

*Rutgers University*  
*Department of Political Science*  
**Fall 2019**

**Topics in Comparative Politics: Women, Gender, and the Middle East**  
**(21:790:465:01)(21:988:389:03)**

Instructor: Nermin Allam  
Office: Hill Hall 708  
Email: [nermin.allam@rutgers.edu](mailto:nermin.allam@rutgers.edu)

Room: HAH 411  
Friday 2:30PM - 5:20PM  
Office hours: Fridays 12:00PM -  
2:00PM or by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The status of women in Middle Eastern and Islamic societies continues to figure squarely in policy discussions and cultural debates. It often functions as a tool to measure progress or as an example of all that is wrong with the Middle East region. Central in these debates is the figure of the *Middle Eastern Woman*—which is often conflated with the *Muslim Woman*. The figure serves as an instrumental symbol within various political programs and functions as a site for cultural demarcation. In this course, we will survey different images of the *Middle Eastern Woman*. We will pay special attention to how these figures are constructed and used to justify certain political projects and discourses and the role that women have played in either shaping or challenging these images. The course will offer students the opportunity to put into practice what they learn in class through partnering with Wafa House—a domestic violence organization founded by women from Middle Eastern and Islamic communities in New Jersey. The course and assignments are designed in a way that facilitates making bridges between academic theory and everyday life. The practical community experience will offer students the opportunity to take a very close look at multiple understandings of agency, gender, and sexuality with which they may be familiar, as well as those which may be unfamiliar.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

The main objective of the course is to supply students with theoretical skills as well as empirical evidence necessary to evaluate and develop their own views on women, gender, and politics in the Middle East. After completing this course, students will gain:

- critical knowledge of some of the key debates and theoretical approaches in the field of Gender and Women's Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic societies
- familiarity with historical and current women's movements and the different modalities of female agency in Middle Eastern and Islamic societies
- ability to situate theories and approaches discussed in class within “real-world” situations
- experience of how students' newly acquired knowledge in gender politics and Middle Eastern studies might find a home and a place in the world

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Every student enrolled in the course is expected to participate in the community engagement placement requiring 8 hours to be dedicated to our community partner over the term. Our community partner, Wafa House, is located in Passaic, you will need to budget extra time for commuting. The community placement has two components:

- 1- You are required to volunteer 4 hours at the office of Wafa House. Signup sheets are posted on the blackboard. You will have until September 20 to sign up, after that date I will randomly assign you to whatever available shift.
- 2- You are required to attend a 4 hours event organized by our community partners. Events will be posted on the blackboard.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

Attendance and Participation:	20%	
Short Reflection paper:	20%	<i>November 01</i>
Presentation:	25%	
Final Paper:	35%	<i>December 06</i>

**Participation:** Students are expected to have read the assigned readings and to be prepared to answer quizzes as well as participate with informed comments and questions during the lectures and group presentations. Students are also expected to attend sessions designated for their community-engagement assignments.

Grading Scheme	
Attendance	/10
Participation	/10
Total	/20

**Short Reflection Paper:** Students will be required to write one short reflection paper (approx. 750 words, double-spaced, *Times New Roman* font size 12). The short reflection paper should respond to **one** of the readings or media materials assigned to **one** of the class meetings. Papers are due before the class that we are scheduled to discuss them. The latest you can submit your paper is before class on **November 01**. Please submit your paper through Blackboard. You should **not** summarize the reading. Assume that the reader has also read the piece and speak from a position of familiarity with the arguments.

Please consider the following questions while writing your reflection paper:

- How does the reading or media clip contribute to your understanding of the topic?
- What is your evaluation of the strength and weakness of the main argument(s)?
- Are there points that you find challenging—or that you disagree with in the reading or media clip?
- What questions do you think remained unanswered about the topic?
- Is there anything that surprised you?
- How does the reading or media clip link to broader themes and, when possible, other articles discussed so far in the course?

Need writing support? Visit the University Writing Center for writing workshops and one-on-one tutoring services at: <https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/writing->

[center](http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/rlc). Another excellent resource for writing support is Rutgers Learning Center at: <http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/rlc>

Grading Scheme	
Depth of Analysis	/10
Link to Other Readings	/5
Clarity of Organization, Grammar/Writing Quality	/5
Total Grade	/20

**Presentation:** Students are expected to sign up for an oral presentation (approx. 20 - 30 minutes) on one of the assigned novels. The library carries copies of the assigned novels; the novels can also be purchased from the bookstore. The assigned novels are:

- ❖ Group A: Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1994).
- ❖ Group B: al- Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*. (Hoopoe, 2017).
- ❖ Group C: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. (Pantheon Books, 2003).
- ❖ Group D: Şāni‘, Rajā’ ‘Abd Allāh. 2007. *Girls of Riyadh*. Penguin Press.

