

ANT335 The Anthropology of Islam: A Dialogue.

T-Th 9:45 - 11:15

Dr. Carl Davila

Office hours: T 3-4:30pm, W 9:30-12:30

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This course explores the complex views of “Islamic culture” presented by anthropologists on one hand, and by the long tradition of Islamic social and religious thought on the other. We approach this subject through a series of thematic units, reading a variety of ethnographic and theoretical works within Western academic discourses on Islam, and “in response,” items from important classical and modern Islamic sources, as well as works by contemporary Muslim scholars of culture. In this way you will become familiar with major main issues and literature in the study of “Islamic society,” and at the same time, acquire a broad view of major cultural themes in the encounter between “Islam” and “the West.”

Why did I put those two words in quotes? We must learn to set aside a lot of assumptions about our subject, and one is that “Islam” and “the West” are inherently distinct and necessarily at odds. Some of the material we will encounter this term will show us that the two have more in common than either may realize. Also, we should resist the urge to reduce all that calls itself “Islamic” down to a few examples that happen to fit our common, mass-media image of Islam and Muslims. You will meet a wide range of cases and contexts in this course, but even so, we cannot by any means cover all the ways in which people of the Islamic faith relate to that faith and embody its precepts and practices. is a very large topic. It is difficult to generalize about what we find in the “anthropology of Islam” (if indeed there is such a thing).

The course emphasizes reading, writing and discussion. To succeed, you will have to participate in the discussions that comprise almost half the class meetings, and show that you have thought about the ideas presented in the course by responding to them in writing. The aim is to expose you to ideas and give you a safe space to process and react to them — to take you beyond “received wisdom” to a place where you can begin to develop your own “native wisdom” on Islam, Muslims and their place in the world. I feel that at this particular moment in history, this is a very important goal.

Readings:

Readings will approach the subject from a variety of angles: ethnography, political economy, postcolonial studies, sociolinguistics and cultural history. Each week you will be responsible for a set of articles or book chapters; and in addition most weeks will require you to read part of a book-length work. Some weeks also have

recommended readings, which are not required, but which offer significant additional insight (and certainly are fair game for use in written assignments and exams). You will read a lot, but there will be ample time in class to discuss and clarify the main themes and examples. If you make the effort to get through the material, you will have plenty of help in understanding it so that you can begin to form educated opinions about it.

We will read all of three books: Clifford Geertz's *Islam Observed*, Brinckley Messick's *Calligraphic State* and Leila Abu-Lughod's *Veiled Sentiments*. The journal articles and book chapters are found under the "Lessons" tab on ANGEL, in a folder called ANT335 Readings. In that folder, you will find folders corresponding to each week of the course. Additional materials (like this syllabus) are found in the same location; some will be handed out in class. You are responsible for all of these materials.

Lecture, Discussion, Reaction:

Tuesdays will consist mainly of a lecture that will help you make sense of the week's readings. Most Thursdays will be devoted to discussion of the readings. You will form a team with one of your classmates; each team will **present one week's readings** and each member will produce a **summary of the readings (about 5 pages)**. All individuals in the class will then write a **short paper (about 2 pages)** reacting to the readings and/or discussion. Reaction papers may reflect personal opinions, experiences, feelings and beliefs, but should engage course materials in the process. Summaries are due on presentation day; reaction papers are due the following Thursday (ie: you have a week to reflect). When I return them, please keep your reaction papers together in a separate folder or binder. This will form a journal of your experiences in the course, which I will collect at the last class meeting on December 6.

All writing assignments are to be word-processed on double-spaced pages and may be submitted electronically. Late work will be downgraded.

Exams:

There will be an in-class **midterm** exam — a combination of short-answer and essay questions covering the first half of the course.

For the **final** exam, you may choose one of two options:

- a) a 30-minute oral exam, to be taken in my office during finals week, or
- b) a substantial research paper (12 pages minimum, plus bibliography) on a topic related to the course subject to consultation and approval by September 30th.

