

Islamic Political Thought in the Global Era

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30 – 11:50 a.m.

Wieboldt 102

Madeleine Elfenbein

Email: elfenbein@uchicago.edu

Office hours: Thursdays, 1-3 p.m., and by appointment

Course website: <https://classroom.google.com/u/4/c/NDc3MDI4MDMwMFpa>

Course Description and Aims

This course examines the trajectory of Islamic political thought from the nineteenth century to the present day. Through a close study of key texts in this tradition, we will investigate how Islam has remained a vital source of principles and doctrines for a diverse array of political thinkers and movements over the course of the past two centuries. Developments in Islamic thought will be considered in the context of global trends, from the rise of liberalism, nationalism, and socialism to the liberation movements of the twentieth century and the confusion sewn by humanitarian crises of an unprecedented scale. Amidst these dramatic shifts in the geopolitical landscape, how have Muslim thinkers sought to ground their demands for dignity, autonomy, justice, and recognition? What do such claims have to do with the pursuit of personal and collective piety, on the one hand, and spiritual transcendence, on the other? Rather than framing Muslim political thinkers as reacting to global modernity, we understand them as key actors in shaping it, and our study of their writings will be oriented toward achieving a better understanding of the modern era as a whole.

Readings have been selected with the aim of offering students not a comprehensive survey, but a suggestive overview of the geographical and ideological breadth of modern and contemporary Islamic political thought. Our primary readings will take us from Istanbul, London, and the Nile Delta to Chicago, Tehran, and beyond, while our secondary texts will offer historical background and theoretical and theological context for the thinkers we focus on. The course aims to equip students to explore the Islamic tradition of political thought on their own. All required readings will be made available in English; the ability to read texts in their original languages of authorship (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, French, etc.) is useful but not necessary. Some familiarity with the history of the modern Middle East and modern political thought is certainly helpful, but is not required.

Methods

This course is a seminar: we meet here twice per week for an 80-minute séance with the dead and the living. Out of courtesy to all who gather here, whether summoned from their beds or their graves, please arrive on time, with the day's texts and your notes in tow. Most class sessions will feature at least one short presentation by a student, but the heart of this seminar will be our discussions together. Students will take turns serving as note-takers and facilitators. The conversation continues outside of class on the course website, where notes from each meeting are posted and students offer reflections on the texts. As the quarter progresses, students will begin work on a capstone project: an essay on a text by an Islamic political thinker of their own choosing. Students will share their work in progress and draw inspiration from each other's adventures in research. The course will culminate in a colloquium where students share their projects and respond to each other's work.

Course Mechanics

Assessment

Final grades for the course will be based upon the following formula:

Class participation (preparation, attendance, engagement, and fulfillment of presenter, facilitator, and recorder roles) – 30%

Online posts (four in total, of 750 to 1,000 words each) – 30%

Capstone essay (including intermediate stages and feedback on a peer's draft) – 40%

Accommodating disabilities

I am committed to helping all of my students participate fully and succeed in this class. If you have a disability that may pose an obstacle to your full participation in the course, please contact me so that we can find a solution together. You can find out more about your legal right to “reasonable accommodation” through the campus office of Student Disability Services at 5501 S. Ellis Avenue, or online at disabilities.uchicago.edu.

Academic integrity

Learning how to responsibly integrate and respond to other people's ideas into your own work is one of the fundamental challenges of scholarship, and it is one of the learning objectives of this course. I am here to help you learn these skills. In return, I expect that the written work you submit will be entirely your own, and that you will make every effort to do justice to your sources. Contemporary standards of academic integrity require you to acknowledge all of the primary and secondary sources that inform your work, whether you quote them directly or paraphrase their contents. Any written work that fails to meet these standards will be considered plagiarism, a serious offense against your fellow students and the aims of this course. If you are found to have committed plagiarism, you will fail the course and face further disciplinary action. *Don't do it.* Instead, refer to the Writing Guide for help with citation standards, and feel free to contact me directly as well.

Other policies

In order to build a genuinely participatory classroom culture, we will set most of the administrative policies for this course together during the first week of the quarter. Once agreed upon, these policies—including standards for classroom conduct, laptop usage, lateness and attendance, and communication outside of class—will be gathered in a single document and circulated as an addendum to this syllabus.

Written assignments

Online reflections

Over the course of the term, each student will write a total of four reflections to share with their peers on the course website. These reflections, of 750 to 1,000 words, are intended to serve as a low-stakes venue for practicing and developing the skills at the core of this course: learning to critically examine, interpret, and contextualize the writings of Islamic political thinkers. You're welcome to do as much or as little research on the text author as you like, but please focus your attention on the text itself, providing a summary of its argument, an analysis of its rhetoric, and its relationship to the broader themes of the course. Please post these reflections on our course website at least 24 hours before our Tuesday morning class so we all get a chance to read them.

Capstone essay

Over the course of the term, students will be introduced to the range of resources available to them through the Regenstein Library for research in the field of Islamic political thought. By the middle of the

quarter, students will submit a proposal for an essay on a primary text of their own choosing, which will serve as the focus of an essay of 3,000 to 3,500 words. While the core of the essay will be a close reading of the text itself, it will include a review of the existing scholarly literature on the text and its author, as well as an analysis of their historical context and relationship to the broader themes of the course. (A more detailed set of guidelines will be made available in the *Guide to Writing, Revising, and Submitting Essays*.)

Students will meet with me at least once to discuss their proposal and develop a bibliography, and throughout the second half of the quarter, they will take turns presenting their research in progress to their peers and soliciting feedback to help them develop their projects. In Week 8, students will exchange drafts with a peer for a final round of feedback before submitting their final essay at the quarter's end. (As noted above, the quality and timeliness of the feedback that students provide on their peer's draft will inform the final grade for their own project.) Students are also invited to share their research at a colloquium to be held in the last week of the course.

Course Schedule

Week 1	Introduction: Islam and Political Thought
Tuesday, March 28	Asifa Quraishi-Landes, "Five Myths About Sharia" (2016)
Thursday, March 30	Ali Suavi on tyranny and Islam in <i>Hürriyet</i> (1869); Edward Wilmot Blyden, " Islam and Race Distinctions " (1876); Shahab Ahmed, "Introduction: Six Questions About Islam," from <i>What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic</i> (2015), esp. pp. 5-10 and 71-109; J.G.A. Pocock, "Languages and Their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought" (1971).
Week 2	Islamic Constitutionalism
Tuesday, April 4	Namik Kemal, "And Seek Their Counsel on the Matter" (1868); selection from Şerif Mardin, <i>The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas</i> (1962)
Thursday, April 6	Muhammad Husayn Na'ini, "Government from the Perspective of Islam" (1909); Hamid Enayat, "Aspects of Shi'i Modernism," from Enayat, <i>Modern Islamic Political Thought</i> (1982), pp. 160-175.
Week 3	Visions of Islamic Renewal
Tuesday, April 11	Excerpts from Muhammad 'Abduh, <i>Theology of Unity</i> (1897); selection from Albert Hourani, "Muhammad 'Abduh," from <i>Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age</i> (1962); selection from Samira Haj, "An Islamic Reconfiguration of Colonial Modernity Muhammad 'Abduh," from <i>Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity</i> (2009)
Thursday, April 13	Rashid Rida "Renewal, Renewing, and Renewers" (1931); Malcolm H. Kerr, "Muhammad Rashīd Ridā: A Revived Doctrine of the Caliphate," from <i>Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Ridā</i> (1966).

Week 4	Building the Modern Islamic State
Tuesday, April 18	Sayyid Abu 'Ala Maududi, "The Islamic Law" (1948); Fazlur Rahman, "The Shari'a," "Modern Developments," and "Legacy and Prospects," in <i>Islam</i> , 2nd Ed. (1979); Irfan Ahmad, "Genealogy of the Islamic State: Reflections on Maududi's Political Thought and Islamism," <i>The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute Supplement</i> 15 (2009), S145-S162.
Thursday, April 20	Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, "The Necessity of Islamic Government" (1970); Selection from Muhammad Qasim Zaman, <i>Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism</i> (2012). <i>Circulation of Writing Guide and discussion of capstone project.</i>
Week 5	The Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Socialism
Tuesday, April 25	Hasan al-Banna, "Toward the Light" (1947); selections from Sayyid Qutb, <i>Milestones</i> (1964) and <i>In The Shade of the Qur'an</i> (1965); selections from Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, <i>The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement</i> (2013)
Thursday, April 27	'Alī Shari'atī, "What is to be done? (1975)"; Kingshuk Chatterjee, <i>Ali Shari'ati and the shaping of political Islam in Iran</i> (2011); Said Amir Arjomand, "Ideological Revolution in Shi'ism," in Arjomand, ed., <i>Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism</i> (1988).
Week 6	Islam and Blackness in America
Tuesday, May 2	Selected texts by Malcolm X: speech at Harvard Law School Forum (1961), letter from Mecca (1964), and interview with <i>Al-Muslimoon</i> (1965); Edward E. Curtis IV, "Islamic Universalism, Black Particularism, and the Dual Identity of Malcolm X (1925–1965)" (2002). <i>Capstone project proposals due online by 5:00 p.m.</i>
Thursday, May 4	Sherman Jackson, "Islam and Black Religion," from <i>Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection</i> (2005) <i>Extended office hours to discuss project proposals.</i>
Week 7	Islamic Feminism
Tuesday, May 9	Amina Wadud, selections from <i>Inside the Gender Jihad</i> (2007); "Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis" (2009)
Thursday, May 11	Asma Barlas, "Introduction," from <i>Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an</i> (2002); "Engaging Islamic Feminism: Provincializing feminism as a master narrative" (2007)
Week 8	Contemporary Jihads and Jihadisms
Tuesday, May 16	"Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) of Palestine" (1990); Usama bin Laden, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places" (1996)
Thursday, May 18	Bettina Gräf, biography of Yusuf al-Qaradawi; International Union of Muslim Scholars statement on European politics (2017); ISIS Video, "No Respite" (2015). <i>Exchange of drafts with a peer.</i>

Week 9	Secularism in/as Islamic Political Thought
Tuesday, May 23	Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, "Islamic Unity and Political Change" (1995); "Together Against the New Totalitarianism: Islamism" (2006); Maryam Namazie, "Rethinking Islam in Public Policy: A Secularist Approach" (2014); Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation" (2006); Talal Asad, "Secularism, Nation-State, Religion" (2003).
Thursday, May 25	Colloquium Day 1
Week 10	Colloquium
Tuesday, May 30	Colloquium Day 2
Week 11	
Monday, June 5	Capstone project due by 5 p.m.