

FUBiS

Freie Universität



Berlin

International Summer and Winter University (FUBiS)

“Islam & the West – Transcending the Dichotomy”

COURSE DOCUMENTATION





In 2009, Freie Universität Berlin International Summer and Winter University (FUBiS) for the second time offered a course called “Islam & the West – Transcending the Dichotomy”. Dedicated students from all over the world gathered in Germany’s capital for four weeks in summer to analyze, discuss and transform for themselves concepts of identity and “otherness”. They had the courage to have their preconceptions about their own selves and the world challenged and were willing and eager to imbibe new ideas and perspectives in an academic setting. Berlin itself served as a dynamic surrounding in which they were to experience “Islam” and “the West” living together, “Islam” and “the West” often no longer working as a useful dichotomy, and “Islam” and “the West” being two creative and equal aspects of various personalities they encountered. 18 young people from 14 different nations studied together, lived together, laughed and learned together, and they all came out of the course with a richer view of the world.

FUBiS wants to thank these participants, their instructor and their guests for making this course an unforgettable experience for everyone involved. We would also like to express our deep gratitude to the German Foreign Office, which supported this course with a generous grant. It enriched the course with 12 young scholars who would otherwise not have been able to participate, and it allowed, among others, for some unique excursions which contributed immeasurably to the rich intercultural experience of the whole class.

What you hold in your hands is a short documentation of this endeavour (also made possible by the support of the German Foreign Office). We hope it will awaken your curiosity towards this course, which will now be offered regularly by FUBiS as part of their Summer University (you will find more information about FUBiS at the end of this brochure). Join us in the future or make others aware of this course – the testimonials of the class of 2009 speak for themselves... Enjoy reading!

Kristina Rödder

Dr. Kristina Rödder
Program Coordinator

Sophia Krause

Sophia Krause
Program Coordinator

The Idea



about “Islam” and “the West”, and how appropriate are these terms to describe groups, ideas and identities in the 21st century? Are they mutually exclusive or can they be peacefully, harmoniously and fruitfully merged into something new?

Freie Universität Berlin as a traditional meeting ground for students and researchers from all over the world is the perfect surrounding to gather young people to take a closer look at the meaning and the usage of “Islam” and “the West”. This is what the course “Islam & the West – Transcending the Dichotomy”, part of the Freie Universität Berlin International Summer and Winter University (FUBiS), does. Its aim: to critically examine the dichotomies (“Islam” vs. “the West”, “we” vs. “the others”) that are used in everyday life, the public sphere, and above all within the context of global conflicts; to analyze their origins; to have participants reflect upon their own identities; and to look at new forms of identity in the wake of globalization and migration processes. The theoretical footing for this academic analysis of collective and individual identities is supplemented by a number of excursions to related sites and institutions in Berlin. Visiting mosques, museums and musical performances or meeting with young Muslims in Berlin provides the course participants with the chance to transform theory into experience and practice.

In order to stimulate discussion and to bring together a variety of world views and cultural backgrounds, the organizers’ desire is to create a heterogeneous course in which dialogue, reflection and deconstruction of existing preconceptions about the self and the other can flourish. In 2009, students from 14 different countries were given the chance to participate in this summer course, which was supported generously by the German Foreign Office. It was the second year in a row that this course took place, and it is now offered as part of the established FUBiS curriculum every summer.

The Instructor

Aydın Süer (Germany)

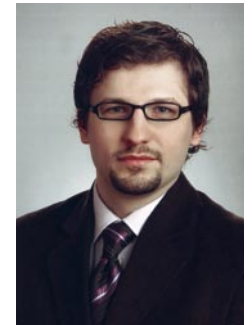
Looking back today I can say that preparing this course was indeed quite challenging for me. Not only was “Islam & the West” a highly delicate topic but since there were so many differing views I had to decide above all how to approach it in a way that was most suitable for our course. Thus the first question I needed to find an answer to was basically what I was supposed to be aiming at. What should our central theme eventually be?

In the end, the course was structured in a way that tried to elaborate not on the “true nature” of “Islam” or “the West” but quite the opposite. By taking a deconstructive perspective, essentialist ideas of any type of identity – be it Islamic or Western – were rejected altogether. Instead, the task was to focus on perceptions. Why do people perceive themselves and – perhaps more importantly – others in a particular way? And under which circumstances do certain perceptions evolve, change, or disappear? So at the bottom line, one could easily say that we were not primarily interested in answers. Rather, we intended to ask the right questions.

