

ARCADIA UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

# Women in the Middle East

HS220 / IS220 MW 1:30 – 3:10 p.m., Taylor 316

SPRING 2006

**Instructor: Professor Hayat Alvi-Aziz**

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**Office Hours:** MW 11:00 – 12:00

or by appointment

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the status and role of women in Middle Eastern culture and society, both historically and in modern times. The Middle East region is characterized by the role of religion in society. The role and status of women in the region is mostly defined by respective religions, mainly Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. These religious factors, along with the traditionally patriarchal social systems, have affected the human rights, freedoms, and legal/judicial rights of women. The course examines these factors, as well as the clash between religious and secular feminism in the region.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course addresses the questions and issues pertaining to the causes and effects of male-dominated societies in the Middle East region. In particular, students will learn about the conflicting values and beliefs between traditional Middle Eastern society and the forces of modernization and globalization. This course addresses the following questions and issues:

- What are the main characteristics of gender inequality in the region?
- What are the causes and effects of gender inequality?
- What are the distinctions in gender relations within Arab, non-Arab, religious, and secular societies?
- What are the similarities and differences between the “orthodox” religions and their treatment of women?
- What is the impact of historical *culture* and *social structures* on gender relations in the Middle East?
- What has been the impact of gender inequality on human rights, human development, health, education, economics, and politics?
- What has been the impact of gender inequality on international relations?
- What are the ramifications of the low status and repression of Middle Eastern women for the region’s future?
- Family Values, Polygamy, Marriage, Children, Divorce, Authority of Males, Financial Independence, Women and Warfare, Gender Segregation, Dress Codes, Honor, Chastity, Crime and Punishment, Sex and Sexuality in the Middle East
- Contradictions in gender relations and statuses in Middle Eastern societies
- What kind of “feminist” movements exist in the region?
- What are the effects of these feminist movements in the region? What is their outlook?

## REQUIRED TEXT

**Fatima Mernnissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Revised Edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). ISBN: 0253311624. \$13.95 Pb.**

**Geraldine Brooks, *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (Anchor, 1995). ISBN: 0385475772. \$10.50 Pb.**

## Articles:

Hayat Alvi-Aziz, “The Human Rights of Women and Social Transformation in the Arab Middle East,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 2, June 2005: pp. 142-160.

PDF: <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2005/issue2/Alvi%20Hayat%20pdf.pdf>.

Isobel Coleman, “Women, Islam, and the New Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2006: <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060101faessay85104/isobel-coleman/women-islam-andthe-new-iraq.html>.

Dina Ezzat, "Documenting Gender Bias," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 24-30 June 2004:  
<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/696/fe1.htm>.

### Selected Readings

*The Flying Camel: Essays on Identity by Women of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Heritage*, edited by Loolwa Khazzoom (Seal Press, 2003). ISBN: 1580050956. \$11.53 Pb.

- Loolwa Khazzoom, "Introduction" (ix-xv);
- Bahareh Mobasseri Rinsler, "Vashti" (39-45);
- Ella Shohat, "Reflections of an Arab Jew" (115-122)

### Online Readings:

"Muslims" – Frontline PBS web site: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/muslims/>

Voice of America, "The Status of Women Worldwide": <http://www.voanews.com/english/womens-status.cfm>.

"Orthodox Judaism," Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orthodox\\_Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orthodox_Judaism).

"Feminism in Judaism": <http://judaism.about.com/od/feminism/>.

### RECOMMENDED READINGS

Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (Random House, 2003). ISBN: 081297106X. \$10.77 Pb.

### FILMS

"Nazrah: A Muslim Woman's Perspective," 2003 (VHS) 55 min.

"On Boys, Girls, and the Veil," 1995 (VHS) 72 min.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Attendance:** Class attendance is mandatory. Students are allowed a total of 3 unexcused absences for the whole semester. More than three unexcused absences will affect students' grade. Twelve or more unexcused absences will result in an automatic 'F' for the course grade.

**Exam:** There will be NO exams for this course.

**In-class Discussion:** Students are expected to participate in the class discussions pertaining to the reading assignments and supplementary material.

**Online Discussion:** Students are required to participate in online discussions. Often the instructor will post additional readings online, which students should read and engage in discussions about them weekly.

