

Jihad in Islamic Tradition
REL300
Fall 2012
Draft Syllabus

Instructor: Danielle Widmann Abraham
Office: Cleveland 305
Office Hours: Tu/Th 9:30-11:00am, or by appt. via email
Class Meeting: Tu/Th. 11:00am-12:15pm
Department phone: 8-6394

How can we respond to religious terrorism while supporting religious pluralism? Since the events of 9/11, the violent actions of people who are committed to *jihad* have transformed American society and global politics. Because the perpetrators followed Islam, many people in the United States now fear all Muslims, and as the concern with security increases, so too does the climate of 'Islamophobia' – the dread of Islam and the subsequent dislike of Muslims. But the effects of this religious terrorism reach around the world, and have profoundly changed everyday life in other countries, too. If we can see how other societies have also been damaged by *jihad*, then that opens up not just new questions but also new, and broader, possibilities for collective action. If *jihad* is both a local and global problem, then it demands both local and global solutions.

This course prepares you to define your own contribution to the collective response to terrorism in our religiously plural world by providing you with two crucial resources: historical knowledge and space for critical reflection. Throughout the semester, we will examine *jihad* as it is debated and sanctioned throughout Islamic history. *Jihad* means 'struggle' and we will look at how that encompasses both violent, militaristic conflict and also the inner, spiritual struggle of an individual to follow God, and how Muslims have interpreted this dual tradition in diverse historical and cultural contexts. This will enable us to better understand how we got here, and how we might begin to deconstruct the power of fear in our present moment. Regardless of our personal religious backgrounds, this history affects all of us, and our classroom community gives us a structure in which we can begin to think about what is at stake for us when we respond to violence as citizens of a religiously diverse country.

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- explain the emergence of jihad within Islamic tradition
- describe the unique characteristics of the two primary forms of jihad and the relationship between them
- delineate the effects of jihad on social movements
- compare the constraints on religious violence in different periods of history
- evaluate modern jihad in light of the project of democracy
- appreciate the impact of jihad on both societies where Muslims are a minority and Muslim-majority societies
- explore your own personal opinions regarding religious violence and pluralism
- apply your analysis of the effect of jihad in response to current events



After suspecting that his neighbors are terrorists, Homer Simpson throws them a “Pardon My Intolerance” party. (episode “Mypods and Broomsticks”, 2008)

taqdirat/assessment

In Arabic, the word for assessment is *taqdir*, which also means estimation, appreciation, respect, rating, appraisal. Learning is a journey, one that involves effort. In this course, we will be drawing on concepts from the Islamic tradition to help us mark the very effort and journey of studying it.

majhud/work (as in, homework)

Every week, you will be given a short assignment, no more than one (1) page, to help you analyze the reading and prepare for class. This course is built on the expectation that students want to be active learners, and keeping up with the reading empowers you to take full advantage of class discussions and lectures. Note that the word ‘majhud’, like the word ‘jihad’, comes from the same root j-h-d , which means to endeavor, to strive, to labor, to put out effort. Consistent effort keeps you on track. That said, most students juggle multiple strivings, and will be allowed to drop two weekly majhuds. All of your majhuds must be posted to Blackboard by midnight Monday, prior to our first weekly class meeting on Tuesday morning. You must also bring a hardcopy of your majhud with you to class. (15%)

maqam/stations

In Islamic mysticism, the long path toward union with the divine is marked by recognizable experiences that are conceptualized as ‘stations’ – places in which the progress of soul can be recognized and reoriented to the path ahead. This notion of maqam is a useful way of keeping track of our own progress throughout the semester. Our course material is divided into four (4) units: the emergence of dual notions of jihad; jihad and ‘holy war’; jihad and modernity; and contemporary jihad and the question of pluralism. At the end of each unit, students will have an opportunity to reflect on and integrate the material in a maqam exercise consisting of a short essay or classroom activity. Each of your maqam should be submitted via Blackboard and in-class as a hardcopy. (30%)

majlis/assembly

An assembly gathers around a common interest, and in Islamic cultures a majlis is a group that sits together for a particular purpose, either political (for a council meeting) or devotional (for a ritual). This means the kinds of speech used in a majlis can be either persuasive or poetic – or both. Your participation in class is vital not just to your own learning, but to that of your colleagues as well. Language is power, and by participating in

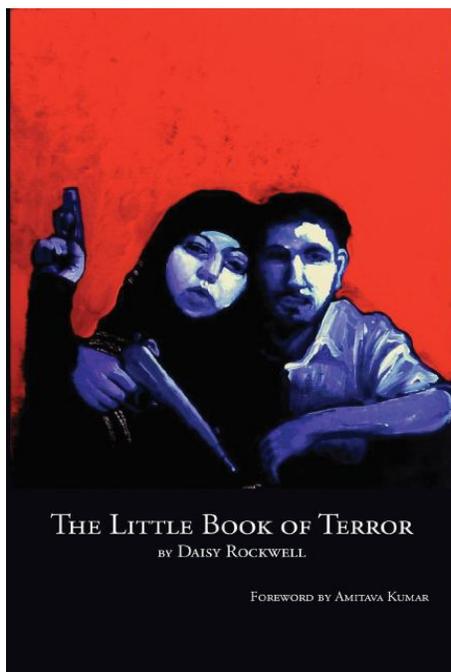
class conversation, you practice excavating the words you need the most. We also play a role in drawing them out of others. Conversation really satisfies, and given that some of what we will talk about is new, and some it will be difficult, the engaged presence of every individual student in our majlis matters. (15%)

qul/voice, assert, maintain, advocate, stand up for

The Arabic root-word qul means to say or to tell. But it means more than just communicating. It has to do with the way in which we use words to relate our commitments to other people, to make what we value part of our relationships. In this course, your qul assignment requires you to integrate what you have learned about jihad in your response to current national events. For this assignment, you will analyze the case of the NYPD surveillance of Muslim citizens and student groups and write a 6-7 page response to be submitted as an 'opinion' piece to a local Virginia newspaper. Your qul will analyze this issue in terms of religious pluralism in the U.S. The prompt, including relevant case material and grading parameters, and will be distributed in class two weeks prior. (25%)

dhikr/remembrance

Your final assignment in this course entails reflecting on and narrating your learning in the form of a portfolio. Your learning portfolio will be a dhikr, a remembrance, in two senses: it should gather together those sources, insights, questions, and ideas from your path through the course that stand out most sharply; a remembrance of the past. And it should also frame those elements of your learning that you hope to take with you into your future journeys; a remembrance as a token of memory that you carry with you as you move ahead. Learning portfolio guidelines will be distributed in class and will be due on our assigned final exam day. (15%)



Daisy Rockwell, granddaughter of iconic American painter Normal Rockwell, re-paints images from the propaganda of the Global War On Terror in her new book of essays.