

'Religion and Politics: Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO
Spring 2008

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or by appointment

I. Description

Shi'ism has been recently transformed into a major political force after long periods of marginalization. It was the main mobilizing force during the Iranian Revolution and has been the principal source of legitimacy for the Islamic Republic; the Shi'i community of Lebanon has developed strong organizational capacity and political acumen since the early 1980s; and Iraqi Shi'a has emerged as the political majority in the post-Saddam era. 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 and 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 our times? How does the study of modern Shi'ism inform the discussions 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. While the main focus throughout the semester remains the politics of Shi'ism, 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 the one of the listed books or two of the listed films (due in class on **February 28th**): 15 percent
- Draft and bibliography for the research paper (due in class on **April 3rd**): 5 percent
- Research paper written on one of the assigned topics (due in class on **April 24th**): 30 percent
- Participation grade which includes attendance and active contribution in class discussions: 10 percent

I may offer within class extra-credit opportunities throughout the semester.

Quizzes:

Quizzes are mostly made of multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank type questions. The quiz dates are **February 7th**, **February 28th**, **April 3rd**, and **April 24th**.

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 review by comparing two books or films.

Books (Choose a pair)

A.

- Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival* W. W. Norton and Company, 2006.

- Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for Power: The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World* Princeton University Press, 2006.

These two books discuss the trajectory of Shi'ism as a political force in the last half century or so and the implications of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

B.

- Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon*, 4th edition, Nation Books, 2002.
- Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*

The British journalist Fisk has been one of the most perceptive observers of Lebanese society and politics. In *Pity the Nation*, he narrates his personal experience of the Lebanese Civil War. Salibi is a prominent historian of Lebanon and provides a forceful reinterpretation of Lebanese history.

C.

- Elaine Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran*, The Free Press, 2005.
- Robin Wright, *The Last Great Revolution: Turmoil and Transformation in Iran*, Vintage, 2001.

Written by women journalists with substantial exposure to Iran, these two books reflect upon the consequences of the revolution and societal dynamics and change under the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iranian Films (Choose a pair)

A.

- Majid Majidi *The Children of Heaven* 1999

Story of a brother and a sister from a poor working class family and their attempts to replace a pair of lost shoes.

- Majid Majidi *The Color of Paradise* 1999

Story of a blind boy and his troubled relationship with his father.

B.

- Tahmineh Milani *Two Women* 1999

Story of a friendship between two female college students and the impacts of patriarchal norms on their lives in the early revolutionary years.

- Jafar Panahi *The Circle* 2000

Story of several women and their life struggles under the oppressive conditions.

C.

- Samira Makhmalbaf *Blackboards* 2000

Story of Kurdish rural teachers in search of students in the mountains.

- Bahman Ghobadi *Turtles Can Fly* 2004

Story of Kurdish children living in destitute refugee camps in the eve of the US invasion of Iraq.

III. 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.

- Heinz Halm, *Shi'a Islam* Markus Wiener, 2007.
- Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State* I. B. Tauris, 2003.
- Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* Saqi, 2004.
- Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* Princeton UP, 2007.

Required articles are indicated in week descriptions below.

Two or three documentary videos will be shown in class:

- Said Bakhtaoui, and Mohammad Ballout, *Shi'ism: Waiting for the Hidden Imam*, 2005.
- Katia Jarjoura, *The Road to Kerbala*, 2005.
- James 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 within
 - c. Rituals and Codes
2. Shi'ism in Iran
 - a. Iran under Monarchical Rule
 - 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. Shi'ism in Lebanon
 - a. The Lebanese Republic
 - b. Civil War and the Lebanese Shi'a
 - c. The Rise of Hezbollah and Lebanese Tragedy

Week I (January 17)

- Religion and Politics and the Birth of Islam

Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam* (Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 61-90
 Marshall H. G. Hodgson *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization Vol. I* (Chicago UP, 1974), pp. 212-23

Week II (January 24)

- The Formation of Shi'ism and Its Crystallization into a Distinct Sect

Halm, *Shi'ites: A Short History*, Part One

Week III (January 31)

- The Evolution of Shi'ism and Divisions within Shi'ism

Halm, *Shi'ites: A Short History*, Part Two and Three

Week IV (February 7)

- Introduction to Iranian Political History and Culture pp. 1-28

Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State* pp.

1st Quiz

Week V (February 14)

- Iran before the Revolution and the Islamist Movement

Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State* pp. 29-146

Halm, *Shi'ites: A Short History* Part Four, chps. 1-3

Week VI (February 21)

- The Revolution and Iran under the Islamic Republic

Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State* pp. 147-204

Halm, *Shi'ites: A Short History* Part Four, chps. 4-7

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

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)

Week VII (February 28)

- Introduction to Iraqi Political History and Culture

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

Halm, *Shi'ites: A Short History* Part Five, chapter on Iraq

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

Documentary showing and 2nd Quiz

Week VIII (March 13)

- Iraq under Saddam

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

We will also attend Dale Eickelman lecture as a class.

Week IX (March 27)

- 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 X (April 3)

Professor Tezcur is overseas for a conference.

Documentary showing and 3rd Quiz

Week XI (April 10)

- Introduction to Lebanese Political History and Culture

Norton *Hezbollah*, pp. 1-21

Halm, *Shi'ites: A Short History* Part Five, chapter on Lebanon

Week XII (April 17)

- The Lebanese Civil War and the Rise of Hezbollah

Norton *Hezbollah*, pp. 21-83

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)

Augustus R. Norton, "Ritual, Blood, and Shiite Identity: Ashura in Nabatiyya, Lebanon," *The Drama Review* 49 (Winter 2005): 140-55. (BLACKBOARD)

Week XIII (April 24)

- Lebanon in the 1990s

Norton, *Hezbollah*, pp. 83-159

4th Quiz

Research Papers due

VI. Book/Film Review Guidelines

The reviews will be seven to eight pages. If you choose to write a book review, be sure that you address themes common to both books. First, provide a very succinct summary of the books. Then, discuss in what ways if any these books contribute to your understanding of the subject under inquiry (e.g. the implications of the US invasion of

Iraq, the causes of the Lebanese Civil War, and the societal consequences of the Iranian Revolution). What did the books tell you that you had not already known? The review should also critically engage with the books and assess their relative strengths and weaknesses. What aspects of the books are most captivating? What did you find missing or misleading? In addition, you may want to reflect upon how book complement or contradict each other in various respects.

The primary purpose of a film review is providing critiques of two films in a comparative manner. A good review should first provide very short synopses of both films. Then, it should 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?

If you feel confused, contact me at once so that we can discuss your review.

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 & 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 bibliography should reflect substantial research both in quantity and quality. Bibliographies that cite less than **ten scholarly works** are considered very weak.

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. As a rule, students should rely on sources that can legitimately claim some expertise on the topic. Such sources usually include scholarly writings, well-established media outlets and information centers (e.g. NGOs). 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 should 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 popular struggle in 1979 has been an anomaly in modern history. 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?