

HEALTH AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Prof. Miri Shefer-Mossensohn

Spring Semester

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Office Hours: Gilman 427, TBD

Short description: This seminar examines the interactions between human societies and the natural environment in the Muslim Middle East by emphasizing the long-term relationships between epidemics and disease and human experience. We are used to thinking of epidemics as tragedies and dramas. We will examine therefore how disease have generated profound processes in human reality - politics, society, religion and culture. However, we will also examine disease as a constant companion of the humans, and not just an exceptional and occasional drama. In addition to historical cases (such as the plague in the middle of the 14th century), we will deal with contemporary cases (such as the MERS epidemic or Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome of the current decade). We shall move between local events and global processes, and analyze, for instance, how the hygiene in Mecca during the pilgrimage intimately ties the Middle East and India.

Assessment: The main assignment (50% of the final grade) is a research paper on a topic related to theme of the seminar. You have the option of writing either a short paper (3,000-3,500 words, including notes) or a long one (6,000–7,000, including notes). We will discuss the process of researching and writing throughout the course. Toward the end of the seminar, all students will be required to present their projects to class and receive group feedback (5% of the final grade). To enter into the spirit of analytical thinking and writing, students are required to submit at least three response papers to reading materials before discussing them in class (15% of the final grade). In addition, students are expected to be active and positive contributors to class discussions (30% of the final grade). Please note the phrase "contribution". If you know you are less inclined towards class participation, make sure you approach me in advance to suggest other ways of contributing.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. Students are permitted a maximum of three unexcused absences without penalty. Any additional absences will affect the final grade and may result in failure of the course

Academic conduct: Any instance of academic misconduct is taken seriously. Plagiarism (submitting someone else's work as your own; failure to accurately cite sources; taking words from another source without using quotation marks; submission of work for which you have previously received credit; working in a group for individual assignments) or disrespect to fellow students and the professor are not tolerated. Any of these may result in failure of the assignment and will likely lead to further disciplinary measures.