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Photo credits
The cover photo, “Blue Mosque,” was taken by Alexandra Cox in Istanbul, Turkey, as part of the Stanford Global Studies student photo contest.

Above: Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Photo by azhrjl on Unsplash.
Dear Friends,

It was with great pleasure that I had the opportunity to direct the Abbasi program this past academic year. I take over from Professor Shahzad Bashir, who deserves special recognition for his outstanding leadership and dedication to Islamic studies at Stanford and beyond. At his initiative, the Abbasi program created two postdoctoral fellowships in Islamic studies for this past academic year. It has been a privilege to host Alaina Morgan and Halil Ibrahim Yenigun, who have become important interlocutors on campus through their mentorship of students and sharing of their research projects. You can read their profiles on pages 10 – 11.

This year, the Abbasi program convened multiple searches for new Stanford faculty in Islamic studies. I am delighted to report that we will be welcoming talented new faculty members to Stanford starting in 2018-2019. We will be joined by Dr. Denise Gill, an ethnomusicologist and accomplished kanun player and Dr. Samer Al-Saber, a scholar of Palestinian theater and a theater director. We are deeply grateful to Dean Richard Saller and Professor Jeremy Weinstein, Director of Stanford Global Studies, for their support of Islamic studies at Stanford.

Serving on the search committees gave me a window into the richness and dynamism in Islamic studies today. I see this reflected in the engagement and vibrancy of our intellectual community at our conferences, lectures, seminars and events. In 2017-18, the program helped organize and co-sponsor over 40 events with scholars, novelists, writers, and filmmakers on a diverse set of topics including public opinion in the Arab world, the experience of Muslims in France, and transsexuality in Iran. There continues to be tremendous energy and interest among students in the arts, history, and politics of Muslim societies. Through student grants, the program supported many excellent student summer research and language study projects in the U.S. and abroad (pages 8 – 9).

We look forward to your participation and contribution to another exciting year at the Abbasi program.

Sincerely,

Lisa Blaydes

Lisa Blaydes
Director of the Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies, Professor of Political Science, and Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies
Samer Al-Saber is Assistant Professor of Theater and Performance Studies at Stanford University. The areas of his scholarly interests include Middle Eastern culture, theater, and performance; the modern history of East Jerusalem; Palestinian Theater; Arab Theater; and the performance culture in the Roman Middle East. His teaching, practice, and scholarship focus on the intersection of cultural production and political conflict in the Middle East.

Denise Gill is Assistant Professor of Music at Stanford University. She is an ethnomusicologist and sound studies scholar specializing in contemporary Turkey who endeavors to develop new methodologies for critical listening. Dr. Gill’s current ethnographic fieldwork considers distinct listening structures attuned to the sounds of death, loss, and migratory thresholds.

Saad Gulzar is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Stanford University. He uses field experiments and data from government programs to study the determinants of politician and bureaucratic effort toward citizen welfare. His research interests lie in the political economy of development and comparative politics, with a regional focus on South Asia.


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EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Muslims of France

The Abbasi program hosted a screening of *Muslims of France*, a three-part documentary created for French television by Karim Miské. Miské is a French-Mauritanian filmmaker and novelist who visited Stanford in the winter quarter as the Aron Rodrigue International Visitor at the Stanford Humanities Center. He was nominated for the fellowship by the Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies and the Center to Support Excellence in Teaching (CSET) in the Graduate School of Education. It is taught by Stanford scholars of Islam and facilitated by CSET pedagogy experts. The goal of the course is to provide educators with a critical background on the histories, concepts, and practices of Muslims around the world to help them expand their students’ understanding of Islam.

The Institute is designed around a wide-ranging set of topics starting with key concepts in the faith and practice of Islam. In 2017, the course included sessions on politics and immigration as well as Islam, arts and gender. The 2018 Institute, which was themed "Muslim Intersectionalities," included sessions that focused on race and Islam in America and Islam and women.

Institute on Islam

The Institute on Islam is a course for middle- and high-school instructors as well as community college educators that is offered by the Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies and the Center to Support Excellence in Teaching (CSET) in the Graduate School of Education. It is taught by Stanford scholars of Islam and facilitated by CSET pedagogy experts. The goal of the course is to provide educators with a critical background on the histories, concepts, and practices of Muslims around the world to help them expand their students’ understanding of Islam.

The enthusiasm of the teachers in the program was phenomenal and I was happy to learn from them about the challenges they face in teaching of Islam at their institutions, and the models they use to combat the stereotypes. For instance, I learned that the students have become more informed about gender and sexuality compared to a decade ago. The teachers hope that a similar positive change will occur through education with regards to the understanding of Islam.

