COURSE DESCRIPTION

The role of religion in contemporary Middle Eastern society may come across as contradictory and puzzling. Has modernity (or late-modernity) essentially weakened or strengthened the role of religion? Have modern reform movements oriented themselves towards or away from democratic values or forms of organization? Does religious mobilization forward or counteract female empowerment, human rights and free, cultural expression? Such questions are recurring in contemporary academic as well as popular discussions. And they have deep repercussions for policies and strategical considerations well beyond the Middle Eastern region, not least relating to foreign policy, strategic considerations, migration policies and attitudes to cultural diversity.

Such questions are not the point of departure for this course. Popular and intriguing as they may seem, they are predicated on questionable or outright erroneous premises, dichotomies and norms. The very formulations as such lead us think about religion as an agent, an entity with its independent logic, agency and trajectory. Secondly, they tend to approach religion as monolithic, an essentially uniform human faculty or social institution with patently observable ‘effects.’ And thirdly, they suggest us to think of religion as ubiquitous, as an inherent and pervasive aspect of ‘religious societies’, defining the very essence of the Middle Eastern social fabric. In contrast to such perspectives, this course attempts to move beyond over-simplified and dichotomous ways of approaching the complex set of phenomena we refer to as ‘religion’. It attempts to explore the complexity of the social processes defining, constructing and traversing religious discourse and practice. Put in a nutshell: this course explores religion through verbs. How is religion constructed? How is religion represented in words and images? How is religion employed in political discourse and commercial enterprise? How is religion lived through social interaction and embodied in everyday practices?

During 8 weeks of joint readings, discussions and presentations of recent academic research on religion in the Middle East, we will theoretically and empirically explore current manifestations of – and debates on – the impact of religious practice and discourse in contemporary Middle Eastern societies, from social, political and cultural perspectives. The two main questions underpinning the readings, lectures, discussions and assignments are:

- How do religious concepts, practices, norms and ideals (and debates thereupon) interrelate with broader socio-economic and political-strategic trajectories in the Middle Eastern region?
• What are the power effects of religious (or religious critical) discourse and practice, from individual, social, political and strategic perspectives?

The course is organized in four thematic sections, with empirical focus on the Arabic speaking world, Iran, Turkey and Israel. During a two-week introductory section, we are addressing some essential theoretical perspectives in the study of religious discourse and practice in the Middle East, as well as exploring the broader tendencies and diversity of religion in the region. During the following weeks, we will focus on empirical cases and analyses of the role of religious discourse in Middle Eastern societies. We turn first to the complicated relation of ‘religion’ and ‘politics.’ We will discuss the roles of religious discourse in a variety of states, institutions, programs and movements, and how the complexity of such cases induces an analysis going beyond dichotomies of sacred/secular, public/private and government/civil society. The third thematic section highlights the notion of representation, exploring innovative staging and formats of religious discourse and practice, such as consumerism, clothing norms and visual representation. The fourth course section consists of an individual, written project, to be presented and discussed during a final seminar.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course the student shall be able to:

Knowledge and understanding

• Demonstrate specialised knowledge of and ability to summarise and describe fundamental features of religious reforms and forms of organisation in the modern societies of the Middle East and how they interact with national political movements and post-colonial factors;
• Demonstrate the ability to describe key concepts of religious studies such as secularism, modernism, theocratism, sectarianism, conservatism, orthodoxy, radicalism and different types of revivalist movements of relevance to the societies;
• Demonstrate specialised knowledge and ability to exemplify how religious concepts and norms have been applied in central policy texts and institutions as well as in broader social and cultural practices in the societies of the Middle East in recent decades.