More will be said about the options for the final as we get closer to the end of the term.

Your final grade:

Rather than obscure letter grades for each task, you will earn points toward a maximum of 100 points. Your various tasks are weighted as follows:

Teamwork:		15 pts.
- Presentation	10 pts.	
- Reading summary	5 pts.	
Reaction Paper Journal		15 pts.
Midterm		30 pts.
Final Exam		40 pts.

Your final grade will be the result of the number of points you accumulate, using the following scale:

93 +	A	77-79	C+
90-92	A-	73-76	C
87-89	B+	70-72	C-
83-86	B	67-69	D+
80-82	B-	63-66	D
		60-62	D-

(If you *really* want a letter-grade equivalent for a given assignment, just calculate the percentage you earned out of the total possible points for that task, and use the scale above. Do not ask me to do high school arithmetic for you.)

Teamwork guidelines and grades:

The discussion leaders' task is to present the following main points of each reading:

Thesis — What is the author's main point? What is she or he on about?

Argument — How does he or she support the thesis? Is there some logic to the discussion? Do you think it holds water?

Evidence — What kind of evidence does the author use? Where does it come from — ethnography? case studies? statistics? literary studies? Is it sufficient to support the thesis?

Remember: this is a team assignment. I need to hear from everyone on the team, in a well-coordinated tour of the readings. You will need to meet outside class to organize yourselves so that it is clear that all team members contributed to the result. I will model some techniques in the first few class meetings. I do not expect you to be expert at this at the drop of a hat: it is an art that must be cultivated.

The criteria for full credit (10 points) are:

- organization — team members coordinate their efforts and the discussion flows smoothly; all team members participate 3 points
- completeness — the discussion covers the readings, with the three main points above emphasized 3 points
- timeliness — all the required readings are covered within the time allowed in class. 1 point
- evaluations by your fellow classmates 3 points

This probably seems like a lot, don't worry: you have some leeway. If, for example, a lively discussion happens and we do not cover all the readings completely, the "completeness" requirement can flex a little. The sure way for your group not to get full credit is if you make a serious blunder (showing up unprepared, missing the point of the readings completely, that sort of thing). The primary goal is that we all come to understand what the authors are saying, and then use that as a basis for intelligent, stimulating conversation.

Reading summary guidelines and grades:

The summary of your team's readings is just that — an abstract that addresses each article or book chapter using the thesis-argument-evidence model presented above. You must show me in coherent, well-organized English that you have got the gist of all the readings that week. This is not a team assignment. If you cover all the readings correctly, the only way you will not get full credit (5 points) is if team members copy one another. That will earn each offender 0 points (but you may be given the chance to earn up to 3 points by rewriting the assignment).

Reaction paper journals:

This is a major component of your work. It is also your easiest task, as long as you put yourself into it. Some weeks, you may not have much to say; on those occasions, write about what you thought was important in the week's topic. Other times, something in the class will stir you up; on those occasions, let it all hang out. Good grammar, composition and cleverness are helpful but not the most important considerations. You will not be graded on those things (unless I can't understand what you're saying!). It is important mainly that you show me that the course materials have made some kind of impression on you — emotional, intellectual, spiritual, whatever. (You can also revisit/reassess reactions from previous weeks, if that is what comes up for you.) I will collect a Reaction Paper from you each week. Usually I'll just tick it off, showing that I've read it. Sometimes, I may include a comment for you to consider for the future.

On the last day of class (Thursday, December 6) you will give me all your Reaction Papers for the semester in a folder or binder and in addition you must **write a 3-4 page conclusion to your journal** reflecting on what you have learned in the course generally and/or from writing the Reaction Papers themselves.

To get full credit for this task (15 points) you must

- give me a reaction paper each week of the course (12 in all)
- engage course materials in at least a general way most of the time
- show me that by the end, the course has touched you in some way

A note about privacy: your Reaction Papers and Journal will be kept in strict confidence. You may write anything you like — I have a thick skin and don't hold grudges. I may, however, share short extracts with the class; authors will not be identified.