That was indeed a difficult task to cope with. However, having 18 students from 14 different countries, who each had a different social, cultural, and religious background was a great opportunity for all of us. For this diversity within class bore a highly creative potential that unfolded in many profound and fruitful discussions. Discourses on identity, religion, modernity, culture, power, gender, secularity, nation, civilisation, and many more were closely examined and it was again the variety of positions in class which revealed the contingent character of all those concepts.

But it was not all about theory. On our numerous excursions in Berlin we had the chance to see how ideas and notions that we had been elaborating on represented “realities” in people’s everyday lives. When visiting a mosque, strolling through multi-cultural Kreuzberg, meeting people from various backgrounds, talking to representatives of different organisations, listening to Islamic Sufi music performed by young Berliners etc. we came to understand the dynamic and permeable character of identities such as “Islam” and “the West”.

Dichotomies, we concluded, are constructed and exist only in our minds. But we should not forget that even though they don’t constitute realities as such, they might nevertheless be real in their consequences.



The Course

Name of Instructor: Aydin Süer

Course title: “Islam & the West – Transcending the Dichotomy”

Language of instruction: English

Contact hours: 48 (6 per day)

ECTS-Credits: 4

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance and participation
2. Presentation
3. Report or synopsis
4. Essay

Literature: A course reader will be provided.

Student profile: Open to everybody

Course schedule (July 28 – August 21, 2009)

- Day 1:** “Drawing a Line” – Social/Cultural Boundaries and the Construction of the “Other”
- Day 2:** Religion and Religious Identities in the (Post-)Modern World
- Day 3:** Islam and the Challenge of Modernity – The Dichotomy of Islamisation vs. Westernisation
- Day 4:** “Western” Modernity or Multiple Modernities?
- Day 5:** “The West and the Rest” – The Cultural Construction of Global Conflicts; Visit to Sehlik Mosque; Visit to Tajikistan Tea Parlour; Concert of “Jungenc” German-Turkish Philharmonic Orchestra
- Day 6:** Assimilation vs. Integration – Islam in Europe and the Emergence of Hybrid Identities; Exploration of Berlin district of Kreuzberg; Concert of Islamic Music
- Day 7:** Lunch Discussion with Engin Karahan (Islamrat der BRD/Islamic Council of Germany) and Dr. Irene Runge (Jüdischer Kulturverein Berlin e.V./Jewish Cultural Association Berlin); Guided Tour of Museum of Islamic Art in the Pergamonmuseum Berlin
- Day 8:** Alternative Discourses – State and Outlook

Engin Karahan, Public Relations Spokesman of the Islamic Council of Germany/Islamrat der BRD: “The course ‘Islam & the West’ has an interesting approach to the idea of identities and collectives without constructing the picture of clashing civilizations. It does not confront two constructions of incompatible worlds. Instead it shows the reasons for the genesis of such ideas and how far these constructions are from real life in society.”

The Participants

In 2009, 18 students from 14 different countries (11 female, 7 male) participated in the FUBiS course “Islam & the West – Transcending the Dichotomy”. They came from all over the world:

Benin	The Netherlands	Turkey
Egypt	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
India	Singapore	United Kingdom
Israel	Spain	United States of America
Mozambique	Sri Lanka	

The participants also brought with them a wide range of backgrounds – academic, social, cultural and religious ones. This added tremendously to the intercultural design of the course content and transformed the theoretical diversity of world views into something which everyone in the course could experience firsthand in the in-class discussions. “Islam” and “the West” became palpable as identities which we assume for ourselves or impose upon others, and it became soon clear which serious limitations rest in these terms. There were, for example, students from countries that would be considered traditionally “Islamic” countries, studying in the USA and considering their lifestyle rather “Western”. There were also students who felt shaped by a variety of worlds – the Israeli, living in a “Western” nation in the Middle East, or the African students with a different understanding of “Islam” than their fellow student from the Gulf Region or those from the Far East. What united them all was their desire to transcend these categories and to find out for themselves, together with other international students and with the help of their German-Turkish instructor, what makes identities and who makes them with which aim, what they mean in our daily lives and how we can better understand them and live together peacefully despite our seeming differences.

Dr. Irene Runge, Head of the Jewish Cultural Association Berlin/Jüdischer Kulturverein Berlin e.V.: “I had the impression that the students from 14 nations were very curious and enjoyed listening to me. The precise questions which followed my explanations confirmed this. Thanks for the invitation!”



What the participants brought to the course and what they took out of it is best expressed in their own words – see their statements on the following pages!

