

**WMST 313: Introduction to Islamic Feminism(s)  
Syllabus****Credit Hours:** 3 credit hours**Program Location:** Amman, Jordan**Course Description**

Is feminism possible within the limits of religion? Or are religion and feminism at odds to the extent that the liberation of women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is never possible unless religion is overcome? Such questions place both religion and feminism at the center of critical inquiry, demanding a deeper reflection on what religion is and what feminism entails. In this course we will examine theories, political goals, strategies and activism(s) of the emerging global trend of Islamic feminism(s). Understood as part of a much broader trend in post-colonial and transitional feminisms, Islamic feminism is one of the responses to the hegemonic tendencies of which secular, western, white, and middle-class focused feminism is often accused. In this class we will discuss how Islamic feminists promote gender equality and social justice based on a feminist reading of Islam's sacred texts. We will learn more about Islam through a gender lens. (Please note this course is more or less a sociology of religion and not theology course).

**Intended Learning Outcomes**

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Understand Islamic feminism as a diverse movement that reflects many varied streams of interpretation and understanding of gender values and theory based on the breadth of experiences of Muslim women globally.
- Appreciate the complex interplay of religious, nationalist and ethnic issues in shaping and manipulating gender identity in predominantly Muslim communities and states
- Identify major feminist approaches to Islam, including text-based praxis, transnational ideological mobilization, and theory ranging across Marxist, nationalist, and religious fundamentalist areas of study.
- Argue with and against feminist interpretations of Islamic scriptures in writing and orally.
- Understand Islamic feminist practices within the context of the transnational feminist movement.
- Recognize key issues in the Western liberal feminist debate and understand how and why these have been detrimental to a number of groups, including Muslim religious women.
- Read major works and recognize key figures within the movement of Islamic feminism.
- Practice through examples how to read the Quran from a gender sensitive perspective.

*\*\*This is a real syllabus for this course, but please note that there may be changes for each semester.*

## Course Requirements

This course has four major requirements: a group-discussion leadership (designed to assess your critical reading, participation, and presentation skills), Quran interpretation (designed to assess the level of your understanding of Islamic feminist hermeneutical approaches), book review (designed to teach you how to write an academic book review and test your analytical and critical reading skills), and a final paper (designed to assess your writing and argumentation skills). Each of these assignments is designed to build on the others. The discussion leadership is designed to take reading for this class, participation, and dialogue with peers to another level of depth. The book review, the only outside research I expect of you, should be used strategically to enhance your presentation, Quran interpretation and final paper. (More outside research is welcome, but not required.) The book review, discussion leadership, and/or Qur'an interpretation should be used as stepping stones to your final paper.

### 20% Discussion Leadership

Groups of 3 students are expected to lead the class discussion on the readings assigned for that class session. Groups may be subject to change half way through the semester. Pay attention to your group assignment and prepare for class accordingly.

#### Guidelines for Discussion Leadership

##### I. The Questions:

- a. Your question should be directly related to the readings.
- b. Try to phrase your questions using a quote from the reading, or a reference to the line and page#.
- c. The questions should be phrased in a way that encourages debate or discussion. Do not ask questions that would result in simple yes or no answers. Instead, ask questions that require commenting, discussing, agreeing or disagreeing with has been said.
- d. In case you wish to lead the discussion beyond the reading and expand beyond the ideas stated by the authors, please make your questions clear and ask your classmates to reflect on the question, bringing examples from their travel, personal life (only if they wish), or other classes. However, try to have everyone give some context to his or her example/experience so that everyone stays on the same page.
- e. The number of questions is not as important as ensuring that you have enough of them to cover a discussion period of 45 minutes.
- f. Email the questions to the class (don't forget to include me in the email) by 9:00pm the night before. The earlier you submit the questions the better.

##### II. Leading the Discussion:

- a. Choose any format via which you wish to lead the discussion: small groups, whole class....
- b. All group leaders should be sure to have not only their questions on hand, but also the relevant readings as well.

- c. Make sure before the discussion begins that everyone was comfortable with the reading and that the group has no questions about the reading before you delve into discussing the questions you have prepared.
- d. Make sure that important terms are familiar to everyone in the class and that there is a basic agreed upon definition of the terms that appear in the readings. If there is a lack of clarity in this respect ask me and I will further explain terms or ideas in class.
- e. Make sure that everyone is comfortable speaking their minds and reflecting on the readings.
- f. Bring the discussion back to the reading should you feel that the discussion has gone in directions that you cannot control.
- g. Avoid allowing certain individuals to dominate the discussion. This is not easy, but, try your best to make everyone feel comfortable.
- h. Try and keep the discussion going by rephrasing and explaining your questions in case the group struggles in understanding what you mean by the question. In other words, make sure the question is clear for everyone.
- i. Ask the class if they would like to add questions to your list. If they see that other questions are equally important try and accommodate suggestions while keeping track of time.
- j. Make sure you have covered all the questions you were planning on covering within the time limits and did not leave any question unanswered or not discussed.

