin, Asma, *The First Muslims, History and Memory* (Oxford: One World), Chapter 1: The Rise of Islam and the life of Prophet Mohammad pp. 1-18, Chapter 4: The End of Rightly Guided Leadership (pp.47-58)

**Seminar 9: Women and Islamic History II**

Lutfi, Huda (1991) “Manners and Customs of Fourteenth-Century Cairene Women: Female Anarchy versus Male Shar’i Order in Muslim Perspective Treatises” in Keddie, Nikki and Baron, Beth (eds), *Women in Middle Eastern History* (New Haven: Yale University Press)

Amer, Sahar (2009), “Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol 18, No.2 (May 2009), pp.215-236, (Texas University Press), Available on JSTOR

**Seminar 10: How to write a paper**

Adams, A (1979) "An Open Letter to a Young Researcher", *African Affairs*, 78: 451-479 (available on JSTOR)  
Caplan, Pat (1988), 'Engendering knowledge: the Politics of Ethnography (Parts I and II, *Anthropology Today* 4(5) 8-12 & (6) 14-17, Available online via JSTOR

Myhre, K.C (2004) 'The Bookseller of Kabul and the Anthropologist of Norway' *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 20, No. 3 June

Oakley, Ann (1981), "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms" in Roberts, Helen (eds), *Doing Feminist Research* (London, New York: Routledge), pp.30-61

**Seminar 11: Colonialism I: The Ugly Faces of Violence**

Cesaire, A (1972) *Discourse on Colonialism*, New York, MR. Can also be found online

Film: *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bOr\\_U\\_92xE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bOr_U_92xE)

Please note that cinema supplements to weekly readings are also mandatory.

**Seminar 12: Colonialism II: Violence and Resistance**

Fanon, Franz (1963), *The Wretched of the Earth*, read introduction by Sartre and On Violence  
United Nations Charter, Chapter IV, article 51, can be found at  
<http://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/CTC/uncharter.pdf>

Film: *Asad al-Sahraa'* ("Lion of the Desert"): 1981. <http://www.onlinewatchmovies.net/2008/09/lion-of-desert-1981-hindi-dubbed-movie.html>

**Seminar 13: The Psychological Effects of Colonialism**

Fanon, Franz (1952), *Black Skin White Mask*

Selasi, Taiye (2013), "Taiye Selasi on discovering her pride in her African roots", *The Guardian*, Friday 22 March 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/mar/22/taiye-selasi-afropolitan-memoir>

**Seminar 14: Colonialism and Gender**

Young, Robert, *Postcolonialism*, (pp. 360-383, Women, Gender and Anti-Colonialism)

Seferdjeli, Ryme (2007) "Two views of women fighters during the Algerian War of National Liberation (1957)" in Amin, Fortna and Frierson (eds.) *The Modern Middle East: A Sourcebook for History* (Oxford University Press).

**Seminar 15: Arab Feminisms in the first half of the 20th century II: Joining the Struggle**

Shaarawi, Huda (1998), *Harem Years, The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist*, Badran, Margot (trans.) (The American University in Cairo Press) read introduction and epilogue

Fleischmann, Ellen, *The Nation and its New Women, The Palestinian Women's Movement 1920-1948*, read pp.115-176

### **Seminar 16: Gender and Nationalism**

Enloe, Cynthia (1989), *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (University of California Press). Chapters 1 ("Gender makes the World Go Round"), Chapter 3 ("Nationalism and Masculinity")

Joseph, Suad (ed.) *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East* (Syracuse, USA: Syracuse University Press), Gendering Citizenship in the Middle East pp.3-32

### **Seminar 17: Gender and Nationalism: Looking at Jordan**

Massad, Joseph (2001) *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (Columbia University Press). Read Chapter 2: pp.50-99.

Amawi, Abla (2000) "Gender and Citizenship in Jordan" in Joseph, Suad (ed.) *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East* (Syracuse, USA: Syracuse University Press), pp. 158-184

Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (1952) ([www.kinghussein.gov.jo/constiution\\_jo.html](http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/constiution_jo.html))

### **Seminar 18: Women and Contemporary Approaches to the Qur'an / Guest Lecturer Dr. Shadaab Rahemtulla**

See: <http://www.youtube.com/user/musawah>

Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), "Preface to the First Edition," "Introduction" and "Chapter 1."

