

## **Gender Issues in the Middle East and North Africa**

**Professor:** Dr. Abdelilah Bouasria

**E-mail:** abouasri@gmu.edu

**Office hours:** Tuesday and Thursday 6-6:45, Aquia 374

**Course number and section:** WMST 600-004

**Meeting days and times:** Tuesdays 7:20---10.00 PM

**Building and room:** Innovation 316

### **Description of the course**

In Western media, Arab and Muslim women are consistently portrayed as oppressed, and Islam is often cited as the cause of such oppression. How and to what degree are women oppressed in the Middle East? What problematic aspects of Arab Society hinder the liberation of its women? This course is designed to provide a nuanced historical understanding of the economic and political history of women in the Middle East and North Africa. It looks at different interpretations of the foundational texts of Islam (the Qur'an and Hadith) in order to judge the accuracy of Western representations of the Arab woman and to understand these women from within. The course will also unveil current contested issues such as the debate about the veil, household power, prostitution, honor crimes, female circumcision and the Arab Spring. The latter came with dire humanitarian conditions, where women and children are often those who suffer the most. Women are in fact eating less nutritious food and find themselves forced into prostitution in war-torn countries like Syria and Yemen.

This class will examine the interface between gender theory and many theoretical methodologies applied to the study of the MENA region, including post colonialism, postmodernism and post structuralism. Students will become acquainted with famous feminist writers in the Middle East and their paradigms such As Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, Joumana Haddad and others. This course will involve lectures, discussions, group work, movies and guest speakers.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**1) Attendance and Participation (15%):** Class attendance is mandatory and only one unjustified absence is allowed. Please do not be late for class, as it is disrespectful and disruptive to me and to your classmates. **Every Student will undertake during the semester the following tasks at least once:** a ten minute presentation about the readings of the day, taking notes for the class to be shared with the group, and preparing short essay questions with their ideal answer.

### *Criteria for Class Participation*

Participation is graded on a scale from 0 (lowest) through 4 (highest), using the criteria below. The criteria focus on what you demonstrate and do not presume to guess at what you know but do not demonstrate. This is because what you offer to the class is what you and others learn from.

**0**

Absent.

**1**

- Present, not disruptive.
- Tries to respond when called on but does not offer much.
- Demonstrates very infrequent involvement in discussion.

**2**

- Demonstrates adequate preparation: knows basic case or reading facts, but does not show evidence of trying to interpret or analyze them.
- Offers straightforward information (e.g., straight from the case or reading), without elaboration or very infrequently (perhaps once a class).
- Does not offer to contribute to discussion, but contributes to a moderate degree when called on.
- Demonstrates sporadic involvement.

**3**

- Demonstrates good preparation: knows case or reading facts well, has thought through implications of them.
- Offers interpretations and analysis of case material (more than just facts) to class.

- Contributes well to discussion in an ongoing way: responds to other students' points, thinks through own points, questions others in a constructive way, offers and supports suggestions that may be counter to the majority opinion.
- Demonstrates consistent ongoing involvement.

#### 4

- Demonstrates excellent preparation: has analyzed case exceptionally well, relating it to readings and other material (e.g., readings, course material, discussions, experiences, etc.).
- Offers analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of case material, e.g., puts together pieces of the discussion to develop new approaches that take the class further.
- Contributes in a very significant way to ongoing discussion: keeps analysis focused, responds very thoughtfully to other students' comments, contributes to the cooperative argument-building, suggests alternative ways of approaching material and helps class analyze which approaches are appropriate, etc.
- Demonstrates ongoing very active involvement.

**2) Final Exam (25%):** The final exam is composed of a multiple choice test (15%) and a movie presentation (10%). Students will pick a movie about Arab women from a list that I will distribute later. They will present the movie synopsis and critique to the class in 15 minutes with video clips and the whole class will discuss it and ask them questions. Peer Students will grade this exercise. For the criteria of grading, check the following website: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/testing/scoring/guides/student/gr3spkg.pdf>

**3) Midterm exam (15%):** The exam will be a mix of multiple choice questions, matching exercises, definitions, and short essay questions about the class readings and lectures.

