

## Theology (Islamic)

Course: Theology (Islamic)

Group of courses: Humanities

Provided by: Dr. Dina El Omari

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### Table of contents

<b>Course objectives</b> .....	2
<b>Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content</b> .....	2
<b>Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum</b> .....	4
<b>Degree Stage</b> .....	4
<b>Basic Literature/Recommended Reading</b> .....	4
<b>Journals</b> .....	4

## Course objectives:

As a basic prerequisite for the systematic study of the contents and methods of women's and gender studies, a theoretical basis for the feminist theology of Islam must first be set up. In this context, students should become familiar with general developments of women's and gender research in Islam in past and present.

Another objective is to explore the meaning of the category of gender in the different areas of Islamic theology. These include studying the Koran and Koranic exegesis (Tafsīr), Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), Islamic history (Tarīkh), systematic theology (Kalām), the prophetic traditions (ḥadīth), and practical theology. Students familiarise themselves with specific contents and methods of women's and gender studies and reflect upon them.

At the same time students are enabled to understand the significance of these areas of Islamic theology for their own lives, for it is precisely the Islamic context that makes it clear how much patriarchal theological content determines the practice of faith, leaving little or no room for approaches to women's and gender studies. Students should therefore be enabled to question these patriarchal contents and to take women's and gender studies approaches into account.

## Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content:

Feminist Islamic theology in Germany is still in its infancy. Even though there are quite a number of women's and gender study approaches and discourses worldwide, these have not yet been established in the sense of a feminist theology.

Theological women's and gender studies should be integrated as a cross-cutting discipline within the course of study, i.e. gender issues should be addressed within the various areas of Islamic theory aiming at the establishment of gender-equitable theology. Within these areas, various issues and methods are in the focus.

In addition, Islamic theological women's and gender studies are open to other theologies and therefore consider interreligious approaches to be indispensable.

The areas of Islamic theology can be summarised as follows, however these priorities can only serve as a guideline due to the above-mentioned lack of an established theoretical framework.

### Exegesis

This area comprises the fields of Koranic exegesis and ḥadīth exegesis. Based on their historicity, different questions about the texts are developed. On the one hand, historical contexts that are relevant for a gender-sensitive approach are reconstructed in order to analyse how they are reflected in the texts. On the other hand, intratextual references within the Koran play a central role in the interpretation, since the intra-Koranic dynamics are relevant for the development of gender-sensitive issues. In this context, the dialectical relationship of Koran und ḥadīth is also subject to analysis. It is important to expose the patriarchal structures of the texts and to reinterpret them against the background of a gender-neutral reading. At the same time, the question is to what extent the texts already contain gender-neutral aspects. Also, the traditional understanding of the text in classical exegesis is subject to critical examination. Exegesis therefore deals with feminist or gender-neutral

readings as well as their various hermeneutic approaches. For this, it is essential to study the works of Riffat Hassan, Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Saadiya Shaykh, Kecia Ali and Aysha Hidayatullah, who discuss specific gender-sensitive topics within the exegesis.

### **Systematic theology**

In this area students are taught about the significance of gender issues for the theological concept of God and their implications for the relationship between God and human beings. Here, it is important to consider androcentric concepts of God and masculine connotations of God, which arise in the Arabic language of the Koran and the prophetic traditions primarily from masculine references to God, which subsequently influence the entire systematic theology. The works of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas are helpful in this context, as they discuss the significance of the Arabic language for androcentric concepts of God. Furthermore, the meaning of the main attribute of God, ar-Rahmān (the All-merciful) should be dealt with in systematic theology, because it can be etymologically derived from the term Raḥma (womb) and thus has a female, maternal connotation.

Another important focal point within this area is creation theology, which provides a broad basis for gender-neutral interpretation from the Koranic perspective, placing the creation of the two sexes on the same level. Again, it is useful to take the findings of Riffat Hassan and Amina Wadud into account.

