Dr. Samira Musleh

I am a critical theorist working on how the ethics of romantic relationships are shaped by economic, religious, and political forces. I am currently revising my first book manuscript based on my doctoral dissertation, "The Unpleasantries of Love: Islamic Marital Economy and the Compensability of Reproductive Labor in Postcolonial Capitalism," which intervenes in existing anthropological interpretation of marriage payments in gift economies, feminist discourses on the compensation for sex work, housework, and maternity/menstrual leaves, and Islamicist scholarship on the equitable division of marital labor. In addition, I am working on my second book project, "Race, Place, Romance," which examines the intersection of contemporary romantic ethics, travel cultures, and interracial relationships based on literary, media, and ethnographic research. My third, collaborative research project explores – through a series of articles – how the real or perceived ignorance of international students and scholars of color of their legal rights makes them particularly susceptible to both individual and institutional discrimination in U.S. institutions of higher education.

I have a PhD in communication studies (minor: feminist and critical sexuality studies) and an MA in communication studies (primary emphasis: critical media studies; secondary emphasis: rhetoric and interpersonal communication) from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities (UMN) and a BSc in Civil Engineering from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). I received additional academic training from the Critical Theory Workshop (Institut Interdisciplinaire d'Anthropologie du Contemporain, France), Gender in Muslim Contexts Summer Program (Aga Khan University, UK), Sapelo Square Freedom School (USA), Islamic Studies Summer Program (Darul Qasim College, USA), Decolonial Summer School (Utrecht University, the Netherlands), Ihsan Academy (Ibn Haldun University, Turkey), Critical Muslim Studies Summer School (Spain), and Islamic Studies Summer Program (International Institute of Islamic Thought, USA).

Research Interests:

Marriage and Romantic Relationships; Labor and Alternative Economies; Religion and Secularism; Race and Coloniality; Travel and Intercultural Communication

Research Publications:

- Musleh, S. (2025). "Slavery, Sex Work, and a Materialist Reconceptualization of Islamic Marriage." Journal of the American Academy of Religion.

- Musleh, S., Liu, R., & Roy, E. (2025). “Alien Academics: Colonial Social Mobility, Datafied Subjectivity, and White-Collar Indentured Servitude in U.S. Higher Education.” Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 18(3), 215-237.
- Musleh, S. (2024). Review of Wives and work: Islamic law and ethics before modernity, by M. H. Katz. International Journal of Middle East Studies.
- Musleh, S. (2022). Other Travelers: Ten Books on Non-Western Travel Writing. Sacred Footsteps.
- Linabary, J. R., Cruz, J. M., Allen, B. J., Chalupa, J. A., Dempsey, S. E., Glenn, C. L., Harris, K. L., Long, Z., McDonald, J., Musleh, S.*, & Oktavianin, F. H. (2021). Envisioning more equitable and just futures: Feminist organizational communication in theory and praxis. Management Communication Quarterly, 35(1), 142–168.
- Musleh, S. (2021). Review of Rediscovering the Islamic classics: How editors and print culture transformed an intellectual tradition, by A. E. Shamsy. ReOrient: Journal of Critical Muslim Studies, 6(2), 240–244.
- Rexhepi, P., Musleh, S., & Mirza, R. (2020). Bandung before and after: Islam, the Islamicate and the de/colonial. ReOrient: Journal of Critical Muslim Studies.

Conference

Selected Presentations:

2025

Alien Academics: Colonial Social Mobility, Datafied Subjectivity, and White-Collar Indentured Servitude in U.S. Higher Education. National Communication Association 111th Annual Convention, Denver, Colorado, November 20-23.

2024

Islamophobia vs. anti-Muslim racism: Choice, corporeality, and culpability in contemporary social justice rhetoric. Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, California. November 23-26.

Postcolonial anxieties over the “marriage crisis” and Islamic ethics of relationality. The International Association for Media and Communication Research Conference, Christchurch, New Zealand. June 30-July 4.

Alien(ated) academics: An account of internationals in U.S. academia. International Communication Association Annual Conference, Gold Coast, Australia. June 20-24.

The borders within: Social media and “postcolonial” narratives of travel and romance. International Communication Association Annual Conference, Gold Coast, Australia. June 20-24.

2022

Questioning the anthropological meaning of marital gift economy in Muslim South Asia. American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Seattle, WA. November 9-13.

Organizational rhetoric in discourses on Muslim family labor. National Communication Association 108th Annual Convention, New Orleans, LA. November 17-20.

Women, marriage, and reproductive labor in South Asian Muslim imaginaries. National Women's Studies Association Annual Conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota. November 10-13.

Measuring labor, pricing love: Marital economy in contemporary Muslim South Asia. Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin. October 19-22.

Feminist and Islamic perspectives on the labor of biological reproduction. Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Denver, Colorado. November 19-22.

Materialist feminism, premodern marital economy, and Islamic ethics of labor. The British Association for Islamic Studies Annual Conference, University of Edinburg, Scotland. June 6-7.

