

**Course:** Legacies of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

### **Course Learning Objectives**

- You will attain religious literacy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – including important historical dates and developments, religious content and practice, and contemporary expressions.
- You will be able to consider each of these three faiths from multiple perspectives – as an “insider” and an “outsider” – and you will be able to thoughtfully compare and contrast from each of these perspectives.
- You will develop your critical thinking skills and communication by conscientiously engaging with a number of texts and media – and by sharing your thoughts with your classmates in discussion.

### **Course Description**

- In this class, we will explore the three religious traditions that claim to be the legacy of Abraham – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Throughout the course we will approach these three faiths from a number of different perspectives – historical, comparative, and sociological. You will not only become fluent in the particulars of these three traditions – both in terms of historical context and relevance as well as religious content and practice – but we will also spotlight a particular contemporary iteration of each of these three faiths as it intersects with broader social justice concerns. Since I am particularly trained to consider gender, our contemporary spotlight modules will reflect this speciality.

### **Course Organization**

- This course will be divided into three main units – on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each unit will be further divided into three modules – historical perspectives, religious content and practices, and contemporary expressions. The first two modules in each unit are designed to develop your literacy of the religious tradition being considered. The first module will give you a broad historical perspective and context including major dates, text, and figures. The second module will provide you with an introduction to the content and practices of each of the three religious traditions, considering questions like: what do adherents believe? how do they practice their faith? has this changed over time? You will consider these questions as both an “insider” and an “outsider.” Finally, the third module will highlight a particular contemporary expression of each of these three traditions and how this expression intersects with one or more social justice concerns.

## **Module:** Gender, Veiling, and Islamic Fashion

### **Module Description**

- In this module, we will explore Islamic fashion in Turkey. Not only will this highlight some of the modern veiling practices of Muslim women today but we will also consider how veiling practices allow some women in Turkey to explore their changing relationships with both modesty and consumption in an increasingly modernized, secularized, and westernized world. In addition to exploring this very particular example of veiling, we will look at veiling practices in a broader historical context as well. We will also consider what motivates some Muslim women to veil and how practices and motivations shift and evolve depending on historical and geographic context.

### **Learning Objectives**

- Building on the literacy you have been acquiring on Islam and Islamic traditions, you will consider the role of veiling as an expression of faith both historically and today. Some of the questions you should be able to answer include: where did the practice of veiling come from? do all Muslim women veil? have veiling practices changed over time? why do some Muslim women veil today? what are some of the different styles of veiling and where are they popular? what kind of veiling is popular in Turkey? After completing the module, you should be able to recognize and describe a number of common veiling styles as well as summarize major historical trends in veiling practices.
- In the discussion threads, you will consider veiling from both from the perspective of an “insider” as well as an “outsider.” Some of the questions to consider include: what are some of the reasons women chose to veil? is veiling inherently oppressive? is the practice of veiling similar to any of the other practices we’ve explored? how is it different? how do some Muslim women experience veiling as a vehicle for considering their modern relationships with both modesty and consumption? After completing the module, you should feel comfortable analyzing popular discourses on the veil and assessing them for common stereotypes and assumptions.
- Finally, you will complete a short quiz assessing your retention of the information presented in this module. Reading the assigned texts carefully and engaging with the posted material and resources should allow you to pass the quiz with a “B” or higher.

### **Required Readings**

- “The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women” by Homa Hoodfar. 248-279.
- “Between Fashion and Tesettur: Marketing and Consuming Women’s Islamic Dress” by Banu Gokariksel and Anna Secor. 118-148.

Before you read the assigned texts, you might consider viewing the Module PowerPoint and reading through the Module Lecture Notes. Both of these resources will provide you with some of the background information you need to successfully read and process the assigned articles.

## Module PowerPoint

## Module Lecture Notes

- Veiling: A Historical Perspective
  - Veiling was a common practical practice with nearly all women in Arabia during the sixth century. In fact, veiling is not mandated in the Qur'an. According to popular Islamic tradition, Muhammad received a revelation that his wives – and only his wives – were required to veil. At that time, for example, if it was said of a woman that she was “taking the veil” it meant that she was to marry Muhammad.