I am a firm believer in the Institute on Islam and really hope the collaboration continues in future years and attracts more teachers from around the country. While the program is immensely important in providing a broader view of topics relating to Islam, the current socio-political climate adds yet another sense of urgency. The fact that our interlocutors are educators who cultivate future generations to have a better grasp of the shifting cultures of such a large population and provide them with tools to critique everyday stereotypes is not to be overlooked. Furthermore, in my opinion, this was a successful example of bridging the gaps between academia and the community.”

Ahoo Najafian is the Ira T. Wender Postdoctoral Scholar in Middle East Studies at Carleton College. She completed her Ph.D. in religious studies at Stanford in 2018.
EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

What Ever Happened to the Arab Spring?
October 4, 2017
Steven Cook

The White Helmets
October 31, 2017
Raed Al Saleh, Khaled Khatib

Difficult Hospitality: Transsexuality in Iran
November 2, 2017
Ahow Najafian

The Economics of Religious Communities: Social Integration, Discrimination and Radicalization
November 6, 2017
Jean-Paul Carvalho

Face/Interface: Type Design and Human-Computer Interaction Beyond the Western World
December 2, 2017

We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria
February 7, 2018
Wendy Pearlman

Pious Legal Activism: Islam, the State and the Family
February 14, 2018
Jean-Michel Landry

Tunisia: An Arab Anomaly
February 28, 2018
Safwan Masri

The “Protestant” Impulse in Modern Islamic Thought
March 7, 2018
Teena Purohit

New Authoritarianism and Democratic Resistance: Reflections on Turkey
April 5, 2018
Halil Ibrahim Yenigun, Yektan Turkyilmaz, Eda Erdener, Sinan Birdal

Public Opinion in the Arab World
April 6, 2018
Amaney Jamal, Mark Tessler, Michael Robbins
STUDENT UPDATES

The Abbasi program awarded grants to 22 students pursuing their summer research, fieldwork, language study or internship placements over the summers of 2017 and 2018.

Isabelle Carpenter
Middlebury summer language school (Mills College), Arabic

Naz Gocek
Social Science Research Council, Brooklyn, NY

Chelsea Burris
Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, DC

Gulin Ustubas
Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, DC

Parsa Nowruzi
Indiana University (Bloomington, IN), Kurdish

Nesrine Mbarek
U.S. Institute for Peace, Washington, DC

Soraya Fereydooni
Historical research into mental health knowledge in literature from Islamic Golden Age

Alexandra Blackman
Project to survey candidates in the 2018 Tunisian municipal elections

Salma Mousa
Fieldwork in Egypt on national crises and social cohesion

Alexandria Brown-Hedjazi
Fieldwork in Zaragoza, Spain, on medieval Islamic architecture

Parsa Nowruzi
Indiana University (Bloomington, IN), Kurdish

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Alexandria Brown-Hedjazi
Fieldwork in Zaragoza, Spain, on medieval Islamic architecture
Morgan Tufan
Archival research in London and Istanbul on sovereignty and autonomy in Kurdish border lands

Eilaf Osman
Humor and resilience in Syrian refugee camps in Czech Republic and Hungary

Basma Fahoum
Ottoman Turkish

Nathan Hausman
Fieldwork on Palestinian diaspora in Kuwait

Mashail Malik
Survey project in Karachi, Pakistan, on state favoritism and discrimination

Daniel Muise
Data collection on social media usage in Yangon, Myanmar

Kerem Ussakli
Jordan, Arabic

Scott Williamson
Jordan, Arabic

Chun-Yu Wang
Ethnographic and archival research in Malaysia

Ala’ Alrababa’h
Field research on autocratic power with Syrian and Iraqi diaspora and refugee populations in Jordan and Lebanon

Andrew Fitzgerald
Jordan, Arabic

Morgan Tufan
Archival research in London and Istanbul on sovereignty and autonomy in Kurdish border lands

Eilaf Osman
Humor and resilience in Syrian refugee camps in Czech Republic and Hungary

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Ethnographic and archival research in Malaysia

Ala’ Alrababa’h
Field research on autocratic power with Syrian and Iraqi diaspora and refugee populations in Jordan and Lebanon

Andrew Fitzgerald
Jordan, Arabic
Halil Ibrahim Yenigun is a comparative political theorist who specializes in Muslim political theory. He left Turkey in 2016 amidst a government crackdown on dissenting academics. Yenigun is currently a visiting postdoctoral scholar at the Abbasi program.

