

Sociology of Muslim Societies

SOC 455/REL 452

Instructor: Azeema Faizunnisa

It may come as surprise to many that more than 500 million Muslims live in just three countries of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and around 200 million more live in Indonesia. Contrary to the popular imagery of Muslims as Arabs, only 15 percent Muslims could be categorized as such. Like the geographic spread of its adherents, Islam is not monolithic in terms of practices. Since the beginning, though the basic tenets of the religion has remained the same but the religion has undergone transformations over time and space, while interacting with other cultures and traditions and has manifested in multiple strands. Thus when studying the Islam (like any other religion), or how it is practiced, a distinction between the religion and culture has to be made. It should also be noted that while baffling to non Muslims, sometimes, the differences and diversities thus created are also source of contention among various Muslim scholars and theologians.

The course is designed to provide a sociological overview of Islam's diverse followers and their practices which ultimately creates the culture collectively known as “Muslim Culture”. This course intends to provide students with an analytical tool to study how the religion (and its interpretation) interacts with existing culture, norms and mores of a place (and its people), and how the lines of religion are drawn between these overlapping spheres. In the class, we will touch upon some of the contradictions and diverse interpretations of the religion. However, the course will not look for conclusions in terms of what is the right practice, for example in the case of Purdah is it a right of the woman to choose or governments have right to impose a ban, like in France.

Lectures will occasional be complemented with videos and films and visiting scholars. Students are encouraged to actively take part in the class and in the on line forum through Laulima.

It should also be noted that this course as stated in the title is about studying Muslim societies, and is not about Islam and Islamic theology. Moreover, the course will focus on contemporary societies from different parts of Islamic world or countries where Muslims are present in significant numbers and hence we will not delve into history of Islam and the Muslims.

Grading:

Quizzes in class: 15%

Weekly posts on the Laulima discussion board: 15%

Class presentation: 30%

Class Project/Paper: 30%

Attendance and participation: 10%

Requirements for Research Paper

Select a topic from the weekly themes and prepare a 10 page research paper. If you are interested you can design a short survey to gather your own “primary” data (instructor will provide guidance) or you can use secondary data from other publications, or it could be a literature review.

Student Presentation:

Presentation on the research outline. This will be an opportunity to share your work with your fellow classmates and get their feedback,

Required readings:

We are not going to follow one text book for this course, however each week we will read two-three articles/chapter/papers related to our topic. These readings will be posted in your Laulima account.

Week 1 (5-8 July): Introduction

July 5: Introduction of the syllabus and a brief overview and short history of Islam

July 6: Documentary: PBS Frontline Muslims

July 7: Demographics of Muslim societies

July 8: Youth in Muslim societies

Reading from:

Carl Ernst, *Following Muhammad*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2003, pp. 1-69.

Week 2 (11-15 July): Gender in Islam

This week we will discuss status of women in selected Muslim countries.

Movie: *Women Without Men* (2009) by Shirin Neshat

Readings:

Ahmed, Leila. 1992. *Women and gender in Islam: historical roots of a modern debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of piety: the Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Wadud, Amina. 1999. *Qur'an and woman: rereading the sacred text from a woman's perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Guest Lecturer: TBA

Week 3 (18-22 July): Art and Culture

We will focus on art and culture from Muslim countries including music and movies

Reading:

LeVine, Mark. 2008. *Heavy metal Islam: rock, resistance, and the struggle for the soul of Islam*. New

York: Three Rivers Press.

Transcript of NPR program: "Understanding Pakistan through music"

Trip: Shangrila, Hawaii

Guest Lecturer: TBA

Week 4 (25-29 July): Contentious Issues

This week we will discuss some of the contradictory elements in Islamic societies. Questions like Sufis vs Salafis, Islam's compatibility with democracy, Jihad, dissidents within Islam, collision and co-existence with modernity will be explored.

Readings from:

Bayat, Asef. 1998. "Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt". *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 40 (1): 136-169.

Ramadan, Tariq. *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Guest Lecturer: TBA

Week 5 (1-5 August): Impact of Globalization

Focus will be how internet, movies, music, television and capitalism has impacted Muslims world.

Readings from:

Cooke, Miriam, and Bruce B. Lawrence. 2005. *Muslim networks from Hajj to hip hop*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Bunt, Gary R. 2009. *iMuslims rewiring the house of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. <http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=454813>.

Simpson, Brad. 2009. "Indonesia's "Accelerated Modernization" and the Global Discourse of Development, 1960-1975". *Diplomatic History*. 33 (3): 467-486.

Guest Lecturer: TBA

Week 6 (8-12 August):

Student presentations

Optional Readings:

Armstrong, Karen. *Islam: A Short History*. Modern Library chronicles. New York: Modern Library, 2000.

Said, Edward W. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.