LECTURE WILL COVER QUESTIONS OF:

- What is the significance of women and gender in Orientalist discourses?
- What are contemporary representations of Middle Eastern women and men?
- Do Middle Eastern women need saving?
INTRODUCTION

• Understanding Gender
• Problematising the “Middle East”
• Orientalism/ the link between scholarship and colonialism
• Scholarship on gender in the Middle East: Old and Contemporary Debates
FEMINISM(S)

- Recognition of systematic & structural inequalities based on gender, and attempt to challenge these to have more equality & justice
- Liberal, Marxist/socialist, radical, postcolonial, transnational feminisms
- Historically, strong relations with nationalist and wider political movements (socialist, anti-imperialist)
- In ME, mainly liberal, Marxist and postcolonial feminisms
DEFINING GENDER

• Analytical concept
• Social & cultural construction of what it means to be an ideal man or woman
• Historically specific
• Denotes specific norms and values, social roles, relationships
• Power and hierarchy
• Challenging binaries (transgender)
• Joan Scott: “Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power”

• “Gender establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as economy, ideology, the family and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself”

• Connell (2009) defines gender as: “must be understood as a social structure. It is not an expression of biology, nor a fixed dichotomy in human life or character. It is a pattern in our social arrangements, and in the everyday activities or practices which those arrangements govern.”
MIDDLE EAST POLITICS

• What is the Middle East? Where is we talking about? Who is in the Middle East?
• Why the region is the centre of conflict and controversy?
• What is homogeneous about this region? What unifies the region?
• Middle (is it in the middle?) how can it be Middle and at the same East? It is a European definition according to their position as a Centre of the planet.
• It’s coined by the European
• Does it still make any sense when European are not the Centre of the world anymore?
• Who is in the Middle East Arab states (22), Turkey, Iran, central Asian states, etc.??
KEY WORDS/IMAGES POP INTO OUR HEADS WHEN WE THINK OF THE MIDDLE EAST:

Muslims
Oil/Rich
Hot /dry/sunny weather
Veil
Terrorism
Backwardness
• Distinction between 'the East' and 'the West'
• Inferiority vs. superiority
• Essentialism and Generalisation
• Stress on continuity and significance of tradition
• 'Orient' mainly created out of texts
• Stress on the significance of Islam
• Exotic & erotic
• Constructed knowledge justifies colonialism and imperialism
• Orientalism reveals more about 'the West' than 'the East'
WHY ORIENTALISM IS STILL RELEVANT?

- Relationship between East and West cannot take place without reference to imperialism
- Significant imbalance of power; the narrative of one is given legitimacy over the narrative of the other
- The possession of greater power generally invests the knowledges of the more powerful with a greater authority than those of the powerless
- Authority facilitates the creation of universalised images of both the powerful and the powerless
GENDERING ORIENTALISM

- Orientalist and wider (neo)colonial & imperialist discourses gendered:
  - Orient feminised, exotic & erotic
  - Use of the female body as marker of racialized difference
  - Men & masculinities linked with violence
  - Women & femininities linked with passivity, oppression and victimhood
THE EROTIC, BACKWARD, PRIMITIVE
WESTERN FEMINISTS AND ORIENTALISM

- Women as sex objects (fulfilling the overdose sexual desire of men)
- Essentialism: Victims/passive/subordinate/oppressed (men are violent)
  Dependent on men (powerless: Saving oppressed women in the Middle East/
  grounds for colonization)
- Generalizing specific incidents or conditions
- Exceptionalism discourse
- Generalization/seclusion, veil, hareem/particularly in relation to Islam
- Cultural Relativism
- Patriarchy as universal and monolithic
- Sisterhood is Global/Women as one category
RESPONSE TO WESTERN FEMINISM

- Condemning "feminism" as an inauthentic Western import (asking for cultural purity and authenticity)
- Celebrating feminism as a local or indigenous project (underestimates the formative power of colonialism in the development of the region) (Abu Lughod, 1998)
- Acknowledging the relationship between colonialism, culture, sexual differences, gender and other forms of inequality
  - Challenge the stereotype of passive and powerless Muslim/Arab/Middle Eastern women
  - Dismantle the notion that Islam shapes women's conditions and lives in the same way regardless of sociopolitical and economic factors (Charrad, 2011)
EARLY WORK OF ARAB FEMINISTS

“Men have singled out women of outstanding merit and put them on a pedestal to avoid recognizing the capabilities of all women.”

~Huda Shaarawi
Gender in the Middle East Studies

- Challenging Western thoughts in relation to Women’s position in Islam/ Leila Ahmed: Gender and Islam /British colony used oppressed women discourse to claim cultural superiority / moral justification for its control over the Egyptian population.
- Representation, culture and sexual difference : Meyda Yegenoglu: “Representation of cultural and sexual difference are constitutive of each other” : Colonial Fantasies: Toward a Feminist Reading of Orientalism (1998)
- Uncovering hareem and the veil discourses/ Fatima Mernissi, Lazrg
- Different forms of patriarchy/different strategies for women Kandiyoti: Bargaining with Patriarchy
- complex gender relations family, community, kinship and state / Abu Lughod
- Women’s rights not fixed: interpretation of religious texts varied over time and from country to another: Judith Tucker the House of the Law: Gender and Islamic Law in Ottoman Syria and Palestine. 1998.
- Women’s movement and Nationalism
MORE OF THE “WHITE MEN SAVING BROWN WOMEN FROM BROWN MEN” PARADIGM?
PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR THE SEMINAR NEXT WEEK:

- Where and in which contexts/forms have you come across Orientalism?
- What are contemporary representations of Middle Eastern women and men?
- Do Middle Eastern women need saving?