Competence and skills

• Demonstrate a specialised ability to identify and apply social constructivist, intersectional and post-colonial perspectives to the role of religion in social, political and cultural processes;
• Demonstrate a specialised ability to describe how key religious concepts have been discussed, interpreted and implemented by current actors, organisations and social practices in the societies of the Middle East;
• Demonstrate an ability to describe the research situation within a delimited field of research concerning the role of religion in the societies of the Middle East;
• Demonstrate the ability to complete a minor case study about the role of religion in the societies of the Middle East and provide nuanced and informed feedback on the case study of a fellow student.
Judgment and approach

- Demonstrate specialised understanding of and ability to assess the extent to which socio-economic and political-strategic circumstances in the Middle East affect current debates about the social functions of religion;
- Demonstrate a specialised ability to draw conclusions about geopolitical, national and local effects of current debates on religion and their applications in the Middle East;
- Use a scholarly approach to assess the impact of religious discourses, constructions and practices on the legal regulation and social control of individuals and groups in the Middle East on the grounds of ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

COURSE ASSESSMENT

The course requires readings, class participation, three written assignments and one oral assignment. All written assignments must include in-text references and a list of cited works. The assignments are to be submitted through LUVIT by the set deadline. The grade distribution is as follows:

Assignment 1 (Theory reflection paper) 20 percent
Assignment 2 (Research review paper) 20 percent
Assignment 3 (Final essay: individual specialization) 40 percent
Assignment 4 (Final seminar discussion + talking points) 20 percent

Class Attendance and Participation

Most classes of this course will be run in a seminar format, meaning that group discussions (in pairs, smaller groups or within the entire class) will take place at every class meeting. Students are expected to keep up with reading assignments and think about the readings critically before they come to class. Informed participation is expected from all students. Students are expected to focus their class participation on analytical insights and theoretical details to construct their arguments.

Students should:

- Attend all class meetings;
- Read all (required) course material with a point of departure in the themes and questions highlighted for every meeting before coming to class;
- Discuss the readings during class;
- Integrate arguments across readings;
- Answer questions presented by the instructor and other students;
- Engage in dialogue with other students to highlight the analytical utility and empirical relevance of theoretical ideas;
- Ask questions relating to readings or comments that are presented by other students; and
- Utilize office hours and email to communicate ideas, questions or comments.

While in class please follow these common courtesy rules:

- Turn off cell-phones (and don’t just put them on vibrate);
- Laptops and other electronic devices are acceptable solely for class related notes;
- Show up to class on time;
Compensation for class absence:
Since students’ involvement is required in every class meeting, attendance records will be kept for each class. In case of having to miss a class meeting, a 1000 – 1200 word paper reflecting on the readings for that class is required (to be submitted within one week after the missed class).

Assignment One: Theory reflection paper

The goal of this assignment is to familiarize you with reading, reflecting on, summarizing and discussing theoretical concepts and perspectives, and their relevance for academic analysis. Based on the course readings of Section 1, you are to choose 2 - 4 of the following theoretical concepts and discuss their utility for analyzing religion in the contemporary Middle East:

- Anthropology of religion
- Geopolitics of art
- Cosmopolitanism
- Culture talk
- Modernization/Modernity
- Tradition/traditionalism
- Secularization
- Objectification
- Sacred/secular
- Ethno-religious identity
- Cleavages

When completing your theoretical reflection paper, make sure to cover all of the following:

- Describe and contextualize the concepts you have chosen. Identify within what or in relation to what broader theoretical traditions they have emerged. In relation to what specific problems and/or historical contexts have they been formulated and applied?

- Discuss the concepts’ utility for analyzing empirical reality. What are their merits? What are the possible shortcomings, limitations and/or problems of the theoretical concepts?

- Assess the concepts in relation to each other. How do they interrelate? How do they complement each other? Are they predicated on compatible ideas or points of departure?

The reflection paper must be 1000 – 1500 words and must provide careful references to the required course readings. Deadline for submission to LUVIT is February 3 at 12.00 (noon).

Assignment Two: Empirical research review paper

The goal of this assignment is to develop your ability to theoretically and methodologically compare and assess current empirical research on religious discourse and practice in the Middle East. From the required readings in Sections 2 and 3, select two articles/chapters and:

- Explain your rationale for selecting the two pieces. What overall academic problem do they respond to and what type of data/evidence are they based on?

- Summarize the basic arguments and results of the two pieces of research.
• Compare the methodological perspectives of the two texts. What are their similarities and/or differences? Identify, compare and discuss the theoretical perspectives of the articles/chapters: to what extent do they complement each other and if so in what way?

