**Beyond the Veil: Women and Muslim Culture in Africa**

AAS 4570-002 / ANTH 4590-001

University of Virginia, Carter G. Woodson Institute for African-American & African Studies

Spring 2014

Wednesdays, 3:30-6:00, New Cabell Hall 209

Instructor: Dr. Katherine Wiley

Email: [kaw2cq@virginia.edu](mailto:kaw2cq@virginia.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesday, 3-5, Minor Hall 107 (enter through Minor 108)

**Course Description**

In recent years Muslim women have been gaining increasing attention in the Western media. George Bush partly used liberating Afghan women as justification for starting the war there. France’s ban on headscarves incited debate about religious expression and its place in the public sphere. But what about the over 400 million people who practice Islam in Africa? What does Islam mean to female practitioners on this continent? How do they impact how this religion is practiced in their home countries and elsewhere? How does their gender shape their religious practices, and how does being Muslim shape what it means to be a woman in these contexts?

**Why study this topic?**

This course examines the lived experience of Muslim women in North and West Africa. We will explore a variety of issues that are significant to contemporary Muslim women including work, marriage, economic development, community, and family asking how their religious beliefs and practices impact these aspects of their lives and vice versa. An underlying question that we will explore throughout the class is how and whether Muslim women exercise agency and how their religion constrains or empowers them. We will also examine the diversity and complexity of what it means to be Muslim and female in Africa. This course is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing from African Studies, anthropology, history, and women’s studies. We will also use novels and primary sources to help us gain insight into how women understand their faiths and lives. Your main assignment will involve drafting a major research paper, which will be an opportunity for you to explore a topic that particularly interests you.

Developing a well-rounded understanding of some of the issues that Muslim women face in Africa and how their faith impacts their lives will be important skills for you if you are considering working in the nonprofit sector, public policy, international development work, or pursuing a higher degree in the humanities or social sciences. Furthermore, this course will familiarize you with the diversity of Muslim experiences which will help you to develop a more complex understanding of this faith, combat harmful stereotypes, and become a more informed and engaged global citizen.

**Learning Objectives**

Upon successful completion of the course, you will be able to

* Better understand the diversity of Muslim practices by conducting course readings and Internet research on women’s experiences with this faith in various parts of the continent
* Identify key issues, concerns, and opportunities that Muslim women face in Africa, both relating to their religion and other aspects of their lives through completing course readings and an independent research project
* Critically engage with media and scholarly works through a news analysis assignment that helps you learn to identify stereotypes and biases in news coverage about Muslims and through writing weekly discussion questions
* Analyze, organize, and disseminate scholarly material and data by conceiving of a research question and drafting a major research paper

**Required Books**

All books are on reserve at Clemons Library and can be borrowed for three hours. Please note that the Robinson and Buggenhagen books are available as electronic books through the library’s website.

* Robinson, David. 2004. *Muslim Societies in African History, New approaches to African history*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
* Newcomb, Rachel. 2009. *Women of Fes: Ambiguities of urban life in Morocco*: University of Pennsylvania Press.
* Mernissi, Fatima. 1994. *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.
* Buggenhagen, Beth Anne. 2012. *Muslim Families in Global Senegal: Money Takes Care of Shame*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
* Ba, Mariama. 2012. *So Long a Letter.* Waveland Press.
* All other course materials will be available on Collab

**Guide to reading and discussions**

Since this class will involve substantial reading, I want to makes some comments on how you might approach the readings. First, don’t think of the readings as the Absolute Truth! Be critical of what you are reading, drawing upon your own experiences and knowledge. If you disagree with what a reading says, that’s fine, but be sure that you can back up your contentions with evidence from the text and your life experiences. Our course readings will be in conversation with each other. Feel free to draw upon past authors’ viewpoints to show how they support (or not) the text that we are currently reading.

At the same time, keep an open mind. Listen to what the readings have to say. Think about your life experiences and reading you have done that may corroborate the course readings. Give yourself time to reflect on the information offered in them. These are not readings to be run through rapidly. Take your time with them; allow yourself to enter into a kind of conversation with them.

This is an upper-level class, so you can see that I assign a substantial amount of reading. While you read, focus on identifying the authors’ main arguments and thinking about how the evidence offered does (or does not) support them. Also note parts of these texts that you find surprising, particularly interesting, or that you feel speak to the larger questions that we’re addressing in the class. Note that I don’t expect you to remember picky details (e.g. all the dates and specific information that Robinson provides about various Muslim empires in Africa); rather, think about the major points those details illustrate (that a variety of Muslim empires have governed various parts of Africa over the last millennium and so Islam is nothing new to the continent and has shaped people’s lives there).