Gifts for housework, wages for reproduction: Examining the Wages for Housework movement through the concept of the gift economy. New Directions in Feminist Thought: Research in Times of Crisis and Change PhD Conference, Annenberg Center for Collaborative Communication. January 26-27.

2021

Gendered labor, gift economy, and Muslim families. Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Baltimore, Maryland. November 17-21.

Marriage and the market: Obligatory gift, Islam, & the compensability of reproductive labor in postcolonial capitalism. Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, Texas. November 20-23.

Laboring decolonially: Islam, class, and patriarchy in the discourse on mahr in Bangladeshi feminist blogosphere. Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, Texas. November 20-23.

Tense transactions: Popular feminism, monetized love, and a decolonial ethic of familial labor. National Women's Studies Association Annual Conference. September 17-18.

Decolonially speaking: Towards a decolonial feminist media studies paradigm. International Communication Association Annual Conference. May 27-31.

2020

"Fertility, Inc.": Neoliberal commercialization of egg freezing technology and the inconvenient and disposable female body. International Communication Association Annual Conference. May 20-26.

Domestic labor, gender, and religion: Towards an intersectional analysis of organizational communication, feminist theory, and Islamic thought. International Communication Association Annual Conference. May 20-26.

The imperial politics of sexuality: The normalization of White racial, sartorial, and aesthetic practices in constructing the grotesque other. Imagined Borders, Epistemic Freedoms Conference, Center for Media, Religion and Culture, University of Colorado-Boulder. January 7-11.

2019

Love in the time of colonialism: Re-reading a dual narration of civilizational intimacy from colonial Bengal. Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin. October 17-20.

Sexual division of labor and its discontents: The disorganized harmony of Islamic discourse, feminist theory and decolonial thought. Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Diego, California. November 23-26.

Consumerism, unruliness, and the politics of sexuality: Graffiti artist Princess Hijab's ambivalent proclamation of a third space. International Communication Association Annual Conference, Washington DC. May 24-28.

2018

Theorizing transnational social movement rhetoric: A case study from Bangladesh. Rhetoric Society of America Conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota. May 31-June 3.

2017

"Black Mirror" and the whole new world: Data-ism, creative capitalist economy and affective digital labor. Annual Conference of the Mid-Atlantic Popular & American Culture Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. November 9-11.

"Black Mirror", trolling and the plight of freedom of speech online. Console-ing Passions International Conference on Television, Video, Audio, New Media, and Feminism, Greenville, North Carolina. July 27-29.

Interpersonal communication in social media: Does it enhance, substitute or harm face-to-face interaction? National Conference of Popular Culture Association – American Culture Association, San Diego, California. April 12-15.

Any other achievements / recognitions:

Competitive Grants, Awards, and Fellowships:

2024

Michael L. Haley Travel Fund, International Communication Association

2022

"Decolonizing the Representation of Muslim Women in the Media" Training Institute Fellowship, University of California – Davis, American Council of Learned Societies and Henry Luce Foundation

Woodrow Wilson Dissertation Fellowship in Women's Studies, Institute for Citizens & Scholars (Finalist)

President's Student Leadership and Service Award, University of Minnesota (UMN)

Dissertation Writing Retreat Award, UMN Race, Indigeneity, Disability, Gender and Sexuality Studies Initiative

Travel Grant, National Communication Association Annual Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana

Travel Grant, Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting, Denver, Colorado

Conference Travel Grant, Department of Communication Studies, University of Minnesota - Twin Cities (2016-2022)

2021

Research Fellowship, Imagine Chair in Arts, Design, and Humanities Project on Critical Disability Studies, UMN Institute for Advanced Study

UMN Leadership in Equity, Inclusivity and Diversity Dissertation Fellowship

UMN International Thesis Research Travel Grant

Travel Grant, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Antonio, Texas

Graduate Summer Research Fellowship, Department of Communication Studies, University of Minnesota - Twin Cities (2017-2021)

2020

Dissertation Proposal Workshop Grant, UMN Race, Indigeneity, Gender and Sexuality Studies Initiative

AGITATE! Journal Editorial Collective Fellowship, UMN Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change

Career Development Grant, UMN Council of Graduate Students

Hardship Fund, International Communication Association Annual Conference

2019

Graduate Student Scholar Award for Outstanding Professional Scholarship, UMN Department of Communication Studies

Finalist, Three Minute Thesis Competition, UMN College of Liberal Arts

Career Readiness Teaching Fellowship, UMN College of Liberal Arts

Travel Grant, International Communication Association Annual Conference, Washington DC

Conference Travel Grant, UMN Council of Graduate Students (Fall 2021; Spring 2020; Fall 2019; Summer 2019)

2018

CAFLOC Travel Grant, Association for Cultural Studies Crossroads Conference, Shanghai University, China

Research-Creative-Travel Grant, UMN Department of Communication Studies (Spring 2022; Spring 2021; Spring 2020; Spring 2019; Fall 2018)