University of Florida, Department of Religion

Islam in Africa

Spring 2019

AFS 4935 & AFS 6905
REL 3371

Meeting & Location

M 8-9 (15:00-15:50 & 16:00-16:55) & W 8 (15:00-15:50) in Anderson Hall 32

Instructor

Benedikt Pontzen | 472 A Grinter Hall (by appointment only) | bpontzen@ufl.edu

Course Description

This course provides a comparative and historical overview of Islam and Muslim societies in their diversity in sub-Saharan Africa. The course will begin with an overview of recent academic debates on how to study these societies and Islam in their diversity. Thereafter, we will dip into the long history of Islam in Africa by highlighting some central historical features and trajectories of Muslim presence in Africa. The main part of the course will focus on contemporary Africa. In this part, we will acquire an overview of the central topics in the study of Islam in Africa, including Sufism and reform, Islam and politics, Islam and public spheres, religious encounters, gender and sexuality, etc. The second part will mainly build on studies of everyday Islam, i.e. Islam as lived by its adherents. In the concluding sessions, we will reflect on how to overcome the prevailing separation between the so-called Muslim world and Africa and ask for how to think the latter as part of the former and vice versa.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, the students should have an:

- overall acquaintance with current academic takes on Islam in Africa;
- overview of the major historical trends and trajectories of Islam in Africa;
- insight into the diversity of Islam and Muslim societies in Africa;
- awareness of how Islam is entangled with everything else and vice versa;
- understanding of religious encounters of Muslims and others in Africa;
- idea of the main currents in contemporary Islam in Africa.

**Course Requirements and Grading Criteria**

The final grade will be determined by:

- attendance (10%);
- active participation and presentation in class (15%);
- 3 response papers to selected readings (25% for each).

**Active participation and in-class presentations:** Students are expected to attend all classes and to participate actively in class discussions. Active and informed participation requires that students do the assigned readings with care and before coming to class. In-class presentations include short presentations (up to 10 minutes) on a selected topic/reading, presentations of response papers, and acting as discussant for the presentations of others.

**The response papers** (1,000 – 1,500 words each): The response papers address the key issues as well as theoretical and methodological questions raised by the readings, lectures, and class discussions. The students write these papers to critically engage in depth with their readings and the discussions in class. This requires a close reading, attentive and active presence in class, and a careful articulation of one’s informed and analytically nuanced position. The more you engage with the classes and readings and the more time you devote to a careful writing, the more likely you are to receive a high mark. The papers’ format is 12pp and 1.5 spaced. Papers are due at the set dates.

**Course Requirements and Grading Criteria – Graduates**

The final grade will be determined by:

- attendance (10%);
- active participation and presentation in class (15%);
- 3 response papers (15% each);
- 3 additional assignments (10% each).

Graduate students will fulfill the requirements listed above – the three response papers included. In addition to that, they will have three other assignments: 1) give an in-class presentation of a selected monograph; 2) write a review of another selected monograph; 3) meet with the instructor in person to discuss the readings and assignments.

**In-class presentation of the selected monograph:** Students give a fifteen minutes exposé of a selected reading. In their presentation, they will summarize the book, highlight its strengths and weaknesses, and relate it to the classes’ discussions and readings.
The review: A review is not a synopsis, it should critically evaluate the text and give an argued opinion on it, highlighting its strengths and merits as well as its weaknesses and shortcomings. The format is as for the response papers but about 2,000 words in length.

Meetings with the instructor: We will meet at least two times during the term for half an hour to discuss your assignments and questions.

Method of Evaluation

Final grades will be computed on this scale:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>A-</th>
<th>B+</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B-</th>
<th>C+</th>
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<td></td>
<td>91-94%</td>
<td>87-90%</td>
<td>83-86%</td>
<td>79-82%</td>
<td>75-78%</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<td>Below 55%</td>
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Make-Ups and Attendance

Make-up exams will be allowed in unavoidable circumstances only; you need to provide compelling reasons and the required documentation. Absence(s) in class will detract points unless you provide documentation or compelling reasons to miss a session.

Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and would like to request disability-related accommodation, you are encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center as early as possible. You do not have to disclose anything to me unless you wish to do so. You can find the Disability Resource Center in Reid Hall: [https://drc.dso.ufl.edu/](https://drc.dso.ufl.edu/) or call them at (352) 392-8565.

Student Honor Code

As a UF student, you have agreed to adhere to the UF Student Honor Code and the UF Student Conduct Code: [https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/](https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/). It is your responsibility to acquaint yourselves with these and to adhere to them.
Syllabus and Readings

Mandatory readings for all are marked with a *, additional readings for graduates are marked with a †. The syllabus includes two buffer slots that will be used to allow more time for discussion or background information when required. The dates of the later classes will change accordingly!

Introduction. Studying Islam in Africa

Week 1, Mo, Jan 07 | Presentation of the Course and Initial Discussion with the Students

Week 1, We, Jan 09 | Studying Islam in Africa


Week 2, Mo, Jan 14 | Studying Islam


Week 2, We, Jan 16 | Studying Africa


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**Week 3, Mo, Jan 21 | Martin Luther King, Jr. Day; No Classes**

**Week 3, We, Jan 23 | “African Islam” and Islam in Africa**


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**First response paper due Fr, Jan 25, by the latest: “Studying Islam in Africa”**

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**Part 1. Histories of Islam in Africa**

**Week 4, Mo, Jan 28 | The Spread of Muslims in Africa**


**Week 4, We, Jan 30 | Royalty, Slavery, and Trade**


**Week 5, Mo, Feb 04 | Jihād and Renewal**


**Week 5, We, Feb 06 | Colonial Occupation**


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Second response paper due Fr, Feb 08, by the latest: “Histories of Islam in Africa”

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**Part 2. Islam in Africa. Central Topics**

**Week 6, Mo, Feb 11 | Sufis and Saints**

†Bang, Anne K. *Islamic Sufi Networks in the Western Indian Ocean (c. 1880–1940). Ripples of Reform*. Leiden: Brill, 2014. [Selected readings]


**Week 6, We, Feb 13 | Sufis and Saints Continued**

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**Week 7, Mo, Feb 18 | Reform**


**Week 7, We, Feb 20 | Reform Continued**

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**Week 8, Mo, Feb 25 | Religious Encounters**


**Week 8, We, Feb 27 | Religious Encounters Continued**

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**Week 9, Mo, March 04 | Spring Break, No Classes**
Week 9, We, March 06 | Spring Break, No Classes

Week 10, Mo, March 11 | Living Islam


Week 10, We, March 13 | Living Religion


Week 11, Mo, March 18 | Islamic Publics and the Islamic Sphere


**Week 11, We, March 20 | Islamic Learning and Education**


**Week 12, Mo, March 25 | Islam and the State**


**Week 12, We, March 27 | Islamic Aesthetics**


**Week 13, Mo, April 01 | Gender**


**Week 13, We, April 03 | Material Culture**


**Third response paper due Fr, April 05, by the latest: “Islam in Africa. A Selected Topic”**

**Conclusion. Studying Islam in Africa**

**Week 14, Mo, April 08 | Islam in Africa. Connections and Relations**

†Bachir Diagne, Souleymane. *The Ink of the Scholars. Reflections on Philosophy in Africa.* Dakar: CODESRIA, 2016. [Selected readings]
*Kane, Ousmane O. *Beyond Timbuktu. An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016. [Selected readings]

**Week 14, We, April 10 | Africa as Part of the “Muslim World”**


**Week 15, Mo, April 22 | Wrap Up**

**Week 15, We, April 24 | Individual Consultations with Instructor**