Course description

Charity and poverty are universal aspects of human societies, culturally specific and historically contingent. Charitable giving is also a fundamental aspect of Muslim belief and practice. As a result, the study of charity affords a unique prism through which to examine the histories of Islamic societies and to view them in comparison with each other and with other societies and cultures.

Until the late 1990s, charity in Islamic societies was written about largely as a timeless aspect of Islam and not a contingent historical phenomenon. Moreover, most research with an historical approach addressed issues connected to the tenets of faith and religious practice, and to the institution of waqf, Islamic endowments, as shaped by Islamic law. Crucially, waqfs were interpreted to have been a negative force in 19th- & 20th-century history of the Middle East and other Muslim majority countries, blocking the modernization of property relations, and preventing improvements and investments in agriculture.

Since the 1990s, research on Islamic charity has changed gears and directions. On the one hand, this turn emerged from greater academic interest in social and cultural history, humanitarianism, welfare and philanthropy within Islamic and Middle Eastern studies. On the other, the shift resulted from the globalization of Islam and the global visibility of Muslims; increases in funding to Islamic charities worldwide, deriving significantly from oil wealth; the increased visibility of Islamic charities as national endeavors became global; and the discourse connecting Islamic charity to the funding of terrorism, especially after September 11, 2001 and global responses to the attacks. The study of charity has also become increasingly salient in recent years with the professionalization of philanthropy.

As a result, the study of charity affords a unique prism through which to examine the history of Islamic societies and through which to view them in comparison with other societies and cultures.

The course will be attractive to anyone interested in the Middle East, in Islam, or in the complexities of philanthropic giving, in the past and present alike. It is framed for undergraduates but graduate students are welcome and appropriate adjustments can can be made for them to the syllabus and requirements.

Class discussions will be based on readings of sources, academic analysis and popular writings, including texts that present religious beliefs and practices, as well as secular attitudes toward giving.

Learning Goals

- To introduce students to a lexicon of terms and general ideas for understanding charity and giving, in general and specifically related to charity in Islamic societies.
- To define and explore a range of charitable practices associated with Muslim faith and societies.
- To map the ways in which charity and poverty are and are not linked.
- To understand how all of the above are shaped by specific and contingent historical situations.
- To promote continuing development in reading, writing and speaking.
- To nurture critical thinking and expression.
- To enjoy the adventure and labor of learning!
Prerequisites: none

Course requirements & Evaluation method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance, regular preparation &amp; participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four (4) response papers</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Class attendance**
  Attendance is mandatory and will be recorded for each class. More than two unexcused absences will earn a reduction of your final grade at the rate of ½ grade for every two additional unexcused absences. In order for an absence to be recorded as “excused”, you must notify me and get my approval in advance. Beyond this, only documented emergencies will be approved as “excused.”

- **Participation 20%**
  - Classes will comprise a mixture of lecture and discussion based on sources, research literature, and popular writings, in order to strengthen critical reading and discussion skills. Students are expected to prepare for each class and participate actively.
  - You are expected to prepare for class by doing the reading and thinking about the suggested discussion questions for each reading.
  - In addition, you are required to upload at least one question to our Latte site before the beginning of each class meeting. These can be on any aspect of the reading that is unclear, on the connection between this reading and any previous assignments, or on connections you’re making between the readings and class discussions, material from other classes or stories in the popular press.
  - There are no “dumb questions,” but good questions require some thought and structure.

- **Four response papers 40%**
  You will be asked to write four short response papers based on prompts related to the readings. Each will count for 10% of your final grade.

- **Final paper 40% (2500 - 3000 words)**
  Your final paper will study in depth a specific question related to Islamic charity. It should include references to original sources. You must consult with and get prior approval from Prof. Singer for your choice of topic, the question you choose to answer, your bibliography and preliminary outline. Guidelines for paperwriting will be distributed during the semester.

- **Grading:**
  - All assignments must be submitted in order to pass the course.
  - You must receive a passing grade for each of the three course components in order to pass the course.

- **Extensions**
  No extensions will be granted on any of the assignments. Rather than spend time thinking of excuses or growling about the course demands, please skip to working on the assignment.
**Course Materials**
You will find the course materials either in the library, available online through the library, or on LATTE.

**Credit Hours**
Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of nine (9) hours of study time per week preparing for class. This includes readings, preparing for discussion, any necessary research, writing, and study for exams.

**Academic Integrity**
You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please consult Brandeis University Rights and Responsibilities for all policies and procedures related to academic integrity. Students may be required to submit to Turnitin.com software to verify originality. Allegations of academic dishonesty will be forwarded to the Director of Academic Integrity. Sanctions for academic dishonesty can include failing grades and/or suspension from the university. Citation and research assistance can be found at LTS – Library guides.

In this class, any act of plagiarism for any reason will earn an automatic F for the assignment and will be reported. Two such instances in a semester will earn an automatic F for the course.

**Communications**
We will use the LATTE system and email in order to communicate, including specific notifications and any out-of-class discussions about the material.

**University Statement on Documented Disability**
Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs accommodations as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you.

In order to provide test accommodations, I need the letter more than 48 hours in advance. I want to provide your accommodations, but cannot do so retroactively. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781.736.3470 or access@brandeis.edu.

**Computers and other devices in class**
Computers will be allowed if you choose to carry the readings in electronic form, since I expect you to have the readings with you for reference during our discussions. I expect you to take notes by hand.

No phones and no recording (on any device) will be allowed. Any visual materials I bring to class will be made available to you on LATTE.