Some of the topics that we discuss will be contentious – is veiling a form of oppression? Are women always disadvantaged in a patriarchal society? Can (and does) religion enhance people’s lives? – and not all of us will always agree on the answers. We shouldn’t and lively debate will help to keep this class engaging and exciting. But such debates also require us to listen actively and try to understand each other’s points of view. I welcome you to disagree with each other (and me!), but we should do so respectfully. There are no ‘wrong’ answers here so I invite all of you to share your viewpoints freely.

**Assignments** (*more complete prompts will be given closer to the due dates*)

**Participation** (30% of grade)

This class will be run as a seminar (e.g. lots of discussion and very little lecture). As an upper-level course, the seminar format will let us delve into the readings and the issues they raise together in a deeper way than we could in a lecture class. The seminar structure allows us to work together to explore topics through rich and stimulating conversations and debates. Since you are all advanced students, I have designed the class to draw on your expertise and insights through in-class discussions and discussion questions that you will submit. As advanced students, I also expect you to be committed to completing the readings and identifying questions and topics to discuss. While our discussions will help you to explore points of interest in the readings, they will also give you the opportunity to practice articulating your opinions and insights before others, skills that will serve you well in your future relationships and careers.

Your participation grade is a substantial part of your final course grade. It will be based on three components:

* **Discussion questions:** I will ask you to submit one discussion question each week that is based on the reading by 11:55 p.m. on Tuesday via the assignment page on Collab. I will accept questions up to 3 p.m. on Wednesday, but any that come in after the due date (11:55 p.m. on Tuesday) will be docked one point. The question serves two main purposes: it should demonstrate your thoughtful engagement with the readings and help us to identify places that need further exploration. Your question could critique an aspect of the author’s argument that you feel she does not adequately develop, question how topics in the reading connect to broader issues we discuss, draw connections (or disconnections) between this text and others that we have read, or identify areas that do not make sense to you. I will use some of your questions to help structure the class which will help us to focus on parts of the texts that you find particularly interesting. Feel free to include additional questions if you have them; only your first question will be graded each week. Each question is worth 2 points (2 = excellent; 1 = acceptable; 0 = didn’t do it or very low quality) and I will drop your lowest grade. (10 percent of grade)
* **In-class reflective papers:** Your participation grade will also be based upon brief, in-class reflective papers that ask you to comment on the readings. These will serve as a way for us to take some time to reflect upon an aspect of the reading that deserves more attention, and they will also help us to structure future class discussion. We will have five unannounced reflective papers during the semester. Each will be worth 5 points, and I will drop your lowest grade. (10 percent of grade)
* **In-class contributions:** Finally, your participation grade will also be based on your substantive, thoughtful contributions to class discussion. I am looking for comments that show that you engaged with the text. This does not mean that you have to have understood everything (some of these texts are difficult), but it means that you need to have thought about it. Thoughtful comments include: raising questions about the text, identifying the author’s main points, critiquing the evidence the author provides for arguments, and highlighting parts that you found confusing. If you don’t feel comfortable speaking in class, feel free to come see me and we will discuss strategies for how to make this easier for you. Each of you will also informally lead part of the discussion once during the semester which will contribute to this part of your grade (10 percent of grade)

**News Analysis Assignment** (10 percent of grade)

This assignment gives you a chance to critically engage with how Muslim women in Africa are portrayed in the media. You will select a topic that relates to Muslim women (e.g. veiling, family code, polygyny) and then both explore the topic and analyze the coverage (in Africa and/or the West) considering what images of Muslim women it depicts. This is a chance for you to learn more about an issue that interests you and to consider how Muslim women are portrayed in the media. Your paper should be three to four pages in length. Due in class on February 5*.*

**Research Paper**

The bulk of your assignments will revolve around writing a major (18 to 20 page) research paper. This is a chance for you to explore a topic that relates to this class that interests you in greater depth. Your paper can build upon a topic that we discuss in class or can go off in new directions. I am also open to you incorporating interviews, literary analysis, news sources, or Internet research of primary documents into your papers. I will discuss possibilities and expectations for the papers early in the semester. We will also spend significant class time talking about and exploring writing.

