

Being an Arab Woman: Feminist Projects in Contemporary Arabic Culture

Course Description:

This course investigates examples of feminist projects throughout the Arab world. The first class opens the discussion by considering definitions of feminism in Arab contexts. We explore nine general topics throughout the course, organizing our study by issues: economy, war and violence, ideologies and identity politics, public discourses, nationalism, literary and artistic discourses, social class, cultural heritage, and globalism. We find that the issues persistent in women's lives are human issues of perennial concern, and we investigate ways that women throughout the contemporary Arab world engage these issues through projects that occupy a spectrum ranging from public activism to personal practice. Along the way, we encounter several theoretical terms (such as 'narrative' and 'performance') to add to our toolbox of concepts and models for thinking about communication and society. The course materials will be provided at no extra charge to students. The materials and assignments are designed to help students think critically, to question their own assumptions, to broaden their knowledge, to engage with disparate views, and to express their own ideas.

Course Requirements:

Participation and Preparation	30 %
Response Papers	20 %
Small Group Discussion Leading	20 %
Midterm / Revision	10 %
Independent Study Project	20 %

Participation: The Participation portion of the grade consists of attendance (on time), active engagement of course material in class discussions, and evidence of preparation outside of class. Preparation, in this class, means: reading, thinking, writing (to be submitted during any three weeks of the course, see below), and preparing to discuss. This is a reading- and writing- intensive course. Students should budget 7-9 hours per week for class-related homework. Preparation also consists of a general contribution to an open class environment of collegiality, mutual respect, and shared responsibilities. The purpose is to allow students to listen to one another and to express their own ideas, while increasing in knowledge and

understanding of the course material. Please inform the instructor of any expected absences in advance. If you need to miss class for a religious observance, university-sanctioned event (such as athletics), or any other reason that you know of in advance, then please notify the instructor as early as possible so that she can make alternative arrangements for you. Also limit the use of all unnecessary technology in respect for the class.

Response Papers: The Response Papers portion of the grade consists of three papers, to be written throughout the semester on the assigned readings. These papers should be written during any three weeks of the course. The purpose is to allow students to explore readings that have sparked their interest, and to express their own ideas in organized writing (complete paragraphs). Target length: 2 pages or 500 words.

Small Group Discussion Leading: This portion of the grade refers to small groups of students (2-3 students) agreeing to meet to discuss the readings for a given week, and to then lead the class discussion that week. The purpose is to allow students to interact independently, and to share responsibility for the direction of class discussions.

Independent Study Project: This portion of the grade consists of a project to be arranged on an individual basis with the instructor.

Remember that the URI policy on academic ethics is in effect in this class. If you have any questions, please ask or consult the University Manual, from section 8.27.10, at <http://www.uri.edu/facsen/8.20-8.27.html>

Course Outline

(subject to adjustment)

Introduction

- Philosophy & Terms: definitions of feminism, gender advocacy, map of feminism, Arab(ic)
- Historical context: Keddie's *Women in the Middle East*
- Possible selection from *Thinking About Women* (2003)
- Background essay by Barbara Petzen

<http://resources.primarysource.org/content.php?pid=515207&sid=4239278>

- Elizabeth Fernea, "The Challenges for Middle Eastern Women in the 21st Century" in *Middle East Journal* 54.2 (Spring 2000) 185-193.

- For MA students: Everett Rowson, "Arabic: Middle Ages to Nineteenth Century," in *Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 43-61.

Part I. Facing Economic Challenges

- Novella *The Servant* by Fatima Sharafeddine
- Novella *Siraaaj* by Radwa Ashour (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2007)
- Huda's story in Carolyn Baugh, *The View from Garden City* (NY: Tom Doherty Associates, 2008) 35-77 and 139-143
- 1 of 3 chapters from *Global Woman*
- Ray Jureidini, "In the Shadows of Family Life: Toward a History of Domestic Service in Lebanon" in *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 5.3 (Fall 2009) 74-101
- Optional Film: *We Loved Each Other So Much*

Part II. Surviving War & Violence

- Short story: Emily Nasrallah, "Our Daily Bread," in *Blood to Ink*
- Rita Stephan, "Leadership of Lebanese Women in the Cedar Revolution" *Muslim Women in War and Crisis: Representation and Reality*, ed. Faegheh Shirazi (Austin: University of Texas, 2010) 175-197.
- Selections from the novel *Granada* and from *Specters* by Radwa Ashour
- Film: *Soraida*
- For MA students: Note and Introduction by Faegheh Shirazi in *Muslim Women in War and Crisis: Representation and Reality* (Austin: University of Texas, 2010) 1-16.

