

Iran, Islam, and the Last Great Revolution

Spring 2020

COLGATE UNIVERSITY
SHERVIN MALEKZADEH

OFFICE HOURS: THURSDAY 3:00-6:00
AND BY APPOINTMENT, SPEAR 2

We are not against the process of getting raw materials from [the west]. It should not be assumed that we reject the products of western culture and its scientific advance that are sometimes miraculous. Such dogmatism is not in line with Islamic views at all and we never follow this trend. We should design the building and it is not important where the raw, needed materials are procured. *However, these materials should fit the design.*

President Ali Khamanei, December 25, 1985

The instructor held up an unfurled green condom as she lectured a dozen brides-to-be on details of family planning. But birth control was only one aspect of the class, provided by the government and mandatory for all couples before marriage. The other was about sex, and the message from the state was that women should enjoy themselves as much as men and that men needed to be patient, because women need more time to become aroused. This is not the picture of Iran that filters out across the world, amid images of women draped in the forbidding black chador, or of clerics in turbans...

Michael Slackman, *The New York Times*, "Molding the Ideal Islamic Citizen"

The title and inspiration for this course comes from Robin Wright's book *The Last Great Revolution*. Wright argues that the 1979 Revolution in Iran completes the promise of the Modern Era, "launched in the West" but "adopted by or adapted to all other parts of the world." The overthrow of 2500 years of monarchy "paved the way for using Islam to push for empowerment." It is this empowerment, of nations and of ordinary individuals, that stands as the signal quality of modernity.

Wright's book reformulates for a popular audience what the historian Monica Ringer has described as the "modernization dilemma," the attempt, starting in the 19th Century, of late developing countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Japan to use European institutions as models for modernization, to adopt European technology and know-how, while at the same time guarding against a loss of cultural agency and authenticity. It is an approach that strives to reach a shared destination, the promised land of the future and of progress, as it were, by paths multiple and different paths. Assessing the possibilities, successes, and failures of the experience of "multiple modernities" in Iran and elsewhere will constitute a significant part of the course.

We will also look critically at the value of the destination itself, whether modernity is a benign and righteous force or a temptation to produce havoc. The promise that modernity will lead to the empowerment of autonomous, self-willing, self-conscious, and self-defining individuals is premised on an acceptance of universal equality, of individuals having, in effect, limits on their will and agency, typically enforced by a transformative state. Empowerment and universal equality, the twin "pillars of modernity" as Farzin Vahdat labels them, stand as possible contradictions, concepts in tension with one another. Critically assessing whether they can be reconciled will be one of our major tasks this term.

This term will also see us exploring the balance between the normative and the empirical, between “feelings and facts.” What is the role of virtue, what No. 402 memorably describes as “decency” in *Darkness at Noon*, in a world in which “all that is solid” seems to “melt into air?”

Finally, there is a normative axe that the course seeks to grind, if only to sharpen the blade a little bit. The notion that postrevolutionary Iran offers an alternative path to modernity is hardly conventional wisdom in the United States or Europe, where images of men draped in religious passion and women in forbidding black *chadors* are as common as the belief that the 1979 Revolution set Iran spinning back thirteen centuries in time. If westerners do not view Iran as entirely anti-modern, then at best they see it as a country filled with “paradoxes” and “puzzles,” one in which indie rock bands play underground, figuratively and literally beneath the feet of retrograde religious fanatics, or unveiled women attend all-night parties only to slip back into proper *hejab* the next morning. The class will ask you to consider why these assumptions exist, whether they are the symptoms of a western civilization “clashing” with the east, and if they are exclusive to the United States or Europe. Does there also exist an “orientalism in reverse,” a negative gaze of Iranians towards the west and towards their fellow, “backwards” citizens?

Requirements:

Participation in class, plus discussion outside of class via blogs (20%)

What in class participation means: “Demonstrates good preparation, knows case or reading contents well, has thought through their implications (the ‘so what?’), brings readings to class, annotated with questions and complaints. Is curious, above all skeptical, about the material and the assumptions that undergird its various claims and propositions. Speaks, or writes, fearlessly and in good faith.”

The work of participation includes blog entries (approximately 250 words or one single-spaced page of text) assigned regularly as a directed reading and in reaction to a particular film, reading, or lecture. My intention is to encourage engagement through the written word, fostering discussion and debate in a context that may be more comfortable for some students.

The blogs will be due **at 5 pm on Friday**, followed by a very brief “response-to-a-response” to a classmate’s posting (you can pick whomever you want). Response postings are expected to be respectful of the dignity and efforts of other students, and to provide constructive criticism or praise on the structure, style, and content of the essay. These will be due **at 5 pm on Sunday**.

The best way to produce good words is to slog through the bad ones, to set down a writing routine that will generate inspiration. In this vein, we will be writing consistently, for improvement as well as for assessment.

