Course title and number: Women and Islam: History, Politics, and Culture
WS 359/ History 359 3 Credits

Course prerequisites
WS 110 or 150 OR AACS 150

Grading: A-F

Course Description
This course examines women and gender in Islamic societies in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. Beginning with an overview of pre-modern history, the course focuses on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Topics include: women’s roles in production and reproduction, gender ideologies and representations of Muslim women, and the development of feminist, nationalist, and Islamist movements.

Throughout the course, we will also interrogate our own categories of analysis. What makes a particular society ‘Islamic’ and is this the best way to define our topic? How does our position in the U.S. shape our understanding of Muslim women? How do culture and politics come together to shape women’s roles and rights?

Course Objectives
This course will:
1. Investigate the history of women and gender in Islamic societies.
2. Examine feminist, nationalist, and Islamist movements.
3. Critically consider representations of Muslim women in the West, especially in the U.S.
4. Explore the relationship between culture, politics, and gender ideologies in Islamic and Western contexts.
5. Require written and oral presentations that demonstrate critical thinking.

Student Learning Outcomes
Students will:
1. Learn about the history of women and gender in Islamic societies.
2. Know about feminist, nationalist, and Islamist movements.
3. Be able to analyze Western representations of Muslim women.
4. Understand the relationship between culture, politics, and gender ideologies in Islamic and Western contexts.
5. Demonstrate critical thinking through written and oral presentations.

Topical Outline of the Course Content
a. Introduction to Islam and women (weeks 1-3)
   An overview of early Islamic history with a focus on women’s lives and gender norms.

b. Islam and the West: Colonialism, Imperial Feminism, and Women (weeks 4-7)
An examination of the interaction between Islamic ideologies and colonialism, with special attention to the pivotal role of gender in shaping this interaction. To focus our discussion, we consider how notions of womanhood became linked to questions of culture, tradition, and westernization. We will select case studies from among the following regions: Egypt, Turkey, India, and Indonesia.

c. Nationalism, Feminism, and Pan-Islamic movements (weeks 8-11)
   We consider each of these movements as they challenged both colonialism and dominant gender norms. Our focus is on how “Islam” became linked to broader movements for social change. We will select case studies from the regions listed above, as well as consider movements in Israel/Palestine.

d. Globalization, Islamization, and Women’s Lives (weeks 12-15)
   We consider the rise of Islamist ideologies in their historical and political contexts, with a focus on their impact on gender norms and women’s lives. We will draw upon case studies from among the following regions: Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

Teaching Methods and Student Learning Activities
- Lectures
- Small group discussions
- Plenary discussions
- In-class presentations
- Essays (responses to the reading)

Student Assessment
Students will be evaluated based upon the following:
- Attendance in class
- Participation in discussion
- Oral presentations on reading and research
- Written assignments

Suggested Reading and Texts

Additional Bibliography

General Studies and Collections


Women and Islam, pre-1800


Fadel, Mohammad, “Two Women, One Man: Knowledge, Power and Gender in Medieval Sunni Legal Thought,” in IJMES Vol. 29, no. 2, 185-204.

Fernea, Elizabeth and Basima Bezirgan, “’A’ishah bint Abi Bakr,” in *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*, University of Texas 1977, pp. 27-36.

Fernea, Elizabeth and Basima Bezirgan, “The Koran on the Subject of Women,” in *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*, University of Texas 1977, pp. 7-26.


Islam and the West: Colonialism, Imperial Feminism, and Women


**Nationalism, Feminism, and Pan-Islamic movements**


**Globalization, Islamization, and Women’s Lives**


**Preparer’s Name and Date:** Mytheli Sreenivas, April 15, 2003

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**Reviser’s name and date:** Dr. Arlene Holpp Scala

**Departmental Revision approval date:** December 1, 2004