Tell us about your background and where you are from.

I earned my Ph.D. in political theory at the University of Virginia in 2013, and then returned to Turkey and took a job at Istanbul Commerce University. There was a massive boom in the higher education sector in the 2000s and the country seemed to be on the right track. That was one of the reasons why I went back: to contribute to the intellectual and scientific life in Turkey, to be a part of the betterment of the society and education.

You lost your job in Istanbul in 2016. What happened?

In January 2016, I signed a petition that was organized by a group of my friends and colleagues named “Academics for Peace.” The petition called for an end to the horrifying massacres of civilians occurring in the Kurdish urban areas at the time and proposed a return to a peace process, stating that we would volunteer as mediators.

Not even an hour after the petition was publicly released, I was called into the president’s office at my university and questioned me about my motives for signing the petition and whether I had signed it knowingly and willingly. A few days later I received a letter from the university stating that I was suspended. The chair of the university’s board of trustees openly attacked me in a mainstream newspaper, calling me a “colonial academic.” By that time there were dozens of dismissals of my colleagues, home raids by the police, and threats from local mobs.

One weekend, I was targeted in a major newspaper by a columnist famous for smearing public figures. I was sacked the next day and denied my legally required severance package.

What did you do next?

In July 2016, I was in the U.S. for academic talks and conferences, and my bags were packed for Istanbul. The coup attempt happened and a state of emergency was declared. The first targets were the officially declared perpetrators of the coup attempt—Gülenists. Travel bans were being issued to academics and passports were being revoked. It was the “and they came for us” moment.

Those couple of weeks in limbo will remain quite memorable for the rest of my life. I decided not to return to Turkey. I spent a year in Berlin as a postdoc where I witnessed the exodus of friends, colleagues, and activists, who had a lot of dramatic stories. Then, I was fortunate to receive a two-year, postdoctoral fellowship offer from the Abbasi program.

Why do you think democracy has failed in Turkey?

That is a quite complex conundrum. At heart, it’s the traditional political problem of the concentration of power and establishment of a one-man regime. The 2010 referendum, which saw the effective abolishment of the separation of powers, was a turning point. The resentment that had built-up against the old Kemalist state elites among the conservative masses, especially the suppressive secularism that did not even let women wear the hijab in the public sphere, did not help matters much. Erdogan fed on those deep-rooted fears among the conservative masses of a Kemalist comeback.

A lot of scholars and observers were suspicious that Erdogan was not a real democrat, but trusted Turkey’s institutions and 150-year experience with constitutionalism. And, when Erdogan said something that betrayed his non-democratic tendencies, liberals close to him offered reassurances that he did not really mean it, or it was not so important, given all the right reforms he was doing. But the Turkish people have, with painful experience, realized that words do indeed matter when politicians utter them, and nobody should ever downplay them or count only on the institutions to save democracy.

How has this experience shaped your thinking and current work?

Over the years my interests have branched out to new subfields beyond my primary field in Muslim political theory. For instance, in Turkey, I wrote and spoke a lot on Islamism and on the Arab Spring. I’ve also engaged with and spoken much more about Turkey’s democratic breakdown, the Kurdish issue, and peace activism in recent years. I am taking the opportunity here at Stanford to get back to my primary research interests. I taught a course on contemporary Muslim political thought in the spring of 2018, and I am now working on my book project.
What inspired you to study the history of Islam in the African Diaspora?

I grew up in a nominally Catholic family, and was forced to perform all of the rites even though I expressed a disinterest in doing so. My father always joked that I became interested in religion in order to be able to reason myself out of having to go to Catholic afterschool education. That was probably partially true, but I was fascinated by what people got out of religious affiliation. What did they decide to practice and why? In college, I kept studying religion, and then 9/11 happened. I had lived in New York my entire life so that impacted me very hard and very personally. Regardless, I recognized that the narrative being told about Islam in America was narrow at best and simply untrue at worst. After college, I decided to go to law school and then spent five years practicing corporate law before I realized that I needed to make a change. In 2011, I was accepted as a Ph.D. student into NYU’s history department where I began to combine all of my interests in racial identity formation, religious belonging, political activism, and specifically, Islam in America. The rest is… well, as we historians say, history.

What is your current research focus at Stanford?

