

ANTH 318 Peoples and Cultures of the Islamic Middle East
University of Washington – Spring 2013

Instructor: **Michael Vicente Pérez**
Email: mvperez@uw.edu
Class Days and Times: T/F 10:30-11:50
Class Location: THO 325
Instructor Office: Denny, 239
Instructor Office Hours: Wednesday 1-2pm and by appointment

Course Description:

This course provides an introduction to the anthropological study of Islam and Muslims in the Middle East. Using contemporary ethnographic accounts, this course will examine some of the complexities of religious meaning and practice for Muslim communities in their specific cultural, political, and economic settings. Approaching Islam as a lived experience, this course will emphasize the everyday lives of Muslims. Particular attention will be paid to the different ways Muslims understand and express their faith and its implications for the meaning and practice of social life. Thematic areas covered in this course include ritual practice, ethical self-formation, gender, modernity, religion and politics, and other critical themes.

Course Goals:

By the end of this course students will be able to:

1. Identify key approaches in anthropology to the study of Islam and Muslims.
2. Identify key critiques of the study of Islam and Muslims.
3. Demonstrate understanding of the meaning of piety in self-formation.
4. Demonstrate understanding of the meaning of “Muslim publics” and its relationship to media.
5. Demonstrate understanding of the production of textual authority.
6. Demonstrate understanding of the role of Muslim political actors in civil society.

Course Requirements:

I. Course Texts:

All books will be available for purchase at the University Bookstore. To save money, I strongly urge you to shop around and/or share texts (photocopy portions). Whatever you choose, make sure you have all of your texts on hand when the quarter begins.

Required Texts:

1. Deeb, Lara. 2006. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Princeton University Press.

2. Schielke, Samuli. 2012. *The Perils of Joy: Contesting Mulid Festivals in Contemporary Egypt*. Syracuse University Press.
3. Bowen, John. 2012. *A New Anthropology of Islam*. Cambridge University Press.

*Throughout the quarter I will post supplementary articles on *catalyst* for particular topics. These readings will be posted at least one week in advance and will be available as PDF documents.

II. Class Participation and Etiquette:

This course is designed to introduce, understand, and critically assess some of the central issues in the study of Muslim practice. My goal as an instructor will be to facilitate productive discussions and critical thinking about the readings. **Your participation is therefore essential for the success of this course. Students are expected to attend every class, arrive on time, and come prepared.** Participation will greatly depend on students' willingness to play an active role in class discussions. I will occasionally call on students to answer questions concerning course topics and readings. It is important that we work together to establish a tolerant and respectful class environment. Be confident and honest, but be respectful. You are encouraged to express your views in this class. Disagreements are normal and expected but please refrain from any inappropriate behaviors.

Etiquette: Please make sure that you turn your cell phones off before entering the classroom. No texting during class. If you have special circumstances and need your phone available, please notify me on the first day of class. Students are not permitted to bring computers to class unless there is a verifiable need.

III. Assignments:

Policies: All assignments must be turned in on time. **No late work will be accepted.** If you have an emergency situation, please notify immediately in writing or email. I expect documentation if you are unable to complete an assignment on time. I will not accept any assignments by email.

I expect that all of your assignments will be **typed and stapled**.

A. Participation (5pts.):

Throughout the quarter, I will evaluate your participation in class. You are expected to contribute to class discussions regularly by offering thoughtful comments and/or questions about the readings and/or your colleagues' comments/questions.

B. Discussion Posts (20pts.):

You are required to **post 5 responses** to the course readings throughout the quarter. These postings will be used to guide and enrich class discussions. **To earn full credit, you must submit all 5 posts—each post is worth 4 points.** I will provide posting schedule on the first day of class.

Your comments should address the week's readings and must be posted **no later than 8:00 pm on the night before class** so that other students have an opportunity to read them.

All students are expected to read the posts before coming class and to bring them to each class session. You are encouraged to respond to particular posts with thoughtful comments/feedback.