Asma Barlas, "The Qur'an and Hermeneutics: Reading the Qur'an's Opposition to Patriarchy" *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 3 (2001), 15-38.

### **Seminar 19: Women and Contemporary Islam**

Mahmood, Saba (2005) *Politics of piety: the Islamic revival and the feminist subject*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press) Read The Subject of Freedom pp.1-39, Chapter 2 pp. 40- 79

Deeb Lara (2006) *An Enchanted Modern, Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*, (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press). Read the Introduction pp.3-42, Chapter 7 pp.220-233

Ababneh, Sara (Forthcoming), "Female Islamists under Feminist Scrutiny: The Structural Effects of Islamic Political Activism in Occupied Palestine"

**Seminar 20: Personal Status Law**

Ababneh, Sara (Forthcoming), "Personal Status Law in Jordan", *Family Law and Gender in the Modern Middle East and North Africa*, eds. Wing, A & Kassim, H (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Mir-Hosseini, Ziba (2012) "Decoding the 'DNA of Patriarchy' in Muslim Family Laws", *Open Democracy* 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2012 <http://www.opendemocracy.net/print/65974>

Tucker, Judith (1996). "Revisiting Reform: Women and the Ottoman Law of Family Rights, 1917". *The Arab Studies Journal*, 4(2), pp. 4-17.

Azhary Sonbol, Amira (2002), *Women of Jordan: Islam, Labour and the Law* (Syracuse University Press), read pp.117-151

2010 Temporary Personal Status Law, Law 36/2010, Official Gazette no.5061 published on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2010, ([www.lob.gov/ui/laws](http://www.lob.gov/ui/laws))

**Seminar 21: The Jordanian Women's Movement**

Atiyat, Ibtisam (2003) *The Women's Movement in Jordan: Activism, Discourses and Strategies*. Politik und Sociawissenschaften. Berlin, Freie Universitaet Berlin. Available online on [http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS\\_thesis\\_000000001001?lang=de](http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_000000001001?lang=de)

Brand, Laurie (1998). *Women, the State, and Political Liberalization*. (Columbia University Press). Read Part Two: Jordan, pp.93-175

**Seminar 22: Student Presentations**

15 minute long student presentations and discussion

**Seminar 23: Student Presentations**

15 minute long student presentations and discussion

**Seminar 24: Feminisms and Power Relations**

hooks, b. (1982) *Ain't I a woman: black women and feminism*, (London, Pluto Press). Read Chapter 1: Sexism and the Black female Slave Experience and Chapter 4: Racism and Feminism

Mohanty, Chandra, 1993, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" in Williams, Patrick, Chrisman, Laura (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory, A Reader*, (Longman).

## Seminar 25: Feminisms and Imperialism

Koopman, Sara. "Imperialism Within: Can The Master's Tools Bring Down Empire?" *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, (2008). <http://www.acme-journal.org/vol7/SKo.pdf>

Roy, Arundhati. "Do Turkeys enjoy thanksgiving"? [http://sentient.mentabolism.org/snippets/Do\\_Turkeys\\_Enjoy\\_Thanksgiving.pdf](http://sentient.mentabolism.org/snippets/Do_Turkeys_Enjoy_Thanksgiving.pdf)

### Suggested selected novels to read while in Jordan

Faqir, Fadia, *Cities of Salt*

Saadawi, Nawal, *Women at Point Zero*

Satrapi, Marjane, *The Complete Persepolis*

Soueif, Ahdaf, *The Map of Love*

Soueif, Ahdaf, *In the Eye of the Sun*

Adnan, Etal, *Sitt Marie Rose*

Sheikh, Hana, *The Story of Zahra*

Khalifeh, Sahar, *Wild Thorns*

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

Kanafani, Fay Afaf. *Nadia, Captive of Hope: Memoir of an Arab Woman*

Sebbar, Leila. *Sherazade*

Shakir, Evelyn. *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab-American Women in the United States*.

Zahran, Yasmin. *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*

Salih, Tayeb, *Season of Migration to the North*

Al Hamad, Turkey, *Adama*

[Mosteghanemi](#), Ahlam *Memory in the Flesh*

[Mosteghanemi](#), Ahlam *Chaos of the Senses*

For more choices also see <http://www.bu.edu/library/guide/caww/>