Presentations must include the following components: 1) author's brief biography; 2) summary of the novel, its chapters, and the main plot; 3) discussion of the images, representations, and tropes that were used and evoked in the novel; 4) discussion of some of your favourite quotes; 5) questions to lead class discussion. You will the opportunity to sign up to the groups until September 13, after this date I will assign students to groups. Please note that you are responsible for remembering the date of your presentation. Please note that you are responsible for communicating with your group.

Grading Scheme	
Author's biography	/5
Summary of the novel	/5
Representation of women	/5
Quotes	/5
Questions for discussion	/5
Total	/25

**Final Paper:** Students will be required to write a final paper (approx. 2,500 words, double-spaced, *Times New Roman* font size 12). The final paper must include a reflection on the community work experience and how it relates to readings and themes covered in the course. The paper must include the following:

- **Overview of the community engagement experience:** In this section, you will give an overview of the activities and tasks you have completed throughout your community engagement experience. In addition, you will tell the reader about the mission and objectives of the organization. In other words, you will describe the rationale that informs the services and/or programs offered by the organization and indicate the individuals whom the services and/or programs are tailored to.

- **Critical analysis of the community engagement experience:** In this section, you will perform an evaluation of your community engagement experience. The components of your evaluation must include: (a) constructive evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the program(s) of the organization, and (b) sharing any eventful moments during your experience.
- **Lessons learned during the community engagement experience:** In this section, you will explain how the community engaged learning experience together with the course readings helped you develop a better understanding of gender, agency, and women's activism. Did your work with the organization contribute to dispelling or did it reinforce some of the myth associated with the figure of the "Middle Eastern women" that we have covered in class? And finally how did your community engaged learning enrich your commitment to gender equality and cultural understanding?

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Grading Scheme	
Critical Analysis and Reflection	/25
Clarity of Organization, Grammar/Writing Quality	/5
Citations and Bibliography	/5
Total Grade	/35

## GRADING SCHEME

<i>Descriptor</i>	<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Grades Scored Between</i>
Outstanding	A	90 - 100
Very Good	B+	87 and less than 90
Good	B	80 and less than 87
Satisfactory	C+	77 and less than 80
	C	70 and less than 77
Poor	D	65 and less than 70
Fail	F	0 and less than 65

## **RUTGERS UNIVERSITY-NEWARK ACADEMIC POLICIES**

**Attendance:** Regular attendance is essential for optimal performance in any course. Unexcused absences will result in partial or total loss of the grade for the “attendance and participation” component(s) of a course, as well as for any assignments that are not handed-in or completed as a result. Per the University policy, absences are excused only in the case of illness, death in the family, religious observance, or official college business. In cases of potentially excusable absences, please notify your professor immediately and provide the necessary documentation.

**Completion of Requirements:** You should complete all the requirements of the course. If you do not submit an assignment or appear for your presentation, you will automatically fail the course.

**Late Assignments:** It is your responsibility to inform your professor as soon as it becomes clear that your assignment will be late. Late research papers will receive *a penalty of 5% per day* including weekends. Research papers more than one week late will not be accepted.

**Make-Ups for Presentations and Exams:** Students who miss class on the date they were scheduled to make their presentation will not be able to make it up on another date, unless the absence was documented and excused in accordance with the University policy. Students will not be allowed to take the mid-term exam on another date unless the absence was documented and excused in accordance with the University policy.

**Academic Integrity and Honesty:** Rutgers University is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the academic integrity code at: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/> and avoid any behavior which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.

**Important Semester Dates:** Important Semester Dates are found at <https://registrar.newark.rutgers.edu/office-registrar-academic-calendar>

**Use of Electronic Devices:** You can only use your laptop for taking notes. Please turn off all cell phones and personal electronic devices when you enter the classroom. There is a wealth of research demonstrating that the use of these devices in the classroom impedes not only the learning of students who use them, but those who are seated near them. Use of cell phones will result in loss of your attendance grade.

**Email Communication:** Outside of the classroom, the primary method of communication will be via emails, sent either directly or via Blackboard. It is your responsibility to ensure that your Rutgers email ID is operational to receive my emails and announcements. Contact the Technology Help Desk immediately if you experience problems in receiving emails from me. If you are still reading the syllabus at this point, email me at the address listed above with a cute kitten picture and you will be able to secure a two-day extension on the final course paper.

Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

**Religious Holiday Policy and Accommodations:** Students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule. The Division of Student Affairs is available to verify absences for religious observance, as needed: (973) 353-5063 or [DeanofStudents@newark.rutgers.edu](mailto:DeanofStudents@newark.rutgers.edu).

**Students with Temporary Conditions/Injuries:** Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury that is adversely affecting their ability to fully participate in their courses should submit a request for assistance at: <https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu>.

