WS 304-4: Women in Religion: Contemporary Debates in Muslim Women’s Feminisms

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The idea of being at once Muslim and feminist continues to be constructed as an ontological impossibility by all sides. The combination of a hegemonic discourse that racializes Muslims as the irredeemable civilizational other, on the one hand, and the dominant patriarchal readings of Islam within Muslim discourses, on the other, threaten to render obsolete the resistant voices of Muslim women. Added to this mix is a western feminist tradition that has often objectified Muslim women as passive, infantilized and in need of being saved. And yet, Muslim women’s feminisms and their activism for social change continue to thrive despite this most inhospitable context.

This course will explore the voices of contemporary Muslim feminists and examine the strategies they have employed to create a viable third space – one that is neither apologetic to patriarchy nor a pawn in the shifting global political realities. This course is not a historical survey, nor is it a course that limits itself to theological issues only. Rather, this course is aimed at looking at Muslim women’s activisms, as defined by Muslim women themselves, and the contexts within which their struggles are played out.

Required Readings:

In addition, readings will be pulled from a wide variety of sources and will be provided to students in a course package, available at the university bookstore

Class Structure:
Class time will be divided between lecturing, class discussions and viewing of relevant audiovisual material.

Course requirements and Grading
Class attendance 5%
Class participation [incl. 1 presentation on the readings] 10%
Critical response papers 2-3 pages [Due week 4] 15%
Critical response papers 2-3 pages [Due week 7] 15%
Critical response papers 2-3 pages [Due week 10] 15%
Class presentation of research [Last week of class] 10%
Research Paper 10-12 pages [Due week 14] 30%

Prerequisites: Six credits in WS, including WS 101 and/or WS 102.

The Department of Women’s Studies encourages clarity of thought and expression and good writing. Students will be evaluated on these skills in all courses given by the Department.