Don’t be intimidated by the length. Many of the earlier assignments are designed to help you to write a strong final draft. I recommend that you devote plenty of time to these assignments as they will help make your paper writing easier. I am also requiring that everyone come and see me during office hours (or by appointment) to discuss your research question or initial ideas for a paper some time before week six in the semester. I will circulate a sign-up sheet closer to the date. Please use me as a resource after this meeting as well! We will also spend time in class workshopping each other’s papers; peer editing has been shown to greatly improve students’ work. I will provide guidance on each assignment closer to the due dates.

* + Research Prospectus and Preliminary Bibliography; due February 26 (10% of grade)
  + Annotated Bibliography; due March 26 (10% of grade)
  + Rough draft of Research Paper plus peer editing; due April 13 (10% of grade)
  + Final Research Paper; due May 5 (30% of grade)

I encourage you to take advantage of UVA’s writing center at each stage of this assignment. They provide hour-long tutorials. For more information see: <http://www.engl.virginia.edu/undergraduate/writing/center>

**Course Schedule:**

**INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM IN AFRICA AND MUSLIM WOMEN**

**Week One, January 15, 2014:** *Introduction to course and key issues for Muslim women*

What are common stereotypes about Muslim women? What are some of the consequences of such stereotypes?

*Readings*

* Laura Bush on Afghan women: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=24992>
* Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2002. “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?  Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others.” American Anthropologist 104 (3): 783-90. (Collab)

**Week Two, January 22, 2014**: *Overview of Islam and Islam in Africa*

What are the central tenants of Islam? How are they similar and different to other religions that you are familiar with? What is the meaning of jihad? Is there such a thing as African Islam? Bring any general questions that you have about Islam! In class we’ll also explore the Pew Research Forum’s study on Islam in Africa.

*Readings:*

* Robinson, pages 1-88

**Week Three, January 29, 2014:** *Approaches to thinking about Muslim Women and Islam in Africa; Introduction to Islam in Morocco*

How do Soares and Osella suggest we approach the lives of African Muslims? How does Mernissi understand women’s lives in Morocco? Do her insights about the role of Islam in their lives resonate with what Soares and Osella say? With Newcomb’s introduction?

*Readings*

* Soares, Benjamin, and Filippo Osella. "Islam, politics, anthropology." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (2009): 1-23. (Collab)
* Mernissi, Fatima. 1987. *Beyond the Veil: Male-female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Rev. ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p. vii-xxx (Collab)
* Robinson, 91-107
* Newcomb, 1-27

**WOMEN AND ISLAM IN MOROCCO**

**Week Four, February 5, 2014**: *Women of Fes: Patriarchy and women’s rights in Fes*

What do rumors tell us about life in Fes? Do you agree with Newcomb’s understanding of rumor? How do women’s religious beliefs play into their views on the family code in Fes? We will also talk with a librarian about conducting research.

***News Analysis Due***

*Readings*

* Newcomb, 28-78
* Morocco, A Look at Women’s Rights Five Years After Reform. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/09/morocco-a-look-at-womens_n_213362.html>

**Week Five, February 12, 2014**: *Gendered social space and making a living*

What kinds of support do women in Fes rely upon? How effective are these support mechanisms? How is the way space is understand changing in Fes? Why?

*Readings*

* Newcomb, 79-151, and conclusion

**Film:** *Dreaming in Morocco*

**Week Six, February 19, 2014**: *Tales of a Harem Girlhood: Seclusion and power dynamics*

What does Mernissi mean by harem? What are the various boundaries and borders that she encounters? How is women’s space and the space of the city different than in Newcomb’s book? (I know this looks like a lot of reading, but it’s an engaging memoir and a fast read!)

*Readings*

* Mernissi, 1-143

**Week Seven, February 26, 2014**: *Harem Girlhood: Female agency and Muslim practice*

What kind of power do men and women wield in this setting? How do they work to alter this? What role does Islam play in how women’s (and men’s) lives are organized in this setting?

***Research proposal and preliminary bibliography due***

*Readings*

* Mernissi, 144-240

**Film:** Where is Love in the Palm Grove?

**Week Eight, March 5, 2014**: *Veiling in France*

What are the various arguments about women wearing the veil in France? What does ‘being French’ mean? What factors affect women’s choices to veil (or not)?

