

Religion and Politics: Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

Spring 2009

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TU-TH, 13:00-14:15

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or by appointment

I. Description

Shi'ism has emerged as a major organizational, institutional, and symbolic affecting political attitudes and behavior. The rise of Shi'ism follows a long period of social and political marginalization. Shi'ism articulated as an ideology was the main mobilizing force during the Iranian Revolution. The Islamic Republic of Iran constructs Shi'i beliefs as its ultimate source of legitimacy. Shi 'i community has come to dominate politics in the post-Saddam Iraq. In Lebanon, the Shi'i community of Lebanon has developed strong organizational capacity and political acumen since the early 1980s. This course explores the political trajectory of modern Shi'ism by adopting a historical comparative approach. It engages with several questions: How was Shi'ism emerged and evolved into a distinct sect in Islam? What are the defining characteristics of Shi'i Islam? How do these characteristics vary over time and across space? What factors has been decisive in the relationship between political authorities and Shi'i communities? What factors has transformed Shi'ism into a major political force in contemporary age? How does the study of modern Shi'ism inform our understanding of religion and politics?

The course has three interrelated goals: 1) making students familiar with the basic aspects of the Shi'i history, 2) providing them with analytical tools and knowledge for an in-depth understanding of the contemporary politics in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, and 3) generating theoretical insight into the question of how religious faith and political action interact and shape each other. The course develops an interdisciplinary approach that draws from political science, history, sociology, anthropology, and religious studies.

II. Requirements

Grades will be based on quizzes, a book review, a research draft and a research paper. The percent distribution of the final grade is as follows:

- Four in-class quizzes, each counting for 10 percent of the total grade: 40 percent
- A review of a pair of the listed films (due in class on **February 26th**): 15 percent
- Draft & bibliography for the research paper (due in class on **April 2nd**): 5 percent
- Research paper on an assigned topic (due in class on **April 23rd**): 30 percent
- Participation grade which includes attendance and active contribution in class discussions: 10 percent

Extra credit opportunities will be offered throughout the semester.

Quizzes:

Quizzes are mostly made of multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank type questions. The quiz dates are **February 3rd**, **February 24th**, **March 31st**, and **April 23rd**.

Students who miss quizzes are given make-ups only if they are able to document their reason for absence **with proper documentation**. Make-ups are given only within four days of the original quiz date. Students who miss more than one quiz will automatically receive **an F for the class**.

Writing Assignments:

Due dates are absolutely non-negotiable. No *force majeure* clauses are applicable. Students who fail to submit review paper, research draft, or research paper on time will automatically receive **an F for the class**.

All writing assignments should be double-spaced and use a **font size of 12**.

Detailed information about the assignments can be found in the end of this syllabus.

Reviews:

Every student is expected to write review by comparing a pair of movies. See section IV for guidelines.

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Iranian Films (Choose a pair)

A.

- *The Children of Heaven*, directed by Majid Majidi, 1999: Story of a brother and a sister from a poor working class family and their attempts to replace a pair of lost shoes.
- *The Color of Paradise*, directed by Majid Majidi, 1999: Story of a blind boy and his troubled relationship with his father.

B.

- *Leila*, directed by Dariush Mehrjui, 2000: Story of a young married woman who is unable to conceive.
- *The Circle*, directed by Jafar Panahi, 2000: Story of several women and their life struggles under harsh social conditions.

C.

- *Blackboards*, directed by Samira Makhmalbaf, 2000: Story of Kurdish rural teachers in search of students in the mountains.
- *Turtles Can Fly*, directed by Bahman Ghobadi, 2004: Story of Kurdish children living in destitute refugee camps in the eve of the US invasion of Iraq.

D.

- *The Wind Will Carry Us*, directed by Abbas Kiarostami, 2000: A poetic story of a group of professionals visiting a backward Kurdish village in Iran.
- *Ten*, directed by Abbas Kiarostami, 2002: A story of woman as she drives around Tehran talking to a series of passangers.

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IV. Academic Honesty

Loyola's College of Arts and Sciences defines plagiarism as "appropriation of ideas, language, work, or intellectual property of another, either by intent or by negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own." A detailed description of what is meant by academic integrity is also found in that catalog. For more information and student responsibilities, see http://www.luc.edu/cas/pdfs/CAS_Academic_Integrity_Statement_December_07.pdf

All acts of academic dishonesty including plagiarism, cheating, submitting false documents, and copying another student's work will be penalized by **an F for the course** without any exception and leniency.

IV. Assigned Material

The following four books are required readings in this class and they are available at Loyola's bookstore.

- H. Halm, *Shi'a Islam* Markus Wiener, 2007 OR M. Momen *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* Yale UP, 1985.
- E. Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* Cambridge, 2008.
- F. A. Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* Saqi, 2004.
- A. R. Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* Princeton UP, 2007.

Required readings also include scholarly articles that are defined below.

The following documentaries are likely to be shown in class:

- S. Bakhtaoui, and M. Ballout, *Shi'ism: Waiting for the Hidden Imam*, 2005.
- K. Jarjoura, *The Road to Kerbala*, 2005.
- J. Longley, *Iraq in Fragments*, 2006.

V. An Overview of the Course

1. The Historical Trajectory of Shi'ism
 - a. The birth of Shi'ism
 - b. The Twelve Imams and divisions
 - c. Shi'ism in early modern age and the Ulama
2. Shi'ism in Iran
 - a. Iran under Monarchy
 - b. The Revolution
 - c. The Islamic Republic
3. Shi'ism in Iraq
 - a. The creation of Iraq
 - b. Saddam and the Iraqi Shi'a

- c. Shi'ism in post-Saddam Iraq
- 4. Theatrical aspects of Shi'ism
- 5. Shi'ism in Lebanon
 - a. The Lebanese Republic
 - b. The Civil War and the Lebanese Shi'a
 - c. The rise of Hezbollah and Lebanese tragedy

Week I (January 13 & 15)

- Some general remarks on religion in contemporary age
- The birth of Islam

Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam* (Cambridge UP, 2003), 61-90 (BLACKBOARD).
Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 1-10.

Week II (January 20 & 22)

- The formation of Shi'ism
- The crystallization of Shi'ism into a distinct sect

Halm, *The Shiites: A Short History*, 3-20.
Momen, *An Introduction*, 11-22

Week III (January 27 & 29)

- The historical evolution of Shi'ism
- The divisions within Shi'ism

Halm, *The Shiites*, 21-37.
Momen, *An Introduction*, 23-85.

Week IV (February 3 & 5)

- Shi'ism in early modern and modern age.
- The Ulama.

Halm, *The Shiites*, 89-124.
Momen, *An Introduction*, 105-118; 130-142; 184-196.

1st Quiz on February 3rd. Documentary showing.

Week V (February 10 & 12)

- An introduction to modern Iranian political history

Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 1-33.
Momen, *An Introduction*, 127-135.

Week VI (February 17 & 19)

- The *Ancien Regime* in Iran
- The Iranian Revolution

Halm, *The Shiites*, 127-149.

Momen, *An Introduction*, 250-261; 282-289.

Abrahamian, *A History*, 63-162.

Week VII (February 24 & 26)

- The Islamic Republic

Halm, *The Shiites*, 149-161.

Momen, *An Introduction*, 289-299.

Abrahamian, *A History*, 162-195.

Gunes Murat Tezcur, Taghi Azadarmaki, and Bahar Melli, "Religious Participation among Muslims: Iranian Exceptionalism," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 15 (Fall 2006): 217-232 (BLACKBOARD).

Ze'ev Maghen. "Occultation in *Perpetuum*: Shi'ite Messianism and the Policies of the Islamic Republic," *Middle East Journal* 62 (Spring 2008): 232-257 (BLACKBOARD).

2nd quiz on February 24th. Film review due February 26th.

Week VIII (March 10 & 12)

- An introduction to modern Iraqi history

Halm, *The Shi'ites*, 168-174.

Momen, *An Introduction*, 261-264.

Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* pp. 52-141.

Documentary showing

Arang Keshavarzian Lecture on March 12, at 4:30 p.m.

Week IX (March 17 & 19)

- Iraq under Saddam

Faleh Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* pp. 199-273.

Week X (March 24 & 26)

- Post-Saddam Iraq

Faleh Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* pp. 15-28.

Juan Cole, 'The United States and Shi'ite religious factions in post-Ba'thist Iraq,' *The Middle East Journal* 57 (Autumn 2003): 543-66. (BLACKBOARD)

Week XI (March 31 & April 2)

- Theatrical Shi'ism

Halm, *The Shi'ites*, 41-85.

Momen, *An Introduction*, 238-244.

Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement*, 185-198.

Norton, *Hezbollah*, 49-68.

Elizabeth W. Fernea, 'Remembering Ta'ziyeh in Iraq,' *The Drama Review* 49 (Winter 2005): 130-9. (BLACKBOARD)

3rd quiz on March 31st. Research outline & bibliography due April 2nd. Documentary showing.

Week XII (April 7 & 9)

- An introduction to modern Lebanese history

Halm, *The Shi'ites*, 165-167.

Momen, *An Introduction*, 264-271.

Norton *Hezbollah*, 1-21

Week XIII (April 14 & 16)

- The Lebanese Civil War and the Rise of Hezbollah

Norton *Hezbollah*, pp. 21-46; 71-83.

Gunes Murat Tezcur, "Lebanese Civil War," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* Ed. William A. Darity, Jr. Vol. 4. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008: 396-8. (BLACKBOARD)

Week XIV (April 21 & 23)

- Lebanon in the 1990s

Norton, *Hezbollah*, 83-159.

Research papers are due April 23rd. 4th quiz on April 23rd.