• Conclude with a discussion how the papers contribute to the understanding of the role of religion (or the debates thereupon) in the contemporary Middle East, and what extent they are successfully integrating (or missing out on) important theoretical perspectives in the analysis.

The research review paper must be 1000 – 1500 words and must provide careful references to two required course readings within Theme 2 and/or 3. Deadline for submission to LUVIT is March 4 at 12.00 (noon).

Assignment Three & Four: Individual Specialization and Seminar Presentation

The final two assignments are interconnected. Assignment Three consists of a written, research-based, well-supported and critical essay on a chosen topic on religion in the Middle East. In Assignment Four, at the final seminar of the course, you will provide oral feedback on another student’s essay, again based on the course literature. In the essay for Assignment 3, you shall:

• Identify and describe one central, current, empirical and/or theoretical tendency or problem, relating to religious discourse and/or practice in the Middle East;

• Assess its relevance, by discussing how it interrelates with social, political, economic, demographic, generational, gendered, strategic and/or cultural processes in and/or beyond the Middle Eastern region;

• Analytically discuss the chosen tendency/problem, in application of one or several theoretical perspectives discussed in the required course literature;

• Conclude with a suggestion for further research on the field, by identifying and formulating a promising research question and a potential material to be explored;

You may use empirical data from the course literature or, in addition, go beyond the course literature for complementary data or perspectives. You may focus on one specific case or apply a comparative perspective. You may primarily devote the essay to a discussion of concrete empirical data or keep the discussion more theoretically oriented. All essays must however refer both to empirical studies and theoretical perspectives, based on the required course literature. The essay must be based on careful references to the required course readings. You are required to cite minimum 7 articles/chapters/reports/websites of the required course readings, but you are encouraged to use more extensive references from the course list. Complementary sources may be employed but cannot supplant the required sources. Essays must be 2000 – 3000 words. Upload on LUVIT no later than 12.00 (noon) on March 13.

For Assignment 4, you are to lead the discussion of another student’s essay, including a short summary and well-reflected and well-supported points for discussion and/or questions. Students must also submit a bullet list of talking points (2 – 6 bullets), brought to the full-day seminar at 09.00 on March 15.
Students should keep in mind some basics of writing good papers:

- Support your claims. Make an argument instead of unsupported assertions.
- Focus on analytical insights instead of opinions.
- Connect ideas, sentences and paragraphs.
- Make sure that your writing flows and that sentences are well constructed to show how ideas relate. Write simply.
- DO NOT use Google or Wikipedia (Google Scholar is OK).
- Use course material and, if relying on complementary sources, academic journals (obtained through databases) and scholarly books.

Students should keep the following in mind when preparing their role as discussants:

- Prepare before the seminar and have a clear plan for presenting your main points.
- Organize your comments as follows:
  - Start with a short summary of the paper and its purpose, questions, main argument and key references;
  - Then proceed to number of well-prepared, strategic and constructive comment and questions about the author’s argument and relation to research.
- Make sure that the comments/questions clearly relate to research (“As argued by...”; “According to...”; “This argument is based on...”; etc.)
- Aim for quality rather than quantity. 2 - 3 well chosen, constructive and clearly formulated comments/questions is preferable to a long series of non-productive or unclear comments.
- Keep track of time – and use the time strategically!
- Present your comments in a clear, organized manner, and refrain from drawn out monologues.

Submission deadlines

Assignment 1 (Theory reflection paper)  
Assignment 2 (Research review paper)  
Assignment 3 (Final essay: individual specialization)  
Assignment 4 (Final seminar discussion + talking points)  

February 3  12.00  
March 4  12.00  
March 13  12.00  
March 15  09.00  

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Dishonesty

I am quite confident that no one in this class would violate academic conventions regarding dishonesty. However, it is my duty to inform you that any student who breaks the rules by cheating, plagiarizing, or falsifying records will receive a failing grade for the course and have their case reported to the University administration.
COURSE GRADES

Course grades will be granted based on the following scale:

A = 93-100
A: Outstanding work that goes above and beyond the requirements of the assignments and demonstrates fully developed, analytical and critical skills and/or creativity, where extra effort, extra achievement and mastery of the material of the course is clearly evident.