Impressions, Insights, Implications



Leila Alhamoodah (USA)

The course highlighted some key issues which opened my mind more than I could have imagined. That we construct our identity in relation to someone that we identify as different from ourselves, and that without this we would be threatened by lack of identity, was an idea that had never occurred to me. These sociological and philosophical approaches were fascinating.

Fieke J.M. Huisman (The Netherlands)

Before I went to Berlin, I knew that my view on the Islam was strongly influenced by what I had seen and heard in Dutch media and politics. But as I was aware of the influence, I always thought that I ‘sort of’ knew what the ‘real’ situation was. I did not. Absolutely not. And this course taught me that.

Ayesha Al Marzouqi (UAE)

After taking the course “Islam and the West”, I have learnt that the differences do not only exist between the West and the Islam. In fact they exist within Muslims themselves, and even within the West. The differences do exist, and we have to learn one thing to make our relations with each other easy and peaceful: acceptance. We have to accept the differences instead of fighting them.

Lulu Marlya Abdul Rahim (Singapore)

Coming from a pluralistic society, I am very much distant from my ascribed religion. From this course, I not only learnt more about my religion. It was also good as I learnt to take apart and draw out categories of ‘Islam’ which now enables me to think critically about the brand of Islam in my country.

Dani Issler (Israel)

I found the course very challenging in terms of its broad academic horizons and interdisciplinary approach. It provided a fascinating overview of many different yet corresponding present-day dominant discourses using the readings and the discussions. During the course I became familiar with new key-terminology that I will definitely use in the future.

About the professor

Leila Alhamoodah (USA)

Professor Suer gave the class an excellent lens to discuss the subject through. He moved from very abstract, philosophical beginnings into more concrete, political issues throughout the course. His syllabus and insightful comments from classmates have inspired me to continue reading about the subject now that the course is over.

Thomas Finn (UK)

The instructor was very successful at making everyone feel comfortable in class which was important for some who were less confident and less outspoken. I also felt that the teacher performed well as a mediator within discussion and debate, he expressed his opinion on some issues but was careful not to impose it upon the class.

About Berlin

Meher Makda (Pakistan)

The various field trips complemented the course exceptionally well. The trip to the mosque, the museum, and the guest speakers provided further information about Islamic culture. My favourite was the visit to the Student’s Club where we were able to sample Sufi music. The musicians were extremely friendly and it was good to interact with German Muslims who were willing to talk about their experiences and feelings.



Christopher Stroot (USA)

In the context of this class, the expeditions to the Türkischer Kulturverein to hear Islamic/Oriental Music, the Museum für Islamische Kunst, the concert featuring Turkish classical music at the Konzerthaus, and the visit to the mosque provided new insights on Berlin and its mainly Turkish, immigrant population.

About the course participants

Thomas Finn (UK)

I was impressed by the lengths that FUBiS had gone to ensure that the make-up of the class represented a mixture of nationalities and view points. Some of the most interesting moments in the course were when people were able to reflect on ideas by drawing on their own experiences from their own countries, something that would not have been possible if not for the sheer range of nationalities present in the class.

Mohamed Mohideen (USA)

The students were amazing. Out of all the classes I have taken in school (in the US & FUBiS), “Islam & the West” was the best, mainly due to the fact that my fellow peers were just amazing.

Ayesha Al Marzouqi (UAE)

It was really interesting to have a classmate from Israel, and this is something that I did not expect. I thought that this will bring a hard time, but it was not the case at all. We could be friends in spite of all differences between us. I believe that we all will not be the same person again after the course finished.

FUBiS

FUBiS – Freie Universität Berlin International Summer and Winter University – is an academic short-term program for international students offering intensive and semi-intensive German language courses as well as subject courses. It is FUBiS' mission to provide international students with a premier study abroad program delivering the highest academic quality and furthering the development of intercultural competence.

In an intensive academic term spanning four to six weeks, FUBiS students not only enlarge their knowledge of a subject matter and/or improve their language skills, they also profit from an international setting rich with cultural diversity and from Berlin's multitude of political, cultural, and scientific institutions that they will explore on field trips and during organised extracurricular activities.

There are three independent FUBiS terms – one in winter (four weeks) and two in summer (six and four weeks, respectively). Each of them includes fascinating courses from the humanities and social sciences such as History, Art History, European Studies, German Studies, Architecture, Cultural Studies, Film Studies, Literature, and Political Science. These classes are held in English by distinguished German, American, and international faculty. In addition, FUBiS offers intensive and semi-intensive German language classes on five different levels of proficiency as well as Business German.

