

Women and Gender in the Middle East

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Introduction

Debates over the status of Middle Eastern women figure centrally in current events and contemporary political struggles. Whether as an example of everything which is wrong with Middle Eastern societies today, as a model of resistance to Western domination, or as victims of violence, the figure of “the Middle Eastern Woman” (invariably conflated with “the Muslim woman”) has served as a potent symbol within various political programs and as a site of political and cultural intervention. Despite the current prominence of the subject, however, the focus on women and their social, political and economic roles in the area which has come to be known as the Middle East is nothing new. Historically gender has always figured centrally in how various movements, communities and political polities have defined and reproduced themselves. This class asks, “how have the politics of gender in the Middle East shaped (and been shaped) by wider local, national and transnational forces over time and across geographic contexts?” “What implications have those politics had for the lives of women in the region?” “Who claims the authority to speak for and represent women in the Middle East and on what grounds?” Special attention will be given to the ways in which the position of Middle Eastern women has been debated within imperial, nationalist and Islamist political programs and the role that women themselves have played in shaping those debates.

Objectives

On the completion of this course students should be able to:

Demonstrate a knowledge of the political and social and forces which have most shaped Middle Eastern women’s lives.

Explain how the politics of gender in the Middle East shaped by wider local, national and transnational forces over time.

Analyze how gender has figured in various written and visual texts (including foundational Islamic religious texts, law, art, fiction, autobiography and prescriptive treatises).

Compare and contrast discourses on women with women’s actual experiences.

Evaluate the possibilities various projects have had for women, both in terms of political activism and in everyday life.

6. Think critically about the production of knowledge about Middle Eastern women and what sorts of purposes and interests that knowledge serves.

Required Texts (Available at the Engineers Bookstore)

Leila Ahmed: *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*

Fatima Mernissi: *Dreams of Trespass*

Leslie Pierce: *Morality Tales*

Etel Adnan: *Sitt Marie Rose*

Supplementary materials:

Other required readings are available on T-Sq in the "Resources" section in the folder designated for the week's lectures.

Honor Code

Students in this class will be expected to abide by the Georgia Tech Honor Code and avoid any instance of academic misconduct, including but not limited to the substitution of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another individual or individuals; false claims of performance or work submitted by the student; possessing, using, or exchanging *improperly* acquired written or verbal information in preparation for, or in writing, an exam or paper. If you have any questions, please consult with me and read the Honor Code, which is available at:

www.deanofstudents.gatech.edu/Policy/code.in.sections.htm#AHC .

Grading

Participation: 20%

Case Study presentations: 10%

Book Reports: On *Dreams of Trespass*, *The Open Door* and *Sitt Marie Rose*: 30%

In Class Midterm: 20%

Take home final: 20%

Reaction Papers

To facilitate discussion, students are required to write 5 informal papers based on the readings. These "reaction papers" are designed to get you thinking and to give you an opportunity to reflect on the issues raised by the course. They should be approximately one page double spaced (300 words). These posts are not intended as summaries; they are exercises in critical thinking and an opportunity to digest and synthesize course material--to formulate questions, suggest alternative interpretations and shape our discussion. They will be graded on a pass/fail (satisfactory/unsatisfactory) basis and will count towards your participation grade. In general, while I expect you to adhere to some basic standards of grammar, spelling and presentation, these posts are more intended to give you an opportunity to reflect critically on the issues raised in lecture and in the course readings than they are to be formal writing assignments. Papers are due **by 8 am the day of class**. You

should post your reactions in the “Drop Box” section of T-Square, where each of you has their own folder.

Case Study Presentations

There will be seven group case study presentations—four on women and nationalism and three on women and conflict. I will provide more specific guidelines in class.

Book Reports

You are required to write two book reports for this class, one on *Dreams of Trespass* and one on *Sitt Marie Rose*. They should be five to seven pages, double spaced using 12 point font. I will give you a separate handout providing more details of how to think about the assignments closer to their due dates.

Communication and E-mail policy

I encourage you to contact me concerning questions or problems you may have in relation to the course by coming to office hours. Office hours provide an extra occasion to discuss the contents of the course and questions you may have about the material. Office hours are also an opportunity to talk broadly about historical or philosophical ideas you may wish to explore further or things which may be outside the confines of the class. I enjoy visitors and office hours are boring if no one comes, so you'll be doing me a favor. Note: *Unless your question requires only a quick (mostly yes or no) answer or you are notifying me of technical problems with T-square, email should be avoided.* If you cannot make it to office hours, we can schedule another time to meet. Also, I do not respond to e-mail after 5 pm in the evening or on Saturday or Sunday, so please try and plan accordingly.

Participation and Classroom Conduct

Participation is a significant part of your grade in this class. You are expected to come to class prepared to contribute actively to classroom discussions and activities. This will not only enhance your own learning experience but the experience of your fellow students. Good participation entails not only speaking and sharing your thoughts on a regular basis, but also being considerate and respecting the views of others. To earn high points in the participation part of the final grade, students will have demonstrated their awareness of the different functions of classroom comments by:

1. varying their discussion strategies,
2. considering what they say before they say it,
3. taking intellectual risks, and
4. always respecting the feelings of peers by not interrupting classmates while speaking and acknowledging interesting ideas.