My research currently focuses on anti-colonial and anti-imperial political activism by Muslims of African descent in the contemporary Atlantic world. More specifically, my research focuses on the ways that Muslims of African descent formed transnational communities centering anti-colonialism and Islam as key components in the global struggle for Black liberation. I argue that these forms of colonialism took place over 50 years (1955-2005), over two continents (North America & Europe), and that as the nature of colonialism and imperialism changed, so did the ways that these Muslims understood their relationship to each other, to the nations of which they were citizens, and their strategies to obtain liberation from racial, social, and economic oppression.

What courses are you teaching at Stanford?

The first course, Islam in America, is designed to introduce students to the experience and legacy of Muslims in America from the 19th century to the present. What I want is for students to recognize is that the experience, beliefs, and practices of Muslims in America (or elsewhere) are not monolithic, but instead are adaptive and syncretic. And also, that the history of Muslims in America spans hundreds of years and is part of the religious fabric of our nation. Muslims are in no way foreign to the Americas, they have been a vibrant and essential part of its religious and political life.

The second course, Islam, Race and Revolution: A Pan-American Perspective, introduces students to the ways that Islam and race together have been used by Muslims throughout the Americas as a basis for political action. I want to introduce students to the ways that Islam has been used by Muslims politically, in terms of Black Power, the Civil Rights movement, Third World solidarity movements, etc., in order to break apart this notion of political Islam as an irrefutable evil.

What are you hoping to accomplish through your research & teaching?

First, I am trying to promote an understanding of how religion and political discourse have been used together to effect Black liberation. Second, I am trying to make a critical intervention in the field of intellectual history. Too often, both Black people and Muslims are discounted when considering the intellectual contributions that they have made to the world. For hundreds of years, historians have studied the genealogies of thinkers from France and England about people of African descent and Muslims without considering how those people have thought of themselves. I want to emphasize the genealogy of both Black and Muslim intellectual production. Third, I want to highlight the things that oppressed people have done for themselves to combat their own oppression.

When most students come to me, they have had no training on the history of Islam in America. There’s so much misinformation about the topic circulating today that it is critical for students to have a basic understanding of the history of Islam in America to combat these hateful and harmful narratives.

Why is it important to study Islam/Muslim societies?

I think that the answer to this question lies in the need to ask this question in and of itself. I am not sure that we, as scholars of Western institutions, would ever need to ask these questions about Christianity or Judaism. Islam as a religion and as a guiding cultural principle has had a remarkable place in forming the world we live in today. And I think part of the misunderstanding of Islam, that it is barbarian or violent, are stereotypes meant to detract from the beauty that Muslims have given to the world and the advances that Muslim societies have contributed. I think that the value of studying Islam and Muslim societies today is critical to the project of promoting inter-religious tolerance and reducing racially and religiously motivated violence.
**State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein**  
Princeton University Press, 2018  
By Lisa Blaydes, Director of the Abbasi Program, Professor of Political Science  
Drawing on archival material captured from the headquarters of Saddam Hussein's ruling Ba'th Party in the wake of the 2003 U.S. invasion, Blaydes illuminates the complexities of political life in Iraq, including why certain Iraqis chose to collaborate with the regime while others worked to undermine it.

**Melancholic Modalities: Affect, Islam, and Turkish Classical Musicians**  
Oxford University Press, 2017  
By Denise Gill, Assistant Professor of Music  
Today, teachers and performers of Turkish classical music intentionally cultivate melancholies, despite these affects being typically dismissed as remnants of the Ottoman Empire. Melancholic Modalities is the first in-depth historical and ethnographic study of the practices socialized by musicians who enthusiastically teach and perform a present-day genre substantially rooted in the musics of the Ottoman court and elite Mevlevi Sufi lodges.

**Muslims in a Post-9/11 America: A Survey of Attitudes and Beliefs and Their Implications for U.S. National Security Policy**  
University of Michigan Press, 2018  
By Rachel Gillum, Postdoctoral Fellow, Immigration Policy Lab  
Muslims in a Post-9/11 America examines how public fears about Muslims in the United States compare with the reality of American Muslims’ attitudes on a range of relevant issues. While most research on Muslim Americans focuses on Arab Muslims, a quarter of the Muslim American population, Gillum includes perspectives of Muslims from various ethnic and national communities.

**Language between God and the Poets: Ma‘na in the Eleventh Century**  
University of California Press, 2018  
By Alexander Key, Assistant Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature  
In the Arabic eleventh-century, scholars were intensely preoccupied with the way that language generated truth and beauty. Key argues that ar-Raghib al-Isfahani, Ibn Furak, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani shared a conceptual vocabulary based on the words ma‘na and haqiqah that they used to build theories of language, mind, and reality.

