

## Tutorial on the Middle East Fall, 2003

Asma Barlas  
Muller 312; 274-3557  
Thursdays 2:30-5:30/by appointment  
Webpage: <http://www.ithaca.edu/faculty/abarlas/index.htm>

### Description

This tutorial focuses on a specific aspect of religion, politics, and society in the Middle East: the presumed relationship between Islam and political violence/ terrorism on the one hand, and sexual inequality/ oppression on the other. Illustrative of the first is the phenomenon of jihad, and we will study this within the context of a critique of both “political Islam” and the Crusades. A comparative approach is crucial for understanding not only religious violence among Muslims, but also Western historical experiences of holy wars and how these have shaped the contemporary Western discourses on jihad. Emblematic of the second is Islam’s stance on women, and we will examine this from a scriptural and also an historical perspective. This will allow us to contrast Western representations of Muslim women (and of institutions like the harem and the veil) with the teachings of Islam’s scripture, the Qur’an, and also to examine how Muslims have interpreted (and practiced) these teachings historically.

Studying Middle Eastern politics through the lens of religion, sex/gender, and violence runs the risk of validating Western stereotypes (reinforced by 9/11) of Islam/ Muslims as deadly, exotic, and radically different from everyone else, but it also can permit a critical interrogation of such stereotypes, thereby allowing for a better understanding of Islam, Muslims and the Middle. That is what the tutorial hopes to facilitate with the intent that such an understanding will become the basis for you to question the tendency—also implicit in the structure of this tutorial—to think in terms of the “Islam/West” binary.

### Materials

Barlas, Asma. *“Believing Women” in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an* (University of Texas Press, 2002).  
\_\_\_\_\_. “Jihad= Holy War=Terrorism: The Politics of Conflation and Denial” (webpage: [www.ithaca.edu/politics](http://www.ithaca.edu/politics))  
\_\_\_\_\_. “Why do they Hate us?” *Ithaca College Quarterly*, Fall, 2001 (my webpage).  
Kepel, Gilles. *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Harvard, 2002).  
Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite* (Perseus, 1992).  
Riley-Smith, Jonathan. *Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades*, Oxford, 2001.  
Sacco, Joe. *Palestine* (Fantagraphics, 2001).  
Sardar, Ziauddin, *Introducing Islam* (Icon/Totem, 2001).  
Wadud, Amina. *The Qur’an and Woman* (Oxford, 1999).  
Online resources

In addition to the texts assigned by me, each one of you will need to pick a book, or a set of articles, or a movie/TV show/video to read/watch and then make a presentation on it during the final two weeks of class.

### **Grades**

Class attendance/discussions	15%
Two concept papers	50%
Two review essays	20%
Student project	15%

### **Attendance**

Since we meet only once a week, more than two unexcused absences may result in my asking you to withdraw from the tutorial at any point during the semester.

### **Concept paper**

A concept paper is a critical essay that should (a) engage the authors/texts we are reading; (b) be analytical; i.e., it should make an argument and also explain why you think in a certain way about something (this requires you to ask yourself why you want to write the paper and what you hope to get out of it); (c) be well organized; e.g., you should state at the outset what you will be writing about and why and also give some indication of how the paper is structured; and (d) be spell-checked, paginated, and properly cited (**I mark down sloppy work**). 10 double spaced, typed, pages.

### **Review Essays**

Should include a review of all books read for a particular segment as well as of the segment itself (e.g., Sardar, Barlas, Kepel for the segment on jihad/political Islam).

### **Independent Projects**

You will be required to make an oral presentation in class, with a written report (3-5 pages) due to me on the day of the presentation. **All assignments must be turned in on time; I do not accept late papers.**

## **Schedule of Readings**

**To be done before coming to class on the day marked**

### **September**

T2: Introduction

I. Islam and political/religious violence

T9: Sardar, *Introducing Islam*; Barlas, “Jihad” and “Why do they hate us?” (both on webpage)

T 16: Kepel, *Jihad*

T 23: Kepel, continued

T30: Kepel, finish;  
Sacco, *Palestine* (Prof. Shawkat Toorawa);  
1<sup>st</sup> review essay due

**October**

II. “The West” and political/religious violence

T7: Riley-Smith, *The Crusades* (class will need to be rescheduled).

T14: Riley-Smith, continued. 1<sup>st</sup> concept paper due

**Fall Break**

T21: Riley-Smith, conclude.

III. Islam and Women

T28: Mernissi, *Veil and the Male Elite*

**November**

T4: Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman*

T11: Barlas, “*Believing Women*”

T18: Barlas, continued; 2<sup>nd</sup>. review essay due

**Thanksgiving Break**

**December**

T2: Summary discussion; student projects

T9: Student projects  
December 16<sup>th</sup>: 2<sup>nd</sup> concept paper due