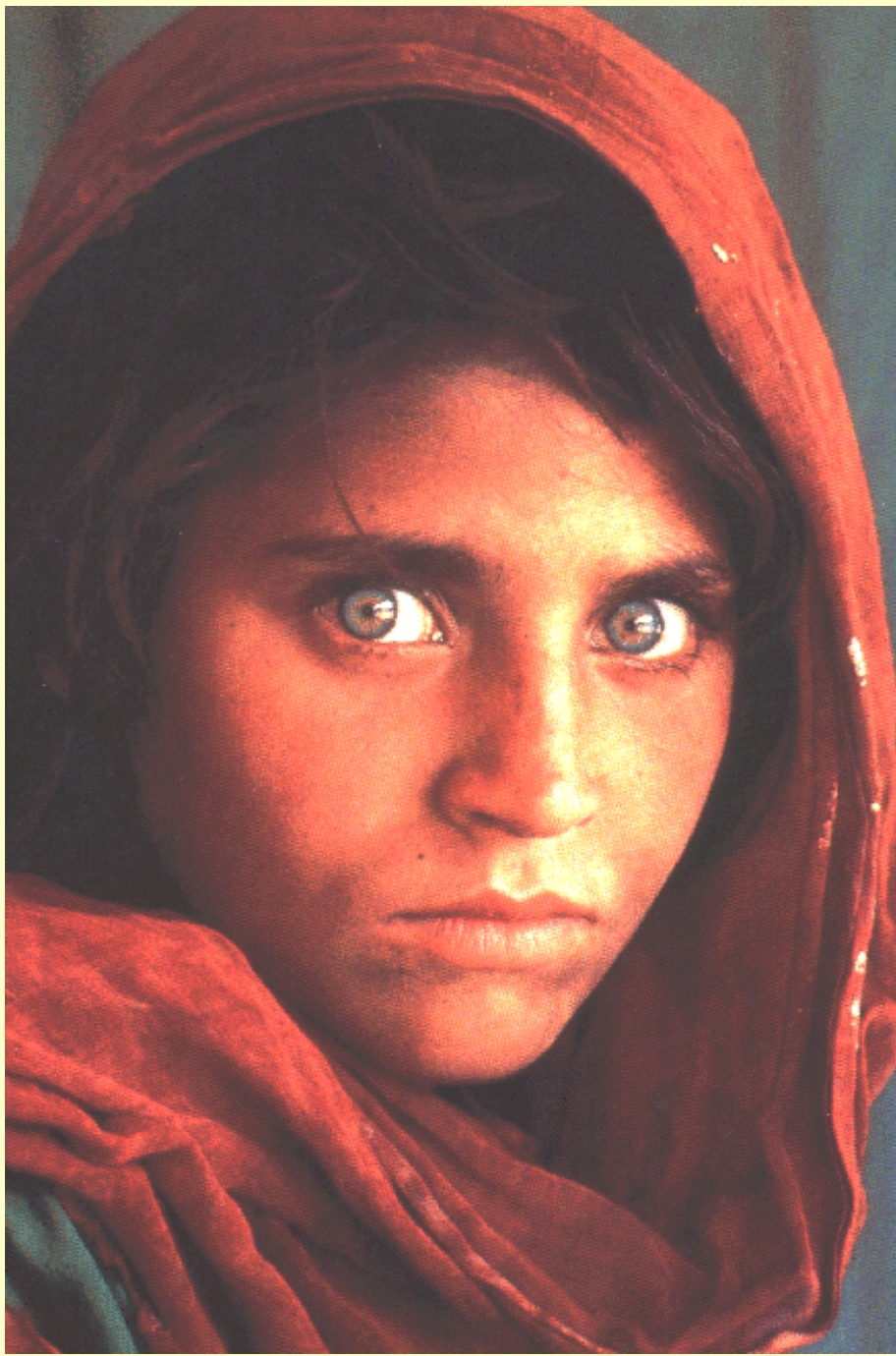


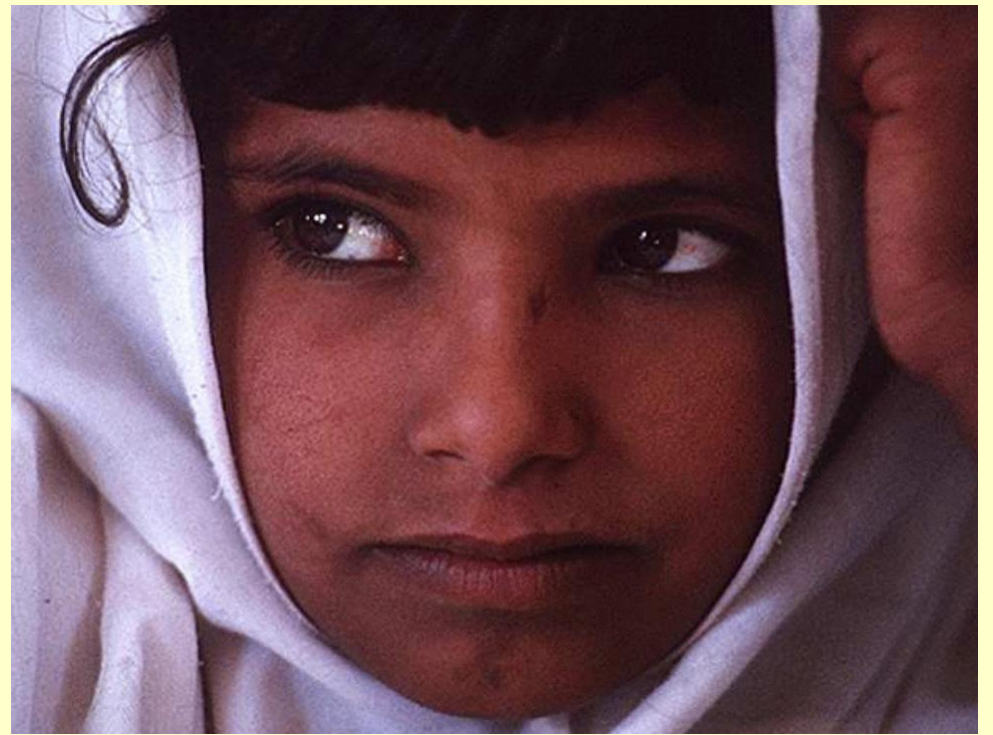
***In the Name of God,
Infinite Tenderness, Eternal Kindness***



***Experiencing Islam,
Religion 328***

Omid Safi

Colgate University



Class Description

- This voyage into the symbolic realm of Islam is intended to introduce students to the intellectual and spiritual *experience* of Islam without assuming any prior knowledge on their behalf. While an "introductory" class, our venture shall touch upon some of the deepest metaphysical ideas, loftiest poetic utterances, most complex issues of modernity and nationalism, and most wondrous literature in all of Islamdom.
- A distinctive feature of this class shall be the emphasis on the *experience* of Islam. Rather than only talk *about* Islam and Muslims, we are going to listen to how Muslims have defined themselves, utilizing their own words and categories.
- A premise of this class is that different Muslims have had vastly differing (at times complementary, at times opposing) interpretations of Islam: at times they refer to different texts as authoritative, at times they offer radically different interpretations of the same texts. Given this spectrum of interpretations, we will never assume that any one Muslim's perspective is somehow "orthodox" to the exclusion of all other perspectives.
- Our readings will literally include samples of primary sources from all 1400 years of Islamic civilizations which have been written in many regions of the Muslim world. Another key feature of this class shall be the integration of the above primary sources with visual material, musical selections, web sources, and films shown in class.
- **A note on what this class *will be*:** The key component of this class are learning about the essential sources of the Islamic tradition as articulated, experienced, and lived by Muslim. To that end, we will spend the majority of the semester learning about the Qur'an, the blessed life of the Prophet Muhammad, and the spiritual tradition of Muslims (Sufism).
- I should also emphasize **what this class *will not be*:** This class will *not* be an exhaustive survey of "Muslim politics", while we will of course touch on it. Also, it is not a "regional" approach to Islam: I am primarily not interested in representing an Arab, Iranian, South-Asian, and perhaps as importantly, American interpretation of Islam. Lastly, it is not exclusively a class on "women and Islam", no doubt an important subject which I will teach at a later point. While we will deal with many gender issues as they come up in our material, this class is not primarily an investigation of the complex relationship between Islam and gender issues.