**A Future in Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage, and the Dream of Peace**  
Oxford University Press, 2018  
By Lynn Meskell, Professor of Anthropology  
In 1945, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was founded as an intergovernmental agency aimed at fostering peace, humanitarianism, and intercultural understanding. However, its mission to combat conflict, destruction, and intolerance, increasingly falls short as recent, much-publicized conflicts have underlined.

**Aural Architecture in Byzantium: Music, Acoustics and Ritual**  
Routledge, 2017  
By Bissera Pencheva, Professor of Art and Art History  
Emerging from the challenge to reconstruct sonic and spatial experiences of the deep past, this multidisciplinary collection of ten essays explores the intersection of liturgy, acoustics, and art in the churches of Constantinople, Jerusalem, Rome and Armenia, and reflects on the role digital technology can play in recreating aspects of the sensually rich performance of the divine word.
Exhibits

**Recommended by Zack Al-Witri, Associate Director of the Abbasi Program**

**New Work: Etel Adnan**

_SFMOMA, September 1, 2018 – January 6, 2019_

Born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1925, visual artist, poet, and essayist Etel Adnan writes what must be communicated through language, and paints what cannot. While her earliest paintings favored pure abstraction, she is perhaps best known for her landscape works inspired by her long obsession with Mount Tamalpais. **New Work: Etel Adnan** presents new paintings and tapestries in SFMOMA’s first presentation of the artist’s work.

**Contemporary Muslim Fashions**

_de Young Museum, September 22, 2018 – January 6, 2019_

Contemporary Muslim Fashions is the first major museum exhibition to explore the complex, diverse nature of Muslim dress codes worldwide. The exhibition examines how Muslim women — those who cover their heads and those who do not — have become arbiters of style within and beyond their communities, and in so doing have drawn mass media attention to contemporary Muslim life.

Books

**Recommended by Ali Yaycioglu, Associate Professor of History**

*Islam without Europe*

The University of North Carolina Press, 2018
By Ahmad Dallal

**Recommended by Alexander Key, Assistant Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature**

*The World in a Book: Al-Nuwayri and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition*

Princeton University Press, 2018
By Elias Muhanna

**Recommended by Aziza Shanazarova, Visiting Student Researcher at Stanford University**

*Women in Mongol Iran*

Edinburgh University Press, 2017
By Bruno De Nicola

**Recommended by Halil Ibrahim Yenigun, Visiting Postdoctoral Scholar at the Abbasi Program**

*Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash That Shaped the Middle East*

Princeton University Press, 2018
By Fawaz A. Greges

Recommended by Kabir Tambar, Assistant Professor of Anthropology

*For Love of the Prophet: An Ethnography of Sudan’s Islamic State*

By Noah Salomon

**Recommended by Lisa Blaydes, Director of the Abbasi Program, Professor of Political Science**

*Frankenstein in Baghdad: A Novel*

Penguin Books, 2018
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*Impossible Revolution: Making Sense of the Syrian Tragedy*

Haymarket Books, 2017
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Upcoming Event

TRANS;FORM: COMPARATIVE LITERATURE WITH PERSIAN, ARABIC, TURKISH, HEBREW, URDU.

Emily Apter
Saqer A. Almarri / Burcu Karahan / Alexander Key / Faris A. Khan / Chana Kronfeld / Jeannie Miller / Shoshana Olidort / Veli N. Yashin

29+30 November 2018
trans-form.stanford.edu

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New Courses from the Abbasi Program for the 2018-2019 Academic Year

Fall 2018
- Islam in America (RELIGST 135)
- Women and Islam (GLOBAL 138)
- Islam and the Western Imagination (FRENCH 247)

Winter 2019
- History of Philosophy from Al-Kindi to Averroes (PHIL 101A)

Spring 2019
- Contemporary Muslim Political Thought (GLOBAL 136)

Interested in the Global Studies minor specialization in Islamic studies? Visit our website to find out more.
We at the Abbasi program express our gratitude to our alumni, parents, students, and friends for their support of our activities at Stanford.

Your gift enhances genuine understanding of the histories, cultures, and languages of Islam and Muslim societies by:

- Equipping the next generation of leaders with rigorous knowledge through courses, seminars, and research or internship opportunities.
- Supporting innovative faculty research and scholarship.
- Deepening our public and K-12 outreach efforts.

Your generosity ensures that knowledge of Islam and Muslim societies is an integral part of the future of America and the globe. For more information, please review islamicstudies.stanford.edu/give/giving or contact Scott Sugiura, Associate Director of Development, at ssugiura@stanford.edu or (650) 723 1208.