**4) Pictures' Collage, Photoshop remaking, cartoon, caricature (original not copied) about Arab Women in relation to the themes of the class (15%):** As the syllabus shows, we will bring about the material/realia in an exhibit in class. There are some criteria for evaluating the quality of your collage:

Visual Impact: Does the image have the “Wow!” factor? How effectively does the image capture and hold the viewer’s attention? Is there a readily identifiable center of interest? Is the theme easily identifiable?

Emotional Impact: What message does the photo convey? Does it evoke Joy or Sadness or Anger? How powerful is the emotional impact? And is the impact present for a majority of viewers?

Composition: Does the photograph follow conventional standards of strong design, such as the rule of thirds, simplicity, clean backgrounds, and the use of leading lines to guide the viewer's eye? Does the image include distracting elements?

Technical Execution: Depicts a wide variety of needs and wants visually

- Title and border are present
- All space has been utilized
- Variety of media used
- Where was the picture taken?

Originality: Is the image similar to others, or does it have its own personality and vision?

**5) Video interview of a famous Arab woman (writer, actress, painter, comedian, singer, business executive, and politician or academic....) either in the US or abroad (30%).** The interview should have a plan of questions, a theme and it will be filmed and handed to the professor **The Last day of Class**. Your commentary and reactions should be in the voice-over. Questions and ideas will need to be cleared by me beforehand. Check the following link for criteria of assessing the caricatures: [http://assets.pearsonschool.com/asset\\_mgr/current/201129/govt\\_rubric\\_political\\_cartoon.pdf](http://assets.pearsonschool.com/asset_mgr/current/201129/govt_rubric_political_cartoon.pdf)

### **Laptops**

Students are encouraged to bring electronic devices (laptops, iPad) to the class and to use them when instructed to do so. Please be respectful of your peers and your professor and do not engage in activities that are unrelated to the class (sending text messages to your significant other does not qualify as class participation). Such disruptions show a lack of professionalism, a touch of laziness and disinterested behavior that may affect your participation grade. If the class is not of importance to you, we are in a free country: Drop it until you like it!

### **Academic Integrity**

GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental principles to follow: (1) all work submitted be your own (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit.

### **Disability Accommodations**

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474;<http://ods.gmu.edu>) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

### **Diversity**

George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, ideology, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions and backgrounds will be respected.

## Calendar

### **Class 1 Handing out the Course Syllabus/Presentation of students**

Small quiz

Small Lecture about Gender and Orientalism:

Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage; 1st Vintage Books edition (1979) pp. 1-28

Steven Stalinsky & Y. Yehoshua, "Muslim Clerics on the Religious Rulings Regarding Wife-Beating" in website MEMRI:

<http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/804/1091.htm>

Video: *Hollywood Harems*, A film by Tania Kamal-Eldin

Egypt, 1999, 24 minutes, Color, DVD, Sub-titled

*Ruses de femmes? Ruses d'hommes? Conte populaire marocain, édition bilingue français-arabe*, Editions Marsam (2007): 43 pages, narrated by Lalla laâziza Tazi, Compilation by par Fatima Mernissi, Translated by Abdellatif Laâbi, Pictures by Fatima Lourdighi

### **Class 2 The Feminine Body and redefining Orientalism (Class canceled due to Labor Day but students will be responsible for the material)**

Therese Saliba, Carolyn Allen, Judith A. Howard, eds. *Gender, Politics, and Islam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, Chapters 5, 7, 8

Ziad Elmarsafy, *Debating Orientalism*, Palgrave Macmillan (2013), Chapters 10 and 11

Marilyn Booth, *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces*, Duke University Press (2011), Introduction, Chapters 5, 10

Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism*, Prometheus Books; First Edition, 2nd edition (2007), Introduction, Chapter 1

-----, *Why the West is Best: A Muslim Apostate's Defense of Liberal Democracy*, Encounter Books (2011), Chapters 3 and 4

Amina and the FEMEN movement (Students find out about this movement on the internet and discuss it in class)

