

**SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL
DISSERTATION PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT FELLOWSHIP
SPRING 2008 WORKSHOP AGENDA**

MUSLIM MODERNITIES

<https://workspace.ssrc.org/dpdf/muslimmodernities>

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**Crown Plaza Hotel St Louis Downtown, Conference Room #304
Wednesday May 28- Sunday June 1, 2008**

This is the first of two workshops designed to help students prepare cogent and fundable dissertation proposals in their chosen field. The two goals of the first workshop are 1) to map the research field with respect to contributing disciplines, methods, sources, and area knowledge; and 2) to help prepare fellows for their pre-dissertation summer research. (The goal of the second workshop will be to focus on the mechanics and methods of writing a dissertation proposal). The two goals stand in close relation to each other: through a sustained and structured discussion of student proposals and their component parts, we hope to contribute to the mapping of the research field itself.

The field of “Muslim Modernities” refers to the interdisciplinary body of work that has emerged over the past generation to examine how various Islamic heritages are extruded, redefined, or invented through modern processes. Increasingly, the study of Muslim communities has contributed to a re-thinking of the West’s monopolistic claims to modernity. Instead of measuring modernization as the adoption of Western institutions and norms, these studies have explored the development of alternative forms of modernity. These alternative forms are modern in three potentially distinct ways: their proponents claim that they are modern; they are recent, not found in “tradition,” though sometimes imposed retroactively on tradition; and they exhibit characteristics frequently associated with Western modernity, such as universalism, rationalization, and reflexivity. The study of Muslim modernities provides a counterpoint to analyses that view contemporary Muslim societies through the prism of premodern recrudescences.

Our workshop participants form a wonderfully diverse, though necessarily incomplete, representation of the multiple disciplinary homes and geographic foci within the field of Muslim modernities, including departments throughout the humanities and social sciences and field research spanning approximately 18 time zones. The juxtaposition of these different approaches during our workshop is intended to provide outsiders’ perspectives on each student’s particular topic. At the same time, we have tried to cluster students into groups of four that share a thematic concern (we apologize that some of these clusters are more natural fits than others), for more intensive break-out discussions.

The primary goal of this workshop is assistance in the preparation of dissertation proposals. Just as important, perhaps, is the additional goal of creating long-term collegial relationships that will deepen our individual and collective understanding of Muslim modernities.

Workshop Readings and Resources

Research Field resources will be placed on the relevant Workspace websites. Students will receive separate explanations and detailed instructions about the access and use of the DPDF digital platform.

Workshop Assignments

- **Assignment #1 of 4. Due May 28, 2008: Readings**

Please read the Waldman essay and two books before we meet at our first session:

1. Waldman essay.
2. One book on modernity.
3. One book on Muslim modernities.

- **Assignment #2 of 4. Due on DPDF Workspace site, May 28, 2008: Reading notes**

For each book, please write approximately two-three pages of reading notes (single-spaced) for each book. Reading notes are a way of making sure that you have read a work carefully enough, that you have extracted the main points, and that you will be able to refresh your memory of these points at some point in the future when you will scarcely remember ever having read the book. Reading notes should include (a) the full bibliographic citation of the work, so that you won't have to track this down again later; (b) the main points of the reading, including summaries of each chapter; (c) definitions of major concepts and examples of their use in the text, (d) significant quotations and items that you find interesting; and (e) your reactions/questions/critiques, which should be set aside from the descriptive notes via brackets, bold lettering, or some other technique, so that you will not confuse them with the author's points. Be sure to give page references for every quotation and paraphrase, so that your notes will serve as a personalized index to the work and you will be able to locate these passages in the future. Get in the habit of taking the time after you read anything in your scholarly career to stop and write reading notes. You will read more than you can remember, and reading without remembering is not an efficient use of your precious time.

Please post your reading notes to the Muslim Modernities portion of the SSRC workspace website, so that your colleagues may learn from your readings.

- **Assignment #3 of 4. Due on DPDF Workspace site, May 28, 2008: Research statement**

Please write a 5-8 page research statement that will serve as the starting point for discussions. You already have written much of what should be included in this statement, but we would like you to focus it in the following way. We recommend that you read over the field statement posted on the DPDF website (www.ssrc.org/programs/dpdf). Please create an individual folder in the Muslim Modernities workspace under the heading Fellow Folders, and post this statement and your reading notes in your folder.

