

# ANTH 141A — Islamic Movements

Instructor: Pascal Menoret (pmenoret@brandeis.edu)

Office: Lemberg 227

Class hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5-6:20pm

Classroom: Brown 224

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4pm-5pm

**Course Description:** In this class you will learn about Islamic movements from an anthropological perspective. You will read about field research conducted on some of today's most visible yet mysterious political movements. You will study the emergence of powerful social movements claiming Islam as a motto and a program, and analyze Islamist politics, from peaceful activism to armed action.

During the semester, you will read two books informed by ethnographic fieldwork and anthropological theory, François Burgat's *Islamism in the Shadow of al-Qaeda* and Faisal Devji's *Terrorist in Search of Humanity*. You will not be passive learners: you will contribute to the material at hand by choosing a few research topics and presenting your findings to the class at the end of the semester. Along the way, you will learn how anthropology can be a potent tool to deconstruct received wisdoms and create solid knowledge about complex contemporary issues.

**Learning goals:** In this course you will learn:

- about the interplay between orientalism, colonialism, and anti-colonial and anti-imperial resistance;
- about the relationship between Islamism, liberalism, and democracy;
- about the main Islamist movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood and the various Salafi groups;
- about the complex relationships between Islamism and feminism;
- about fieldwork methods used to study Islamists;
- about the role of urban spaces in the rise of Islamism;
- about radicalization and terrorism, victimization, martyrdom, and the notion of "just war".

## **Course plan:**

### Week 1 – Good Muslim, Bad Muslim

January 11 Introduction

January 16 Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (Doubleday 2004), Introduction and Chapter 1, p. 3-62.

### Week 2 – The Right to “Speak Muslim”

January 23 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Penguin 1977), I-I and I-II, p. 31-73.

François Burgat, “Double Extradition: What Edward Said has to tell us 30 years on from Orientalism,” *Review of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2009, 43-1, p. 11-17.

January 25 François Burgat, *Islamism in the Shadow of Al-Qaeda* (University of Texas Press 2008), Introduction and Chapters 1-2, p. 1-54.

François Burgat and Linda Jones, Interview with Sheikh Hamid al-Nayfar, *Middle East Report*, 153, 1998, p. 23-26 and 50.

### Week 3 – Islamism and the Public Sphere

- January 30 Talal Asad, “The Limits of Religious Criticism in the Middle East: Notes on Islamic Public Argument,” *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Johns Hopkins University Press 1993), chapter 6, p. 200-236.
- February 1 Saba Mahmood, “Ethical Formation and Politics of Individual Autonomy in Contemporary Egypt,” *Social Research*, 70-3, 2003, p. 837-866.

### Week 4 – Islamism and Feminism

- February 6 Saba Mahmood, “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 2001, 16-2, p. 202-236.
- February 8 Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, “Feminism, the Taliban, and Politics of Counter-Insurgency,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 2002, 75-2, p. 339-354.

### Week 5 – Islamism in the Arabian Peninsula

- February 13 François Burgat, *Islamism in the Shadow of Al-Qaeda*, Chapters 4-5, p. 65-87.
- February 15 Pascal Menoret, “The Suburbanization of Islamic Activism in Saudi Arabia,” *City and Society*, 29-1, 2017, p. 162-186.  
Pascal Menoret, *Graveyard of Clerics* (unpublished book manuscript), Chapter 5: “Awakening Suburbia.”

### Week 6 – Studying Radicalization

- February 27 François Burgat, *Islamism in the Shadow of Al-Qaeda*, Chapters 6-7, p. 89-120.  
Adam Hanieh, “A Brief History of ISIS,” *Jacobin*, December 2015.
- March 1 Scott Atran, “ISIS is a Revolution,” *Aeon*, December 15, 2015.  
Scott Atran, Robert Axelrod, Richard Davis, Baruch Fischhoff, “Challenges in Researching Terrorism from the Field,” *Science*, 355-6323, January 27, 2017, p. 352-354.  
Aysha Navest, Martijn de Koning and Annelies Moors, “Chatting About Marriage with Female Migrants to Syria,” *Anthropology Today*, 32-3, 2016, p. 22-25.