### **Islamic history**

This area deals with the historical relevance of women on a socio-political, intellectual and spiritual level, considering them as Islamic scholars, politicians or free spirits who have actively contributed to and shaped societies. These women and their achievements often remain highly marginalised in the Islamic reception, as patriarchal structures dominate in the various social and intellectual realms. Therefore, narratives of male personalities are in the foreground. It is therefore important to make these female voices heard again and to tell their (hi)stories. At the same time, however, it should also be shown within the historical context where patriarchal structures were dissolved by the involvement of men allowing room for women to develop on a social and intellectual level. The aim is to encourage research on women's history. Some approaches focus explicitly on female biographies in Islamic history. In her study "Women as bearers of religious knowledge: concepts of images of women in early Islamic traditions to the ninth century", Doris Decker has explored images of women from the time of the Prophet to the ninth century and has detected some emancipatory advances of women throughout that time span. In her monograph "Gender and Muslim constructions of exegetical authority", Aisha Geissinger has explored the role of women who have passed on traditions as exegetical authorities. Furthermore, there are English translations of female biographies from Arabic biographical works (Tabaqāt), e.g. Mohammad Nadwi's "Al-Muhaddithat: the women scholars in Islam".

### **Practical theology**

Practical theology comprises Islamic religious education (IRP) and Islamic jurisprudence and, above all, concerns the issue of gender equality in religious practice. Within Islamic religious education it is necessary to deal with forms of gender-equitable religious education and to include the corresponding feminist concepts as an integral part of Islamic religious education. The question of the gender specificity of religious socialisation should also be addressed, so that students learn to expose patriarchal structures and to question them with regard to gender equality. Here, Islamic jurisprudence plays an important role, because it supports patriarchal structures, which in turn have a great influence on the role of women in the practice of faith, e.g. in spiritual offices. Therefore, it is also important to point out gender-equitable solutions and interpretations, and to give students the opportunity to respond to current questions, which primarily concern their own reality by looking at various hermeneutic

methods on the basis of a gender-equitable approach. To this regard, Amina Wadud and others have dealt with questions of Islamic jurisprudence such as the male dominance in marriage or the question of female imams, taking a new historical gender-equitable approach.

## **Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum:**

In principle, it is desirable that the above-mentioned gender and women's studies teaching objectives are integrated as cross-cutting elements into all areas of Islamic theology during the Bachelor's phase. This could be covered individually for each area within the introductory modules, or alternatively, in a cross-disciplinary introduction to women's and gender studies. It is recommendable to offer a corresponding module in the Bachelor's phase, which should include both a lecture and a seminar. The lecture should provide a general overview of developments of feminist ideas in Islam, focusing on the European, Anglo-American and North African areas, as these play a decisive role in German discourse.

The seminar should then deal in-depth with concrete persons and their positions as well as influences on the developments of feminist Islamic theology. This module could be offered as a compulsory or elective subject, according to feasibility. Opening up to other religions is desirable, in particular, interreligious references should be made. This could be implemented as part of the gender module or as part of a specific interreligious module. There is also the option to offer interreligious seminars, e.g. in cooperation with the Catholic theology department. Again, it is a matter of feasibility and availability to offer this as a compulsory or elective module.

Selected women's and gender issues should be studied in-depth at Master's level as part of the above-mentioned theological areas, becoming an integral part of at least one session of the respective main seminar.

## **Degree Stage:**

At Bachelor's level, the basics of theological women's and gender studies in the different areas of Islamic theology as well as the relevant questions should be dealt with. At Master's level, specific thematic areas of women's and gender studies should be studied in-depth.

## **Basic Literature/Recommended Reading:**

- Amirpur, Katajun: Den Islam neu denken: Der Dschihad für Demokratie, Freiheit und Frauenrechte. München 2013.
- Barlas, Asma: Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an. Texas 2002.
- Decker, Doris: Frauen als Trägerinnen religiösen Wissens: Konzeptionen von Frauenbildern in frühislamischen Überlieferungen bis zum 9. Jahrhundert. Stuttgart 2017.
- Geissinger, Aisha: Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority. Leiden 2016.
- Herrmann, Kerry: Gender-Jihad. Der Kampf islamischer Feministinnen für Frauenrechte und eine Neuauslegung des Korans. München 2009.
- Hidayatullah, Aysha: Feminist Edges in the Qur'an. Oxford 2014.
- Nadwi, Mohammed: Al-Muhaddithat: The Women Scholars in Islam. Oxford 2013.
- Schneider, Irene: Der Islam und die Frauen. München 2011.

- Wadud, Amina: Inside The Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam. Oxford 2016.
- Wadud, Amina: Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective. Oxford 1999.

## **Journals:**

- [Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion](#)
- [Middle East Women`s Studies Review](#)
- [Contemporary Islam](#)
- [The Muslim World](#)
- [Journal for Islamic Studies](#)