Marwan M. Kraidy, "The Revolutionary Body Politic: Preliminary Thoughts on a Neglected Medium in the Arab Uprisings" in *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 5:1 (2012)

### **Class 3 The State VS The Family**

Mounira Charrad, "Contexts, Concepts and Contentions: Gender Legislation as Politics in the Middle East," in *Hawwa* Volume 5, Number 1 (2007) pp.: 55-72

Fatna El Bouih, *Talk of Darkness*, University of Texas Press: 2008, Chapters 1, 17, 20

Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Vanja Hamzic, "Criminalizing Sexuality: Zina laws as Violence against women in Muslim Countries" in Mir-Hosseini and Hamzic, *Control and Sexuality: The Revival of Zina Laws in Muslim Contexts* (2010), pp.19-48 (<http://www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/CaS%20e-book.pdf> ) E-book

Diane Singerman and Homa Hoodfar, *Development, Gender and Change in Cairo: A view from the Household*, Indiana University Press: 1996, Introduction and Chapter 7

Mary Layoun, "Telling Spaces: Palestinian Women and the Engendering of National Narratives." In Parker, Russo, Sommer and Yaeger, eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, 1992, New York: Routledge, pp.407-423.

### **Class 4 Islamic Feminism**

Ramadan Tariq, "The birth of Islamic Feminism" in *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press: 2005, P.138-145

Zakia Salime, "The War on Terrorism: Appropriation and Subversion by Moroccan Women," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 33:1, 2007, pp. 1-24.

Asma Barlas, *Believing Women into Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, University of Texas Press, First edition (2002), pp.1-20, chapter 2

Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, Yale University Press (1993), pp.208-240

Video: Saudi Arabian Women Unveiled, 16:39 min, Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6Sa-gaCrDk>

## **Class 5 The veil**

Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*, Princeton University Press: 2007 (Introduction, Chapters 1, 5)

MacLeod, Arlene, "Hegemonic Relations and Gender Resistance: The New Veiling as Accommodating Protest in Cairo" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1992; 17 (3).

Woldesemait Mihret, *Unfolding the Modern Hijab: From the Colonial Veil to Pious Fashion*, Honors Thesis 2013, <http://hdl.handle.net/10161/7554> (link online)

*Jasad & The Queen of Contradictions*

A Movie by Amanda Homsy-Ottosson

UK/Lebanon, 2011, 40 minutes, Color, DVD, Arabic, Subtitled  
Discussion

## **Class 6 The veil...Again!**

Daniel Tutt, "Psychoanalysis and the Veil in Islam: Rethinking Truth and Liberation," May 7, 2013, <http://www.berfrois.com/2013/05/daniel-tutt-psychoanalysis-and-the-veil-in-islam>

Azza Karam, "Veiling, unveiling and the meanings of the veil, challenging Static Symbolism" in *Thamyris*. 1996, Vol 3, pp: 219-236

Ozlem Sandikci and Güliz Ger, Veiling in Style: How Does a Stigmatized Practice Become Fashionable? *Journal of Consumer Research*, November 17, 2009

Pavin Darabi and Rowin Thomson, *Rage Against the Veil. The Courageous Life and Death of an Islamic Dissident*, Amherst: NY, Prometheus Books, 1999, Chapters 25-30

Marnia Lazreg, *Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women*, Princeton University Press, 2011, Introduction, Letter 2 and Letter 5

## **Class 7 Health and Arab women**

Sandy Sufian, "HIV/AIDS in the Middle East and North Africa: A Primer," in *MERIP*, Link: (<http://www.merip.org/mer/mer233/hiv aids-middle-east-north-africa>)

Karamatuna – An Investigation into the Sex Trafficking of Iraqi Women and Girls



Paper in Website: <http://sce-me.org/images/stories/sceme-projects/karamatuna-web.pdf>

Weight Loss and Diet Arab Women, link: <http://weightlossdietinarab.blogspot.com/2012/10/obesity-is-new-black-plague-of-arab.html>

Ali Kecia, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Quran, Hadith and Jurisprudence*, Oxford: One world: 2006, pp. 97-111

Moruzzi, Norma Claire, "Cutting Through Culture: The Feminist Discourse on Female Circumcision" in *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 14: 2 (2005): pp.203-220