### Week 7 – Terror and Humanitarianism

- March 6 Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics* (Columbia University Press, 2008), Preface and Chapter 1, p. viii-x and 1-23.
- March 8 Engseng Ho, “Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat,” *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, 46-2, 2004, p. 210-246.

#### Week 8 – Victimhood and Sacrifice

- March 13 Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity*, Chapter 2, p. 25-56.  
March 15 Faisal Devji, “The Paradox of Non-Violence,” *Public Culture*, 23-2, 2011, p. 269-274.

#### Week 9 – Terrorism and Direct Action

- March 20 Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity*, Chapter 3, p. 57-96.  
March 22 James Gelvin, “Al-Qaeda and Anarchism: A Historian’s Reply to Terrorology,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20, 2008, p. 563-581.

#### Week 10 – Toward the Caliphate

- March 27 Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity*, Chapter 4, p. 97-135.  
March 30 Irfan Ahmad, “Genealogy of the Islamic State: Reflections on Maududi’s Political Thought and Islamism,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropology Institute*, 2009, p. 145-162.

#### Week 11 – Just Wars

- April 10 Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity*, Chapter 5, p. 137-164.  
April 12 Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge University Press 2007), chapter 5, p. 175-210

#### Week 12 – Presentations

- April 17 Oral presentations.  
April 19 Oral presentations.

#### Week 13 – Presentations

- April 24 Oral presentations.  
April 26 Oral presentations.

#### **Evaluation:**

##### Attendance and participation: 20%

You are expected to attend all classes, to read all the week’s texts in advance, to think about them carefully, and to participate actively in classroom discussions. After two unexcused absences you’ll have to document your absences. (Documentation includes a note from a physician or from the Brandeis health center.)

You must complete all assigned coursework to pass the course. It is your responsibility to submit all assignments before the due date by email. No extension will be granted. Work not turned in, or turned in after the due date without a documented explanation will be downgraded (one grade level by day, from A to A- to B+, etc.).

The following is a list of the written assignments. A full description of each assignment will be handed out during the semester. All page lengths are for double-spaced text, Times New Roman, size 12. Please email your assignments to me. No hard copy is needed.

##### Weekly reflection: 20%

Every week you will write a short reflection on the week's readings. Write about what intrigued you, interested you or shocked you most in the texts. Any length between a few lines and one page — the shorter the better. Assignment due every Monday at midnight.

First assignment: 20%

In no more than three pages, you will write the biography of an important Islamic activist, dead or living, based on all the sources you can find (primary, secondary, written, visual, audio, etc.). Assignment due on February 8 before class.

Second assignment: 20%

In no more than four pages, you will write a brief history of an important Islamist movement. You will discuss the birth of the movement, its main figures, its political action, and its influence on other political formations. Assignment due on March 15 before class.

Third assignment: 20%

In no more than eight pages, you will analyze one aspect of Islamism that particularly struck you as noteworthy. You will choose your topic in consultation with me, and you will come to my office to discuss the direction of your research. Assignment due on April 30.

Oral presentation: ungraded

You will present your final paper and get feedback from your classmates and myself. Presentation will be 10 min. long, followed by a 5 min. Q&A. Presentations will take place on April 17, 19, 24, and 26.

**No electronic devices:** Studies have shown that we perform better, as thinkers and writers, with pen and paper than when offered the possibility to check our Twitter and Facebook feeds. No use of laptops, tablets, or cellphones is allowed in class. Have doubts? Read this: <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom>.

**Disabilities:** If you are a student with a documented disability and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.

**Academic integrity:** Academic integrity is the acknowledgment of what we owe to other writers and researchers. Plagiarism is the non-acknowledgment of our sources and ranges from improperly quoting to paraphrasing to copying an author without admitting it. Plagiarism will not be tolerated, and all cases will be submitted to the university. For more information on academic integrity at Brandeis University, see: <https://lts.brandeis.edu/courses/instruction/academic-integrity/index.html>.

**Statement of time required:** Success in this 4-credit course is based on the assumption that you will spend a weekly average of 9 hours of time outside of class in preparing and completing course assignments.

**Course material:** You will purchase Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics* (Columbia University Press, 2008). All other readings are available on Latte.