As Islam spread, it encountered veiling traditions in Persia, where veiling was a status symbol distinguishing high born women. In fact, if you were not high born and were caught wearing a veil, you could be punished for it. Over time, however, veiling became popular with both Arab Muslim women and remained popular with Persian women who converted to Islam.

Veiling, in modern times, has sometimes been more politically motivated and often coincides with the rise of Islamism. In cases where veiling is more clearly tied to politics, veiling practices are often more strict than we might have seen in the past or in areas where Islam is less politicized.

We have now explored where the tradition of veiling in Islam comes from as well as how it has changed over time. Next, we will consider what motivates some Muslim women to veil.

- Motivations: Why Some Muslim Women Veil
  - Muslim women veil for a number of reasons. Many Muslim women believe that veiling reflects their religious commitments to modesty and piety. Others veil for political reasons – in a number of countries Islamist groups have become increasingly popular and some women see veiling as a visible rejection of westernization and secularization.

A good example of politically motivated veiling occurred in Iran during the Revolution of 1979. This was a time of massive upheaval in Iran with a variety of political groups working to overthrow what they saw as a puppet government of the West. A variety of disparate groups united in this project – from communist secular groups to radical Islamist groups – to renounce the monarchy of

Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. One of the things that many women did – even those who identified as secular or atheist – was to take up the veil as a symbol of solidarity and unity against what they saw as a westernized government.

Other women veil to follow customs and traditions or because of community pressure or simply out of convenience. In Egypt, for example, wearing a veil in certain parts of Cairo protects women from unwanted attention from men as they commute from school or work. There are some areas in the world that mandate veiling – either legally or through intense social pressure – in which case women may not have a choice in veiling. There are also, however, nations like France that prohibit wearing a veil in public institutions.

Finally, veiling has become increasingly fashionable in some parts of the world – like Turkey – and many women see veiling as an expression of individual identity and style.

Now that we've considered both the history of veiling as well as what motivates some Muslim women to veil, let's consider some of the different styles of veiling that are popular in different parts of the world.

- Popular Veiling Styles

- There are a number of broad terms we can use to describe the practice of veiling. For example, some use the terms “headscarf” or “hijab” to indicate the veil. Some women wear the veil in a very relaxed fashion – sometimes with hair peeking out – while others even wear gloves so that the skin of the hands is not visible.

The most popular style of veiling worldwide is the Hijab style, which is a style that often covers all of the hair and some of the upper shoulders.

Women on the Arabian peninsula and in the Gulf – in countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar – often also wear a Niqab. The Niqab is an additional “face veil” that leaves only the eyes exposed.

The Burka, a veiling style that covers a woman from head to toe, often with mesh over the eyes, is worn primarily in Afghanistan and some parts of Pakistan. The “Burka” or “Burqa” is often either blue or black and is often considered the most “oppressive” veiling style. The Chador is primarily worn in Iran and is long veil that women often clutch under their chin. Veiling practices in Iran have become more relaxed in recent decades but were much more rigid during the time just after the Iranian Revolution.

Now that you've been introduced to a number of veiling styles that are popular to varying degrees in a number of both Muslim-majority societies, we should

consider whether or not veiling is inherently oppressive.

- Agency and the Veil

- Given all that we've learned about the veil, it would be hard to claim that veiling is, in all times and places, inherently oppressive of women. In many ways, this type of claim is actually anti-feminist. Many, though not all, veiled Muslim women freely chose to veil. To claim that this is simply the product of "false consciousness" or because they are oppressed does not resonate with the experiences of many Muslim women.

For example, in the early twentieth century, a number of powerful Egyptian men traveled to the United States. They were shocked by what they saw. Women's dressing styles appeared more revealing than they were used to and they noticed men harassing women on the streets. Returning to Egypt, they reflected that women in their country were treated with much more respect because their bodies were not so visibly sexualized. This example highlights how "oppression" looks different depending on your socio-historical location.

Another example to consider concerns Turkish politician Merve Kavakci. Kavakci was democratically elected as a Virtue Party deputy for Istanbul in 1999. Turkey does not allow women to wear the headscarf in public institutions. Kavakci refused to remove her headscarf and was prohibited from taking her oath of office as a result. In this case, some have argued, laws AGAINST allowing women to wear the veil were more oppressive than wearing the veil to begin with.