**III. You will be graded according to the following rubric:**

Category	A	B	C	D
<b>Enthusiasm</b> 5 points	Participants show by their voice and actions strong enthusiasm for the topic. All participate equally.	Participants generally seem engaged, but not always. Some uneven involvement with leading discussion.	Energy level discourages conversation. One or more members seem unengaged.	Facilitation lacks energy, organization, and group involvement.
<b>Content</b> 5 points	Shows full understanding	Shows good understanding. May have to be prompted.	Much of the discussion is superficial or uneven.	Not sure all members did the readings.
<b>Props</b> 5 points	Group uses props that add to the presentation in an original way	Props add to presentation	May have no props or props give little to presentation	No props
<b>Collaboration</b> 5 points	All members listen, share, and cooperate for a seamless presentation	Most members seem to be cooperative, but there may be minor problems with presentation	One member fails to communicate with others leading to a weak presentation	Food fight
Total Points				

20%

**Book Review (800-1000 words long)**

**DUE: Week 8**

In light of issues raised by the course, discuss & analyze the FULL text of  
—a book on the syllabus (where only a part of the book is assigned)

- a book related to your final project
- any book related to the course topic

Book reviews typically evaluate recently-written works. They offer a brief description of the text's key points and often provide a short appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of the work.

A book review gives readers a sneak peek at what a book is like, whether or not the reviewer enjoyed it, and details on purchasing the book.

**20% Interpretation of Scripture (750-800) DUE: Week 10**

Reading of Qur'anic verses (or chapters) relating to gender issues (such as veiling, wives of the prophet, social or spiritual equality or inequality, Qur'anic women, etc.). this assignment should be 750-800 words long.

**30% Final Paper (2000 words) DUE: Week 13**

The paper should further one of the course's topics or explore a related subject. This paper may be related to your scriptural interpretation, or book review. The paper should be 2000 words long. Further detailed instructions on structure and format will be handed in class.

**10% Attendance and Engagement**

Attendance in this course is mandatory, and it is crucial that you come to class prepared to *discuss* the material. You should think of the lecture and the readings in no way as mimicking each other—the lectures are not a summary of the readings; they rather will be going hand in hand and complement each other in various ways. Even if it is not your turn to run the class discussion on that session, you are still expected to participate in class conversation. Participation in class discussions will also help you articulate your questions and your ideas in a friendly and safe setting. You should never be discouraged to talk, but also remember that ideas informed by the readings and by the lectures are formulated into much better statements. Also, *you learn much better when you verbalize what you know. Think of this course as a collaborative intellectual project where we help each other to think and learn.* I am hoping you will learn from me as well as from each other.

Required readings should be completed by the class session for which they are listed. Plan readings in advance, factoring the time needed for coursework in other classes.

In principle, we will follow and apply AMIEAST's attendance policy. This policy is outlined below:

- Only one unexcused absence is permitted per student. If a student has more than the permitted number of unexcused absences his/her grade for the course will be lowered by one "mark" for each additional unexcused absence. In other words, one unexcused absence is allowed. After two unexcused absences an A becomes an A-; after three an A becomes a B+; after four an A becomes a B, etc.

- An unexcused absence is one not caused by illness or otherwise not approved by AMIDEAST staff. An excused absence means written approval from the Program Manager (and sometimes a doctor) justifying the absence. Arriving late to class may also count towards an absence.

Please note the following attendance policy requirements:

1. Three occurrences of tardiness (to class or meetings with professor) are equivalent to one unexcused absence; each subsequent instance of tardiness is considered an additional unexcused absence.
2. Students are expected to do the required reading before class, volunteer for presentations and participate actively in class discussions.
3. Excused absences are determined by the lead AMIDEAST staff member; in some instances a doctor's certification may be required.
4. Deadlines must be respected, even in cases of excused absences.
5. Students are responsible for getting homework assignments they miss and submitting it in a timely manner. Assignments turned in after the due date will result in a penalty to be determined by the instructor.
6. Any assignments not submitted will result in that assignment being given a grade of 0 (zero).
7. The Attendance Policy is applied until the last day of the program.

### **Required Texts**

Ahmed, Leila. *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. Yale University Press, 1992.

Amīn, Qāsim. *The liberation of women: And, the new woman: Two documents in the history of Egyptian feminism*. American Univ in Cairo Press, 2000.

Badran, Margot. *Feminists, Islam, and nation: Gender and the making of modern Egypt*. Princeton University Press, 1996.

Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and woman: Rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1999.

See syllabus for additional required readings.