*Readings*

* Scott, *The Politics of the Veil,* 1-44 (Collab)
* Killian, Caitlin. 2003. “The Other Side of the Veil: North African Women in France Respond to the Headscarf Affair.” Gender and Society 17 (4):567-590. (Collab)
* van Santen, José C.M. 2010. 'My ‘‘veil’’does not go with my jeans': Veiling, fundamentalism, education, and women’s agency in northern Cameroon. Africa 80 (2):275-300. (Collab)

**No class 3/12/14, Spring Break! Have a great Break!**

**WOMEN AND ISLAM IN SENEGAL**

**Week Nine, March 19, 2014**: *Changing Value in Postcolonial Senegal*

How do Diouf and Leichtman suggest we should study Muslim identity? How and why are male and female authority shifting in the Senegal context? What is the role of exchange in this setting?

*Readings*

* Robinson, 182-196
* Diouf, Mamadou, and Mara Leichtman. *New perspectives on Islam in Senegal: conversion, migration, wealth, power, and femininity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. (Collab)
* Buggenhagen, 1-38

**Week Ten, March 26, 2014**: *Women in global trade networks and gendered paths to piety*

How does Islam articulate with economics in Senegal? How have relations between different generations of people shifted over the past century?

***Annotated Bibliography Due***

*Readings*

* Buggenhagen, 39-92

**Film:** Mali and Senegal: The Power of Islam

**Week Eleven, April 2, 2014**: *Marriage and women’s contributions to family power*

How are notions of love shifting in Senegal? What roles do exchange play for men and women? What personal qualities and actions are important to creating religious merit?

*Readings*

* Buggenhagen, 93-169 and epilogue

**Week Twelve, April 9, 2014**: *So Long a Letter: African feminisms and Islam*

What challenges does the narrator face? How does her faith contribute to these/ help her deal with them? What are her hopes for her life and her country?

*Readings*

* Ba, 1-92

**Week Thirteen, April 16, 2014**: Rough Draft due and peer editing

**Week Fourteen, April 23, 2014**: No Class – work on research paper, feel free to come see me in my office

**Final paper due to me in my mailbox by 5 p.m. on Monday of finals week (May 5, 2014).**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**Course Policies**

**Attendance and lateness**

This class will be taught as a seminar and you should come ready to actively participate. I allow one unexcused absence; after this your final grade will be dropped by one half a grade for each additional absence (e.g. from an A to an A- if you have two unexcused absences). Please bring a doctor’s note or other documentation of an excused absence. *Please come to class on time.* If you are consistently tardy, late arrivals will begin to count as absences.

**Missing Class:** *If you need to miss class, it is your responsibility to contact another student to get notes on our discussion, as well as the assignment, etc.* If you talk to me ahead of time, I will give you any assignments. Below, write the names, email addresses, and phone numbers for two classmates to contact in the event that you miss class to get the notes and any assignments from them. When you return, I will expect you to be caught up and prepared to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Academic dishonesty**

Violations of academic integrity include but are not limited to:

* cheating on tests;
* handing in work that was completed by someone else or that was revised by someone else (unless I specify that peer editing is permitted or required);
* plagiarism on written assignments;
* claiming others’ ideas as your own;
* submitting work for this course which has already been submitted to another course by yourself or another student.

For more information on academic integrity, please consult the UVA Honor Code: <http://www.virginia.edu/honor/> Don’t hesitate to contact me if you have questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty.

**Grading policies**

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned date. Print out your papers and bring them to class. Be sure to use Times New Roman 12 point font with one-inch margins and no additional spaces between paragraphs. All pages must be numbered and double-spaced. At the top of the first page include your full name, the class title, the assignment title, and the date. Make sure to staple the papers.

Grades on assignments will be based on clarity and strength of argument, thoughtfulness, coherence and clarity of presentation, and quality of writing. Grades on late assignments will be dropped a full letter grade each day that they are late (e.g. from an A to a B). I will make exceptions to the above policy in the case of emergencies with proper documentation (a doctor’s note, etc.). Please contact me as soon as possible if an emergency is going to prevent you from turning in an assignment on time so that we can come up with an alternative plan.

I will use the grading scale below:

A 93-100% B+ 87-89% C+ 77-79% D+ 67-69%

A- 90-92% B 83-86% C 73-76% D 63-66%

B- 80-82% C- 70-72% D- 60-62%

**Policies on Electronic Devices:**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_