Any successful learning experience requires mutual respect on the part of the student and the instructor. Neither instructor nor student should be subject to others' behavior that is rude, disruptive, intimidating, or demeaning. The instructor has primary responsibility for and control over classroom behavior and maintenance of academic integrity.

Instructor responsibilities:

- Start and end class on time.
- Treat all students with courtesy and respect.
- Be open to constructive input from students in the course.
- Ensure that opportunities to participate are enjoyed equally by all students in the course.

Student responsibilities:

- Come to class on time, and refrain from packing up belongings before class ends.
- Turn off all electronic devices that might create a disruption in class.
- Be quiet and give full respectful attention while either instructor or another student is speaking.
- When speaking, use courteous, respectful language and keep comments and questions relevant to the topic at hand.

I expect you to fulfill your responsibilities to me and to your fellow students. By the same token, if I am not meeting my responsibilities to you I expect you to let me know. In short, let's make our classroom a comfortable space for real intellectual dialogue, where everyone has the opportunity to contribute.

Class Schedule

Week I: Introduction

Aug. 23 (T) Overview

Aug. 25 (Th) Problems in the Study of Middle Eastern Women

T-Sq:

Lila Abu-Lughod: "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" (1-8)
Chandra Mohanty: "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses"

Week 2: Middle Eastern Women and the Politics of Knowledge

Aug. 30 (T): Gender and Orientalism

T-Sq:

Sarah Graham Brown "Images of Women in the Middle East"
Edward Said: "Orientalism"

**** Please Bring in cuttings/clips of images of Middle Eastern Women and men from newspapers, magazines, internet, TV etc.**

Sept. 1 (Th): Discussion

Presentations of Group Findings: Gaze Assignment

Reaction paper #1 due

Week 3: Early Islam

Sept. 6 (T) Pre-Islamic Discourses on Women

Ahmed: 1-37

Sept. 8 (Th) Women and the Emergence of Islam

Ahmed: 41-78

T-Sq:

Spellman: Political Action and Public Example: 'Aisha and the Battle of the Camel

Week 4: Women in the Qur'an: The Politics of Interpretation

Sept. 13 (T) Women in the Qur'an

Ahmed: 79-101

T-Sq

Asma Barlas: Believing Women in Islam: Intro. (pgs. 1-18); Chap.2

Reaction paper #2 due

Sept. 15 (Th) Gender and Communities of Interpretation

T-Sq

Asma Barlas: Believing Women in Islam, Chap. 3

Week 5: The Politics of Sex and Household: Medieval and Early Modern Societies

Sept. 20 (T) Female Sexuality and the Organization of Society

Ahmed:102-125

*Lutfi: Manners and Customs of the 14th Century Cairene Women

Sept. 22 (Th) Gender, Class, Power

No Readings: Take time to finish "Morality Tales" and start "Dreams of Trespass"

Week 6: Case Study: Law and Gender in an Early Modern Court

Sept. 27 (T) Morality Tales I

Pierce, *Morality Tales*, Intro., Part 2

Sept. 29 (Th) Morality Tales II

Pierce: *Morality Tales*, Part 3, Conclusion

Reaction paper #3 due

Week 7 Nineteenth Century and Early 20th Century Transformations

Oct. 4(T) The Transformation of Political, Social and Economic Institutions in the 19th century

Ahmed: 127-143

*Khalid Fahmy: “Women, Medicine and Power”

Oct. 6 (Th) “The Liberation of Women”

Ahmed: 144-168

T-Sq:

Qasim Amin

Reaction Paper # 4 due

Week 8 Modernity and the “New Woman”

Oct. 11 (T) Gender and Modernity in Iran

T-Sq: Najmabadi: Veiled Discourses, Unveiled Bodies

Najmabadi: Creating an Educated Housewife in Iran

Oct. 13th (Th) Class Discussion: *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* Book Report #1 Due

Week 9: Midterm

Oct. 18 (T) Fall Break: No Class

Oct. 20 (Th) Midterm

Week 10 The Politics of Gender, Nation and State

Oct. 25 (T) Gender and Nationalism, Feminism

Ahmed: 169-207

T-Sq:

Deniz Kandiyoti, “End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey,” in Deniz Kandiyoti, ed., *Women, Islam & the State* (1991), 22-47.

Oct. 27 (Th) Film: A Voice Like Egypt

Week 11 Women and Nationalism: Case Studies

Nov. 1 (T) Egypt, Iraq and Syria/Lebanon

Nov. 3 (Th) Palestine and Algeria

Week 12 The Politics of Law and Family

Nov. 8 (T) Film: Divorce, Iranian Style I

Nov. 10 (Th) Film: Divorce, Iranian Style II

Week 13 and 14 The Politics of Religion

Nov. 15 (T) Gender and Islamism

Ahmed: 208-234

*Arlene MacLeod: "Hegemonic Relations and Gender Resistance: The New Veiling as Accommodating Protest in Cairo."

Nov. 17 (Th) Film: Veiled Voices

**Nov. 22: (T) Discussion of the Film
Reaction Paper #5**

Nov. 24: Happy Thanksgiving!

Part VII. Women and Conflict in the Middle East

**Nov. 29: (T) Women and Conflict : The Gendered Costs of War
Readings TBA**

Nov. 1 (Th) Case Studies: Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon

**Dec. 6 (T) Discussion: Sitt Marie Rose
Book report #2**

Dec. 8: (Th) Wrap-Up

Take Home Final Due: Dec 13 by 5 pm