The expansion of Islam has historically been most successful in the eastern direction, in the lands bordering the Indian Ocean. One of the results of this successful expansion is that currently more than half of the world’s Muslim population lives in what we may call the ‘Indo-Islamic world’: Pakistan (with or without parts of Afghanistan), India, Bangla Desh, Malaysia, and Indonesia together with most of the mainland countries of Southeast Asia.

Paradoxically, in much of this area Muslims remained a minority for many centuries, often a rather small one, within the general population that remained ‘heathen’, i.e. Hindu and/or Buddhist. The Islamization of the Indo-Islamic world has never been complete.

In this seminar we will explore some recent (as well as some of the older) attempts to explain these and other peculiarities of the historical development of the Indo-Islamic world, the different modes of its expansion, as well as its changing cultural and religious idiosyncracies. Almost equal attention will be given to the earlier (medieval and early modern) and the modern and contemporary ages.

Course requirements: attendance of the seminar and one mid-term and final exam (dates to be announced).
I. Geography and history


II. The Turko-Mongol empires


III. Islam, trade and the coastal societies of the Indian Ocean


IV. Modern imperialism and the Great Game