

Description

This seminar critically engages with various forms of Arab and Muslim “feminism”, taking into consideration the historical and cultural contexts shaping feminist demands and forms of women’s resistance in the Arab world. The seminar begins from a decolonial perspective, examining how we study feminism in the Middle East, realizing the myriad distinctions between Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern worlds, as well as the diverse cultural and regional factors shaping debates about women’s liberation within those categories.

Illustrated through examples from Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon, theoretical perspectives and major debates are explored via their historical and political framework. Islam, al-Nahda (the Renaissance of the 19th Century), the surge of anticolonial resistance in the first half of the 20th century, followed by grand projects of “nation building” in the second half of the 20th century, underline how Arab Feminism was born anti-imperialist, with all the strengths and challenges that prerequisite entailed for the movement.

Ongoing social and geo-political conflicts in the region constitute the final part of the seminar. From the Arab Spring of 2011, to military atrocities and mass displacements, it has become increasingly evident that material and historical conditions shape the trajectory of Arab women’s resistance.

Participants will read a selection of core texts in advance of each class, and are expected to critically engage with a variety of materials, whether texts, films, videos, or music. Class discussion will be central to unpacking the themes and ideas detailed below. Exact excerpts will be shared closer to the time of the seminar.

Schedule

Part I: From where to start?

1- How to study feminism in the Middle East

- “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others.” (2002) by Lila Abu-Lughod.
- “How Not to Study Gender in the Middle East” *Jadaliyya*, (December 4, 2012) by Maya Mikdash [Required reading: The whole article in the link below]

<https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/25434/How-Not-to-Study-Gender-in-the-Middle-East>

2- Women and Islam

- *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (1992) by Leila Ahmed [Required reading: Introduction, pages 1-7]

Part II: Middle Eastern Feminism(s)

3- Women and Society: Al-nahda in the 19th century

- "Al-Nahda & the Emergence of Arab Feminist Thought." Fiker Institute, (December 2022) by Ola Rifai. [Required reading: The whole article in the link below]
<https://www.fikerinstitute.org/publications/al-nahda-the-emergence-of-arab-feminist-thought>
- (1848) المعلم بطرس البستاني، تعليم النساء [Required reading in Arabic: pages 1-7]
(Can be read in English too)

4- Rising Feminist Consciousness

- "A CENTURY OF EGYPTIAN WOMEN'S DEMANDS: THE FOUR WAVES OF THE EGYPTIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT" by Hala Kamal (2016).
https://scholar.cu.edu.eg/sites/default/files/halakamal/files/emerald_egyptian_womens_demands.pdf
- "The Emergence of the Palestinian Women's Movement 1929–1939" by Ellen L.Fleischmann (2003).
https://www.palquest.org/sites/default/files/The_Emergence_of_the_Palestinian_Womens_Movement_1929-39.pdf

5- Anti-Colonialism, Nationalism and feminism(s)

- *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*(1996) by Margot Badran. [Required reading: "Chapter Four: Egypt for which Egyptians?", pages 74-88]

6- Post colonial states and feminism(s):

- **State feminism:**
"Economic and Political Liberation in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism."
(1992) by Mervat Hatem
- **Islam, Feminism, and Islamic Feminism:**
Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry (1991) by Fatima Mernissi.
[Required reading: Introduction, pages 1-11]

Part III: Current Debates

7- Women and the Arab Uprisings

- *Biography of a Revolution: The Feminist Roots of Human Rights in Egypt* (2025) by Lucia Sorbera. [Required Reading: Chapter Ten:Historicizing the Egyptian Revolution, pages 193-201]
- Gilbert, Victoria. "Sister Citizens: Women in Syrian Rebel Governance." (2021) by Victoria Gilbert. [Required reading: pages 1-11]

8 - Arab Women Now: Voices from Egypt and Palestine

- Elsadda, Hoda. "Travelling Critique: Anti-Imperialism, Gender and Rights Discourses."(2018) by Hoda Elsadda.
- Film Screening: Palestine 36/ فلسطين 36, directed by Annemarie Jacir (To be confirmed)

Bibliography in English

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Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992.

Baron, Beth. *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. Chapter 3, "Nationalist Iconography," 57–81; Chapter 5, "The Ladies' Demonstrations," 107–134.

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1929، البستاني، بطرس. المعلم بطرس البستاني، تعليم النساء [و] آداب العرب. بيروت: المطبعة الكاثوليكية

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