Women’s Rights and Politics in Muslim Societies  
Law, Societies and Justice 421/Anthropology 498

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This course focuses on women's political and legal status in Muslim societies today and emphasizes women’s everyday, lived experiences. Working to unpack stereotypes of women in Muslim majority societies, readings will focus on local settings in order to examine particular conditions, including the political, economic, social and historical, through which the women in these societies perceive their status, rights, and identities. At the same time, we will question the political and social bases of our views on Muslim women and their lives.

Students will engage with feminist theory, post-colonial theory, and theories of the state to better understand and explore women’s rights and politics in Islamic societies. Finally, students will be introduced to debates regarding human rights and women in Islam to examine issues underlying the question of Islam's conformity with international human rights, democracy and modernity.

Aims

The aims of this course are to introduce students to the complexities of issues surrounding women’s rights in Muslim societies and to learn to examine their status through critical analyses that take into account legal, social, economic and historical variables.

Requirements

This is an advanced seminar. Discussion is the primary avenue of instruction. Readings, assignments and class meetings are designed to inspire students to elaborate new ideas and engage in critical thinking, discussion, and writing.

Leading Discussion:

Each student will make a 10-minute presentation introducing a reading by offering background material, key arguments and raising questions for discussion. Sign-up sheets will be available on the second class meeting. Students are encouraged to meet with me for additional guidance regarding presentations.

Reading Response E-posts:

Eight 1/2-page (250 word min.) reading response e-posts are required. E-posts are aimed at prompting inquiry, analysis and discussion among students, both in class and on-line. E-posts are due by 5:00 p.m. the day before the class for which a student wishes to contribute an e-post. Students are encouraged, but not required, to read one another’s e-posts. Additional guidelines for e-posts will be given in class.
Papers and Paper Presentation:

A 5-page mid-term paper (due by the beginning of Week 6) and a 12-page final paper are required. Final papers are due March 17, 2008 at noon. For the midterm paper, topics will be handed out. For final papers, students must initiate their own investigation, but are required to discuss final paper topics with me. Papers should argue a specific point and contain analysis. One class period in week 9 is reserved for student paper presentations; participation is mandatory. Further guidelines for papers and presentations will be offered in coming weeks.

Grading:

Grades will be based on class participation (10%) and leading discussion (10%), reading response e-posts (10%), and mid-term paper and final paper (30% & 40% respectively).

Texts:

Course Pack: The bulk of the readings are articles contained in a course packet that will be available for purchase by the first day of classes (17) at Ram's Copy Center on 4144 University Way.

In Week 6, we will also read: John L. Esposito with Natana J. DeLong Bas, Women in Muslim Family Law, 2nd Edition. Syracuse University Press, 2001. Due to pricing discrepancies, I did not order the book at the UW bookstore. I recommend purchasing this book on-line at a much reduced cost. Please be sure to have it by February 11.

Course Outline

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Week 1

Introduction: Historical and Political Parameters

1/7-9

- FILM: WOMEN AND ISLAM 1994 LEILA AHMED 30 MIN.


Week 2

Women in Islam: The hermeneutical approach: How does Barlas approach the Qur’an as a text? What is her argument? What is a hermeneutical approach? How does Mohanty connect with Barlas? What is her argument?

1/14-16

- FILM: ORIENTALISM


**Week 3**  
**Revolution and post-colonial, imperial:** In what capacity did women participate in anti-colonial revolutions? What were their roles? And how did that begin to shape their internal feminist politics?


**Week 4**  
**Women and Nation-building:** What were women's roles in nation-building? What did the notion of "woman" represent in nation-building and how did this coincide with women's actual experience in family and society?


**Politics of Identity:** What does a discussion of identity politics bring to the "woman question" in contemporary Muslim politics and state ideology? How is the study of gender a useful analytical tool in examining women’s roles in the world and, in particular, in Muslim societies?


**Week 5**  
**Islam and the State:** How do we distinguish between nation and the state, and where do women figure within these institutions?

• Laurie Brand, Women and the State in Jordan (in Haddad and Esposito, Islam, Gender, and Social Change 1998). Pps. 100-123.

**Women's Bodies and the body of the State:** How are women's bodies mobilized by the State? By whom and to what ends? Who are the various actors and how do their interests compare with one another? How do these readings get us to think differently about the contemporary stereotypes about veiled women and practices of veiling?

• **FILM:** UNDER ONE SKY 2000 NORTH AFRICA 44 MIN

Week 6  **(Mid-term paper due on Wednesday, February 13)**
2/11-13

**Women's Legal Status:** Why is women's legal status an area of contestation, both within Muslim societies and outside of them as well?


**Muslim Family Law:** What is Muslim Family Law? How do we understand it in the context of modern legal codes?


- **FILM: DIVORCE IRANIAN STYLE**

Week 7
2/20

**Muslim Family Law in Contemporary Practice:** What are the issues revolving around legal practice today? How do you see the authors attempting to bridge theory with practice?


Week 8
2/25-27

**Updating Islam: Discourses of Modernity:** How do we characterize and understand new trends within the Muslim state and in Quranic interpretation? But first, how do we define and understand Modernity?

- **FILM: STRUGGLING WITH MODERNITY (LIVING WITH ISLAM SERIES 1993 50 MIN)**


**Islamic Feminism:** To begin, look up the word ‘feminism.’ Can there be such a thing among
women in Muslim societies? If so, is it necessarily "western"-based or is it something else? What do the different authors mean by Islamic Feminism?


**Week 9**

**Resistance, Power, and Participation:** What does Abu-Lughod refer to as the "romance of resistance"? How do we understand and appreciate these small resistances? What is the critique of such resistance? How are women’s contemporary concerns colored by politics and international issues? What spaces for maneuver might exist?


**Producing Modernity: Education, Class and Citizenship:** In what way is "Modernity" a construction of place and politics? How does gender, especially women's roles as mothers, help define modernity in the nation? How does class play a role in the construction of citizenship? How is the concept of citizenship constructed and practiced in Saudi Arabia, according to the author? How is this different from Western liberal notions of citizenship?


**Week 10**

**Muslim Women’s Movements:** How are Islamist movements seen as feminist and how are they a part of a greater political goal? Are these claims compatible? Compare with earlier times, such as anti-colonial movements? What is the aim of connecting Muslim women's concerns with global movements? How does this coincide with Mohanty's project calling for the "formulation of autonomous, geographically, historically, and culturally grounded feminist concerns" (1990:51). Are the two ideas compatible?

**FILM: TWO WOMEN**

**Concluding Remarks: Islam, Human Rights and Women’s Status**

• Reading: TBA

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**Final Papers** are due no later than Monday, **March 17, 2008 by noon.** Please hand papers in, in hard copy, to Denny Hall, Department of Anthropology, M-41 or my mailbox in the department. **Emailed papers are not accepted.**

**Late papers** will receive a .5 grade deduction per day. Papers turned in late risk not being graded by the end of the quarter, in which case students will receive an “I” on their grade report. Papers turned in more than a week late will not be read and will receive 0.0 credit.

**Paper comments:** Students who would like to receive comments on their final papers are asked indicate this, either with a note that you will pick the paper up or by providing a self-addressed stamped envelope when handing in their papers. Otherwise papers will not contain written comments.
Feedback Sheet for Discussion Leaders

Name:  
Date:  
Discussion topic:  

CONTENT:  
Accuracy (do you address the major points):  

Clarity (did it make sense to the audience):  

Questions (did you raise questions to engage critical discussion):  

DELIVERY:  
Pace:  
Volume:  
Energy:  

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS:  

GRADE: