

ISLAM IN THE MODERN ERA
HIS-REL 267-01 (SPRING 2015)
GRINNELL COLLEGE

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OFFICE HOURS: T 10:15-11:15 AND TH 2-3

Throughout our lives, we are members of myriad communities, some intensely local and others more distant and abstract. What is the nature of the attachments that draw us into these communities? Toward what ends (goals) do these communities exist? Who decides what these goals are and how best to reach them? What are our responsibilities to others in our communities? What are the bases of these responsibilities? We can just as easily ask these questions about communities distant from us in time and space—they are, in other words, the kinds of questions appropriate to humanistic inquiry. In this course, we will be asking them in specific relation to Muslim communities in Egypt and South Asia during the modern period. Of particular concern are the historical processes through which conceptions of community changed during this time, most especially regarding the idea of the common good or, in other words, the goals of collective life. After establishing a framework for our investigation, we will turn to a general account of how Muslim communities defined and maintained collective life prior to the modern era. We will then explore modern colonial histories in Egypt and South Asia, investigating reforms in many areas related to collective life, such as education and law, as well as the religious reform movements that emerged over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Together, these areas of inquiry will help us understand how Muslim communities in these contexts came to ask—and answer—the above questions in transformed ways during the modern period, especially concerning the place of religion in collective life.

COURSE TEXTS:

Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim*

Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*

Wael Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*

Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy*

Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*

These texts form the backbone of our course, but throughout the semester we will also be working with articles or excerpts from books. Some of these readings are accessible via “Library Resources” on our Blackboard course site, in which case they will have an “R” next to them on the syllabus, or on the course site itself, in which case they will have “pweb” next to them.

You can read scholarly sources with a few questions in mind:

- Can you identify a sentence or sentences that constitute the thesis statement?
- Can you state the author's thesis—even regarding a single chapter or article—succinctly in your own words?
- If part of a larger work, how does a particular chapter or chapters fit into the bigger picture? If a stand-alone piece, can you relate this reading to another that we have completed in the course?
- Can you identify at least two examples the author uses to support her or his argument?
- How does the reading relate to the broader questions we discussed at the beginning of the course?

As you read the primary documents with which we will work, please keep the following questions in mind:

- Who is writing? What do you think was her or his purpose in so doing?
- What is the larger relevant context? (Beware of anachronistic analysis!)
- What is the author's relative position of power in the context of the document's production?
- How does this document support or call into question claims made by the authors of our secondary sources?

From a skill-building perspective, then, **two important learning goals** of this course are (1) reading scholarly sources for argument and presenting that argument and exemplary evidence in succinct terms and (2) cultivating the ability to offer contextually sensitive readings of primary source documents.

COURSE EVALUATION AND POLICIES

Engagement: 20%

As the weighty percentage indicates, I consider your participation in this course to be an essential component of its success. Participation includes regular attendance. In this vein, anything beyond two unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your participation grade. (I realize that things come up—the key to managing your various responsibilities is open communication.) Chronic tardiness will not help your cause, either. However, participation includes much more than attendance. Your participation grade is a reflection of your *engagement* with the course. I understand that not everyone chooses to speak in each class, and there are lots of other ways to show engagement: Make eye contact during lecture; when I request that you post to the course site, do so thoughtfully and punctually; come by office hours now and then—even if you don't have a particular agenda; be sure you proof-read and edit *all* your written work carefully—the quality of your efforts in this

regard plays a role in your participation grade, too. At the same time, nothing illustrates engagement like a willingness to be a vocal participant in our course. In the end, your (individual and collective) engagement with the course will be a significant determinant of what kind of experience we have together.

Vocabulary Quiz: 5%

Short Essays: 20%

You will complete two short (three page) essays, each worth 10% of your final grade. I will post prompts for these assignments on the course site one week in advance of the due date. The brevity of these formal essays will require real concision. I expect that they will contain all of the elements of formal writing—such as a clear argument and thesis statement, strong transitions, and clear topic sentences for each body paragraph—and directly engage course materials.

Group Project Portfolios: 35%

Over the course of the semester, you will work as part of a group to foster engagement with course themes outside of class. Your group will be responsible for producing 750-word treatments for each unit that draw on course readings and discussion. Each group member will have to identify one topic from the unit that s/he thinks is especially important. (When possible and appropriate, topics should cut across all readings from a given unit.) As a group, you will select two of these topics—either through a process of elimination or a process of combination—and explain how they relate to one or more of the core questions of the course. Twice during the semester you will collect these treatments into portfolios, at which time you will (as a group) also prepare and explain an assignment prompt that draws together the material from each of the units (500 words). The first portfolio will constitute 15% of your final grade, while the second portfolio will constitute 20% of your final grade. To ensure that your group makes steady progress, you will need to post drafts of your treatments within one week of unit completion. You can do so using your group's discussion board. Simply create a new thread for each unit. Failure to do so will affect your course engagement grade.

The group project provides us with our **third skill-related learning goal**: cultivating the ability to work successfully with a team on a long-term project. Collaborating is hard work, and beyond engaging the content of the course this assignment will put a premium on managing group dynamics and workflow. By the end of the semester, you will have accrued significant experience in a kind of work valued across professional settings.

Presentation: 10%

The group presentations at the end of the semester, along with your final portfolio, will serve as a culminating experience for the course. Your group will craft its own final prompt and the presentation itself will be your response to the question you pose.

Final Reflection: 10%

Reflecting the larger liberal arts and humanistic settings for the course, this final three-page assignment provides you with an opportunity for more personal reflection about how the course may or may not have affected the way you think about one or more of the core questions of the class.

Course Policies:

- Email policy part I: I am generally good about returning email in a reasonable amount of time. Please always reach out to your colleagues first with logistical questions about our course; you can do so via the email function on the course site. If no one can figure out the answer, then by all means get in touch. You can always ask in class, too, and you will find that I am quite accessible outside of class. I'd much rather meet you in person—and you can email to set up an appointment! [This policy does not apply to real emergencies.]
- Email policy part II: I encourage you to use email to share interesting news or course-related information you come across. This is actually a great way to help promote a collective learning experience.
- Unless I instruct otherwise, submit all written work to elfenbei.grinnell@gmail.com. Please be sure to submit all work as pdf. The subject heading of your submission should include "HIS-REL 267" and the name of the assignment.
- Know that I am pre-disposed to saying no to requests for extensions. I provide plenty of notice for each of the assignments—it is your responsibility to plan your time accordingly. That said, please do not be shy about approaching me for an extension if you have extenuating circumstances. It is essential to keep lines of communication open.
- If I suspect that you are using computers in class for anything other than note taking or document viewing, you will lose your computer privileges for the remainder of the semester. (If I suspect that you are texting in class I will ask that you leave your phone with me at the start of each class. Cell phones should be set on silent.)
- If you are involved in an extracurricular activity that will take you away from campus be sure to let me know beforehand. Regardless of the reason (except for dire family emergency, hospitalization), if I do not hear from you *before* you miss class I will assume you are simply skipping class. An after-the-fact note from Health Services will not suffice.
- Breaches of academic integrity will result in an official disciplinary process guided by the Dean's office. Although I will inform you of any action I take, I will not negotiate with you privately about such matters. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism I suggest you consult the Student Handbook immediately.
- It is essential to me that everyone in the class has the same opportunity to thrive. Please let me know of any particular learning needs you have (assuming they are on file with the College) and we will work together to make sure that you get the most out of this learning experience.

COURSE SCHEDULE

FRAMEWORKS

January 20

- Introductions

January 21: Evening screening: *The Square* (details tba)

January 22

- Discussing *The Square*

January 27

- Craig Calhoun, “The Public Good as a Social and Cultural Project” (pweb)

January 29

- Frederick Cooper, “Introduction: Colonial Questions, Historical Trajectories” (pweb)

FOUNDATIONS FOR HISTORICAL CHANGE AND COMPARISON

February 3

- Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 1-56

February 5

- Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 57-82

February 10: Vocabulary quiz

- Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 83-114

February 12

- Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 1-59

February 17

- Group Work: Divorce in Colonial South Asia

CREATING AND DIFFERENTIATING RELIGION

February 19: Short Essay #1 Due

- Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 60-86

February 24

- Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 205-256 (R)

February 26

- Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work*, 3-19, 23-39, 50-61 (R)
- Archival Materials Relating to Educational Reform (pweb)

DISCOVERING SOCIETY

March 3

- Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy*, 1-45

March 5

- Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy*, 46-76

March 10

- Portfolio Meetings

March 12

- Portfolio Meetings

March 13: Portfolios Due by 5 p.m.

SOURCES OF RE-FORM

March 31

- Hajj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, 1-30
- Muhammad ‘Abduh, “The necessity of religious reform” (R)

April 2

- Hajj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, 67-108
- Abduh, “Islam and Progress” (pweb)

April 7

- Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Contestations on the Common Good” (R)

April 9

- Hajj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Traditions*, 109-152

April 14

- Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 115-139
- Hajj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, 153-187
- Archival Materials Relating to Legal Reform Re: Divorce (pweb)

ISLAMIST VISIONS

April 16

- Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy*, 150-201
 - Focus your reading on 150-167, skim remainder
- Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam* (selections) (pweb)

April 21

- Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 148-158
- Zaman, *The 'Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 87-110
- Mawdudi, *Political Theory of Islam* (selections) (pweb)

GUIDANCE AND COMMUNITY IN A GLOBAL AGE

April 23: Short Essay #2 Due

- Zaman, *The 'Ulama in Contemporary Islam*, 144-151
- Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen and Bettina Graf, "Introduction," in *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi*, 1-16 (pweb)
- Qaradawi, *The Lawful and Prohibited in Islam* (selections) (pweb)

April 28

- Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim* (selections)

COURSE REFLECTIONS

April 30

- Presentations

May 5

- Presentations

May 7

- Wrapping Up

May 13: Final Portfolios and Individual Three-Page Reflections Due by 5 p.m.