ISLA 603 Research Materials in Islamic Studies
FALL 2021
328 Morrice Hall
Fridays, 2.35-4.25

Instructor: Prashant Keshavmurthy
Email: prashant.keshavmurthy@mcgill.ca
Office hours for seminar’s participants:
Zoom TH 4-5:00 pm or by appointment

Objectives
This course is an introduction to research methods in Islamic Studies. The seminar introduces students to current conceptual and methodological questions in the multiple fields that make Islamic Studies and presents them with imitable models of research practice. Students will learn to orient themselves in Islamic Studies’ multiverse territory, placing scholarship in perspective, reflecting on methods, and practicing some research formats (debates, book reviews, gists, annotated bibliographies, research proposals).

Course Description
Islamic Studies is a composite academic field, made up of research that spans times, places, methods and objects of research. The assumed notion that scholars in this field study topics that can be termed “Islamic” from drastically different disciplinary perspectives demonstrates the impossibility of a comprehensive “survey” approach and complicates matters rather than offering orientation.

Taking this complexity as constitutive, the course will approach the multiverse archipelago of Islamic Studies by considering some of the conceptual operations that undergird its practices. Dominating processes of valuation, these operations delineate a fragmented and
yet resilient landscape of research and academic debate inflected by a post-orientalist sensibility, an attention to language/s and archives, specific articulations of time and place, and an overarching concern for the political dimension of scholarship. These, the course argues, are the constitutive matters of Islamic Studies.

The seminar will introduce you to Islamic Studies in two ways. You will:

1. **Learn about recent trends in Islamic Studies.** We will read recent books and essays that highlight current debates in different subfields. The books and essays selected stand out for their innovative approaches and interconnected, transregional, intersectional accounts. (course activities: readings, book reviews, discussion).

2. **Develop your research.** We will work together to turn your enthusiasm for research into the academic formats required to pursue it. Formulate a research question, relate your project to existing scholarship, elaborate a method of analysis, show the relevance of your contribution. (course activities: locate your research in the field, establish a bibliography, write a research statement).
Seminar’s format

In-person teaching

Fixed Activities: One hour and 50 minutes weekly live seminar discussion from 2.35-4.25 on Friday.

Course Materials

Required books are available on the shelves at Paragraph Bookstore (just opposite McGill's Roddick Gates) or can be purchased online at https://paragraphbooks.com/collections/textbooks under the link for ISLA 603. All the other essays and chapters are accessible electronically via MyCourses at the links below (or soon to be added below).

Readings

Course Activities

This is a summary of all seminar activities, with indicated % in case activity is graded. In the weekly schedule of readings overarching questions for segments of the syllabus are in violet.
On MyCourses you will find chapters and essays listed below. These chapters and essays will also be available at the links below (or soon to be added below).

Participation grade is built into some of the assignments below.

**Discussing (10%)**: Verbalizing and thus socializing your relationship to what you read is essential to graduate life. 10% of your final grade will depend on how responsive you are in classroom conversation to the assigned reading for the week and on the quality of your response. This is not to seek proof that you have read it as the assumption will be that you have, but to get a sense of your understanding of the text at hand and your willingness to develop that understanding through conversation.

**Reading (20%)**: Reading is a fundamental component of graduate study. Building research skills means that you need to familiarize yourself with works that make up the scholarly field in which your MA/PhD thesis will intervene. You will elaborate and exchange bibliographies with other participants. You are strongly encouraged to read as much as possible during this course and to work beyond the materials required for the course.

- Read required books throughout semester
- Suggest a book review relevant to your field
  - Sept 20
- What is my favourite journal/publication
  - Sept 30
- Two Book Reviews of the two required books i.e. Kia & Mitchell (10% each)
  - 20% Oct. 15; Oct. 29.
**Writing (70 %):** One of the main activities of the seminar is to work with you to develop your research topic by familiarizing you with the formats required to present your project. These activities are designed to help you in the process via a step by step approach to composing a research statement. You will start with an initial statement and rewrite it and revise it until the end of the semester, each time deepening and specifying your topic, the scholarship you refer to, your approach/method, the significance of the work and the audience (field, discipline) you aim to address.

