

Tel Aviv University International

Arab and Muslim Feminisms in the Middle East and North Africa: the case of Bedouin women

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Course Description

Are Arab and Muslim women subordinated by patriarchal norms and the Muslim religion? Does study of their lives and the unique strategies of their struggle help us understand how identity/ies, power relations and the Western gaze form our perspective on the 'Other'?

This course offers an essential alternative to the Orientalist and ethnocentric perspectives typical of Western feminism that perceive Arab and Muslim women as veiled, weak and subordinate to Arab men, who exclude them from the public space. By challenging this hegemonic way of thinking, this course aspires to broaden the conventional patterns of our perceptions and arrive at a different consciousness of the Arab and Muslim world, by learning about lives influenced by colonial, political and cultural contexts. We will be guided by research into the knowledge and practices of local women and their unique strategies in struggling with patriarchy, and the politics of their representation by the West, in relation to their geographical, historical and cultural situation. We will survey some of the major debates, controversies, and issues in gender, culture and history, in relation to contemporary debates on gender, liberal Western discourse, identity and culture. The course will introduce students to the lives of real Bedouin women from the Negev, and their empowerment activities through feminist Bedouin organizations.

The course will include a tour to the Negev and meeting with feminist Bedouin organization, guest lecturers/speakers and screenings of documentaries.

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Critically observe their own reality in a complex and less judgmental way, by viewing it beyond their specific cultural identity;
2. Understand (more of) the Arab and Muslim world;
3. Engage in reflexive discussion of about Self-Other identities and value complexities;
4. Recognize the dominant Other and their 'insider gaze' in Israel by meeting with Bedouin-Arab women; and
5. Engage in reflective observation.

Course Structure:

The course will be conducted through a combination of formal lectures, small study groups and class discussion. The lectures will be based on weekly reading assignments. Classes will include films with panels of participants; conducting and analyzing interviews; reading and analysis of feminist ethnography; and presentations from students (at the end of the course).

Course requirements:

A) Attendance and active participation: Being present in class and actively involving yourself in class discussion.

B) 20%, two presentations. Firstly, each student will be assigned one weekly presentation on reading materials. In the presentation, students will briefly introduce this week's authors and readings, as well as offering their own analysis and criticism of this scholarly work. The student will offer questions for class discussion based on this reading. Secondly, all students will give a short class presentation about their final essay, and will receive feedback from classmates to improve their argument prior to submitting the essay. During your 15-20 minute presentation, you may use PowerPoint, performance, lecture and/or other presentation styles.

C) 20%, one short paper based on interviewing Muslim/Arab women and analyzes their choices and struggles (two pages). The paper should include: a working title, including a description of the chosen case study; academic reading reviews of two items from the syllabus that help you to frame your questions; analysis of the interview based on its main arguments, findings and conclusions; and a detailed description of how you will use this material in your analysis.

D) 20%, one short paper covering reading and other course material (two pages). The paper requires students to build on their analysis of class reading in relation to one of the films shown in class, and provide their own description, analysis and criticism of the film.

E) 40%, final research paper (ten pages). Your paper should present sociological/historical/ cultural analyses of a contemporary case study, text or film regarding gender, culture and/or religion among Arabs/Muslim and/or the Western world. You will outline what scholars know (and do not know) about the case and describe your analyses based on your accumulated academic knowledge.

Weekly schedule and reading assignments:**1. 27.2.2019: Class introduction, Arab Feminism**

- Kandiyoti, D. (2007), Contemporary feminist scholarship and Middle East studies. In: Kandiyoti D. (ed.), *Gendering the Middle East: emerging perspectives*. New York: Syracuse University Press, pp. 1-29.

- Badran, M. & Cooke, M. (1990). *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminism Writing*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Jagger, A. (2000). "Globalizing Feminist Ethics". In: Narayan U. & Harding, S. (eds.). *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial and Feminist World*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, pp.1-25.

Optional reading:

- Bulbeck, C. (1997). *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.1-95.

2. 6.3.2019: Muslim feminism

- Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical roots of Modern debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Cooke, M. (2001). *Women claim Islam*. New York: Routledge, chapters 3 and 6.

- Afshar, H. (1996). Islam and Feminism: An Analysis of Political Strategies. In: Yamani, M. (ed.), *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives*. Reading: Ithaca Press.

3. 13.3.2019: Secular feminism

- Badran M. (2005). Between secular and Islamic Feminism: Reflections on the Middle East and beyond. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1(1): 6-28.

- El Saadawi N. (2007). *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (second edition). New York: Zed Books.

4. 20.3.2019: Struggling with patriarchy 'from within'

- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with Patriarchy. *Gender and Society*, 2: 274-290.
- Hasan M. (2002). The politics of honor: patriarchy, the state and the murder of women in the name of family honor. *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society*, 21(1-2): 1-37.
- Shalhoub-Kevorkian, N. (1999). Towards a Cultural Definition of Rape: Dilemmas in Dealing with Rape Victims in Palestinian Society. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 22 (2): 157-173.

5. 27.3.2019: Negev Bedouin feminist organization tour

6. 3.4.2019: The Muslim veil as a feminist strategy to empower women? A Critical View

- Marnissi, F. (1991). *The veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's rights in Islam*. New-York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, pp. 1-14.
- Arar, K., T. Shapira, F. Azaiza and R. Lazarowitz-Hertz (2013). *Arab women Management and Leadership: Stories from Israel*. New York: St. Martin's Press, chapter 6.
- Ahmed L. (2011). *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Optional reading:

- Abu-Odeh, L. (1993). Postcolonial feminism and the veil: Thinking the difference. *Feminist Review*, 43: 26-37.
- we will also be watching a short film relating to the Veil in western world and conducting a debate on 'the freedom of choice among Muslim women'. This class is based on interviews conducted for students.

7. 10.4.2019: Resistance and empowerment from private spaces

- Abu-Loughod, L. (1990). The Romance of resistance: Tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women: *American Ethnologist*, 17, (1): 41-55.
- Abu-Rabia-Queder S. (2007). The activism of Bedouin women: Social and political resistance. *HAGAR Studies in Culture, Polity and Identities*, 7 (2): 67-84.
- we will also be watching the film *Sandstorm*, Elite Zexer (2016).

8. 17.4.2019: Guest speaker

9. 24.4.2019: Gender and oral history: Reading feminist ethnography

- Gluck S. (1984). What is so special about Women? Women's Oral history. In: D.K. Dunaway & W.K. Baum (eds.), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. Walnut Creek and London: Altamira Press, pp. 215-231.
- Aburabia, S. (2012). "Is Slavery Over? Black and White Arab Bedouin Women in the Naqab (Negev). In: M. Levene & Shafir G. (eds.), *Struggle and Survival in Palestine/Israel*. London: University of California Press. Pp. 271-287.
- we will also be watching *The Film Class*, Uri Rosenwaks (2006).

10. 1.5.2019: Reflecting the 'Western gaze'

- Mohanty, M.C. (2002). "Under Western Eyes": Revisited Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles. *Sign: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28(2): 499-535.
- Motzafi-Haller, P. (2000). Reading Arab feminist discourses: a postcolonial challenge to Israeli feminism. *HAGAR: International Social Science Review*, 1 (2): 63-89