

POLS 79

ISLAM, RACE, AND EMPIRE

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Since 9/11, Muslims in Europe and the United States have been at the center of contentious political debates about the meaning of secularism, citizenship, and democracy. From Donald Trump's Muslim Ban to feminist critiques of the Islamic headscarf, politicians and pundits across the political spectrum have questioned Islam's compatibility with Western values and ways of life. These disputes belie longer and messier histories of empire, colonialism, and the War on Terror, through which categories such as "Islam" and "Muslim" have been racialized into a monolithic brown Other in contrast to the "West." Drawing on a range of intellectual traditions, including postcolonial theory, ethnic studies, anthropology, and critical race studies, this course examines how imperial legacies and enduring ideas about racial, religious, and ethnic difference structure contemporary debates about Islam and Muslims in Europe and North America. Over the course of the semester, we will read works by prominent theorists such as Wendy Brown, Frantz Fanon, Lila Abu-Lughod, Mahmood Mamdani, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak, and discuss how Islam figures into public conversations about anti-Semitism, citizenship and democracy, gender and sexuality, multiculturalism, national identity, secularism, tolerance, and political violence. Through our readings and discussions, students will learn about the diversity of lived experiences of Muslims in Western societies and explore the connections between race, religion, and the afterlives of empire.

Eligible for credit in Islamic Studies, Global Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Interpretation Theory, German Studies, French and Francophone Studies