

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

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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

1. Essays/chapters by al-Azmeh, Salvatore, Neuwirth, Saleh, Rahemtulla, Geissinger, Flood, Belting, Minissale, Ricci.
2. Mana Kia. *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism*. Stanford UP, 2020. We will read all of this book.
3. Timothy Mitchell. *Carbon Democracy: Politics in the Age of Oil*. Verso 2011. We will read all of this book.

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 0 %
Sept 20
- What is my favourite journal/publication 0 %
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

Certain assignments (especially research statement and the annotated bibliography) require *continuous and sustained work throughout 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:

1) Chapter 1: “Late antiquity and Islam” from Al-‘Az̤meh ‘Az̤iz. *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity : Allah and His People*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.

<https://www-cambridge-org.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/core/books/emergence-of-islam-in-late-antiquity/late-antiquity-and-islam/EE81767904ABF188E2811C2E09427F4E>

2) Chapter 2: “Brotherhood as Matrix of Civility” from Salvatore, Armando. *The Sociology of Islam : Knowledge, Power and Civility*. 1. version, 1st ed., Wiley, 2016.

<https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/doi/10.1002/9781118662601.ch2>

- 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 ?
- “Introduction” and Walid Saleh, “The Etymological Fallacy and Qur’anic Studies” (pp 649-698) from Neuwirth, Angelika, et al. *The Qur’ān in Context : Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’ānic Milieu*. Brill, 2010.
<https://brill-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/view/title/11399>
- **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

- 1) “Introduction” and Chapter 2 (“Theology on the Margins”) from Rahemtulla, Shadaab. *Qur'an of the Oppressed : Liberation Theology and Gender Justice in Islam*. Oxford University Press, 2017.
<https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198796480.001.0001/acprof-9780198796480-chapter-1>

2) Introduction (pp. 1-29) to *The Classical Genre of Qur'an Commentary, Exegetical Authority and Gender* from Geissinger, Aisha. *Gender and Muslim Construction of Exegetical Authority : A Rereading of the Classical Genre of Qur'an Commentary*. Brill, 2015.

<https://brill-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/view/title/15735>

- 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

- Presentation of “Introduction” and “Part 1” of Kia, Mana. *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism*. Stanford University Press, 2020.

- 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

- Part 2 of Kia, Mana. *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism*. Stanford University Press, 2020.

- 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.
- “Introduction” & Chapter 2 (“Cultural Cross-Dressing”) from Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval “Hindu-Muslim” Encounter* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

Week Ten: November 12: Islam Translated 2

- How literary networks can mediate Arabicization and Islamization.

- “Introduction” & “Part 1: Translation” (i.e. chapters 2, 3, 4, 5) from Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

- 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.

- “Introduction” & Chapter 2 (“The Taming of the Eye: Criticism of Seeing in Islam”) from Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad : Renaissance Art and Arab Science* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

Week Twelve: November 26: Islamic Visuality 2

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

Gregory Minissale, *Images of Thought: Visuality in Islamic India, 1550-1750* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006), “Introduction” & Chapter 1 (“Reading Anti-Illusionism”).

- **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).

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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.

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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.