



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
(International) in the United Kingdom
Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations

AKU-ISMC Winter Programme 2022

17-25 January

Gender in Muslim Contexts

Session Topics and Descriptions

Session I: Understanding Gender: Key Concepts and Debates

Lecturer: Sevgi Adak

This session will provide an introduction to gender as a concept and an interdisciplinary field of study. The main aim of this first session is to familiarise the participants with the key questions and issues in gender studies scholarship and to provide a critical forum to discuss various aspects of gender as a lived experience and the ways in which it intersects with class, ethnicity, sexuality and religious identities. To this end, the session will introduce intersectionality as a methodological approach and conceptual paradigm to analyse the interrelationships of gender, class, race and other social and cultural divisions. The session will also briefly discuss other key concepts, such as patriarchy, gender inequality and gender regime/gender order as essential concepts in feminist scholarship. The second part of the session will focus on the development of the study of gender in Muslim contexts.

Session II: Gendering Muslim Contexts

Lecturer: Sevgi Adak

This session looks at the current state of women's rights and social positions in Muslim-majority contexts. It focuses, in particular, on the academic debate on gender inequality in Muslim contexts in two fields, sociology of gender and gender and development. Muslim majority countries consistently rank low in global gender equality indexes, especially when it comes to women's labour force participation, citizenship rights and political participation. The session unpacks the various ways scholars respond to the question of how to explain the persistence of high level of gender inequality in Muslim majority countries. Is it the family and kinship structure? Is it the "Islamic culture"? Is it the "Arab culture"? Is it Islamism? Is it the impact of oil and the type of economic relations it supports? Or is it the patriarchal state and government policies? By looking at this debate, the session will examine the historical and cross-country variations of gender regimes in Muslim contexts.

Session III: Gender and Sharia

Lecturer: Jonas Otterbeck

In this session we will look at gender through the prism of interpretations of Shari'a. You will have a number of different types of texts to engage with before the session. During the session, we will hear about the gendered structure in Sharia interpretations, gendered jurisprudence but also attempts at reinterpretations or counter-interpretations of different sorts. We will end the day with a discussion of the latter using both scholarly texts and yet another, short text that will be introduced during the session.

Session IV: Violence, War and Gender

Lecturer: Sanaa Alimia

This session starts by asking what is violence? It explores different definitions from structural violence to war to domestic violence. How does class, race, ethnicity, and/or religion combine with gender to impact lived experiences of structural violence? Next, the session examines how in colonial and neo-colonial contexts, constructions of "native" women (including Muslim women) forms a basis for epistemological violence that enables direct conquest and wars. Finally, the session discusses gender based violence in Muslim settings with specific attention to "honour" killings. Whilst colonial and neo-colonial debates on the Muslim woman are imbricated in a messy relationship between knowledge and power, patriarchal and gendered violence against women does take place in Muslim societies. So how is this justified, challenged, and negotiated in these contexts?

Session V: Gendering Migration

Lecturer: Sanaa Alimia

The session pays attention to forced displacement and undocumented migration. First, we will explore definitions: who is a legal migrant, an undocumented migrant, a trafficked person, a refugee, a citizen, a displaced person, and the like? And what are the implications on everyday lived experiences? How can this tell us a story about how borders are legal, physical, and also social? Second, we will examine how control over populations and their mobility is central to the makings (and upholding) of the modern nation-state and interstate system and how this is gendered. Finally, the session interrogates how gender informs decisions to move (or not) across national borders. Stepping beyond the idea that people move only because of economics, politics, or force, we ask how do sexuality and gender shape decisions to move? This final point will be discussed with regards to the migrations of young men and women sex workers.

Session VI: Men and Masculinities

Lecturer: Jonas Otterbeck

The formation of masculinities is a crucial topic for any society and the research on different masculinities in relation to Muslim contexts is steadily growing. Therefore, we are devoting this session solely to masculinities. We will be discussing various texts to study and emphasise the usefulness of the theoretical perspectives on masculinity even in everyday life. We will end the day with a discussion on the historicity of masculinity, changes and continuities in Muslim contexts.

Session VII: Gender and Piety Movements

Lecturer: Sevgi Adak

In this session we are going to discuss how issues related to gender, women's roles and rights, and religious traditions and practices are contested, negotiated and redefined in everyday life. Following the literature on feminist anthropology of Islam and sociology of gender and Islam, we will focus on the rise of women's piety movements in Muslim contexts and the ways in which pious Muslim women mobilise their capacities through new female religiosities to claim their space in the religious domain. We will be looking at the case of women's mosque movements that emerged in various Muslim contexts since the 1990s and through this case we will engage a conceptual discussion on women's agency and empowerment.

Session VIII: Women's Activism, Feminism and the Islamic Feminism Debate

Lecturer: Sevgi Adak

This session looks at the history of women's political activism in Muslim contexts and examines the legacy of this history for the women's rights struggle today. Following an historical overview of the emergence and development of women's movements and feminism in Muslim contexts, the session especially focuses on the recent debate on Islamic feminism and the various implications of this debate for feminist activism and solidarity among women's movements in Muslim contexts. We will discuss the various convergences and divergences between Islamic and secular feminisms as well as the problematic aspects of such categorizations.