

September 2021 Newsletter



Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Graduate Student Spotlight: Marie-Rose Tshite Botshila



How did you hear about the WGSS MA program?

I did not know about WGSS until Fulbright enrolled me in the WGSS MA program. I had applied for a MA in political science, I love political studies, but I was offered gender studies instead. Life is full of surprises; let's see how things go.

Who are your favorite theorists?

I do not know about feminist theorists; I'm currently learning who they are, what distinguishes them from other theorists, what are they striving for, and I hope one will become my favorite by the time I finish this fall semester.

What excites you about the field of WGSS?

I have worked with women and youth (young women) from major political parties in my country [Democratic Republic of Congo] since 2014. I oversaw capacity building of issues such as women's participation and engagement in politics, positive masculinity within political parties, and elaboration of political messages and public speaking during the political campaign. Last year, I coached 32 young women in a leadership camp for New Emergent Women in politics for the NDI (National Democratic Institute) organized in Liberia (February 2020). What excites me about WGSS? I'm a curious person; I always try to learn as much as I can. So, I hope to be able to better combine practice (groundwork) and theory on the issue of gender by the time I finish my degree. I hope to be able to see things through the eyes of a feminist researcher and apply it in my political work back home.

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WGSS Affiliate Faculty: Dr. Muhammad U. Faruque

Muhammad U. Faruque is Inayat Malik Assistant Professor (2022-) in the Department of Romance and Arabic Languages and Literatures at the University of Cincinnati. Muhammad's research lies at the intersection of religion, philosophy, and literature, especially in relation to the Islamic intellectual tradition. He earned his PhD from the University of California, Berkeley (with distinction), and served as Exchange Scholar at Harvard University and as George Ames Postdoctoral Fellow at Fordham University. His first monograph *Sculpting the Self: Islam, Selfhood, and Human Flourishing* (University of Michigan Press, 2021) addresses "what it means to be human" in a secular, post-Enlightenment world by exploring notions of selfhood and subjectivity in Islamic and non-Islamic philosophical and mystical literatures. Weaving together insights from several disciplines, such as religious studies, philosophy, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and neuroscience, and arguing against views that narrowly restrict the self to a set of cognitive functions and abilities, this book proposes a spectrum theory of the self that offers new options for addressing central issues in the contemporary world, including spirituality, human flourishing, and meaning in life.

Dr. Faruque's work has been supported by the Ames Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, and the Bestway Foundation, among others and has appeared in numerous peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes, such as *Philosophy East and West*, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* (Cambridge), *Brill Journal of Sufi Studies*, *Journal of Islamic Ethics*, and *Ancient Philosophy*. He is also the recipient of numerous awards, grants, and fellowships, including a *Templeton Foundation Global Philosophy of Religion Project* grant.

While his past research has explored modern and premodern conceptions of selfhood and identity and their bearing on ethics, religion, and culture, his current project investigates whether or not Sufi philosophy and practice—as articulated in the School of Ibn 'Arabī—support and foster an active engagement toward the planet's well-being and an ecologically viable way of life and vision. He has recently won a Templeton Foundation grant to organize a conference on evil, suffering, and the global pandemic, in which he will seek contributions from a diverse range of contemporary Muslim philosophers, including female voices and other historically under-represented minorities. He also has a forthcoming article entitled "Sculpting the Feminine Self: Gender and Subjectivity in Ibn 'Arabī's Religious Anthropology," in which he argues for a comprehensive rethinking of the gendered metaphysical anthropology that is foundational to various systems of Muslim ethics. He is very excited to serve as affiliated faculty in WGSS at UC, where he looks forward to exploring topics in Islam and gender hermeneutics.

