The Spirituality of Muslim Women

Course Outline

Instructor: Ingrid Mattson, PhD
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Department of Theology, Room A227
519-438-7224, ext. 269
*Email is the preferred method of communication.

Time and Days: Wednesdays 3:30-6:30

Room: V210

Prerequisites: none

Course Description and Goals:
In this class we will explore the spirituality of Muslim women past and present. We begin with a study of the portrayal of women in the Qur’an and the lives of female companions of the Prophet Muhammad whose concerns and perspectives helped shape the spiritual development of the early Muslim community. In later centuries, we will look at the roles women have played in the establishment of religious discourses and institutions and discuss challenges Muslim women have faced in fulfilling their spiritual needs in diverse societies. We will consider many more questions, such as how spirituality is embodied by women and the impact of such practices as gender segregation and hijab. Does the elevation of “the feminine” in traditional spirituality contribute to Muslim women’s spiritual empowerment or the contrary? What are the spiritual practices and understandings of major life cycles? How do women understand the spiritual dimensions of marriage and celibacy, motherhood and childlessness, intimacy and abuse?

Learning Goals:

- To know what the Qur’an says about women and gender
- To understand different hermeneutical approaches to the Qur’an and the Sunnah and various legal methodologies that impact women
- To be able to identify at least a dozen prominent Muslim women religious leaders in history or contemporary society
- To be able to discuss the ways in which Muslim women’s spirituality is the same or different as men’s spirituality
- To identify the way culture and social structures shape and impact Muslim women’s spirituality.

Course Materials:
All readings will be uploaded to OWL. You are only required to bring for the first few weeks of class a translation of the Qur’an. I recommend Muhammad Asad or Muhammad Abdul Haleem’s translation. If you know any Arabic, make sure you have the Arabic Qur’an handy as well.

Grading:

1. **Participation: 10%**
   Students are expected to respond in class to required readings and engage in discussions. Students will lose 2 points/day for unexcused absences from class after one absence.

2. **Presentation 30%**: Each student will make a 20 minute presentation in class about a historical or contemporary Muslim woman religious or spiritual leader, religious scholar or activist who expresses herself through Islamic religious discourse. The presentation should be accompanied by a one-page
handout and will be scheduled by the instructor during the second week of class once we see how many students are in the class. You must request approval for the subject of your presentation from the instructor. A list of possible subjects will be supplied, or you may suggest your own subject.

3. **Book report 20%**: Students will submit one 1200-word book report on a book approved by the instructor. A list of possible books for review will be supplied, or you may suggest your own title.

4. **Research paper or project 40%**: A research paper of 8-10 pages must on a topic approved by the instructor. In addition to any monographs the student may find on the topic, he or she should also consult the Index Islamicus, JSTOR, the Religion Index or another source to search for relevant scholarly articles. In lieu of a paper, students may develop projects in which they integrate and apply what they have learned in the course. Examples of possible projects include: A presentation designed for a faith community/community group; writing and submitting entries for Wikipedia; designing and installing a creative expression of ideas/people discussed in the class. All projects must be approved in advance.

**MTS Students will write a 12-15 page paper.**

**OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

1. **Use of Electronic Devices during Class**
   I do not allow the use of a laptop or other electronic devices during class, even to record notes. Studies have shown that such usage blocks deeper comprehension and analysis of the ideas being presented and discussed. Please read this article: [http://www.educationnews.org/technology/study-laptops-in-the-classroom-can-distract-hinder-learning/](http://www.educationnews.org/technology/study-laptops-in-the-classroom-can-distract-hinder-learning/) and this article: [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/technology/21brain.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/technology/21brain.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0). If, having read these articles, you still are determined to take notes on your laptop, you must submit a request in writing to the professor, explaining why you believe this will improve your learning and what you will do to ensure that your screen does not distract others.

2. **Use of Electronic Devices during Tests and Exams**
   No electronic devices may be used during tests and exams unless required for a documented medical condition or learning disability.