Grading:

This is a "reading" class. I take it seriously that the class is listed at the 300 level, and will treat it accordingly. You do not need to be a "P&R" concentrator to take this class. However, I do expect you to work hard, and to contribute to class discussions.

While I will lecture for part of the class almost every day, it will be conducted much more on a seminar model of examining your reactions to the reading material. The readings are engaging, and heavy: On average, there is about 50 pages of secondary material *or* about 60-70 pages of primary sources per class. If you have not done the readings, it will simply be impossible for you to participate in the discussion. While we will suffer from that, the main damage will be done to your own learning, and your participation grade (50% of class grade).

Class participation: 40%

(composed of **in-class discussions**, short weekly papers, and "talking points")

Weekly papers: Where you will be asked to synthesize your own reflections, the readings, and class

discussions.

"Talking papers": Which you will bring with you to every class. A typed, one page paper consisting of two components:

- 1) one paragraph about the main thesis of the author, and one paragraph about how it relates to previous material you have read.
- 2) Three typed questions or comments you have about the assigned readings for that day.

2 Midterms, and Final: each 20%.

The assignments that I tend to give are not "factual" exams, but interpretative essays. If you have not done the readings before you get the exam, and if you have not been in class, I can promise you that no amount of "pulling all nighters" will help you. On the other hand, if you have kept up with the material and have participated in the discussions, I think you will find them engaging, and dare I hope, pleasant, opportunities to analyze and synthesize your own reflections. All exams are take-home, open book, but not "open friend"! [See Honor Code]

Grading Scale:

So that there are no mis-understandings later on, I find it useful to share with you my definitions of what I expect for various grades:

A: Superb, Excellent. An ability to offer original and insightful analysis of the facts.

B: Solid Work. The facts have been grasped, and significant moves have been made to interpret the material in an analytical fashion. A "good" paper.

C: The student has made a reasonable attempt to attend the class, and has a fair grasp of the factual material presented. The analysis of these facts, and an attempt to contribute towards an original interpretation, however, is severely missing.

D: A simplistic familiarity with the subject matter can be gleaned through the assignments which have been turned in.

F: A disappointment—no attempt being shown on the behalf of the student to engage the material, to respect the parameters of the class and its schedule, or the turning in of assignment.

Required Sources:

Required for the class, **bring the readings with you** to each class.

1) Michael Wolfe, *The Hadj*.

2) William Chittick, *Vision of Islam*.

3) John Esposito, ed, *Oxford History of Islam*.

4) Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary*.

5) Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*

6) Farid al-Din Attar, translated by Dick Davis. *Conference of the Birds*.

7) Carl Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*.

8) Roy Mottahedeh, *Mantle of the Prophet*.

9) *Reliance of the traveller*

10) Farid Esack, *On Being A Muslim*

Recommended for purchase CD: ocean of remembrance.

Web resources:

You would do well to acquaint yourselves with the following web-page, and use it as a frequent point of entry and exploration around many of the issues we will be discussing:

[Web Resource for Islamic Studies](#)
(Courtesy of Dr. Alan Godlas)

Guide to Writing:

Many of us struggle at various times with writing analytical papers, and you might also find yourself at times struggling with one aspect or another of writing. In that case, you might find it useful to refer to a page I have put together, titled: "[Research and Writing Guide for Students](#)."

Now, click below to see the actual syllabus for this class:

[Religion 328 Course Syllabus](#)

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