## Course outline

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignment
<b>Week 1</b> (first class meeting will take place on a Saturday due to Eid al-Adha)	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> Introduction to course, Islam  Introduction to Islam  Gendered Perceptions of Islam	Ahmed, Shahab. <i>What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic</i> . Princeton University Press, 2015. Chapter 1 - <a href="http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s10587.pdf">http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s10587.pdf</a> Also view: "Women in Islam" <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNXMxaXCIJI">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNXMxaXCIJI</a> "Repression of Muslim Women" <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpLlhOfShoQ">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpLlhOfShoQ</a> "Submission" <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXGZBs65qMs">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXGZBs65qMs</a> "Burka Blue" <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8fCXUKLQyq">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8fCXUKLQyq</a>	Submit one paragraph summarizing what you know about Islam and the main sources of your information about Islam and Muslims. (This is not a research paper. It is only meant to assess the limits of your knowledge about Islam and help me supplement the gaps in your understanding of Islam).
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Islam and Gender: Orientalist Representations</b>	Malek Alloula, <i>The Colonial Harem</i> , Chapters 1-4, 10, pp. 3-36, 105-126 Michel Foucault, <i>History of Sexuality</i> , Volume 1, Part One, "We, 'Other Victorians," pp. 1-14 Part Two, "The Repressive Hypothesis," pp. 15-50	Group 1 leads the discussion
<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Colonizing Muslim Women</b>	Edward Said, <i>Orientalism</i> , "Pilgrims and Pilgrimages" pp. 180-191 Ann Stoler, <i>Race and the Education of Desire</i> Chapter 1, "Colonial Studies and the History of Sexuality," pp. 1-18 Franz Fanon, <i>A Dying Colonialism</i> - Chapter 1, "Algeria Unveiled," pp. 35-68	Group 2 leads the discussion
<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Colonizing Muslim Women</b>	Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses." <i>Feminist review</i> 30 (1988): 61-88. Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others." <i>American anthropologist</i> 104.3 (2002): 783-790.	Group 3 Leads the discussion
<b>Week 5</b>	<b>Feminism, Colonialism, and Nationalism</b>	Lazreg, Marnia. <i>The eloquence of silence: Algerian women in question</i> . Psychology Press, 1994.- Chapter 7, "Nationalism, Decolonization, and Gender," pp. 118-141. Margot Badran, <i>Feminists, Islam, &amp; Nation: Gender &amp; the Making of Modern Egypt</i> - Part One: "Rising Feminist Consciousness," pp. 3-88	Group 4 Leads the discussion
<b>Week 6</b>	<b>Feminism and Nationalism</b>	Qasim Amin, <i>The Liberation of Woman</i> - Read Chapter 15: The status of Women: A Reflection on the Nation's Moral Standards.	G1
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>Commentary on Qasim Amin</b>	Leila Ahmed, <i>Women and Gender in Islam</i> , Chapter 8, "The Discourse of the Veil," pp. 144-168 Chapter 9, "The First Feminists," pp. 169-188	G2 Due: Book Review
<b>Week 8</b>	<b>Gender and the Qur'an</b>	Amina Wadud, <i>Qur'an and Woman</i> Chapter 1, "In the Beginning, Man and Woman Were Equal," pp. 15-28; ALSO 62-74 Surat al-Nisa'a, pp. 1-140. Concentrate especially on: the Prologue, the Qur'anic text, and Qutb's interpretations of 4:1 & 4:34.	G3
<b>Week 9</b>	<b>On Gender Equality</b>	Amina Wadud, <i>Qur'an and Woman</i> Chapter 3, "The Equity of Recompense: The Hereafter in the Qur'an," pp. 44-61 Qur'an, Surah 55 "al-Rahman" <a href="http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/">http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/</a>	G1
<b>Week 10</b>	<b>Veiling Resurgence</b>	Ahmed, Leila. "Veil of ignorance." <i>Foreign Policy</i> 186 (2011): 40. Fedwa El Guindi, <i>Veil: Modesty, Privacy, Resistance</i> , Part II, "Dress, Libas, and Hijab," pp. 47-157 WATCH IN CLASS: Covered: Hejab in Cairo Egypt, Tania Kamal Eldin	G3 Due: Final Papers

<b>Week 11</b>	<b>Memoirs and Native Informants</b>	Azar Nafisi, Reading Lolita in Tehran, pp. 1-77	G4
<b>Week 12</b>	<b>Neo-Orientalism</b>	Hamid Dabashi, "Native informers and the making of the American empire," al-Ahram Weekly 797 (1-7 June 2006) <a href="http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/797/special.htm">http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/797/special.htm</a> Negar Mottahedeh, "Off the Grid: Reading Iranian Memoirs in Our Time of Total War," MERIP (September 2004) <a href="http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/mottahedeh_interv.html">http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/mottahedeh_interv.html</a>	Each Students brings one discussion question based on the reading to class
<b>Week 13 and Week 14</b>	<b>The Jordanian Context</b> Writing the Lives of Jordanian Women, Memoirs of Jordanian Women	Khouri, Norma. <i>Honor lost: Love and death in modern-day Jordan</i> . Beyond Words/Atria Books, 2003. Part 1. Husseini, Rana. <i>Murder in the Name of Honor: The True Story of One Woman's Heroic Fight Against an Unbelievable Crime</i> . Oneworld Publications, 2009. <b>Introduction, chapter 4 (bound by honor), chapter 15 (the road to real honor)</b> <b>Watch: Forbidden Lies:</b> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VlxTRTJ-s4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VlxTRTJ-s4</a>	Each Students brings one discussion question based on the reading to class