MAP, SPRING 2005 ISLAMIC SOCIETIES Prof. GILSEMAN
(revised version Jan.19th) V55.0502 On Barak (TA)
NOTE: changes marked ***

Lectures: Tuesday/Thursday 9.30-10.45 a.m.
Location: Silver Center 713
Office Hours: ***
Michael Gilsenan: Tuesdays/Thursdays 2-4 or by appointment (9th floor, 265 Mercer)
On Barak: 11-12.30 Tuesday (202, Kevorkian Bldg, 50 W'ton Sq. South)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course explores the anthropology and modern history of 'Islamic societies'. For our initial purposes, 'Islamic societies' will be understood simply as those in which practices, beliefs, discourses and institutions regarded as Islamic play significant, though often very different, changing roles.

We will focus on the varying ways in which Islam has been and is studied, represented, performed, transmitted, negotiated, argued and debated in the world from the mid-nineteenth century to the present.

The required readings have been chosen to give you a range of voices and approaches, periods and places, cultures and persons.

The aim is to develop a deeper, critical understanding of contemporary ways of reporting on, filming and recording, thinking and writing about aspects of 'Islam' and of our own unquestioned assumptions about 'it'.

Major topics and themes include:

1. The varying importance for Islamic religious formations of the powers, policies and understandings of colonial and post-colonial states; their unintended as well as intended consequences for forms of Islam in societies.
2. Education systems and their transformations (Quran schools, madrasas, state schooling).
3. Sacred and vernacular languages in changing worlds.
4. Ritual occasions of the Islamic tradition, such as prayer, the Pilgrimage and pilgrimages, and sacrifice in different social and historical contexts.
5. Law and society; what the shari'a (Islamic law) and calls for its application entail for religious movements, authority and states.
6. Gender, private and public spaces, concealment and revealing, morality and sexuality in social life and political ideologies.
7. The varying nature of authorities and polities legitimated as Islamic; institutions such as Sufi Orders; forms of association, cultural, political and economic activity that have been crucial in Islamic networks of teaching, blessing, authority and social organization.
8. Debates between 'modernist' and 'traditionalist' Islamic movements in the twentieth century.
9. The roles of media, from the manuscript and the book to radio, films, videos, dvd's, in the world flows of persons, images and meanings; the place of musical forms in those flows.
10. Migration patterns and the shifting boundaries of Muslim communities in the age of transnationalism.

These topics will be interwoven with specific studies of cultures, institutions and movements in different historical periods in the Middle East (Egypt and Lebanon), West Africa (Mali, Senegal and Nigeria), East Africa (Tanzania), Pakistan and India, Indonesia and Southeast Asia (Singapore and Malaysia), Europe (England, France and Germany), and America.

COURSE WEBSITE:

We will be using NYU Blackboard for the course. Copies of the syllabus and readings will be posted as will general announcements (including any changes, so please check this regularly).

To access an NYU Blackboard Course Site:
1. Log in to NYUHome with a valid NYU NetID and password.
2. Click on the ‘Academics’ tab and look under the ‘Classes channel for the course name.
3. Click on the course name to enter the NYU Blackboard course site.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance: Attendance at all lectures is mandatory.

Readings: It is crucial to your participation in discussion groups and to the success of your participation in the course as a whole that you do the weekly readings before the lectures.

***Discussion groups (NOT sections): After further consideration, I think it would be better to organise two weekly discussion groups of approximately sixty students per group rather than to have sections meeting every three weeks. The discussion group format should lead to greater continuity for you and to regular sessions with On Barak, our TA. We are currently negotiating times and spaces with the MAP administration and will let you know immediately via e-mail/Blackboard when we have them so that you can register for one of the groups. At each discussion group you should be prepared to participate actively in the sessions from your own response paper (2-3pp.) on the readings for that session as well as submitting it via Blackboard. All papers should be typed (12 pt.font, double spaced) paginated and stapled. (NOTE: response papers will be handed in but will not count towards the grade.)

Exams: Midterm Exam: to be held in the final class period before Reading Week, Thursday, March 9th. 40% of the final grade.
Final Exam: Will be held in the week after the end of classes, May 1st. Students will be expected to demonstrate in the exams a grasp of the required readings and books. 60% of the final grade.

Plagiarism: Do not plagiarize. It is unethical, a terrible waste of your intelligence and time and there are severe penalties.

Required Readings (in bookstore and on reserve):

D. Eickelman  New Media in the Muslim World: the emerging Public Sphere. Indiana UP, 1999. (Chaps.1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9)

Readings on Library Reserve (see separate sheet)

Lecture Schedule

Week 1  Two introductory lectures
Jan.17/19

Week 2  Debating Islam
Jan.24/26

Week 3  The Hidden and the Revealed
Jan.31/Feb.2
Readings: Gilsenan, Chaps.5 & 6, pp.95-141 Gilsenan, ‘Lies, Honor and Contradiction’ (Blackboard)

Week 4  Forms of Religious Association: Sufi Orders
Feb.7/9
Readings: Gilsenan, Chaps.4 (The Operations of Grace, pp.75-94) and 10 (The World Turned Inside Out, pp.215-250)