Islam in the Modern World

01:840:227:01   Fall 2015
Professor Sandy Russell Jones   T/Th 4:30-5:50pm
Office Hours: Thurs 2:45 – 4pm   Hardenburgh A-7 (CAC)
88 College Ave, Room 103

ISIS. Al-Qaeda. Sharia. Forced veiling. On any given day, the media offers a good dose of bad news about Islam. Anyone who has even a little bit of exposure to this fourteen century-old religion knows that much of this is hype: singular incidents exaggerated and magnified to generate shock, fear, and fascination. While the world's two billion Muslims would tell you that this is indeed the case, it can be difficult for the average non-Muslim to find reliable and accessible information that can help them get past the hype, and especially, the long-held stereotypes non-Muslims have about Islam.

One of the most trenchant ideas the so-called "Western world" has about Islam is that it is incompatible with "modernity." Modernity, this perspective holds, demands the rationalization and full secularization of society, economics, and political systems. Because Islam espouses a doctrine of all-encompassing divine authority, it will remain stagnant, and never develop the kinds of institutions that are essential to becoming part of the modern world, such as democracy and the free market. As pervasive as this view has become, it is significantly flawed on many levels. In this course, we will unpack this perspective, beginning with ideas about what "modernity" is, and briefly trace its historical development. We will do the same with the concept of "religion," which is also *an idea with a history*, and look at some ways in which this idea has been applied to Islam.

After establishing definitions of key terms and concepts, we'll survey the history of Muslim thought, starting with the colonial era, and ending in the current period. We'll cover major trends in thinking such as Modernist Islam, Islamism, Jihadi Islam, Progressive Islam, and the contemporary issues of technology and Muslim pop culture. Students will participate in an "iMuslim" project, in which they will explore the ways in which contemporary Muslims have incorporated digital and internet technologies into their practice of Islam.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Following Muhammad, Carl Ernst, UNC Press, 2003

Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought, Roxanne Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, Princeton University Press, 2009

Selected readings posted on the course Sakai website

It is recommended that you have regular access to a copy of the Qur'an. If you would like recommendations for quality English translations, please see me. You can also find the text on quran.com, which allows you to search by surah (chapter) and ayah (verse), and play recorded recitations. However, the book itself has a presence that cannot be experienced by reading online (an issue for discussion in our unit on Islam and technology!).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

Pop quizzes	15%
Midterm	30%
iMuslim project	15%
Final	30%
Class participation	10%

ABSENCE POLICY:

To fully benefit from the course, you will need to be in class. The readings are, of course, crucial material, but much of the work we will do will be in the classroom. Particularly, we'll be analyzing primary sources in the form of writings of Muslim thinkers, as well as images and recordings produced by Muslims. This is not work that can be done at home, and sample texts will appear on both the Midterm and the Final that you will be expected to analyze in the manner that was done in class.

So do please attend class regularly. However, absences due to severe illness or the observance of religious holidays are fully excusable.

The university requires that absences are reported through the online absence reporting system. Go to the following link, and follow the instructions:

COURSE SCHEDULE:

WEEK	TUESDAY	THURSDAY
	IDENTITIES – The East and The West	
1	9/1 **Course introduction**	9/3 **Pre-modern Islamic identity** – Physicians, Philosophers, and first-class Scientists. **Film**: *Islam: Empire of Faith* prepare: buy/borrow your books
2	9/8 MONDAY CLASSES MEET – **NO CLASS** prepare: Ernst Ch 1	9/10 **The "Clash of Civilizations"** prepare: Huntington (SAKAI)
3	9/15 **Western Imperialism & Colonialism** prepare: Ansari (SAKAI) Gelvin (SAKAI)	9/17 **Orientalism: how the West saw the East** prepare: Said (SAKAI)
	DEFINITIONS – Religion and Modernity	
4	9/22 **Religion as a constructed category** prepare: Ernst Ch 2	9/24 **What is "Modernity," anyway? "Tradition" vs. "Modernity"** prepare: Robinson Waldman (SAKAI)
5	9/29 **Some basics** prepare: Ernst Ch 3	10/1 **Ethics and Life in the World** prepare: Ernst Ch 4
	ISLAMIC MODERNISM	
6	10/6 **How the East saw the West** prepare: Kurzman (SAKAI) al-Tahtawi (SAKAI)	10/8 **Early Islamic Modernism** prepare: Afghani (SAKAI)
7	10/13 **Abduh & Rida** prepare: Abduh (SAKAI) Rida (SAKAI)	10/15 **Egyptian Feminism?** prepare: Amin (SAKAI) al-Badiya (SAKAI)
	ISLAMISM	