B = 85-92
B: Strong work that demonstrates a thorough understanding of the course material, fulfills all aspects of the assignments and displays clear evidence of analytical competence as well extra effort, extra achievement or extra improvement.

C = 76-84
C: Satisfactory work that fulfills ALL aspects of the assignments, demonstrating basic analytical competence, complete understanding of the course material and evidence of adequate achievement and effort. If you do the assignments exactly as they are assigned, you will receive a C grade.

D = 68-75
D: Partially satisfactory work that shows a basic understanding of the material and some evidence of analytical ability, but also certain failures to fully follow instructions, implement specific recommendations or demonstrate personal effort.

E = 60-67
E: Passable but sub-satisfactory work, where all assignments have been submitted and meet minimum requirements, while the work shows several examples of failure to follow instructions for assignments or to demonstrate an understanding of basic course material.

F = 0-59
F: Failure to show up to class, submit assignments and/or submitting work that shows consistent failure to follow instructions for assignment or to demonstrate an understanding of basic course material.
CLASS SCHEDULE

SECTION 1. THEORIZING AND MAPPING RELIGION, POWER AND REPRESENTATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Introduction

During the introductory thematic section, we will be addressing some essential theoretical perspectives for the study of religious discourse and practice in the Middle East. Central are anthropological and political scientific perspectives on religious discourse, power and representation. In focus for our discussions are questions such as:

- How has academic scholarship, social debate and political analysis tended to represent the role of religion in Middle Eastern (and most notably Muslim) societies?
- What are the problems with such representations and how can we overcome them?

The introductory section concludes with the session 'Who’s Middle East? Mapping religious landscapes', where we explore the broader tendencies and diversity of religious sentiments, traditions and populations in the Middle East, with particular attention to religious minorities and the results (and problems) of the World Value Survey project.

Class 1, January 22: Theorizing representation

In the introduction to the seminal work *Islam Obscured*, Daniel Varisco critically reflects on main traits in anthropological representation of Islam and the Muslim world in academic scholarly work. In their article, Papastergiadis and Mosquera approach the question from a different but related perspective: artistic representation and aesthetic norms in a globalized world of arts and exposition. And in an essay published in the wake of 9.11, Mamdani reflects on the notions underpinning the debates on violent Islamic extremism in the wake of 9.11.

- What is Varisco’s main argument in and purpose with his book? What theoretical and methodological questions are central to consider?
- What similarities and differences can be identified among the three texts?
- What are your conclusions from the readings for formulating research perspectives on religion in the contemporary Middle East?

Required Readings:


Recommended readings:


Class 2, January 25: Critical perspectives on the anthropology of Islam

We dig deeper into Varisco’s reading of four central anthropological/sociological analyses of Islam in the Middle East, focusing Clifford Geertz, Ernst Gellner, Fatima Mernissi and Ahmad Akbar. In this seminar, pairs/groups of students will present their reading of each chapter in 10-minute presentations, followed up by joint discussion in class.

- What are the main arguments of the four scholars discussed, and how does Varisco assess their strengths and problems?

Required Readings:

Recommended readings:


Class 3, January 29: Analyzing religion and politics beyond sacred/secular dichotomies

In 20th century scholarly work on religion, few ideas have been more formative than the ‘secularization thesis’. Interrelated with orientalist notions, this thesis has contributed to normative and flawed constructions of ‘Muslim politics’ in essentialist, monolithic and ubiquitous categories. As a corrective, Eickelman & Piscator revisit the very notion of ‘politics’ and re-examines it in a fruitful combination of political scientific and anthropological perspectives, in the discussion of the political roles of religious discourse in the Middle East.

- What does this perspective mean for concepts such as ‘modernization’, ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’?
- What do the authors mean by the ‘objectification of Islam’ – and what historical/social processes and power effects are constitutive for this objectification?
- How do Eickelman & Piscatori’s perspectives relate to the sacred/secular categories in the context of Israeli and Turkish politics, as discussed by Sultan Tepe?

