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Reconsidering Islamic Reformism - Comparative Perspectives

July 5-16, 2004

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Abstract

Islamic Reformism is the name normally given to modernist trends in Islamic thought and practice. The purpose of the course is methodologically to invigorate and historically to enrich the study of Islamic Reformism. Not least in light of more recent developments in Muslim and non-Muslim countries, including the development of scholarship, it is felt necessary both to reconsider the origins of Islamic reformism proper, including its intra-regional and intra-national dimensions, and to rethink its general conceptual configuration. This will facilitate the suggestion of theoretical approaches that would open up the phenomenon for broader understanding in its religious dimensions, especially when compared with other religious reformist currents, and in regard to its historical and ideological relationship with secularisation and secular movements. Muslim reformism is not generically specific: it has important areas of comparison with reformist currents in other religions, and finds its bearings, like them, in a variety of social, political, cultural and historical settings out of which it arises. This comparative and analytical aspect is very important, and will form an integral part of the summer schools' orientation

The phenomenon Islamic Reformism appeared in the late nineteenth century, in India, Turkey, Iran, Indonesia and the Arab World (mainly Egypt, Greater Syria and Tunisia). It aimed, in the first place, at the reinterpretation of Muslim canonical texts and practices along lines that were seen to conform with the imperatives of modernity, most saliently the reinterpretation of the Koran and Hadith in historical and allegorical terms, and of legal and social practices associated with Islam in light of irresistible social, political and legal transformations. Though the reformist current was paramount, in Muslim societies, at least in Turkey and in the Arab World until recently, and was supported by modern states as the official form of the Muslim religion, it has in recent years become marginalised, not least in the representations of the mass media local as well as international, outflanked by radical forms of political Islamism. Under the influence of such movements, and out of wariness towards them, it has tended in many instances to deny its indebtedness to modernity, or at the very least adopt a highly apologetic stance. Present circumstances make it imperative that scholarly and public attention be once again turned to this current in modern Islam. This is the main rationale of the course.

Target audience and course design

The target audience envisaged is some 15-20 doctoral students specialising in this subject, future doctoral students intending to pursue research in this domain, and persons who have recently completed doctoral work in this particular field. It is intended that this group of persons pool

together their methodological skills, their historical investigations, and their knowledge of the primary sources, with the help of the faculty.

It is also envisaged that the course will be organised around workshops that discuss the work of the participants, work in progress or recently accomplished, discussion groups that deal with some fundamental primary texts and modern commentaries, and lectures by members of the faculty that take up the historical, analytical and comparative dimensions of the topic, to be followed by discussion. As the comparative dimension is at once social, historical, cultural and conceptual that encompasses not only Muslim societies but also other phenomena of religious reform (Protestantism, Hindu modernism, and Buddhist modernism), it is envisaged that material on these dimensions will be available for study and discussion, and will form part of the lectures delivered by faculty.

Course syllabus

Thematic Sessions/ Working groups

Plenary sessions

1. Session: Defining *Reformism*
2. Session: Defining *Modernity, Modernization, and Secularism*
3. Session: Defining *Tradition*

Working groups, followed by plenary discussion:

4. Session: Decadence and Progress in Reformist Discourse
5. Session: Canon and History
6. Session: Religion, Social Reform and Political Power
7. Session: Traditionalization & The Formation of the Individual Subject
8. Session: Hierarchy and Obedience

Lectures:

- A. Reception and consequences of the theme – opening lecture (Arjomand)
- B. On the Distinction between Fundamentalism and Reformism (Al-Azmeh)
- C. Secularism and Religious Responses in Europe and the Middle East (Waardenborough)
- D. The Book and the Text (Abu Zaid)
- E. Canon and Censorship (Al-Bagdadi)
- F. Guest lecture: Max Weber and reformism from a sociological perspective (to be nominated)
- G. Indian Islam: Reform and response to the secular state (Hasan)
- H. (to be determined)

Course specific application requirement

If available, applicants may like to send a copy of an article published in one of the major European languages or in Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, Farsi or Turkish, if available.

Tentative Time Table/Schedule

1. Week

Times	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9.00–11.00	Opening Session: Welcoming of Participants and Introduction	SESSION 1 Defining <i>Reformism</i>	SESSION 2 Defining <i>Modernity, Modernisation, and Secularism</i>	SESSION 3 Defining <i>Tradition</i>	SESSION 4 Decadence And Progress In Reformist Discourse (work in groups)
11.00–11.30	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break
11.30–13.00	Opening Lecture A	Lecture B	Lecture C	Lecture D	Cont. Session 4: Plenary meeting
13.00–14.30	Lunch break	Lunch break	Lunch break	Lunch break	Lunch break
14.30–17.00 (with coffee break)	Working groups: Discussions on thesis Meeting I	Working groups: Discussions on thesis Meeting II	Individual research	Working groups: Discussions on thesis Meeting III	Individual research

2. Week

Times	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9.00–11.00	SESSION 5 Canon And History (work in groups)	SESSION 6 Religion, Social Reform And Political Power (Plenary session only)	SESSION 7 Traditionalization & The Formation Of The Individual Subject (work in groups)	SESSION 8 Hierarchy And Obedience (work in groups)	Concluding discussions and further perspectives
11.00–11.30	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break	
11.30–13.00	Lecture E	Lecture F	Lecture G	Lecture H	
13.00–14.30	Lunch break	Lunch break	Lunch break	Lunch break	Lunch
14.30–17.00 (with coffee break)	Working groups: Discussions on thesis Meeting III	Individual research	Plenary session	Plenary session	

For more detailed biographies, updated course description, syllabus, reading lists please check <http://www.ceu.hu/sun/index.html>

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