



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Sectarian separation: Sunnis and Shiis in the modern period - 38170

Last update 05-09-2023

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: Islamic & Middle East Stud.

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: English

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Prof. Simon Wolfgang Fuchs

Coordinator Email: Simonw.Fuchs@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Monday, 15-17

Teaching Staff:

Prof Simon Fuchs

Course/Module description:

What caused the widespread sectarian enmity between Sunnis and Shi'is in the modern period? Why have efforts at ecumenism in the 20th century failed? How is all of this connected to politics and internal changes within the Shi'i community?

Course/Module aims:

Learn about the complicated relationship of Sunnis and Shi'is in the modern period and identify periods of contestation and reconciliation. Gain skills in academic writing, reading, and analyzing primary and secondary sources.

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

- *Describe the major fault lines between Shi'is and Sunnis historically and in the contemporary period*
- *Outline the transformation of Shi'i religious authority since the 19th century*
- *Appraise the importance of scholarly Shi'i networks*
- *Debate the consequences of the Iranian Revolution on sectarian conflicts*
- *Investigate current trends of sectarian harmony and conflict*
- *Determine the relationship between political factors and doctrinal differences in feeding sectarian conflict*

Attendance requirements(%):

100

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: Discussions, group-work, analysis of primary sources

Course/Module Content:

In our day and age conflicts between Sunnis and Shi'is have become commonplace in the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and beyond. It is hard to imagine, then, that there was a time when the rector of al-Azhar University in Cairo would issue a fatwa granting Muslims the liberty to change their affiliation to any of the four Sunni schools of law plus the Shi'i school of law. Yet, this is precisely what happened in 1959, when Mahmud Shaltut in fact declared Sunni and Shi'i law to be almost identical (or rather as different as widely accepted internal Sunni variances). What made this high point of Islamic ecumenism possible? What has happened

since then? Which roles can be assigned to the Iranian Revolution, anti-Shi'i propaganda originating in Saudi Arabia, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, respectively? In this course we will also pay close attention to the internal changes in Shi'i Islam since the 19th century. What does it mean to be a "Grand Ayatollah" and which networks can leading Shi'i clerics rely on? Is this form of authority exclusively male? How do forms of Shi'i piety differ between Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi-Arabia, and Pakistan? What sparked sectarian conflict in the modern period and how can we make sense of its political dimensions? Which efforts were made to once again reunite Sunnis and Shi'is? What were the consequences of Arab spring?

Required Reading:

Sample list of required readings (full details on Moodle):
Toby Matthiesen, *The Caliph and the Imam. The Making of Sunnism and Shiism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023)
Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The 'Ulama' of Najaf and Karbala* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism. Law, Shi'ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010)
Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the Twentieth Century. The Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint* (Brill: Leiden, 2004).
Elvire Corboz, *Guardians of Shi'ism. Sacred Authority and Transnational Family Networks* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)
Raihan Ismail, *Saudi Clerics and Shi'a Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)
Lara Deeb und Mona Harb, *Leisurely Islam. Negotiating Geography and Morality in Shi'ite South Beirut* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013)
Mirjam Künkler und Roja Fazaeli, „The Lives of Two Mujtahidāt: Female Religious Authority in Twentieth-Century Iran,” in Mirjam Künkler und Devin Stewart (ed.), *Female Religious Authority in Shi'i Islam: Past and Present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 271-297
Fonar Haddad, *Understanding 'Sectarianism': Sunni-Shi'a Relation in the Modern Arab World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)

Additional Reading Material:

A full syllabus with required readings and supplementary readings will be distributed in class and will also be made available on Moodle.

Grading Scheme:

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 70 %
Active Participation / Team Assignment 15 %
Mid-terms exams 15 %

Additional information:

Please note that regular attendance is mandatory. Absences will result in a deduction from your grade. If a student accumulates more than three absences (excluding reserve duty and exceptional circumstances supported by documentation), they will be required to discontinue the course. Students are expected to come to the sessions prepared for discussion, having read the assigned material at home. Preparedness for the sessions is accompanied by short writing assignments before each class, which are mandatory (ungraded). The course cannot be completed without submitting these assignments on time.