MPhil Proposal:

Module title: Anthropology of Islam in Contemporary Europe

Term taught: LT

Description of the module in a few sentences:
This module takes an anthropological approach to the study of Islam and Muslims in contemporary Europe. It entails five seminars: Methodology, Constructing Identity, Structuring Community, Culture and Society, and Political Engagement. Discussions will employ a series of case studies from the reading list to explore empirical accounts and theoretical questions.

Background:
Lived Islam in Europe is dynamic, varied and complex. This MPhil module will explore some key areas of academic and wider interest in the subject area, including transnationalism, youth, gender, authority, education, religion-state relations, and Islam in the public sphere. Drawing on a number of excellent case studies, it seeks to tackle the subject in depth and breadth.

Name of seminar coordinator: Chris Moses

Teaching provision: 5 x 1.5 hour classes
Students will be set readings in advance of each class. There will be a degree of flexibility regarding which specific areas they would like to focus upon within a seminar topic. Before meeting, students will send an A4 page offering a critical analysis of the readings to the coordinator. In classes, students will take turns to present readings and lead group discussion.

Module aims: This module primarily aims to develop students’ knowledge and understanding of Muslims and Islam in Europe from a social science perspective through reading, analysing and discussing texts, and writing a substantial essay on this subject.

The module also seeks to be open towards cross-disciplinary understanding and comparison, through approaching its subject through categories canonical to anthropology and religious studies. Further, the module aims to provincialise certain ideological, academic, and common sense imaginations of Europe in relation to Islam, side-stepping insufficient approaches that tend to focus on northwestern European countries (e.g., the UK, France, Germany and the Netherlands) and, insofar as the literature allows, acknowledge both Muslim-majority contexts (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, Turkey) and understudied Muslim-minority contexts (e.g., Bulgaria, Switzerland, Georgia).

Learning outcomes:
Students will:
- read and analyse a series of texts exploring a series of issues of academic and wider interest pertaining to Islam and Muslims in Europe.
- develop their presentational skills in a seminar setting.
- develop their academic writing skills.
- explore the diversity and complexity of Muslim experiences in Europe.
- analyse the contested nature of particular concepts within their field of study.
- evaluate the application of particular theoretical concepts to their field of study.
- evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of anthropological approaches to their object of study.
- consider the wider significance of the understanding they have gained from the course for related areas in the fields of anthropology and religious studies.
- develop an understanding of the role of research for their object of study.

Prerequisites: N/A

Senior Seminar: Compulsory attendance at the appropriate Senior Seminar.

Seminar topics

1. Methodology
   - Example topics: terminological debates, academic reflexivity

2. Constructing Identity
   - Example topics: practice, ethnicity, transnationalism, inter-religious relations

3. Structuring Community
   - Example topics: authority, institutions, education, rituals

4. Culture and Society
   - Example topics: gender, youth, dress

5. Political Engagement
   - Example topics: state-religion relations, secular liberalism, public sphere

Introductory Reading List


Martin van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi (eds.), Producing Islamic Knowledge:


Description of assessment:
Coursework essay of 5000 words. Students may wish to select an essay from the list below, in consultation with the seminar coordinator. Alternatively, they may wish to formulate their own title, subject to the approval of the seminar coordinator and the Degree Committee.

Example Questions:

1. Does it make sense to speak of ‘European Islam’?

2. What is Muslim identity?

3. What structures Muslim ‘community’?

4. Among European Muslims, what is the significance of national context for any of the following? (i) Gender; (ii) Youth; (iii) Dress.

5. What, if anything, is unique about the political engagement of European Muslims?
6. ‘Muslims are present in Europe and yet absent from it.’ (Talal Asad) Discuss.

7. ‘… it seems obvious that there is hardly anything except Islam that could constitute a common denominator for Eastern and Western European Muslims.’ (Katarzyna Görak-Sosnowska) Discuss.

8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of ‘Muslim’ as an analytical lens?

9. Can the anthropological study of Islam in Europe generate any theological insight?

10. What is at stake in the academic study of European Muslims?