The FUBiS program offers students many choices:

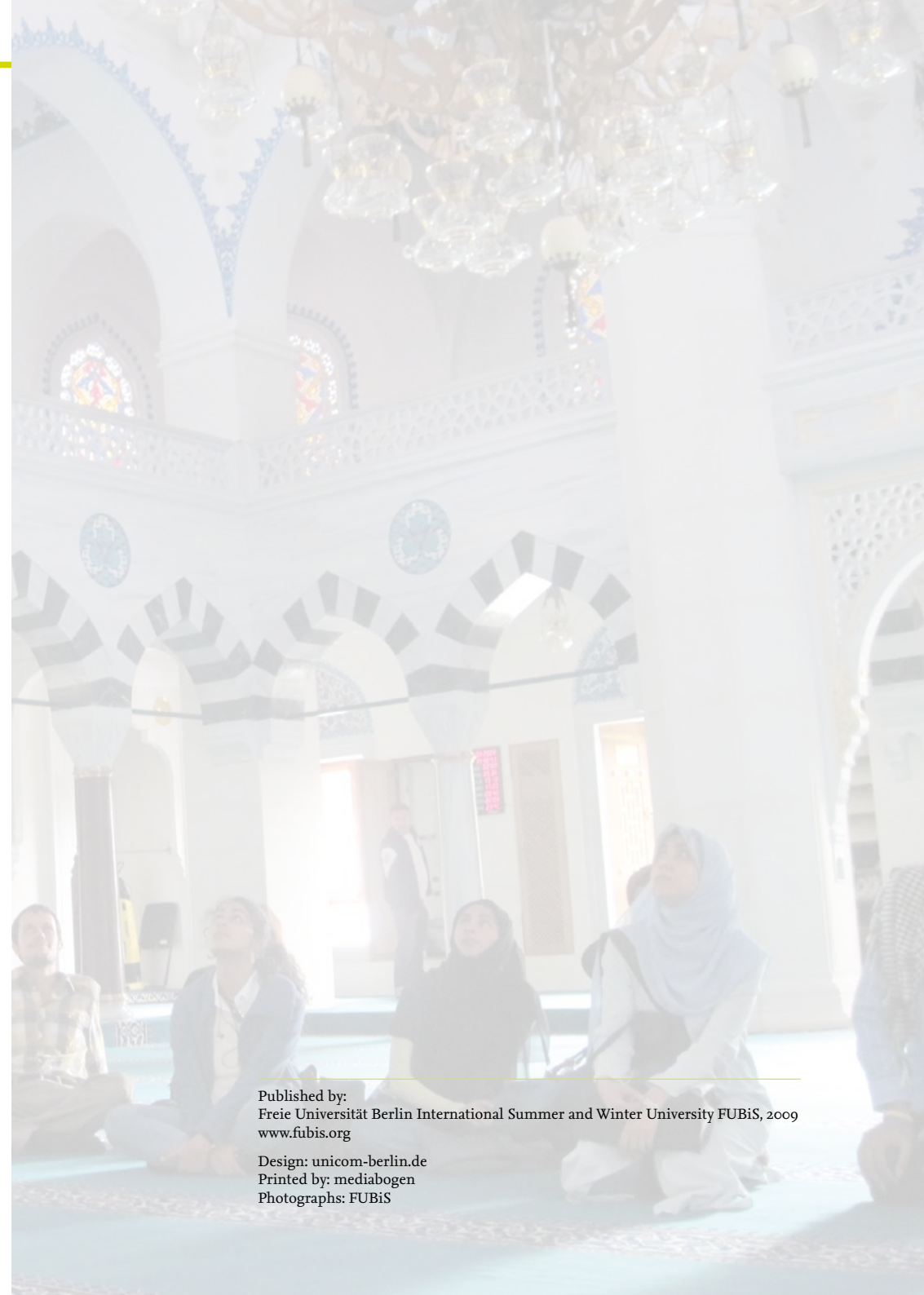
- The combination of language and subject classes. This allows students to improve their language skills as well as further their knowledge of a subject matter.
- The combination of two subject classes which may count toward a major or minor at the home institution.
- Intensive German language classes. These classes meet every weekday and allow students to focus on and thus considerably improve their German skills.
- Participation in either one semi-intensive German class or in one subject class.

In all courses, students can earn credits that may be counted towards their degrees at their home institutions.

As an additional service, FUBiS also arranges for appropriate off-campus accommodation (home stay in guest families; shared or single apartments) and/or insurance for the duration of the program at the student's request.

FUBiS' goal is to provide a stimulating and rewarding experience – academically, culturally, and personally.

FUBiS – where the world meets to study!



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