3. **Academic Offences**: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholoff.pdf).

4. **Plagiarism-detecting Software/Computer Marking**:
   A)  All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com ([http://www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com)).

5. **Support Services**:
   - UWO Registrar's Office: [http://www4.registrar.uwo.ca](http://www4.registrar.uwo.ca)
   - Huron's Faculty of Theology, Office of the Dean: [http://www.huronuc.on.ca/faculty_of_theology/info_for_current_students](http://www.huronuc.on.ca/faculty_of_theology/info_for_current_students)
   - srice@uwo.ca, 519-438-7224, ext. 289
   - Huron's Writing Skills Centre: [http://www.huronuc.on.ca/student_life/writing_services](http://www.huronuc.on.ca/student_life/writing_services)
   - UWO Student Support and Development Services: [http://communications.uwo.ca/current_students/student_services.htm](http://communications.uwo.ca/current_students/student_services.htm)

6. **Accommodation for absences**:
   *If documentation is required for either medical or non-medical academic accommodation, then such documentation must be submitted by the student directly to your Faculty's Dean's office (or academic counselor),*
and not to the instructor. For the Faculty of Theology, all such documentation must be submitted to room A120. It will be the Dean’s office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

a) Non-medical absences and late work:
Points will be deducted from the participation grade after two unexcused absences from class. 5% will be deducted per day for late assignments.
A request for relief be submitted to the Dean's Office in order for accommodation for non-medical absences from tests and examinations to be considered.

b) Medical absences: See also the Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medical.pdf

For work representing 10% or more of the overall grade for the course, a student must present documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet his/her academic responsibilities. Documentation must be submitted as soon as possible to your Faculty Dean’s office (Huron Arts & Social Science students should take their documentation to the Academic Counsellor, through the Academic Services Centre at Huron), together with a Request for Relief specifying the nature of the accommodation requested. The request and documentation will be assessed and appropriate accommodation will be determined by the Dean's office in consultation with the instructor(s.) Academic accommodation will be granted ONLY where the documentation indicates that the onset, duration and severity of the illness are such that the student could not reasonably be expected to complete his/her academic responsibilities.

The UWO Student Medical Certificate (SMC) and Request for Relief are available at the Student Centre website (https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/index.cfm), Huron University College Academic Counselling website (www.huronuc.on.ca) or from the Dean's Office or Academic Services Centre at Huron.

SCHEDULE

September 14
Introduction
For those who have not taken an Islamic/Muslim Studies class before, read: Susan Douglass, “The Fabric of Muslim Daily Life”.

Women in the Qur’an
- Eve: 2:30-39; 7:11-33; 20:116-123
- Four women: 66:10-12

The Mothers of the Believers
- Qur’an 33:6; 33:28-34; 24:1-33; 60:7-13

September 21
Qur’anic Hermeneutics and Women in the Qur’an
- Mattson, selections from The Story of the Qur’an, Chapter Two, pp. 68-73.

The Positive and Negative Contributions of Tafsir
- [Lecture by Mattson on “Occasions of Revelation” and the responsiveness of Qur’an to women – in class]
September 28

**Gender and Divine Ontology**

**Can Women be Prophets?**
- Hajar: Reading from Mattson, The Story of the Qur’an, Chapter One
- Lynda Clarke, “Prophecy and Women Prophets,” in Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Cultures

**The Prophet Muhammad and Women**

October 5

**Hadith Methodology and Women**
- Fatima Mernissi, “Introduction,” from The Veil and the Male Elite.
- Khaled Abou El Fadl, “Faith-based assumptions and determinations demeaning to women,” chapter 7 of Speaking in God’s name: Islamic law, authority and women. (pp. 209-218)

October 12

**Women and Religious Scholarship**
- Selections from Ruth Roded, Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Sa’d to Who’s Who (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Pub., 1994), pp. 3; 143-144.
- Selections from Muhammad Akram Nadwi, Al-Muhaddithat: the Women Scholars of Hadith (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2007); students will be assigned one chapter from Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8
- Preface to Mack and Boyd, One Women’s Jihad.