Discussion and reaction guidelines:

No opinion, thoughtfully expressed, is automatically out of bounds in this class. On the contrary: expressing your opinions is essential to success in this course. But it is also important to do so through reasonable, respectful discussion. If you want to wave a flag (or religious icon), please be gracious about it. If you are Muslim or have some personal connection with Islam or Muslims, these are valuable experiences for all of us in the class, and I hope you will feel free to share them. If on the other hand you are only looking for evidence to validate some stereotype, whether positive or negative, you will find this course challenging.

Remember: this is not a course about religion, but about the myriad ways in which one extremely important world religion shapes how people think about themselves, form communities and orient themselves in a universe that includes both mundane and supernatural phenomena. So in the anthropological tradition, we will strive for a balance between valid personal reactions to the material and an intellectual view that sees our subject in an inclusive and relativistic light. This may be a delicate dance at times, but in the end you will find it rewarding.

Reading Assignment and Discussion Schedule

Unit 1 — Week 1

Is there such a thing as an 'anthropology of Islam' ?

T 8/28 Lecture: "Introduction to the course (and a brief history of Islam)."

Th 8/30 Lecture-Discussion: "Orientalism...and its children"

Required Readings:

- Talal Asad: "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam."
- Soraya Altorki: "The Anthropologist in the Field..."
- from Edward Said, *Orientalism*

Book: Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (Chapter 1)

Recommended Readings:

- Lila Abu-Lughod: "Anthropology's Orient..."

Unit 2 — Week 2

Views from within: Islamic conceptions of society.

T 9/4 Lecture: "Islam and society in theory and practice."

Th 9/6 Discussion — Team #1. 1st reaction paper due

Required Readings:

- selected readings from Qur'ân
- Fazlur Rahman: *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Chapter 3 "Man in Society"
- Akbar Ahmed: "Al-Beruni: The First Anthropologist."
- Richard Tapper: "'Islamic Anthropology'..."

Book: Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (Chapter 2)

Recommended Readings:

- Jonathan P. Berkey: *The Formation of Islam*, Chapter 21
- M. Z. Sidiqi: "Origins and Development of the Hadith Literature"

Unit 3 — Weeks 3 & 4

Islamic ritual & praxis

T 9/11 Lecture: "Islamic practice as a social and spiritual phenomenon."

Th 9/13 Discussion — Team #2. 2nd reaction paper due

Required Readings:

- Annemarie Schimmel: from *And Muhammad is His Prophet*, pp. 144-147
- Tong Soon Lee: "Technology and the Production of Islamic Space..."
- Gregory Starrett: "The Hexis of Interpretation: Islam and the Body..."
- John R. Bowen: "Salat in Indonesia..."

Book: *Islam Observed* (Chapter 3)

Recommended Readings:

- John R. Bowen: "On Scriptural Essentialism..."

T 9/18 Lecture: "Sufism and its social dimensions."

Th 9/20 Discussion — team #3. 3rd reaction paper due

Required Readings:

- Arthur Gribetz: "The *sama* 'Controversy...'"
- Nancy Tapper: "*Ziyaret*..."
- Liyakat Takim: "Charismatic Appeal or Communitas? ..."
- Eva Evers Rosander: "Going and not going to Porokhane..."

Recommended Reading:

- Jonathan P. Berkey: *Formation of Islam*, Chapter 24

Unit 4 — Weeks 5 & 6

Islam and identity.

T 9/25 Lecture: "Identity and culture."

Th 9/27 Discussion — team #4. 4th reaction paper due

Required Readings:

- Marie Nathalie LeBlanc: "The Production of Islamic Identities..."
- Moira Killoran: "Good Muslims and 'Bad Muslims,'..."
- Mazumdar and Mazumdar: "The Articulation of Religion ..."
- Lawrence H. Mamiya: "From Black Muslim to Bilalian..."

T 10/2 Lecture: "Islam from the margins."