**Students Who are Pregnant:** The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist students with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy: (973) 353-1906 or [TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu](mailto:TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu).

**Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment:** Students experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, should know that help and support are available. To report an incident, contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance: (973) 353-1906 or [TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu](mailto:TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu). To submit an incident report: [tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm](https://tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm). To speak with a staff member who is confidential and does **NOT** have a reporting responsibility, contact the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance: (973) 353-1918 or [run.vpva@rutgers.edu](mailto:run.vpva@rutgers.edu).

**Childcare:** While I maintain the same high expectations for all students in my classes regardless of their parenting status, I understand how unforeseen disruptions in childcare can prevent you from meeting course expectations. In case of minor illnesses and/or unforeseen disruptions in childcare, students are welcomed to bring their child to class. It is however important to note that this is not a long-term childcare solution. I also request that you sit close to the door so that if the little one needs attention or is distracting other students, you can step outside and attend to their needs. The University does not have a formal policy on children in the classroom; the policies described here are based on best practices adopted in family-friendly courses.

**Disability Services:** Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must complete and submit the Registration Form, schedule and complete an intake meeting, and submit appropriate documentation. If your request for reasonable accommodations is approved, you will receive a Letter of Accommodations (LOA), which you should present privately to the instructor as early in the semester as possible. Accommodations are not retroactive and are effective only upon submission of the LOA to the instructor. Please begin the process by completing and submitting the Registration Form, Applying for Services, which is available at the website below.

- **Applying for Services:** <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/applying-for-services>
- **Documentation Guidelines:** <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>

- **Letter of Accommodations (LOA):** <https://ods.rutgers.edu/my-accommodations/letter-of-accommodations>
- **Office of Disability Services (ODS)**  
Suite 219, Paul Robeson Campus Center  
(973) 353-5375  
[odsnewark@rutgers.edu](mailto:odsnewark@rutgers.edu)

### FEELING OVERWHELMED?

The Student Wellness Program (SWP) is a free and confidential counseling service which helps students deal effectively with stressors and pressures.

- Call to schedule an appointment: (973) 353-5805
- Drop off at: Counseling Center Room 101, Blumenthal Hall,
- Visit website for more information at: or <http://counseling.newark.rutgers.edu/>

### COURSE SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNED READINGS

The readings will draw on a variety of disciplines, from political science and sociology to history and anthropology. I understand that students are often required to purchase several textbooks for each course which places an undue financial hardship on them. I have thus assigned only one textbook for this course. It can be purchased from the University Bookstore:

- ❖ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992).

In addition to the course text, the majority of the assigned readings will be in the form of academic journal articles, book chapters, newspaper pieces, and blog entries. These readings are accessible online through the library databases at Rutgers and available on the Blackboard.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings, Media, and In-class Activities	Assignments and Exams Due Date
1	09/06	<b>Introduction</b>	No Required Reading	
2	09/13	<b>Gender and Colonialism: The figure of the "Harem"</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Malek Alloula, <i>Colonial Harem</i>, trans. Myrna Godzich (Minneapolis, United States: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), [pages 26 to 59]. Available at: <a href="http://bit.ly/2MsudsD">http://bit.ly/2MsudsD</a></li> </ul>	

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ali, Isra. “The harem fantasy in nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings.” <i>Dialectical Anthropology</i> 39, no. 1 (n.d.): 33–46. Available at: <a href="http://bit.ly/2PAuoPH">http://bit.ly/2PAuoPH</a></li> </ul>	
3	09/20	<b>Meet at Wafa House at 3:30pm. Address posted on blackboard</b>		
4	09/27	<b>Gender and the Politics of Modernity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leila Ahmed, <i>Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate</i> (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992). Chapters 8.</li> <li>• Jenny B. White, “State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman,” <i>NWSA Journal</i>, no. 3 (2003): 145 - 159. Available at: <a href="http://bit.ly/2B6FY2Z">http://bit.ly/2B6FY2Z</a></li> </ul>	<b>Group A</b> Presentation on Fatima Mernissi, <i>Dreams of Trespass : Tales of a Harem Girlhood /</i> (Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1994).
5	10/04	<b>Gender, Nationalism, and Liberation Struggles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ellen L. Fleischmann, “3: The Other ‘Awakening’: The Emergence of Women’s Movements in the Modern Middle East, 1900-1940,” in <i>Social History of Women &amp; Gender</i></li> </ul>	