1. Begin with the broad research question that you are trying to understand.
2. Then tell all of us why you find this question important. You may talk about real-world importance, place it in the context of a research tradition, or talk about extending work done elsewhere to a new research site.
3. For most of the rest of the statement, we would like you to sketch out your “method” in a very broad sense. Among the questions you will want to address are: What sort of research activities will I carry out? Why these rather than another set? In what way does my research question push me in this methodological direction? Where will I work and why? What kinds of information do I expect to end up with? What will I learn from it? What difficulties might I face?
4. Please pose a question generally not on research proposals: What are the trade-offs in my chosen approach; what do I not learn very much about by approaching the topic in this way?
5. We would like you to consider whether there are a few works in your field that you find exemplary as guides to method, on how to approach studying your topic. (We mean examples of good empirical studies, not manuals!)

- **Assignment #4 of 4. Due May 29, 2008: Introductions**

On the afternoon of Thursday, May 29, each student will introduce another student’s research project in four minutes. We have paired you for introductions as follows, in hopes of generating interesting cross-talk:

Group A:	Pair 1. Abdelrahman/Yuskaev	Pair 2. Parkinson/Sounaye
Group B:	Pair 1. Behrouzan/Zavarella	Pair 2. Camden/Decker
Group C:	Pair 1. Cakir/Hakim	Pair 2. Gedacht/Ray

Please read your partner’s research statement (Assignment #3) in order to tell the group a few things about your partner’s research site(s), questions, and methods – plus one thing that you find particularly intriguing about your partner’s research project. (Feign enthusiasm if necessary.)

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

ARRIVAL, Wednesday, May 28: Reading handouts / packets will be distributed at registration along with other materials.

Wednesday Evening: *Reception, 6-8 pm.*

Session 1: Introduction and Purpose of Workshops

(Thursday, 9 AM – 12:00 PM)

Plenary Session: Presentations by Program Director Peter Sahlins and the Research Directors

Session 2: What Everyone Should Know About Early Islam

(Thursday, 2:00 PM – 5 PM)

2 p.m.-3 p.m.: Introduction of research proposals by partners (see Assignment #4).

3 p.m.-5 p.m.: What everybody who studies contemporary Muslim societies needs to know about early Islam. This session will review the latest scholarship and debates on the emergence of Islam, the expansion of Muslim societies, the legal institutions that emerged to interpret Islamic rights and responsibilities, and the sources on which these interpretations are based. This overview is necessary not because this period determines 20th and 21st century outcomes, but because it forms an intellectual background that most Muslims today share and some of them wish to replicate.

Session 3: Modernities

(Friday, 9 AM – 12:00 PM)

9 a.m.-10:30 a.m.: Definitions of modernity. This session provides a broad framework for analyzing Muslim societies comparatively by examining the most influential theories of modernity from the 17th century to the present, especially the ways in which they define their own modernity through the construction of non-modern “others,” which are frequently Islamic. This session will also review scholarly debates about the relationship of these theories to European colonial and post-colonial interventions in Muslim societies.

10:30 a.m.-12 p.m.: Modernities in practice. Each student will take about four minutes to describe the relationship of “modernity/ies” to their research project, with a focus on two points: Do the people you are studying consider it important to be “modern” (based on your preliminary knowledge of them), and what might they mean by “modern”?

Session 4: Theory

(Friday, 2:00 PM – 5 PM)

2 p.m.-4 p.m., break-out into 3 groups of 4 people each (labeled Groups A-C in Assignment #4): What theorists will you be dealing with in your dissertation, and why them and not others?

4 p.m.-5 p.m., Committee of the Whole: Presentation and discussion of three proposals, one each from Groups A-C.

Session 5: Sampling

(Saturday, 9 AM – 12:00 PM)

9 a.m.-11 a.m., Groups A-C: How will you know whether the information that you collect during your field research is representative of the group(s) and process(es) that you wish to discuss in your dissertation?

11 a.m.-12:00 p.m., Committee of the Whole: Presentation and discussion of three more proposals.

Session 6: Documentation

(Saturday, 2:00 PM – 5 PM)

2 p.m.-4 p.m., Groups A-C: What documents will you need to collect during your field research, and how will you place each text in context?

4 p.m.-5 p.m., Committee of the Whole: Presentation and discussion of three more proposals.

Session 7: Politics

(Sunday, 9 AM – 12:30 PM)

9 a.m.-11 a.m., Groups A-C: How will you navigate the inevitable political pressures in the field – both the fieldsite(s) and your disciplinary field(s)?

11 a.m.-12:00 p.m., Committee of the Whole: Presentation and discussion of final three proposals.

12:00 p.m. -12:30 p.m. Final thoughts on the workshop process; suggestions for the fall workshop.