ANTH 5402 Topics in Ethnography

Understanding Contemporary Islam

ANTH 5402      FALL 2012      NAH 11

Lecture: Wednesday 4.30-6.15

Tutorial: Wednesday 6.30-7.15

Teacher: Minaz G. Master

Course Description

Contemporary understanding of Islam is strongly influenced by the media which often provides politically motivated biased perceptions that are based on the orthodox interpretations of Islam observed by some Muslim societies. The Muslim world seems to be in a crisis over the question of authority and representation; how Islam is represented, how it should be represented, who should represent it and what the consequences of this representation are. The canonization of the Quran further complicates the issue of authority. This course will encourage the students to understand how the core beliefs of Islam are translated into practices and institutions, thereby addressing some current political issues. We will be examining the social institutions and cultural expressions of the religious community through the anthropological studies of Islam as it is lived and practiced by believers both within Muslim societies and non-Muslim societies.

We will start our study of Islam by examining the historical developments of Islam in pre-Islamic Arabia and look at the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Then we will examine some aspects of Islamic civilization, culture and philosophy. Finally we will address the issues of the so-called ‘politicalization of religion’ in the context of globalizing modernity and violent conflict. One of the dominant theories maintains that Western and Islamic civilizations are destined to be in a state of permanent conflict with each other, through this course we will investigate the insights that anthropological analyses can offer to discussions centering the relations between Muslim societies and the West.

Course Objectives

- Study and appreciate the contemporary cultural diversity, values and world views of Muslims living in diverse circumstances and spaces
- Introduce the contemporary struggles over religious authority and orthodoxy in some parts of the Muslim world
- To identify with the ideas and practices relating to gender, education and art
- To assist students in understanding and appreciating the complexity of the lives of Muslims in the contemporary world
• Challenge and think critically about existing stereotypes about Muslims and Islam
• Think critically and constructively about the issues that are discussed

Students are required by university policy to submit soft copies of all papers to VeriGuide. Check the website http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/ for information on how to submit papers through VeriGuide

Readings for the course are reserved in the University Library and journal articles are available through the university e-resource.

Course Grading

• Take-home midterm examination (30% of your grade) Due October 31
• Take-home final examination: (15-pages) or final paper of 20 pages (50% of your grade) Due December 12
• Class participation, particularly in tutorials and attendance (20% of your grade).

September 12: What is Islam? Local and Global Perspectives

Assigned readings:


Amir, Hussain. 2006. Oil and Water: Two Faiths, One God. Kelowna: Copper House pp7-15, 19-30


September 19: The Revelation, life of the Prophet and the Birth of Islam

Film showing: “The Message” (1976)

Assigned readings:


**September 26: Beliefs and Rituals**

**Assigned Readings:**


Amir, Hussain. 2006. Oil and Water: Two Faiths, One God. Kelowna: Copper House, pp 43-68.


**October 3: Islamic Art and Architecture**

**Assigned Readings:**


**October 10: From Islam to Muslims**

**Assigned readings:**


**October 17: Representing Islam before and after September 11**
**Assigned Readings:**


Amir, Hussain. 2006. *Oil and Water: Two Faiths, One God*. Kelowna: Copper House, pp115-140.

**October 24: Islam and the West at Loggerheads**

**Assigned Readings:**


**October 31: Muslims in Global Contexts**

**Assigned Readings:**


November 7: Modernity and Islamic Traditions

Assigned Readings:


Available Online

OR


November 14: Gender and Veiling

Assigned Readings:


November 21: Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance

Assigned Readings:


**November 28: Deconstructing Stereotypes**

**Assigned Readings:**


**December 5: The Road Ahead**

**Assigned Readings:**