			<p><i>In The Modern Middle East</i> (Perseus Books, LLC, 1999), 89 - 139.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marnia Lazreg, “Gender and Politics in Algeria: Unraveling the Religious Paradigm,” <i>Signs</i> 15, no. 4 (1990): 755–780. Available at: <a href="http://bit.ly/2Mr7RrE">http://bit.ly/2Mr7RrE</a></li> <li>• The Battle of Algiers Documentary [In-class]</li> </ul>	
6	10/11	<b>Women from the Postcolonial State to the Neoliberal state</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mervat F. Hatem, “Economic and Political Liberation in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism,” <i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i> 24, no. 2 (1992): 231–251. Available at <a href="http://bit.ly/2Mr8Jwq">http://bit.ly/2Mr8Jwq</a></li> <li>• Mounira. M. Charrad, “Policy Shifts: State, Islam, and Gender in Tunisia, 1930s–1990s,” <i>Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State &amp; Society</i> 4, no. 2 (July 1, 1997):</li> </ul>	Group B: al-Zayyat, Latifa, <i>The Open Door</i> . (Hoopoe, 2017).

			284–319, Available at: <a href="http://bit.ly/2MpApl4">http://bit.ly/2MpApl4</a>	
7	10/18	<b>Refer to your schedule at Wafa House</b>		
8	10/25	<b>Women, Gender and Political Islam: The Empowered Muslim Women</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Margot Badran, “Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/S: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond,” <i>Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies</i> 1, no. 1 (2005): 6–28. Available at: <a href="http://bit.ly/2Mp5KVb">http://bit.ly/2Mp5KVb</a></li> <li>• Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject. Conversation with the author Saba Mahmood. Available at: <a href="http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-myth-of-the-secular-part-3-1.3154810">http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-myth-of-the-secular-part-3-1.3154810</a></li> <li>• Rochelle Terman, “The Piety of Public Participation: The Revolutionary Muslim Woman in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” <i>Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions</i> 11, no. 3–4 (September 1, 2010): 289–310,</li> </ul>	Group C presentation on: Marjane Satrapi, <i>Persepolis</i> /. (Pantheon Books, 2003).

			Available at: <a href="http://bit.ly/2Mr47Gp">http://bit.ly/2Mr47Gp</a>	
9	11/01	<b>Refer to your schedule at Wafa House</b>		Short Reflection Paper due
10	11/08	<b>Women, Gender, and the War on Terrorism: Are Muslim Women Weak Or Are They Dangerous?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others,” <i>American Anthropologist</i> 104, no. 3 (January 7, 2008): 783–90, Available at: <a href="http://bit.ly/2MtHD7S">http://bit.ly/2MtHD7S</a></li> <li>• Hadiya Abdelrahman, “Are We Weak Or Are We Terrorists? Here’s How Muslim Women Are Caught In The Web Of Violent Stereotypes,” <i>Everyday Feminism</i>, October 30, 2017, Available at: <a href="https://everydayfeminism.com/2017/10/muslim-women-stereotypes/">https://everydayfeminism.com/2017/10/muslim-women-stereotypes/</a>.</li> <li>• The Economist, “Why the French Keep Trying to Ban Islamic Body Wear,” <i>The Economist</i>, August 23, 2016, Available</li> </ul>	

			<p>at  <a href="https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2016/08/23/why-the-french-keep-trying-to-ban-islamic-body-wear">https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2016/08/23/why-the-french-keep-trying-to-ban-islamic-body-wear</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ISIS Women Unveiled Documentary [In-class]</li> </ul>	
11	11/15	<b>Refer to your schedule at Wafa House</b>		
12	11/22	<p><b>Gender Politics post the Arab Uprisings: Female Activists</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sherine Hafez, “No Longer a Bargain: Women, Masculinity, and the Egyptian Uprising,” <i>American Ethnologist</i> 39, no. 1 (01 2012): 37–42, Available at: <a href="http://bit.ly/2MwgzVC">http://bit.ly/2MwgzVC</a></li> <li>• Marwa Shalaby, “Challenges Facing Women’s Political Participation Post Arab Spring: The Cases of Egypt and Tunisia,” in <i>Empowering Women After the Arab Spring</i>, ed. Marwa Shalaby and Valentine M. Moghadam, Comparative Feminist Studies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), Available at: <a href="http://bit.ly/2MtIXa">http://bit.ly/2MtIXa</a></li> </ul>	<p>Group D presentation  Group D: Şāni‘, Rajā’ ‘Abd Allāh. 2007. <i>Girls of Riyadh</i> /. Penguin Press.</p>

			<p><a href="#">Z</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Al-Najjar, Omaila. “What It Means to Be a Women’s Rights Activist in Saudi Arabia.” Accessed January 22, 2019. <a href="https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/means-women-rights-activist-saudi-arabia-181209132021565.html">https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/means-women-rights-activist-saudi-arabia-181209132021565.html</a>.</li> </ul>	
13	11/29	<b>No Class</b>		
14	12/06	<b>Conclusion and reflection on the themes covered and the experience of community-engaged learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No Required Readings</li> </ul>	Final Paper Due Note: Extra 5% if you would like to present on your experience