If you have a documented learning issue for which you require a device, please come to discuss this with me at the beginning of the semester during my office hours or make an appointment. I’d like to ensure that you are comfortable taking this course.
COURSE PLAN

Week #1 (Jan. 14 & 16, 2020): Introductions

- Introduction to the Topic
  - What is charity? What is poverty? What is Islam
  - Issues in the study of each
  - Course plan: topics, materials, requirements
  - Basic vocabulary
  - First source to read together: Suras from the Qur’an, *hadith*

- *Zakat* – obligatory giving: a basic point of reference in Islamic charity
  - Giving as an act of faith
  - Maintaining the community

- Readings*

*Note on the weekly lists of readings: Some of these readings will be required, some will be optional. This will be clearly specified in prior postings to you through Latte. The balance of required/optional and the choices will depend in part on the directions of class interests as these become clearer during the semester.

Week #2 (Jan. 21 & 23, 2020): *Zakat* (continued)/ and *Sadaqa* – Voluntary Giving

- Topics for discussion
  - *sadaqa* – voluntary giving
  - *maslaha* – community welfare/benefit
  - *waqf* – endowments – a legal framework for redirecting revenues as charitable giving

- Readings


---

**Week #3 (Jan. 28 & 30, 2020): Waqf: enduring and transformed**

- **Topics for discussion**
  - Urban development
  - Production of culture
  - Public kitchens – Feeding people, feeding power
  - Fiscal relations

- **Readings**
  - Kozlowski, G. C. 1995. Imperial Authority, Benefactions and Endowments (Awqāf) in Mughal India. *JESHO. Special Issue on Waqfs and Other Institutions of Religious/Philanthropic Endowment in Comparative Perspective* 38:355–70.

---

**Class #4 (Feb. 4 & 6, 2020): Charitable giving in other religions**

- **Topics for discussion**
  - Charity compared: forms, goals, motivations
  - Endowments compared: Judaism, Byzantine Christianity

- **Readings - Judaism**


- Readings - Christianity

- Readings – Faiths beyond Western monotheism

Week #5 (Feb. 11 & 13, 2020): Poverty
- Topics for discussion
  - What is poverty? Who is poor?
  - Deserving and undeserving poor
  - Connections between poverty and charity
- Readings


Midterm recess, Feb. 17-21, 2020

**Week #6 (Feb. 25 & 27, 2020): Secular Ideas about Philanthropy**

- **Topics for discussion**
  - What is money for?
  - Giving well
  - Altruism

- **Readings**

**Week #7 (Mar. 3 & 5, 2020): Premodern to Modern – State Initiatives and Welfare**

- **Topics for discussion**
  - Philanthropy replaces charity?
  - Scientific philanthropy
  - Institutionalization of welfare

- **Readings**
Week #8 (Mar 10 & 12, 2020): Humanitarianism and International Aid

- Topics for discussion
  - A new form of charity?
  - The birth of the Red Crescent Society
  - Cross and Crescent but secular?

- Readings

Week #9 (Mar. 17 & 19, 2020): The Public Sphere and Civil Society

- Topics for discussion
  - Are the “public sphere” and “civil society” new institutions or new names for older social structures and practices?
  - What is the relationship of the public sphere and civil society with the state?

- Readings
Week #10 (Mar. 24 & 26, 2020): Muslim giving in Muslim minority communities

- **Topics for discussion**
  - As members of a religious minority, do Muslims give differently in places like the U.S. and the U.K.?
  - How do national laws affect minority institutions and practices?

- **Readings**
  - UK Charity Commission website www.gov.uk/government/organi  sations-charity-commission

Week #11 (Mar. 31 & Apr. 1, 2020): Topic to be decided with students according to how their interests develop during the semester

- **Topics for discussion**
- **Readings**

Week #12 = Tues., April 7, 2020 = Brandeis Thursday (i.e. class as usual): Pious Neo-Liberalism

- **Topics for discussion**
  - Global trends in economic thinking and their impact on attitudes to giving

- **Readings**
April 8 – April 16, 2020 = Passover & Spring recess

Week #13 (Apr. 21 & 23, 2020): Fortifying Charity, Demonizing Charity

- **Topics for discussion**
  - Worldwide and more than in the past, Islamic charity has not been a unchallenged practice nor one viewed neutrally during the past two decades. How do debates about Islamic charity bring to the surface a variety of broader issues and conflicts inherent in charitable giving?
  - Doing good well
  - The World Congress of Muslim Philanthropists
  - Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
  - Clean money? Dirty money?

- **Readings**

Week #14 (Apr. 28, 2020): Concluding discussion

- **Topics for discussion**
  - How have your perceptions of charity and poverty changed over the course of the semester?

- **Readings**: on charity and giving from the popular press & media

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

**General questions to guide all your reading: a basic checklist**

1. Who is the author: origin, education, field of research, other publication(s)?
2. When was the article or book published and where? Are there different editions?
3. What is the topic of the article/chapter?
4. What is the question that the author is trying to answer about this topic?
5. What is the main thesis or claim of the author about the topic (the answer to the question)?
6. What is the structure of the discussion and how does it add/detract from the author’s work?
7. What are the author’s sources?
8. What is the author’s method?
9. Does the author draw inspiration from any other specific theory? How does this affect the article?

10. Is the author obviously engaged in a discussion with any previous scholarship on the subject?

11. How does the author use footnotes/references in this article?

12. What other rhetorical devices does the author use?

Basic references on Islam – helpful in filling gaps in basic knowledge – short and to the point

- *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition and/or THREE. Leiden: Brill. Available online through the library. Good for basic information and bibliography, written by scholars and well-documented. Articles may be cited in your research papers.