**Book Review:** Students are required to write a 4-page (typed, double-spaced) book review of Geraldine Brooks' book, *Nine Parts of Desire*.

**Project/Presentations:** Students will be required to select a country in the Middle East & North Africa and research the status of women in that country. Near the end of the semester, students will give individual presentations about their findings. The instructor must approve presentation topics.

<b>Grading:</b>	Attendance	25%	Book Review:	20%
	Participation	25%	Final Project/Presentation:	30%

# COURSE OUTLINE

## January

Weds. Jan. 18, 2006

**Introduction:** Course Syllabus

**Discussion:** The Middle East & North Africa & Islam

**Read:** Mernissi, Intro to Revised Edition (pp. vii-xxix); Preface (pp. 7-9); Introduction: Roots of the Modern Situation (pp. 11-24)

Mon. Jan. 23, W25, M30

**Lecture/Discussion:** The MENA Region & Islam; Arab & Non-Arab; Cultures & Traditions of the MENA

**Discussion:** Perceptions & Stereotypes of Women in the MENA

**Read:** Mernissi, ch. 1 Muslim Concept of Female Sexuality (27-45)

## February

W1, M6, W8

**Lectures/Discussions:** Islam, Christianity, & Judaism – Terminologies & Beliefs; Status of Women in MENA Religions

**Discussions:** Mernissi's Introduction

**Read:** Mernissi, ch. 2 Female Sexuality & Social Order (46-64); Dina Ezzat's Article, "Documenting Gender Bias;"

**Start Reading:** Geraldine Brooks, *Nine Parts of Desire*

M13, W15

**Select Countries/Topics for Final Projects**

**Lecture/Discussion:** Muslim Concept of Female Sexuality; Social Order; Documenting Gender Bias

**Read:** Brochure: "The Muslim Woman's Dress According to the Qur'an and Sunnah"

**Read:** Mernissi, ch. 3 Sex & Marriage before Islam (65-86)

M20, W22, M27

**Continue Discussion:** Female Sexuality & Gender Bias; Sex & Marriage before Islam

**Discussion:** Brochure about Muslim Woman's Dress

**Film:** "Nazrah" followed by Discussion

**Read:** Mernissi, ch. 4 Moroccan Data (89-96); ch. 5 Sexual Anomie (97-107)

## March

W1, M6, W8

**Lecture/Discussion:** Moroccan Data; Sexual Anomie

**Read:** Mernissi, ch. 6 Husband & Wife (108-120); ch. 7 Mother-In-Law (121-136); ch. 8 Spatial Boundaries (137-148); ch. 9 Economic Basis – Sexual Anomie (148-164)

## Spring Break March 11-19<sup>th</sup>

M20, W22, M27, W29

**Lecture/Discussion:** Husband & Wife; Mother-In-Law; Spatial Boundaries; Economic Basis – Sexual Anomie

## April

M3, W5

**Film:** "On Boys, Girls, & the Veil" followed by Discussion

**Read:** Mernissi, Conclusion (165-177); Coleman, "Women, Islam, & the New Iraq;" Alvi-Aziz, "Human Rights of Women in the Arab Middle East"

**Read:** From *The Flying Camel*: Khazzoom, Introduction (ix-xv); Rinsler, "Vashti" (39-45); Shohat, "Reflections of an Arab Jew" (115-122)

## April

M10, W12\*

**Lecture/Discussion:** Mernissi's Conclusion; Women, Islam, & the New Iraq; The Human Rights of Women in the Arab Middle East; *Flying Camel* Essays

**\*Book Review of Geraldine Brooks' *Nine Parts of Desire* DUE Weds. Apr. 12<sup>th</sup>**

M17, W19

**Final Project Presentations**

M24, W26

**Final Project Presentations**

## May

M1

**Final Project Presentations**

Tuesday May 2<sup>nd</sup>: Reading Day 8:30-4:00

**Exams: May 2-9**

# Reading List

## BOOKS:

Fatima Mernnissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Revised Edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). ISBN: 0253311624. \$13.95 Pb.

- *Read the Whole Book.*

Geraldine Brooks, *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (Anchor, 1995). ISBN: 0385475772. \$10.50 Pb.

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