Th 10/4 Discussion — team #5. 5th reaction paper due

Required Readings:

- Richard L. Warms: "Merchants, Muslims and Wahhabiyya ..."
- Douglas Anthony: "Male Igbo Converts in Hausaland..."
- Barbara M. Cooper: "Hausa Women, Song, Hajj..."
- Richard Kurin: "Islamization in Rural Pakistan"

Recommended Reading:

- Edward E. Curtis: "Islamicizing the Black Body..."

Week 7

T 10/9 — **Midterm exam**

Th 10/11 — Guest lecture: Raheel Raza

6th reaction paper due

Unit 5 – Week 8

Language, power and authority

T 10/16 – Midterm Break: no class

Th 10/18 Lecture/Discussion: “The language of Islamic authority.”

Readings:

- Michael Lambek: “Certain Knowledge, Contestable Authority”

Book: Brinkley Messick, *Calligraphic State* (Introduction and Part I)

Recommended Readings:

- James M. Wilce, Jr.: “The Kalimah in the Kaleidophone...”

Unit 6 – Week 9

Law & society

T 10/23 Lecture: “Foundations and social practice of *Sharīʿa*.”

Th 10/25 Discussion – team #6. 7th reaction paper due

Readings:

- Gamal Badr: “Islamic Law and the Challenge of Modern Times”

Book: *Calligraphic State* (Part II)

Recommended Readings:

- Joseph Schacht: *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, Ch. 1-4, 26

Unit 7 – Weeks 10 & 11

‘Fundamentalism,’ neocolonialism and nationalism

T 10/30 Lecture: “A history of Islamic reform movements”

Th 11/1 Discussion – team #7. 8th reaction paper due

Readings:

- from Sayyid Qutb: *Milestones*, pp. 7-22

- “Osama bin Laden’s Message to the American People”

Book: *Calligraphic State* (Part III & conclusion)

Recommended Reading:

- John O. Voll: “Fundamentalism in the Sunni Arab World”

- Abdullahi An-Naim: “A Kinder, Gentler Islam?”

T 11/6 Lecture: “Nationalism and Islamic Realities”

Th 11/8 Discussion – team #8. 9th reaction paper due

Readings:

- Ira Lapidus: “The Golden Age: The Political Concepts of Islam”

- Muhamad S. Umar: “Muslims’ Eschatological Discourses...”

- Jane E. Goodman: “Singers, Saints...”

Unit 8 — Weeks 12 & 14

Gender and Islamic society

T 11/13 Lecture: “Deconstructing the harem: Men’s and women’s lives.”

Th 11/15 Discussion — team #9. 10th reaction paper due

Readings:

- from Fatima Mernissi: *Dreams of Trespass*, Chapters 1, 3 & 10
- from Veronica Doubleday: *Three Women of Herat*, pp. 62-83

Book: Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments* (Part I)

Recommended Readings:

- Saddeka Arebi: “Gender Anthropology in the Middle East...”
- Robert Antoun: “On the Modesty of Women...”
- Nadia M. Abu-Zahra: “On the Modesty...a Reply.”

Week 13 — Thanksgiving Break

Unit 8 contd. — Week 14

T 11/27 Lecture: “On veils and veiling.”

Th 11/29 Discussion — team #10. 11th reaction paper due

Readings:

- from Fatima Mernissi: *The Veil and the Male Elite*, Chapter 10
- Fadwa El Guindi: “Veiling *infitah*...”
- Read and Bartkowski: “To Veil or Not to Veil?...”

Book: *Veiled Sentiments* (Part II)

Recommended Readings:

- Samira Hajj: “Palestinian Women and Patriarchal Relations”
- Arlene E. MacLeod: “Hegemonic Relations and Gender Resistance...”

Week 15

T 12/4 Lecture

Th 12/7 Further reflections and some concluding thoughts.

12th reaction paper & Reaction Paper Journal due

Finals Week

Option (a) final exams — by appointment in my office

Option (b) finals due — 4pm Thursday, 12/13