Najlaa Abou Mehri and Linda Sills, The virginity industry, *BBC Radio 4*, Saturday, 24 April 2010, Link: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8641099.stm>

Anahid Devartanian Kulwicki, "The Practice of Honor Crimes: A Glimpse of Domestic Violence" In *The Arab World*, 2002, Vol. 23, No. 1, Pages 77-87 in link: <http://informahealthcare.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01612840252825491>

### **Class 8 Sexuality and Arab Women**

Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, Indiana University Press: 1987, pp. 46-88

Fatima Mernissi, *Sheherazade goes West*, Washington Square Press; Reprint edition (2002), Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 13

As'ad Abu Khalil, "Gender boundaries and sexual categories in the Arab world," *Feminist Issues*, March 1997, Volume 15, Issue 1-2, pp. 91-104

Joumana Haddad, *I Killed Scheherazade: Confessions of an Angry Arab Woman*, Chicago Review Press; Reprint edition (September 1, 2011), 150 pages, **The Whole Book**

### **Class 9 Gendered Vices**

Mahdavi, Pardis, *Gridlock: Labor, Migration, and Human Trafficking in Dubai*, Stanford University Press (2011) Chapters 1, 2, 3

Shereen El Feki, *Sex and the Citadel: Intimate Life in a Changing Arab World*, Pantheon (2013), **The Whole Book**

Dubai's Night Secrets: Prostitution and Sex Trafficking (YouTube Video, 12 minutes)/ Discussion, Link:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eS\\_WeJq5xxY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eS_WeJq5xxY)

Saudi Wahhabi Preacher Issues Fatwa Allowing Jihadis to Rape Syrian Women ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qvo4\\_hMrF4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qvo4_hMrF4) ) Video: 1.16 min

Nightmare in Dreamland - housemaids in Dubai, Video 4:51 min Link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgPnsid4r5s>

Legalized Prostitution in Saudi Arabia, Link:

<http://www.cifiaonline.com/prostitutionlegalized.htm>

**Class 10 In-Class Midterm exam (one hour and 45 minutes)**

**Movie:** Hidden Beauty by Olga Sapozhnikova (26:59 min) Link:

<http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/2425/Hidden-Beauty>

Discussion

### **Class 11 Theoretical Frameworks**

Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*, N.J: Princeton University Press: 1991, Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3

Samar Habib, *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East: Histories and Representations* (Routledge Research in Gender and Society), 2007, chapters 1-2-6-7

“A Personal Feminist Theory of Belly Dance”, Move with Nadia Blog, <http://nadiadenov.weebly.com/a-personal-feminist-theory-of-belly-dance.html>

### **Photo Exhibit Due**

### **Class 12 Marriage in the Arab World**

#### **Guest Speaker**

Homa Hoodfar, *Between Marriage and the Market: Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo*. University of California Press: 1997, Introduction, Chapters 2, 5, 6

### **Class 13 Politically Incorrect views....or are they?**

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*, Pocket Books; New edition (February 5, 2007), **the whole book**

Wafa Sultan, *A God Who Hates: The Courageous Woman Who Inflamed the Muslim World Speaks Out Against the Evils of Islam*, St. Martin's Griffin; Reprint edition (April 26, 2011), Chapters 2, 6, 8

### **Class 14: Theoretical Framework**

Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook On gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (New York, state University Of New York, 1992), Chapters 2 and 3

Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim*, Prometheus Books; Reprint edition (2003), pp.290-327

Robert Spencer, *Islam Unveiled*, Encounter Books, First edition (November 1, 2003), pp.73-92

Anat Berko, *The Smarter Bomb, Women and Children as Suicide Bombers*, October 2012, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Chapters 7, 8, 15

Courtney C. Radsch, *Unveiling the Revolutionaries: Cyber activism and the Role of Women in the Arab Uprisings*, James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, Rice University; May 18, 2012, In the following website:

<http://www.bakerinstitute.org/publications/ITP-pub-CyberactivismAndWomen-051712.pdf>

### **Class 15 Video Assignment Due**