Please single-space your post and sign your name at the end. Each posting should be at least two short, coherent paragraphs that follow one of these two formats:

- 1. Close reading (title your posting "Close reading: [name of author/s]"):** Identify a passage from one of the readings that grabs your attention, provokes or excites you, or stumps and frustrates you. Briefly explain how or why it does so and pose a question that might help move our discussion forward to follow your inspiration or address your frustration
- 2. Crosstalk (title your posting "Crosstalk: [topic or theme]"):** Write a short paragraph situating the day's readings within the context of the course as a whole. What new elements do they bring to our exploration of ethnicity? Which previous readings do they build upon, which do they forget? How do they speak to themes emerging in class discussion?

C. Critical Response Papers (30pts.):

You are required to turn in **2 critical response papers**. I will provide you with the questions in advance. You will select one of the questions and prepare an essay response. Your papers must be 2-4 double-spaced pages. I expect that your response will use the readings to construct a coherent and defensible paper. Your paper should demonstrate that you understand the readings and are able to present a critical engagement with the authors' ideas. You must cite the authors when necessary.

Note: Try to extend the principle of charity to each author's work. It is often useful to give the author's argument the best possible interpretation before providing a critique.

D. Quizzes (5pts.):

I will assign **five in-class pop quizzes** throughout the quarter designed to evaluate your engagement with the texts. The quizzes will be very short and focus on specific areas of the weekly readings. **You cannot make up any quiz without a valid (and documented) excuse.**

E. Ethnographic Assignment or Final Paper (40pts.):

Option #1: Ethnographic Assignment: You are required to conduct a mini-ethnographic research project among Muslims in the Seattle area focusing on a particular topic related to the course readings/discussions. Topics can include identity, gender (men and women), ritual (prayer, fasting, alms-giving), media, etc. For this project, you will be required to visit a local Muslim community (mosque) and play the role of an anthropologist engaged in participant observation. This means that you will (1) observe,

(2) record/document (conduct interviews, read/analyze texts), (3) participate (in prayer, for example), (4) and analyze.

For this paper, you must identify a clear research question that can be reasonably answered through participant observation. Examples include: “What is the meaning of fasting for Muslims in Seattle?” “What role does the prayer play in the formation of community?” “Why do women and men separate for prayer?” “How do Muslims represent the Prophet’s example in daily life?”

You must then **prepare a 5-page (double-spaced) paper reflecting your research** on this question. In this paper, you are expected to draw on available sources on the topic. They may be from the course readings or from other sources. The paper should have the following sections:

- a. Introduction to topic: present a clear introduction to the topic reflecting your sources. Ground your discussion on prayer, for example, within existing literature on the subject. Present the various ways other authors have discussed the subject of Muslim prayer and identify which one(s) you used for your own project. This section should be 1-2 pages.
- b. Methodology: present the methods you used for your project. Identify where and how you conducted your project (observation of Friday prayers/sermon, interviews with male Muslims, etc.). Identify some of the challenges you faced conducting your project (were you nervous or uncomfortable, did you find it difficult to get interviews with people, etc.) This section should be 1 page.
- c. Data/Analysis: present your data and analysis in a clear and coherent way. This section should present what you discovered using your observations, participation, and interviews. This is the section in which you present your evidence and identify your analytical claim. For example, you should use your observations and interviews to show how Muslim men think about gender separation through the examples of Muslims abroad. This shows that the practices of Muslims in Muslim-majority countries provide a strong religious example for Muslims living in the United States. This section should be 2-3 pages.
- d. Conclusion: present your findings and reflections. This section should include a summary of your findings and claim. It should also provide a personal reflection on the experience of doing the project and the way it may or may not have changed your ideas about Islam and/or Muslim practice. This section should be 1 page.

PROPOSAL: You must prepare a 100-word project description identifying your topic, research question, and potential research locations by week 5 of the quarter. You will submit this to me in class for credit.

Option #2: Critical Review Paper: You are required to identify a topic focused on Islam/Muslim practice and prepare a **5-page critical review essay**. The essay must (1) present at least three different approaches to the topic, (2) evaluate the

strengths/weaknesses of each approach, and (3) indicate which approach is the most promising for understanding Muslim practice and why.

You can rely on the course texts for this assignment but you must include at least 2 outside sources (scholarly books or articles). At least one of your sources must be anthropological. Topics for your essay may include the hijab (veiling), prayer, pilgrimage, media, youth identity, gender, class, authority, etc. Your paper should have a clear introduction identifying the approaches you will examine and stating what argument you will make for the approach you believe is best, a clear body presenting each approach and assessing their strengths/limitations, and a clear conclusion identifying which approach you believe is the most productive and why.