Part III. Engaging Debates of Ideologies and Identity Politics

- Nada S. Fuleihan, "In Search of Identity: Hijab Recollections from West Beirut" *Muslim Women in War and Crisis: Representation and Reality*, ed. Faegheh Shirazi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010) 165-174.
- Sara Salem, "Feminist Critique and Islamic Feminism: The Question of Intersectionality" in *The Postcolonialist* 1.1 (November 2013).
- Interview with Azza Soliman, Egyptian human rights activist
- Lara Deeb, "Silencing Religiosity: Secularity and Arab American Feminisms"
- Third Way selections by Doris Gray in *Beyond Feminism and Islamism: Gender and Equality in North Africa* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013)

- Nawal El Saadawi, "A Postmodern Christian-Muslim Feminist" in *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6.3 (Fall 2010) 183-187.
- Optional: Leila Ahmed selections from her autobiography *Border Passage* and *A Quiet Revolution*
- Film: *Four Women of Egypt*

Part IV. Participating in Public Discourses and Public Spaces

- Stefanie van de Peer, "An encounter with the doyenne of Tunisian film, Selma Baccar" in *The Journal of North African Studies* 16.3 (September 2011) 471-482.
- Hana Hajjar, Saudi cartoonist
- Khede Kasra campaign in Lebanon
- Optional: Selections from Nawal Saadawi's *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*
- Film: *Sukkar al-banaat / Caramel* (Lebanon) 2007. Director: Nadia Labaki.
- Film: *Camera / Woman*

Part V. Supporting the Modern Nation

- Novel and Film: *The Open Door* by Latifa al-Zayyat
- Nadia Marzouki, "Images of Manipulation: Subversion of Women's Rights in the Maghreb" in *Muslim Women in War and Crisis: Representation and Reality*, ed. Faegheh Shirazi (Austin: University of Texas, 2010) 198-209.
- Article by Margot Badran <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1999/462/women.htm>
- *Daughters of the Nile* photos
- **Radwa Ashour** Ch. 5 pages 109-117, 122-129 in *Cultural Criticism in Egyptian Women's Writing*
- Interview with Eman Hashim about 2011 protests
- For MA students: Note and Introduction by editor, in *Muslim Women in War and Crisis: Representation and Reality*, ed. Faegheh Shirazi (Austin: University of Texas, 2010) 198-209.
- Optional: Qasmin Amin selection

Part VI. Telling Stories and Imagining Worlds

- Cheikha Rimitti's *rai* lyrics
- Narrative: Brief theoretical selection on this term

- **Salwa Bakr** short stories: "Green Trees," "Corncobs" and Ch. 2 in *Cultural Criticism in Egyptian Women's Writing*, pages 17-29, 52-55
- Leila Abu Zayd's memoirs *Return to Childhood* and *Year of the Elephant* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1989)
- Optional: "Women's Songs from the Berber Mountains" in *Middle Eastern Women Speak* (Austin: University of Texas, 1977) 127-134.
- Author's Note and Intro. by Caroline Symour-Jorn in *Cultural Criticism in Egyptian Women's Writing*, pages xv - xli
- For MA students: Ch. 1 The 1970s Writers in Context
- Ghada Samman's story collection *The Square Moon* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1998)

Part VII. Family & Domestic Life

- Status: Ulfat Idilbi's short stories "The Charm" and "Public Bath"
- Parenting / Coaching: Latifa al-Zayyat's short story "Narrow Path"
- Domesticity: Fatima Mernissi's memoir *Dreams of Trespass* and scenes from the film "Searching for My Wife's Husband" and biographical articles about Fatima Mernissi
- Marriage / Domestic Partnership: Emily Nasrallah's short story "September Birds"
- "The 1400-Year Hurdles" on Arab women in sports
- Video of mother and champion weight lifter (Ar. with Eng. subtitles)
vimeo.com/90629247

Part VIII. Speech & Performance

- Speech: Lila Abu-Lughod article on resistance in Bedouin women's discourses
- Performance: brief theoretical selections on this term
- Style: *Sayyidati* and other women's magazines
- Noor al-Qasimi, "Immodest Modesty: Accommodating Dissent and the 'Abaya-as-Fashion in the Arab Gulf States" in *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6.1 (Winter 2010) 46-74.
- The *caftan* in Morocco, article "Three Generations of Moroccan Fashion Designers: Negotiating Local and Global Identity" by M. A. Jansen

Part IX. Deploying Heritage

- Somayya Ramadan story (my translation) from *Qālat al-rāwiyya / She the Storyteller Said: Stories told from a woman's perspective, inspired by popular Arabic texts* (Cairo: Women & Memory Forum, 1999) available online:

<http://k1nlitra.ca/k1n/article.php?opt=3&i=MTQ3&i2=MTM=&l=En>

- *Abu Jmeel's Daughter* Levantine folktale selection by Jamal Sleem Nuweihed (New York: Interlink Books, 2002)
- *Women as Brave as Men* Amazigh / Berber folktale selection (Ifrane, Morocco: Al-Akhawayn University, 2003)
- Folktale: "Aisha" rendered by Fatima Mernissi, also pp. 104-117 in Hejaiej, Monia. *Behind Closed Doors: Women's Oral Narratives in Tunis*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1996.
- Film: Scenes from *Women's Wives* by Farida Benlyazid with review by Carter

Part X. Creating Cyberspace, Globalism, and Universalist Ideals

- Blog, book, and television series: *I Want to Get Married*
- LGBT - Article by Moroccan man explaining homosexuality to his mother
- Selections from *Sex and the Citadel*
- Interview with Moroccan singer Oum <http://globalgirlmedia.org/>
- *Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow* novel

Welcome! / marHaba / مَرَحِبَا