Required readings:

**Recommended readings:**


**Class 4, February 1: Who's Middle East? Mapping Middle Eastern religious landscapes**

Academic research on the subjects of Islam and Muslim societies in the Middle East has sometimes overshadowed the complex map of religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities in the region, and the no less complex interrelation of minority communities with local/national governments. During the first half of the class we will discuss:

- How does Coffey conceptualize ‘minorities’ and how does the Ottoman notion of *dhimmi* status feed into contemporary affairs and processes of Middle Eastern minorities?
- Why are minorities sometimes less prone to challenge political authoritarianism, according to Belge and Karakoç?
- Reflect on the results of the Pew Research Center Report on Israel (by Shahgal & Cooperman). What are the main differences in attitudes to religious values between the Muslim and Jewish Israeli communities according to the report? How such differences interrelate with economic, social, strategic and political factors?

During the second part of the class, we will discuss broader trends in the religious demographical development in the Middle East and tendencies in the attitudes to religious values and norms as analyzed by the Pew Center and in the World Values Survey project.

- Why is Islam “rising fastest” as a world religion, according to the report? In what respects? What do think about the report’s conclusions?
- Visit the *World Values Survey* webpage. Browse around among the various Middle Eastern country surveys and take note of general tendencies. What picture(s) emerge(s)? Can we discern any problematical methodological aspects in the surveys?

**Required readings:**


**Recommended readings:**


**Submission 1, February 3 (12.00):** Theoretical reflection paper

**SECTION 2. IMAGINING RELIGIOUS ORDER(S) AND COMMUNITIES**

**Introduction**

During the following two thematic sections, we will turn to empirical perspectives on the role of religious discourse in Middle Eastern societies – while keeping the theoretical engines running! We start by revisiting the complex relation of 'religion' and 'politics' in empirical detail and how it currently plays out in various national settings, asking questions such as:

- What is the function of religious discourse in current political movements and ideologies, and based on what theological interpretations and politico-socio-economic agendas? And with what effects for power and representation?
- What is the context of the current tug-of-war of secular and theocratic nationalist interests and imaginations raging across the Middle East?
- What is 'post-Islamism' according to Asef Bayat’s understanding and how does it manifest itself in various quarters of the Muslim world?
- What do we mean by 'sectarianism'? Why does it currently seem to gain momentum?

**Class 5, February 5: Rethinking Islam, Islamism and social order**

We start out in recent academic discussions of 'Islamism' and how it, arguably, has led to flawed homogenization in popular and political debate as well as research. In light of this, we explore the concept(s) of 'post-Islamism' and how it may refine analyze(s) of recent conflations of religious discourse and social, political and economic order in the Middle East. With the perspectives of Varisco as well as Eickelman & Piscatori in the back of your mind, reflect on:

- What similar as well as different critical perspectives are suggested in the texts by Burgat and Baker, regarding the analysis and representation of Islamism and Arab politics in academic research, international politics and media debate?
- What does Bayat mean by the concept of ‘post-Islamism’? Does it provide a more refined tool for understanding recent currents of religious discourse and politics in the Middle East? If so, how?
- According to Pinto, how does religious discourse and practice interconnect with power mechanisms in Syrian Sufism? May we understand such processes as political from the perspectives suggested by Eickelman & Piscatori and/or Varisco? How so?
- At the end of the class, texts will be chosen for presentation in the following seminars.
Required readings:


Recommended readings:


Class 6, February 8: Religion and Political Imaginations – Case Studies 1.

Class 7, February 12: Religion and Political Imaginations – Case Studies 2.

During these two classes, students will summarize and critically reflect on 7 case studies (3 of which are individually chosen), focusing on the accommodation of – or resistance to – religious discourse in political imaginations and institutions in the contemporary Middle East:

- Select one chapter in *Post-islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam* (other than the introduction chapter).
- Select two chapters in *Islamist Politics in the Middle East: Movements and Change Islam* (other than Burgat’s and Baker’s articles).
- Read the texts by Hazama, Norton, Tepe and Yadgar.
- Students present one of the texts and prepare comments/questions relating to the other 6 texts (based on the questions outlined in the Section introduction above). Each presentation is followed by discussion in class.