PROPOSAL: You must prepare a 100-word paper proposal by week 5 of the quarter identifying your topic, justification for topic, and potential sources. You will submit this to me in class for credit.

*** Resource: Anthropology Writing Center**

For writing assistance, please consider visiting the Anthropology Writing Center. It is located in Denny 430 and is open daily from 9-5 (Monday – Thursday) and 9-1 (Friday). You can visit the center any time during these hours or set up an appointment by visiting tinyurl.com/anthwrc.

Course Schedule and Topics:

WEEK 1: Introduction to Islam

April 1-5

Tuesday:

Bowen: Chapter 1 How to Think about Religions – Islam, for example (pgs. 1-10)

*Fluehr-Lobban: Islamic Society in Practice (pgs. 18-43)

Friday:

*Geertz: Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia (pgs. 65-74)

*Gilsenan: Recognizing Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Arab World (pgs. 51-63)

WEEK 2: An Anthropology of Islam

April 8-12

Tuesday:

*Asad: The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam (pgs. 1-17)

Friday:

*Varisco: Islam Obscured: The Rhetoric of Anthropological Representation (pgs. 322-337)

*Said: Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams Cannot Be Simplified (pgs. 69-74)

WEEK 3: Authority

April 15-19

Tuesday:

Bowen: Chapter 2 Learning (pgs. 11-41)
*Messick: Chapter 4 Audition (pgs. 75-98)

Friday:

Bowen: Chapter 3 Perfecting Piety Through Worship (pgs. 42-74)
Deeb: Introduction: Pious and/as/is Modern (pgs. 3-41)

WEEK 4: Piety and Modernity

April 22-26

Tuesday:

Deeb: Chapter 1 Al-Dahiyya: Sight, Sound, Season (pgs. 42-66)

Film: Quran by Heart

Friday:

Deeb: Chapter 2 From Marginalization to Institutionalization (pgs. 67-98) & Chapter 3 The Visibility of Religion in Daily Life (pgs. 99-128)

WEEK 5: Piety and Modernity

April 29-May 3

Tuesday:

Deeb: Chapter 4 Ashura: Authentication and Sacrifice (pgs. 129-164)

Friday:

Deeb: Chapter 5 Community Commitment (pgs. 165-203)

WEEK 6: Piety and Modernity & Prayer

May 6-10

Tuesday:

Deeb: Chapter 6 Public Piety as Women's Jihad (pgs. 204-219) & Chapter 7 The Pious Modern Ideal and Its Gaps (pgs. 220-231)

Friday:

Bowen: Chapter 5 Healing and Praying (pgs. 102-118)
*Mahmood: Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Salat (pgs. 827-845)

WEEK 7: An Anthropology of Sufism

May 13-17

Tuesday:

Bowen: Chapter 6 Pious Organizing (pgs. 119-137)
*Ewing: Dreams from a Saint: Anthropological Atheism and the Temptation to Believe (pgs. 571-579)

Guest Lecture: Dr. Terri DeYoung

Friday:

Schielke: Chapter 1 Introduction (pgs. 1-18) & Chapter 2 At the Mulid (pgs. 19-52)

WEEK 8: An Anthropology of Sufism**May 20-24****Tuesday:**

Schielke: Chapter 3 Festive Experiences (pgs. 53-80)

Friday:

Schielke: Chapter 4 Against Ambivalence (pgs. 81-110) & Chapter 5 An “Other” of Modern Egypt (pgs. 111-132)

WEEK 9: An Anthropology of Sufism**May 27-31****Tuesday:**

Schielke: Chapter 6 A Cultural Icon (pgs. 136-151) & Chapter 7 Legitimizing Celebration (pgs. 152-174)

Friday:

Schielke: Chapter 8 Transformations (pgs. 175-199) & Chapter 9 Conclusion: A Complete Life (pgs. 200-208)

WEEK 10: Authority**June 3-7****Tuesday:**

Bowen: Chapter Judging (pgs. 138-155)

*Agrama: Ethics, Tradition, Authority: Toward an Anthropology of the Fatwa (pgs. 2-16)

Friday:***Classes End*****FINAL PAPER DUE:**