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VII. Film Review Guidelines

A good film review should not try to provide a summary of the film under review. Instead, it should be *interpretative* and *comparative*. Focus on the cinematic quality and techniques (i.e., *montage*), artistic approaches, and types of actors. Also, aim to address several interrelated questions such as: What do these films share in common? How do their understandings of human experience in Iran resemble or differ from each other? How do they enrich cultural understanding? How do they construct life in Iranian society? The reviews will be seven to eight pages.

VII. Research Project Guidelines

An important part of this course is writing a term paper on a subject that arouses your intellectual curiosity. The project encourages you to sharpen your analytical thinking skills and improve your research and writing abilities. It has two components:

Outline & Annotated Bibliography

The outline should clearly state the focus of your interest, briefly discuss different approaches to the topic, and summarize how you plan to build your argument. The draft should be around **two double spaced** pages. The annotated bibliography should reflect substantial research both in quantity and quality. An annotated bibliography briefly describes the content of the book (in one or two sentences). Annotated bibliographies that cite less than **twelve scholarly works** are considered very weak. A classical source to consult when writing a term paper is

K. L. Turabian. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 2007 (seventh ed.) or 1996 (sixth ed.). U of Chicago Press.

Paper

Papers should not be less than **ten double spaced** and not more than **twelve double spaced** pages. Papers should be submitted in hard copies during class hours on due date. Electronic submissions are not accepted. Papers are evaluated according to several criteria: a) the quality and scope of research, b) the quality of writing and organization, c) the accuracy of knowledge, d) the ability to engage with different arguments, and e) the coherence and consistency of the main argument. A good paper makes a credible argument and sustains that argument by relying on a variety of sources. Hence, it is conceptual and analytical, rather than being purely descriptive. As a rule, students should rely on sources that can legitimately claim some expertise on the topic. Sources that are usually considered legitimate include academic scholarship, well-established media outlets, information centers (e.g. NGOs), and primary documents. For this reason, students should give priority to locating scholarly articles and books pertinent to their topic (this means using the printed and electronic sources provided by library). Scholars and analysts often tend to disagree. A good paper discusses all relevant arguments and

evaluates their strengths and weaknesses in a fair manner. Unreliable websites with dubious credibility should not be treated as authoritative sources; especially on controversial issues. For instance, you should be able to write a Wikipedia entry on the subject based on your research rather relying on Wikipedia for your research. You should consult me when you are not sure what qualifies as a valid source.

Topics

You may choose one of the following topics as the focus of your research.

A. Shi‘ism and Politics in Contemporary Iran

The theocratic regime in Iran that came to power as a result of a popular revolution in 1979 has some unique characteristics. A group of clerics who claim to rule by reason of their professional and religious skills carried this theocratic vision into reality. However, their claim to rule has not gone unchallenged. Contemporary Iranian politics is characterized by substantial divisions regarding the proper role of clerics in politics, and the relationship between religion and the state. Write a paper that explores the basic contours of politics in contemporary Iran. What have been the consequences of the transformation of Shi‘ism from a source of political opposition to a source of political legitimacy? How do the competing political visions differ from each other in contemporary Iran? What factors do facilitate or hinder political change in Iran?

B. The Rise of Political Shi‘ism in Lebanon

While Shi‘a of Lebanon were politically marginalized until the last quarter of the 20th century, they have become a force to be reckoned with since the early 1980s. In particular, the rise of Hezbollah dramatically has changed the balance of power in Lebanon and in the region. Write a paper that focuses on the trajectory of Shi‘i revival in Lebanon in recent times. What were the causes of Shi‘i political revival in Lebanon? How would you explain the rise of Hezbollah and the evolution of its political vision and strategies? How would you evaluate the prospects for a peaceful settlement in Lebanon?

C. The Shi‘i Majority in post-Saddam Iraq

Despite being superior in numbers, Shi‘a of Iraq were politically subordinated until the fall of Saddam regime in 2003. Since then, Shi‘a have come to dominate Iraqi politics by the help of their sheer numbers, organizational capacity and favorable geopolitical contexts. Yet, some important divisions remain among them. Write a paper that investigates the major Shi‘i political actors in contemporary Iraq. Who are the main Shi‘i political actors in contemporary Iraqi politics? How are they organized and do mobilize public support? How do their political orientations differ? What are the competing political visions among the Shi‘i community (i.e., with regard to the role of clerics, the state enforcement of Islamic norms, the relevance of sectarian and gender identities to political rights)?

D. The Theatrical Aspects of Shi'ism

Shi'ism has historically had a very salient theatrical dimension. Especially, the rituals and plays (*taziyehs*) depicting the Karbala massacre has been crucial to the formation of communal bonds among the Shi'a. These rituals and plays have evolved over time and gained new political meanings. Their explicitly political character in the years of the Iranian Revolution has been well-documented. Write a paper that compares either Shi'i rituals in a single country over time (e.g. Iran before the revolution and under the theocratic regime) or in two different countries (i.e. contemporary Iraq and Lebanon). What are the political implications of Shi'i rituals? How do the ritualistic interpretations of Shi'ism differ from one community to other or over time in a single community? What characteristics of the rituals do appear to be resistant to historical change and be constant over different ethnic cultures?