This is not to say that some women do not experience the veil as an oppressive custom that they would rather not participate in. But the two examples above do highlight that it would be unfair to argue that the veil is inherently oppressive for ALL women.

Now that you've read the assigned texts, viewed the PowerPoint, and read the Lecture Notes, join us in this week's discussion threads. The first thread encourages you to consider content and critical thinking questions with your classmates. The second is an activity that encourages you to consider common stereotypes associated with veiling.

### Discussion Thread Questions

- Discussion Thread One
  - Consider the following sets of questions:
    - Content questions:
      - Where did the practice of veiling come from and has it changed over time?
      - Do all Muslim women veil?

- Have veiling practices changed over time?
- Why do some Muslim women veil today?
- What are some of the different styles of veiling and where are they popular?
- What kind of veiling is popular in Turkey?
- Critical thinking questions:
  - What are some of the reasons women chose to veil?
  - Is veiling inherently oppressive?
  - Is the practice of veiling similar to any other practices we've explored? How is it different?
  - How do some Muslim women experience veiling as a vehicle for considering their modern relationships with both modesty and consumption?

Fully explore at least two of the content questions and at least one of the critical thinking questions and share your thoughts with your classmates. Ideally all of the questions should be addressed throughout the course of the discussion. You may offer personal opinions if you do so respectfully, but this should not be the bulk of your contribution.

Be sure to share your original response at least three days ahead of the deadline. Also please respond to at least two of your classmates' contributions thoughtfully and thoroughly.

- Discussion Thread Two
  - Watch, read, and consider the following links:
    - From BBC:
      - [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/hijab\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/hijab_1.shtml)
    - From New Humanist:
      - <https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/4199/why-feminists-should-oppose-the-burqa>
    - From The Guardian:
      - <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/20/muslim-woman-veil-hijab>
    - From PBS:
      - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ogMu9gaNsc&feature=youtu.be>
    - Primary Footage:
      - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMhK0dAfjmQ&feature=youtu.be>
    - From Fox News:
      - <http://insider.foxnews.com/2015/04/22/meet-manal-al-sharif-saudi-woman-who-was-arrested-daring-drive-car>

Now please consider the different discourses of the veil being mobilized in these examples. What are some of the stereotypes and assumptions about veiled Muslim women you can identify? What other patterns and themes do you see? Finally, find another example to share with us. Make sure to post the link to your example in your response. How would you compare your example to the examples provided? You may offer personal opinions if you do so respectfully, but this should not be the bulk of your contribution. Be sure to consider these examples and your own example in light of the assigned material for this module.

Be sure to share your example at least three days ahead of the deadline. Also please respond to at least two of your classmates' examples thoughtfully and thoroughly.

Now that you've had a chance to explore all of the material for this module and participated in two discussions with your classmates, check out the following sample quiz questions. Spend some time reviewing the material before taking this module's quiz. Finally, bear in mind the Assessment Statement provided below.

### **Sample Quiz Questions**

- True or False: Veiling originated as an Islamic practice with the Qur'an instructing all Muslim women to wear the veil.
  - True
  - False
- As Islam spread, where did it encounter veiling as a signifier of status?
  - China
  - India
  - Persia
  - North Africa
- What are veiling practices often called in Turkey?
  - Burka
  - Chador
  - Tesettur
  - Niqab

### **Assessment Statement**

- For this module, you will be expected to participate in two discussion threads, which will require you to engage both with the assigned readings and materials as well as with your own critical thinking. You will also take a ten question quiz. Scoring 80% or higher would indicate that you are successfully meeting the expectations of this course. Scoring 70% - 80% would indicate that you are adequately meeting the expectations of this course. Scoring below 70% would indicate that you are not meeting the standards of this course and should consider engaging with the assigned readings and materials more thoroughly.

## Online Resources

- From BBC:  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/hijab\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/hijab_1.shtml)
- From New Humanist:  
<https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/4199/why-feminists-should-oppose-the-burqa>
- From The Guardian:  
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/20/muslim-woman-veil-hijab>
- From PBS:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ogMu9gaNsc&feature=youtu.be>
- Primary Footage:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMhK0dAfjmQ&feature=youtu.be>
- From Fox News:  
<http://insider.foxnews.com/2015/04/22/meet-manal-al-sharif-saudi-woman-who-was-arrested-daring-drive-car>