8	10/20 **Origins** prepare: Euben & Zaman (hereafter E & Z), Intro, Ch 1	10/22 **al-Banna and Mawdudi** prepare: E & Z, Ch 2	
9	10/27 *"Islam al-Hal."* The Muslim Brotherhood & Sayyid Qutb prepare: E & Z, Chs 4 & 5	10/29 **Women and Islamism** prepare: E & Z, Chs 10 & 11	
	JIHADI ISLAM		
10	11/3 **Origins and key ideologues** prepare: E & Z, Chs 13 & 14	11/5 **al- Qaeda & ISIS** prepare: E & Z, Ch 18 Wood (SAKAI) Letter to ISIS (online link)	
	PROGRESSIVE MUSLIMS		
11	11/10 **Gender Justice** prepare: Safi Part 1 (SAKAI)	11/12 **Pluralism** prepare: Safi Part II (SAKAI)	
	POP CULTURE & TECHNOLOGY		
12	11/17 **"Let us be Moors"** prepare: Aidi (SAKAI)	11/19 **Islam.com** prepare: TBD (SAKAI)	
13	11/24 **MESA CONFERENCE – NO CLASS**	11/26 **THANKSGIVING RECESS – NO CLASS**	
	iMUSLIM PROJECT		
14	12/1 **iMuslim PRESENTATIONS**	12/3 **iMuslim PRESENTATIONS**	
15	12/8 **iMuslim PRESENTATIONS**	12/10 **Wrap – up**	

STUDENT PROJECT: iMuslim

The iMuslim project is designed to expose students to the various mays that contemporary Muslims have incorporated new technologies into their practice of Islam. Most academic introductions to the Islamic religion focus on the origins and classical expressions of Islamic practice (as they should), but few also explore the ways in which those practices have changed with the development of new forms of communication and information management such as the internet, digital technologies, and pop culture. The internet, especially, has collapsed spatial (and temporal, for that matter) distances such that Muslims of any given community who were once fairly limited to local forms of Islamic expression now have access to the ideas, beliefs and practices of Muslims anywhere else on the globe, instantly.

Students will each choose one form of modern technology to focus on. Some examples are:

Websites
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, pinterest, etc.)
Blogs
Podcasts
Applications for smartphones and tablets (Apps)

THE PREPARATION STAGE

Research

Once you've chosen your specific technology, you'll research the ways in which Muslims use this technology to practice their religion. Uses can range from joining online discussion groups that address any number of religious topics, such as Qur'an study, women's issues, or eating halal, to websites that issue and collect online fatwas.

First, work to get a general sense of what kinds of ways Muslims find this technology useful. For instance, if you choose to look at blogging, do searches to learn what are the most common types. What are the topics that Muslims want to write and publish about? Then, choose a specific type that you want to focus on.

Ethnography

After zeroing in on your chosen form of technology, and the specific topic or use you want to look at, you'll talk to people about it. While you're not limited to the Muslim community at Rutgers, you may find it easiest to seek out fellow Rutgers students who are Muslim to interview about your topic. Some of you may already be part of a local Muslim community here in NJ, or alternatively, somewhere abroad, so feel free to interview your own friends and family, but do make an effort to also talk to people who are outside that community as well. For instance, if you're Sunni, make an effort to interview some Shi`is. If you're liberal, seek out Muslims who are conservative.

The kinds of questions you ask will depend on your specific project. However, here are some questions you might ask:

-   Have you ever used this technology?
-   Does it help you in your practice of Islam?
-   Do you feel like some part, or a great part of your Muslim community exists online?
-   Do you feel like this technology provides you with more or less information/insight/answers about your religion than your mosque, imam, or shaykh does?

Analysis

The last part of the project will get you to think about what you've learned, and fit it into the larger context of the course. Throughout the semester, you will have read from the works of many of the most prominent Muslim thinkers of the 19ᵗʰ- 21ˢᵗ centuries as they attempted to make sense of being Muslim in the modern world. We will have discussed many of the issues that Muslims considered crucial for preserving, reviving, or enriching Islam through the passage of time. Some of these issues are:

-   The place of Shari`a in the modern state
-   The role of women in religion, society, and the family
-   Science vis a vis religion
-   Relations with non-Muslims

Think about the form of technology you researched. Does it address in any way any of the issues we have discussed? How does it speak to these issues? Does it reinforce ideas of 20ᵗʰ century thinkers? Does it challenge them? Does it present entirely new ways to define what it means to be Muslim? These are some of the many questions you might ask, and seek to answer in your project.

THE PRODUCTION STAGE

Report

Once you've completed all of the preparation, you'll write a 4 – 5 page report on what you learned. The report can be organized in whatever way you find most appropriate to the topic. However, it must describe the results of all three elements of the project: research, ethnography, and analysis. More details will be given in class. The report is due on the day you present your project.

Presentation

Each student will have 20 minutes to present their project to the class at the end of the semester. You can use any kind of media you wish, and you will want to plan to demonstrate your technology (show websites, blogs, social media on the classroom

screen; bring in your smart phone to show us apps, etc). You can also record videos of your interviews and show excerpts during your presentation. We can discuss the presentations more fully later in the semester.