October 19

**Women and Religious Education**
- Watch: “The Light in Her Eyes” (in class)

**Women, Charity and Patronage**

October 26 – FALL STUDY BREAK; NO CLASS

**Book reports due – put in DropBox**
- Watch and take notes for next class for discussion: “Koran by Heart”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptHdmw57rzM.

November 2

- Discuss “Koran by Heart” documentary

**Women as Pastoral Leaders**
- Amina Wadud, Cape Town Khutba from Inside the Gender Jihad, pp. 158-163.
Women Spiritual Guides in Sufism

- Nana Asma'u, poem: “Sufi Women”
- Margaret Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*, 19-68.
- Reading from Murata, *The Tao of Islam*

November 9

Women and the Mosque

- Christopher Melchert, "Whether to Keep Women out of the Mosque: A Survey of Medieval Islamic Law".
- Watch (in class) documentary by Zarqa Nawaz, “Me and the Mosque”

November 16

Presentations

November 23

Presentations

November 30

Family, Life Cycles and Ritual Life

- Aliah Schleifer, “Respect for the Mother in Islam,” from *Voices of Islam*
- Seemi Bushra Ghazi, “The Birth of Aliya Maryam,” from *Voices of Islam*
- Nana Asma'u, Lament for her sister
- Afeefa Syeed on the death of her son Hamza

December 7

Resistance and Religion

- Amina Wadud, “Muslim Women’s Collectives, Organizations, and Islamic Reform,” Chapter 3 from *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women’s Reform in Islam*
- Asiila Rasool, “Can Sharing a Husband be a Feminist Act?” [http://www.altmuslimah.com/b/rsa/can_sharing_a_husband_be_a_feminist_act](http://www.altmuslimah.com/b/rsa/can_sharing_a_husband_be_a_feminist_act).
RS 3131 SPIRITUALITY OF MUSLIM WOMEN

BOOKS FOR REVIEW


El-Azhary Sonbol, Amira (Editor). *Beyond the Exotic: Women's Histories in Islamic Societies* (Gender, Culture & Politics in the Middle East) Syracuse University Press. 2005.


Grewal, Zareena. *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority.* New York University Press, 2014. [please focus on women in this study]


**Non-Exhaustive List of Women for In-Class Presentations**

*(Confirm selection with instructor)*

**Pre-Modern:**

- A lesser-known but important Companion such as Al-Shifa’ Layla bint Abdullah
- Any 2nd or 3rd generation Muslim woman (i.e., a “Successor” or a “Successor to the Successors”), such as Asma bint Talha
- Sufi Shaykha or ascetic, such as Rabia al-Adawiyya of Basra
- “Lady” Nafisa bint Hassan
- Hadith scholar, legal scholar or preacher of the classical period such as Fatima al-Samarqandiyya
- Nana Asma’u of the West African Sokoto caliphate
- Fatima al-Fihriyya or other woman patron of religious institutions

**Modern:**

- Fatima al-Yashrutiyya, Sufi teacher of Palestine
- Munira al-Qubaysi, Syrian and global spiritual leader
- Bint al-Shati’, Egyptian scholar of the Qur’an
- Mukhtar Mai, activist of Pakistan
- Malala Yousafzai, activist of Pakistan
- Amina Wadud, religious scholar of the USA
- Mohja Kahf, poet and author of USA and Syria
- Tawwakul Karman, human rights activist of Yemen
- Amina Rasul-Bernardo, peace activist of the Philippines
- Kadriye Avci Erdemli, Former Fmr. Deputy Mufti of Turkey
- Tayyibah Taylor, Founder and Publisher of Azizah Magazine
- Anse Tamara Gray, Religious Scholar, Founder and Director of Rabata
- Many other women can be found on [http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/](http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/)