

COURSE SYLLABUS



Islam and the West

Course code: IRS367/667

Term and year: Fall 2025

Day and time: Thursdays, 11:15-14:00

Instructor: A. Ebru Akcasu, Ph.D.

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Consultation hours: Fridays, 10AM-11AM, Room 4.10

Credits US/ECTS	3/6	Level	Introductory
Length	15 weeks	Pre-requisite	None
Contact hours	42 hours	Grading	

1. Course Description

This course introduces students to the long and dynamic history of contacts, exchanges, and entanglements between peoples and geographies associated with "Islam" and "the West." It begins by problematizing the terminology and the paradigms with which we are used to approaching the topic and proceeds to survey and interpret co-created histories from the advent of Islam to the present day. Rather than categorizing interactions between "Islam and the West" into distinct categories, the course aims to show nuances in identity and belonging across "civilizations" that are often discussed in binary terms. The course thus allows students to explore a complex and nuanced history of still-evolving encounters and entanglements, spanning from the advent of Islam to the contemporary era, in a way that helps shed light on the background of some of the predicaments we face in contemporary politics and international relations.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify paradigmatic shifts that have shaped studies of Islam and the West.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically about the complex history of exchange between the societies associated with "Islam" and those associated with "the West."
- Explain with examples how the societies under study have shaped one another, and how their understandings and relationships with one another have evolved over time.
- Interpret the relevance of the topics and themes covered for current affairs and international relations.

3. Reading Material

The reading consists of several book chapters (available in the library, on reserve, or in the e-learning platform) and articles (accessible through databases like JSTOR, which students are expected to know how to navigate and retrieve sources from on their own).

Required Materials

- Almond, Ian. *Two Faiths, One Banner: When Muslims Marched with Christians across Europe's Battlegrounds*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 2009.
- Dodge, Toby. *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

- Al-Tayeb, Salih, trans. Denys Johnson-Davis, [*Season of Migration to the North*](#), Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1969.
- El-Tayeb, Fatima. *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Frantantono, Ella. *Governing Migration in the Late Ottoman Empire*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024.
- Hamid, Shadi and William McCants, eds., *Rethinking Political Islam*. New York: Oxford UP, 2017. Hall, Stuart, David Held, Tony McGrew, eds., *Modernity and its Futures*. Cambridge: The Open University, 1992.
- Hall, Stuart, David Held, Tony McGrew, eds. *Modernity and its Futures*. Cambridge: The Open University, 1992.
- Holt, P. M. *The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517*. London: Longman, 1986. Lewis, Bernard. *Islam and the West*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Provence, Michael. *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Robinson, Francis. *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.

4. Teaching methodology

The course adheres to different formats before and after the midterm break. Before the midterm, it is divided into four components per session: lecture, primary source exercise, seminar, and journaling. Following the midterm, it is divided into students' culminating experience presentations, seminar, and journaling. Students are expected to arrive to class having read the material beforehand.

5. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
Session 1 4 Sep.	Topic: Framing "Islam and the West." Description: Introductions, go over the syllabus and course requirements. Discuss terminology, concepts, definitions, and paradigms that are relevant for studying "Islam and the West." Reading: Lewis, <i>Islam and the West</i> , pp. 3-42; <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i> , 1-11. Assignments/deadlines: Sign up for presentations and get access to CAS.
Session 2 11 Sep.	Topic: America after 9/11 Description: Active viewing and in-class journaling. Reading: Mandaville, Peter, "Islamism and U.S. Foreign Policy," in <i>Rethinking Political Islam</i> , pp. 203-218; <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i> , 11-21. Assignments/deadlines: Sign up for student presentations.
Session 3 18 Sep.	Topic: The Emergence of Islam Description: The rise of a new world civilization, from the Arabian Peninsula to the Iberian, the Indian Ocean world, and beyond. Contacts and exchanges. Reading: Crone, Patricia. "The Rise of Islam in the World," in Robinson <i>The Cambridge History of the Islamic World</i> , pp. 2 – 31; <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i> , 21-35. Assignments/deadlines: Primary source exercise.
Session 4 No class:	Topic: Holy War and Beyond