- **Develop a research statement** through these steps (worth 70% in total):

  1. Initial research and field statement.  1.5% Sept. 17.
  2. Who am I writing to/for? (what is my field) 1.5% Sept. 24.
  3. Write your research question in one sentence 3 % Oct. 1.
  4. Developed Research statement +10 books 5% Oct. 15.
  5. Your Approach/Method 10 % Oct. 22.
  6. Revised statement +10 books 10% Oct. 29.
  7. Annotated bibliography 10-15 works 15% Nov.12.
  8. Final research statement 25% Dec. 3.
Weekly Schedule

Certains assignments (especially research statement and the annotated bibliography) require continuous and sustained work through the semester. Make sure to devote time to each of them every week. Overarching questions for segments of this schedule appear in violet.

**Week One: September 10: Introduction: What is Islamic Studies?**

- What is Islamic Studies? Please read Setrag Manoukian, “Ordinary Matters in Islamic Studies: Notes from the Field”.
- Course Presentation
- Discuss Islamic Studies (what am I doing here?).
- Q & A about class format and activities

**Week Two: September 17: Postorientalism 1**

- Postorientalism
- Rewriting Islamic Cosmogonies

**• Rewriting Islamic cosmogonies:**


• Bring to class an initial research statement of one-and-a-half to two double-spaced pages length, prepared to present and discuss it.

**Week Three: September 24: Postorientalism 2**

- Postorientalism 2

• What is my favourite journal/publication?

• Who am I writing for? What is my field?


• **QUESTION 1**: What is your relationship to a hegemonic scholarly voice or position in your field? Come to class having thought over how you might assess and intervene in a hegemonic scholarly voice or position in your field. This hegemonic voice could be a 19th-20th century Orientalist or simply a salient scholar or scholarly position.

• Library session with Anaïs Salomon, Director of the Islamic Studies Library McGill, from 3.25 to 4.25 in the Islamic Studies Library.

**Week Four: October 1: Language Matters**


- Email me a bibliography of 10 books relevant to your research topic and field.

- **QUESTION 2**: What is the relevance of language in your work? Come to class with verbal responses to this question.

**Week Five: Oct 8: The Archive and Theory 1**


- Write your research question in one sentence and present it in class.

**Week Six: October 15: The Archive and Theory 2**

- Developing an archive
- How to write a book review


- Developed research statement + 10 books due by email.

- Book reviews due of *Persianate Selves*.

- **QUESTION 3**: What are the categories that organize your archive?
**Week Seven: October 22: Times/Spaces 1**

- What are the times and spaces of Islamic Studies?

  • Presentation of Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 from Timothy Mitchell. *Carbon Democracy: Politics in the Age of Oil*.

  • Statements (2 double-spaced pages long) due on your approach/method.

**Week Eight: October 29: Times/Spaces 2**

- What are the times and spaces of Islamic Studies?

  • Presentation of Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 & Conclusion from *Carbon Democracy*.

  • Book reviews due of *Carbon Democracy*.

  • Revised research statement +10 books due by email.

  • **QUESTION 4**: What are the spaces and times of your research?

**Week Nine: November 5: Islam Translated 1**

- How Translation Theory approaches to material history and art history can complicate political history and the history of ideas.


**Week Ten: November 12: Islam Translated 2**
- How literary networks can mediate Arabicization and Islamization.


• Annotated Bibliography due by email.

• QUESTION 5: What is the relevance of translation taken in all of the above senses to your project?

**Week Eleven: November 19: Islamic Visuality 1**

- How theological commitments, scientific practice and picture-making can qualify each other across Islamic and non-Islamic contexts.


**Week Twelve: November 26: Islamic Visuality 2**

- How to explicate implicit knowledge from an artistic practice that has no written theory.


• QUESTION 6: What is the place of materiality and technology in your project?

**Week Thirteen: December 3**
• Final discussion.

• Final Research Statement due by email on December 3.

McGill University Statements

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Academic Integrity
McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l’honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity).

Language
In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue)

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Inclusive Learning Environment
As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment.
However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the *Office for Students with Disabilities*, 514-398-6009.