Sociology of Religion:
Islam and the Modern World

This course is designed to explore the role of religion in modern societies. We will examine religion as an important social institution and also as a cultural system. We will study canonical and contemporary theories of religion (Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Dewey, and Geertz). The focus of the course, however, will be Islam. We will look at the cultural context and historical construction of Islam, as well as the different social contexts within which Islam has evolved. We will examine the relationship between Islam and modernity, including secular ideologies, gender politics, and modern democracy. We will pay particular attention to the role that Islam plays in the everyday life of those who practice it, who are affected by it, or who struggle with it as their tradition. Our goal is to study Islam not as a fixed object or authentic tradition but as a social and cultural phenomenon subject to change, contestation, and critique. Texts may include John Dewey, A Common Faith; Karen Armstrong, Islam: A Short History; Fatima Mernissi, Islam and Democracy; Leila Ahmed, A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America, and Elizabeth Fernea, In Search of Islamic Feminism.
Course Objectives and Learning Outcome:

By the end of this course students will:

- Achieve a good understanding of the sociological approaches to studying religion in modern contexts.
- Understand various historical and contemporary Islamic traditions and experiences.
- Have a good grasp of the modern contexts within which Islamic societies have experienced the West (colonialism, modernity, and democracy).
- Have an understanding of the various ways in which Islam is politicized.
- Have a critical understanding of the social and cultural contexts of gender relations in contemporary Islamic societies.
- Be able to apply sociological theories and concepts in the analysis of contemporary representations of Islam.

Important Notes:

Learning is a collaborative experience. It is therefore, essential that students attend class, come prepared, and participate in class discussions. Students with absences or habitual lateness will have their grades lowered, even though they may have completed their required assignments.

Please do not hesitate to drop by my office should you have problems with the course, or just want to talk. Students who may need special consideration because of any sort of disability should make an appointment to see me in private. You should be advised that late papers would be substantially penalized and no incomplete grades will be allowed (except in rare and unexpected situations).

Plagiarism Policy:

As an NYU student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

Required Readings:
The following books are available at NYU bookstore; all other readings are posted on the Blackboard.
Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*.  
Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy*.  
Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism*.  

**Class Discussion Leaders:**

Starting on October 12th, two students, as a team, will choose to participate preparing for and leading the discussion of readings for that particular class. The team will work with the instructor to develop a critical, analytical summary of the readings to be sent by email to the class by noon of day before class. This critical summary will lay out key terms, concepts, and arguments within the texts. The team will also develop a set of discussion questions or a participatory activity for class. Class discussions should focus on a close reading of the text/s, critically analyzing theoretical contributions and may then apply concepts and theories to addressing related issues/problems (it is helpful to choose passages from the readings to consider in order to focus class discussion).

**Course Requirements:**
Students are evaluated and graded based on the following assignments:

**1. Class attendance and active participation in class discussions.** You are required to attend classes on a regular basis. You should also complete all assigned readings before each class meeting so that you can contribute to ideas and issues discussed in each class.

Each student is required to write one page review of the reading materials for each class. You should have the written notes with you in the class so that you can participate in the class discussion based on your prepared text.

**2. Class Discussion Leaders.** Each student is required, as a team with another fellow student, to lead the discussion of readings for that one class.

**3. Mid-term Essay:** Students are asked to write one analytic essay in which they will compare and contrast central issues, assumptions, and concepts in a set of readings. The instructor will provide several questions and students are only asked to choose one question and write an essay based on the readings discussed in the class. I will give you the mid-term questions on October 25 and your essay is due on NOVEMBER 7.

**4. Term Paper:** based on materials we cover in class. The topic can be a text, a theorist, or a subject relevant to the main theme of the course (10 pages). Your term paper is due on December 22.

**5 Class Presentation:** based on your term paper.
Grading Criteria:

1. Quality of Class Discussions (15%).
2. Leading Class Discussion (10%).
3. Mid-term Essay (30%).
4. Oral Presentation (10%)
5. Term Paper (35%)

Guidelines for Research Paper:
You are required to write a research paper (10-12 pages) analyzing a particular topic of interest. You have wide latitude in selecting the themes/topic of your paper. However, your paper should demonstrate a critical analysis of theoretical texts or of research informed by readings and discussions from this class. You should not simply write a summary of what other theorists have said. The paper should demonstrate your ability to critically reflect on readings, while framing debates and advancing arguments with analytical rigor and insight. It is expected that all papers make use of at least some of the readings for this course. Students will be asked to write a one-page abstract describing their planned paper. I will review your abstract and suggest changes in discussion with you. If you are uncertain about your topic, feel free to talk to me before you write your paper abstract.

Please note that you have freedom to structure your term papers as you wish. However, you may find the following guidelines helpful in thinking about writing your research paper:

a. **Introduction** (1-2 pages). Introduce your main theoretical argument and briefly situate your topic in the overarching theme of the class (predicament of modernity). You need to clearly explain what the purpose of your paper is and what your central argument / thesis is. In reading the first two paragraphs of your paper, I should clearly know what the goals and purpose of the paper are. I would also suggest a “map” paragraph at the end of the introduction that tells me where we will be going in the paper. (For example, “I first explain….then argue….by presenting evidence about three themes….”).

b. **Body** (6-8 pages). Here you develop your argument by providing theoretical analysis and empirical information in support of your main argument. Try to be as specific as possible and avoid making general statements or broad arguments. Please develop your argument by clearly presenting the evidence you have gathered in support of it. After you write this section, read it and see if you have a coherent argument or an analytical narrative. It is critical that the main body of the paper is closely integrated.

c. **Conclusion** (1-2 pages): By this point, your argument and all of your evidence should be clearly presented. Briefly summarize your argument here and think about what the broader implications of your argument might be. If your findings raise questions about other topics covered in this class, please make those connections briefly here. If you have concluded, after writing this paper, that you want to know more about your topic, explain what the next steps might be.
Course Outline

Introductions and Orientation:

September 7  
**Required Readings:**  


September 12  
**Required Reading:**  

Theoretical Approaches to Religion:

September 14  
**Required Reading:**  

**Suggested Readings:**

September 19  
**Required Reading:**  
*Clifford Geertz*: “Religion as a Cultural System.” p. 87-125.

**Suggested Reading:**  

Classical Theories of Religion:

September 21  

September 26  
**Emil Durkheim**, *the elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 203-218.

September 28  
**Karl Marx**, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, p. 41-58.

October 3  

October 10 No class (Fall recess).


Islam in Historical and Social Contexts:


Mid-term will be given.

October 30 Class Discussion

November 2 Class Discussion


Mid-term due

Muslim Women’ Lives Stories


November 21 Elizabeth Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism*, p. 62-143 (Morocco).

November 24 No class, Thanksgiving

November 28 Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism*, p, 144-199 (Kuwait)

November 30 Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism*, 200-239 (Turkey).
December 5  Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *In Search of Islamic Feminism*, p. 240-288 (Egypt).


December 19    Class Presentations

December 21    Class Presentations.

Term paper due on December 22.