25 Sep. Makeup: 19 Sep.	<p>Description: Multiple perceptions of the Crusades, their social, economic, political, and religious relations between the 'Islamicate world' and the 'West'—approached from a macro- and micro- historical perspective.</p> <p>Reading: Holt, P.M. <i>The Age of the Crusades</i>, pp.1 – 30; <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i>, 36-55.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Primary source exercise.</p>
Session 5 2 Oct.	<p>Topic: Early Modern Encounters</p> <p>Description: Cultural and scientific exchanges. The impact of European geographical expansion on global dynamics and the Islamicate world; hybrid identities.</p> <p>Reading: Almond, Ian. <i>Two Faiths, One Banner</i>, pp. 139 – 180; <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i>, 55-69.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Primary source exercise; culminating experience pitch.</p>
Session 6 9 Oct.	<p>Topic: Colonialism and the Age of Reform</p> <p>Description: Challenges faced by the Islamicate world in the years immediately preceding and following Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. A deliberation on the concepts of modernization and westernization in the nineteenth century Islamicate world. Institutional changes and cultural negotiations.</p> <p>Reading: Ella Frantantuono, <i>Governing Migration in the Late Ottoman Empire</i>, pp. 25-61; ; <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i>, 70-87.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Primary source exercise.</p>
Session 7 16 Oct.	<p>Topic: The World at War, and Beyond</p> <p>Description: The Great War, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the making of the Modern Middle East.</p> <p>Reading: Provence, <i>The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East</i>, pp. 56-100; <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i>, 88-104.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Primary source exercise.</p>
Session 8 23 Oct.	<p>Topic: Midterm – “with success!” – “bittawfiq!” - “بالتوفيق!”</p> <p>Description: Multiple choice, fill-in-the blank, matching, short answer, essay. The material covers lectures, readings, presentations. Students will have the full session to complete the exam.</p> <p>Reading: <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i>, 105-115.</p>
27-31 Oct.	Mid-term break
Session 9 6 Nov.	<p>Topic: In-Class Movie: Turtles Can Fly</p> <p>Description: Active viewing and journaling.</p> <p>Reading: Dodge, <i>Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied</i>, pp. 1-42; <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i>, 116-129.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Culminating experience annotated bibliography.</p>
Session 10 13 Nov.	<p>Topic: Theorizing the Other</p> <p>Description: Culminating experience presentations & seminar.</p> <p>Reading: Said, <i>Orientalism</i>, pp. 1-49; <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i>, 129-149.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Presentations</p>
Session 11 20 Nov.	<p>Topic: Bodies in Conflict</p> <p>Description: Culminating experience presentations & seminar.</p> <p>Reading: Butler, <i>Frames of War</i>, pp. 1-32; <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i>, 149-165.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Presentations</p>

Session 12 27 Nov.	Topic: Gender and Islam Description: Culminating experience presentations & seminar. Reading: Ahmed, <i>European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe</i> , pp. 81-120; <i>The Season of Migration to the North</i> , 166-169. Assignments/deadlines: Presentations
Session 13 4 Dec.	Topic: Identity Description: Culminating experience presentations & seminar. Reading: Hall, <i>Modernity and Its Futures</i> , pp. 273-326. Assignments/deadlines: Presentations
Session 14 11 Dec.	Topic: Current Challenges and Opportunities Description: Wrapping up the semester and takeaways, interactive mapping of connections across space and time, and pinpointing the relevance of the material covered for our contemporary world. Assignments/deadlines: Culminating experience papers due before midnight on 11 December.

6. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Class Participation	42	5%	Demonstrating punctuality and preparedness for participation and critical engagement.	2, 3
Primary Source Exercise	10	5%	Demonstrating preparedness, critical thinking and contextualizing the text within broader course themes.	1, 3
Midterm	28	25%	Ability to demonstrate knowledge of historical factors, actors, and events that have shaped the history of interaction between 'Islam and the West.' The essay section should be well structured, demonstrate critical thinking and provide examples from both the lectures and the readings.	1, 2
Culminating experience presentation	20	20%	Demonstrating critical thinking and contextualizing of the culminating experience project within broader course themes.	1, 2, 3
Culminating experience final paper	30	20%	Ability to demonstrate critical thinking and write a well-structured coherent and academic research paper, using both primary and secondary sources, utilizing correct citations and proper formatting, and making a	1, 2

			strong argument for a well-defined thesis.	
Journals (inclusive of active viewing reflection #1 and #2)	20	25%	Demonstrating critical thinking, originality, and effective communication.	1, 2
TOTAL	150	100%		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

7. Detailed description of the assignments

Assignment 1: Primary source exercise

The primary source exercise is a weekly student-led component of the class before the midterm. Students are expected to come to class prepared to lead a critical evaluation and historical contextualization of a primary source from multiple angles. The assignment is done in groups, is randomly assigned, and peer evaluated. **Due date:** Due on a continuing basis.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Preparedness & Knowledge	20%
Clarity of Explanation	20%
Discussion Questions	20%
Peer Engagement	20%
Critical thinking	20%

Assignment 2: Midterm

The mid-term exam will mark the moment of transition from historical survey to theory and special topics. It will be composed of multiple choice, identification, short answer, and an essay question. The multiple choice and the identification questions will be drawn from a bank of questions that will be built each week, based on reading material, lectures, and presentations. The essay section should be at least 600 words and ought to demonstrate critical thinking and the ability to contextualize the topic within a broader framework, and may be taken as an oral exam - the quality of content matters more than length. Students have the whole class time to complete the exam. Oral exams are scheduled, in advance, for the week of the exam. **Due date:** 23 October

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Multiple choice and identification	25%
Short answer	30%
Essay/Oral Exam	45%

Assignment 3: Culminating Experience Presentations

The culminating experience project provides students with the opportunity to demonstrate learning, knowledge, creativity, and insight through an in-depth research project that will be submitted in two parts: presentation and final paper. Your presentation must include a topic overview, findings, analysis and critical thinking, visual aids, and discussion questions.

Due date: rolling.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Preparedness & Knowledge	20%
Clarity of Explanation	20%
Peer Engagement & Discussion Questions	20%
Critical thinking	20%
Annotated bibliography (submitted through e-learning platform)	20%

Assignment 4: Culminating Experience Essay

The culminating experience project's essay component provides students with the opportunity to write a research essay that trains them for their final thesis projects. The essays should demonstrate the ability to develop an argument, engage with existing scholarship, and clearly present findings.

Word count: 2,500 BA 3,000 MA (excluding pitch and annotated bibliography, which are separate submissions).

Due dates: 2 October (pitch), 6 November (annotated bibliography), 11 December (final essay). All submissions will be submitted via Turnitin by midnight on the due dates.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Pitch and Bibliography	15%
Thesis and argument	25%
Research	20%
Organization	10%
Critical thinking	20%
Writing and Mechanics	10%

Assignment 5: Journals

This is a hand-written reflective assignment that asks students to critically engage with the class material by journaling at the end of some of our sessions. Prompts will mostly be spontaneous, and will include engaging with the *Season of Migration* and other readings as well as topics that come up in lectures and presentations. Two of the entries will be active viewing reflections for the in-class films.

Wordcount: +750 per entry **Due date:** Due on a continuing basis.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Legibility	30%
Direct and clear engagement with prompt	30%
Critical thinking	20%
Evidence of active reading/viewing/engagement with course material	20%

8. General Requirements and School Policies**General requirements**

All coursework is governed by AAU's academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work. Please see the AAU intranet for a [summary of key policies](#) regarding coursework.

Course specific requirements

There are no special requirements or deviations from AAU policies for this course.