Required readings:


Recommended readings:


Class 8, February 15: Middle Eastern Politics from ‘sectarian’ perspectives

‘Sectarianism’ offers a different perspective on the political relevance of religious discourse, highlighting questions of political representation and institutional organization rather than ideological movements. Like ‘Islamism’, the concept is fraught with problems and vagueness, while certainly offering important perspectives as well.

- How does ‘sectarianism’ as a concept contribute to the analyzes of the role of religion in Middle Eastern party- and geopolitics?
- How does sectarian politics play out empirically in contemporary Middle Eastern politics, in response to what circumstances and with what effects?

Required readings:


Recommended readings:


SECTION 3. RELIGIOUS CONSUMPTION, EMBODIMENT AND VISUAL (RE)PRESENTATIONS

Introduction

A central theme of the first two course sections was the necessity of going beyond dichotomies such as sacred/secular, public/private and government/civil society in assessing the socio-political relevance of religious discourse in Middle Eastern societies. During the third thematic
section, we are exploring this in empirical detail, by focusing on realities outside of ‘traditional’ political institutions, contributing to the ‘fuzziness’ of religious discourse and practice and its relation to power and politics. Central questions here are:

- Who has power of representing religion, from what normative positions and with what effects? How does the late-modern, consumer and information society both contribute to and challenge such orders?
- How does the visual enter, perpetuate and/or challenge the political – and what is the role of religion is such processes?

In order to explore such perspectives, we will follow the growing significance of innovative formats for religious staging. Examples are urban art and architecture; ritual innovations in public space; entrepreneurship and branding; clothing norms and fashion; children’s literature and political poster art. The section ends with a seminar where we discuss recent student theses, focusing the question of representation as an entry point for exploring religion in the Middle East.

Class 9, February 19: Depiction, exhibition, gaze – representation revisited

We start out by revisiting the concept of representation and themes previously discussed in connection with Daniel Varisco’s work, but now with a focus on visual exhibitions of the Middle East and how (imaginations of) religion feed into representations. Timothy Mitchell’s often cited article from 1992 provides a fruitful point of departure for reflecting on the power mechanism and colonial legacies in a Euro-centric gaze on the Middle East – and how such legacies have been assessed and appropriated in debates and practices in, as well as outside of, the Middle East. In this class, we will explore such processes in two related cases of the visual (re)presentation of the Middle East and the relevance of images/imaginations of religion for such representations.

- What does Mitchell mean by ‘the world-as-exhibition’ and what is the relevance of this concept for the assessment of the representation of (religion in) Middle Eastern societies?
- How did the American post-9.11 context affect imaginations of ‘Islam’ affect national discourses on Middle Eastern art, according to Jessica Winegar’s analysis?
- To what extent did representations of the ‘Cartoons controversy’ in Arab media reproduce, resist and/or challenge Euro/American media representations, according to Jamila Hakam? What was the role of religious imaginations/references in such representations?
- In a broader perspective, how do the themes of ‘9.11’ and the ‘Cartoons controversy’ relate to Mitchell’s notion of the ‘world-as-exhibition’?

Required readings:


**Recommended readings:**


**Class 10, February 22: Restaging religious discipline**

As pointed out by Eickelman & Piscatori, the objectification of religion is a central tendency in (late)modern Middle Eastern societies, by which ‘Islam’ (and other religions) take shape both as mental/educational *objects for reflection* and in the form of tangible and often commodified *objects* on a religious market. Such processes invite religious entrepreneurship and inventiveness, often in direct or indirect challenge of established religious institutions – and often interconnected with nationalistic imaginations, aspirations and/or identity politics.

