ISLAM AND IDENTITY IN MODERN ASIA
with special reference to
AFGHANISTAN, IRAN AND PAKISTAN

This course is part of a series that focuses on parts of the world that appear prominently in the current headlines and offers anthropological perspectives on the human experience behind them. It uses both ethnographic and historical sources, and analyses and explains events as they occur in the course of the semester. We will also consider some of the differences between anthropological and other approaches to this type of enquiry. Previous courses in this series over the past decade have focused on Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan individually. This year, since Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan are equally prominent in the media for reasons that are difficult to deal with separately, we shall focus on the similarities and differences between them, following the news as we go.

The course will begin with an analytical introduction to the current situation in each of the three countries. We then turn to the social and historical forces that lie behind the current situation, starting with the larger Islamic context and then taking the three countries in alphabetical order: setting the present in a world-historical perspective. Special attention will be given to ways in which Islamic thought, practice, and awareness have changed in recent times, and continue to change today. Another important emphasis throughout the course will be on the way the sense of social and cultural identity has developed in each country and how the sense of being Muslim has played out differently in each. The final sessions will be devoted to an assessment of what has been learned. Some time is devoted in each class to a discussion of events in the preceding week.

Throughout the semester we shall bear these specific questions in mind:

In general—
- What has made these countries different today both from each other and from the countries around them?
- How has Islam played in this process?
- What other forces from outside the region have played a significant role and why—both historically and now, under globalization?
- How might the cases of these three countries help us understand situations that are unfolding in other parts of the world?

More specifically—
- To what extent are the populations of these countries victims of
  (a) their geography,
(b) their geo-political situation,
(c) their peculiar social or cultural dynamics?
- What do larger historical forces such as Islam, or colonialism or neo-colonialism have to do with the current problems in each country?
- how did the boundaries that separate them into three distinct nation-states get drawn, starting in the 1870s, and why?
- What insights can anthropological tools of analysis offer that might differ from what we know from other sources?

This course is designed as a learning and research experience relating what we know theoretically and historically to the problem of understanding what is currently happening in a particularly troubled part of the world. It is apolitical. It does not take sides or promote any particular policies. Although it may be easier to argue for particular policies at the end of the course than at the beginning, no particular policy will be favored in readings, lectures or class discussions.

Schedule of classes
1. 1/23/12
   INTRODUCTION to the course material and the current news
   Definitions, geography (maps) and objectives
   Organization of the course
   Reading: critical selection of news sources on Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan

2. 2/30/12
   Introduction to Islam:
   The historical orientation and modern political perspectives
   Reading: Michael Cook, The Koran

3. 2/6/12
   Afghanistan
   History of the Afghans since the 18th century: Pashtuns (Pathans) and others
   Reading: David Edwards, Before Taliban, Parts I and II

4. 2/13/12
   Afghanistan (cont.)
   Extension over time of various external interests into the area: Persianate, Arab, Turkic, Indian, Chinese, Mongol, Russian, British, American.
   Reading: David Edwards, Before Taliban, Part III

5. 2/20/12
   Afghanistan (cont.)
Video: Kabul Transit
Afghanistan and its modern neighbors
Reading: Rory Stewart, The Places in between

6. 2/27/12
Iran. Cyrus or Ali?
Reading: Roy Mottahedeh, The Mantle of the Prophet

SPRING BREAK

7. 3/12/12
Iran (cont.)
Iran, Islam and Persia
Reading: Roy Mottahedeh, The Mantle of the Prophet

8. 3/19/12
Iran (cont.)
The current turmoil
Reading: Roy Mottahedeh, The Mantle of the Prophet

9. 3/26/12
Pakistan.
South Asian Islam and the "homeland for South Asian Muslims"
Reading: Shahid Javed Burki, Pakistan: Fifty Years of Nationhood

10. 4/2/12
Pakistan (cont.)
Modern Pakistan as an assemblage of different societies
Reading: Laura Ring, Zenana

11. 4/9/12
The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)
Reading: Robert Sammon, The Federally Administered Tribal Territories

12. 4/16/12
India: the elephant in the region
Reading: project research

13. 4/23/12
Globalization: the implications of accelerating social change.
Reading: project research
REQUIREMENTS

Final grades will depend on
(a) participation (attendance, contribution to class discussion, a research prospectus, an oral presentation, and meeting deadlines),
(b) three short essays (c. 1000 words each, distributed through the semester) on the assigned readings and class material, and
(c) individual research projects.

RESEARCH PROJECT.
Ask yourself what you would most like to find out that has something to do with the subject matter of this course. Formulate a research project that you can carry out and write up by the end of the semester. Then:
   a) submit a prospectus for your project by week 5 (1-2 pages only).
   b) be prepared to discuss your project in class after the spring break
   c) give a brief oral progress report in class in April
   d) write up the final report on your project and submit it at the end of the first week of the examination period. (The length should be between 10 and 20 pages.)

ESSAYS.
Study questions will be posted in weeks 5, 7 and 10. On each of these dates choose one question and explore it in an essay of around a thousand words, and submit it the following week.

GRADING:
Class participation 30%
Essays 35%
Research Project 35%