- What examples of ‘religious entrepreneurship’ do you find in the readings?
- To what extent may the ‘transnational mosque’, ‘Islamic children’s literature’ and ‘Islamic relics’ be analyzed in terms of objectifications of Islam? What are the differences/similarities?
- Compare the conflation of images of *children, childhood and religion* in the Islamic children's literature and in Hizbollah’s recent poster art.
- Identify examples of the interconnectedness of re-imaginations of religion and nationalist/identity political aspirations in the readings.

**Required readings:**


Class 11, February 26: Clothing, religious gendering and embodied practices

With at point of departure in the notions of objectification and religious entrepreneurship, in this class we will extend the discussion of re-imaged Islamic virtue by focusing gendering and embodiment. We do so in discussion of the emergent market of ‘modest fashion’, as analyzed in Elizabeth Bucar’s recent study of female, Muslim dress-codes and practices of dressing, with a focus on Turkey and Iran.

- What is the point of departure for Bucar's study? What notions does she challenge? And how does this affect her overall argument and evaluation of power mechanisms connected to female clothing?
- What is the role of the national context for understanding current trajectories of female dressing codes and practices in Turkey and Iran? What are the differences and/or similarities in the Turkish and Iranian setting?
- How is ‘modest fashion’ interconnected with social class in contemporary Turkey and Iran? Again: reflect on how differences/similarities.

Recommended readings:
Class 12, March 1: Youth, consumerism and religion as aspects of identity processes

Youth perspectives have long been overlooked in academic research on religion in general, and religion in the Middle East in particular, but are currently attracting increasing attention. This, in turn, partly relates to current discourses on migration and security, unemployment and the challenges of multiculturalism. Mass mediated as well as political and academic interest in youth therefore commonly rests on Euro/American-centric, ethnocentric notions and priorities. With such perspectives as a point of departure, this class is devoted to discussion of the diversity of young Muslim realities in and beyond the Middle East and the role (?) of religious discourse and practice in such realities.

- Bourdieu has famously formulated that ‘youth is just a word’ – critiquing its analytic use, given the empirical diversity of young realities. Herrara & Bayat acknowledge this critique; yet they come to a different conclusion. How and why? What are your own reflections of the utility of a ‘youth perspective’ in academic research? What are its benefits and/or problems?
- Based on the reading of two chapters of Being Young and Muslim, reflect on and compare the role (or no role) of religious discourse and practice for the youth described. In what ways, under what circumstances and in what forms has religion meaning?
- How does the findings in the two chapters relate to the results of the Pew Research Center and World Value Surveys discussed earlier in the course?

Required readings:


Recommended readings:


Submission 2, March 4 (12.00): Research review paper

Class 13, March 5: Inventive explorations of Middle Eastern religion in young scholarship

The concluding class of the section is devoted to discussions of five recent student theses that all apply innovative perspectives in the exploration of religion in the contemporary Middle East. The theses apply several theoretical and methodological perspectives discussed during the
course, such as representation, re-imaging and re-imagination of Islam and, not least, the usefulness of visual perspectives for analyzing the role of religion in Middle Eastern political discourse.

- Read all abstracts, introductions and conclusions of the theses.
- Work in pairs (or small groups) and prepare an ‘opposition’ of one thesis. This opposition should include a *short summary* of the thesis’ main argument and results, as well as 3 – 4 *critical follow-up questions* to be discussed in class. The questions may concern theoretical and/or methodological considerations and/or comments relating to the findings, literature review and results of the thesis, with relevance for analyzing religion in the Middle East.

**Required readings:**


**SECTION 4. INDIVIDUAL SPECIALIZATION**

The last two weeks of the course will be devoted to an individual essay-project, where the you choose to focus a topic of interest relating to religion in the current Middle East and discuss it in relation to one or several theoretical perspectives covered during the course. During the process, there will be opportunities for individual tuition. Individual essays will be presented at the final seminar of the course, where you also offer oral feedback on another student’s essay and submit the talking points for your feedback in the form of bullet points.

**March 4 – 8, 11 – 12: opportunity for individual tuition on appointment**

**Submission 3, March 13 (12.00): Individual essay**

**Class 14, March 15: Assignment 4, Seminar presentation of individual essay and discussion of another student’s essay (+ submission of talking points)**