First Short Essay, 4-5 pages (15%)

Second Short Essay, 4-5 pages (15%)

Presentation and Précis, 5-7 pages (20%)

Research Paper, 15-20 pages (30%)

Final Project

The course ends with our own version of an academic conference (#nerdfest). This is an opportunity to workshop your final research project as well as to practice providing critical feedback and analysis to your fellow classmates.

Here's how it works: Three weeks prior to our final class session you'll circulate a précis of your final paper to the entire class, a first-cut brief of no more than five pages. The précis should include a clear thesis statement and paragraph, followed by a page or two outlining the existing literature on your topic (if any exists) and how your research fits into that body of evidence. You'll then lay out a rudimentary plan of action as well as any questions or challenges facing your project. Try to point to the broader implications of your research, the proverbial "so what?" question (we'll talk more about this piece in class).

Keep in mind that the précis and presentations are expected to be works in progress. The work should be raw but legible, filled with the promise of good and original research! The final project is open-ended but must be cleared with me, **no later than the end of Week Ten**. Your précis is due on **Friday, April 8**.

I can't emphasize enough the excellence of Colgate's Writing and Speaking Center, where peer writing consultants can help you with an essay draft's focus, organization, grammar, style, and citations. All meetings are private, and you may visit at any stage of your writing process, from clarifying your initial ideas to reviewing a final draft. See <http://www.colgate.edu/writingcenter> for more information or to reserve an appointment. The center is located in 208 Lathrop Hall.

Get to know Steve Black, our library liaison for social sciences. Colgate has an outstanding array of resources, not least of which are its research librarians. Seriously. *Get to know Steve!*

Finally: Being a college student is a stressful and highly demanding role (believe me, I've been there). Feeling emotionally depleted, or wondering if you've "got what it takes" to be successful is not a reflection of your abilities as a student, or your abilities to be successful in this class. Colgate admitted you because you deserve to be here. It is not my job as an instructor to evaluate your worthiness as a student, that has already been determined. It is my job to help you grow and be successful as you push forward with your education. Please feel free to reach out to me at any time if you find you are struggling, in this course or at this institution, even if those struggles are not academic in nature. The door is always open.

Readings:

The following texts are available for purchase at the bookstore and will be on reserve at Sawyer. All other readings will be on Glow or distributed in class.

- Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shabs*
- Ali Ansari, *Iran: A Very Short Introduction*
- Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*
- Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870-1940*
- Charles Kurzman, *Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*

- Laura Secor, *Children of Paradise: The Struggle for the Soul of Iran*
- James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*
- Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*
- Adam Seligman, *Modernity's Wager: Authority, the Self, and Transcendence*
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*
- Sadegh Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*
- Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft: The Politics of Islam in Iran*
- Kevan Harris, *A Social Revolution: Politics and the Welfare State in Iran*
- Narges Bajoghli, *Iran Reframed: Anxieties Of Power In The Islamic Republic*

WEEK ONE

The Return to Dignity

Tuesday, January 21

- Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shabs*

Thursday, January 23

- Laura Secor, *Children of Paradise*, pp. xi-21
- Daniel Lerner, "The Grocer and the Chief: A Parable"
- Negar Razavi, "The Systematic Problem of 'Iran Expertise' in Washington" (for your first blog)

Please take a moment to read through Ali Ansari's primer, *Iran: A Very Short Introduction*

Recommended

- Narges Bajoghli, "Suleimani's Death Changes Nothing for Iran"
- Shervin Malekzadeh, "Why This Time the Protests in Iran are Different"

WEEK TWO

We Moderns

Tuesday, January 28

- Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*
- Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, selected chapters

Thursday, January 30

- Monica Ringer, *Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran*, pp. 1-13
- Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, pp. 5-36

Recommended

- Nahid Siamdoust, "Silence Falls on Iran's Protest Movement"

- Shervin Malekzadeh, “Why This Time the Protests in Iran are Different”

WEEK THREE

Negotiating Modernity in Iran

Tuesday, February 4

- Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*, pp. 1-53
- Ringer, “The Quest for the Secret of Strength in Iranian Nineteenth-Century Travel Literature: Rethinking Tradition in the *Safarnameh*”

Thursday, February 6

- Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran’s Intellectual Encounter with Modernity*, pp. xi-xviii, 27-36 on Malkum Khan, 42-49 on Akhunzadeh, 54-61 on Afghani
- Shervin Malekzadeh, “The 1979 Revolution: Unfinished Business in Iran”

First short essay assigned, due February 16.

WEEK FOUR

Nationalism and the Endless Project of Authenticity

Tuesday, February 11

- Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*

Thursday, February 13

- Afshin Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870-1940*, selected chapters
- Shervin Malekzadeh, “What Trump Doesn’t Get About Ideology in Iran. It’s About Nationalism, not Theocracy”
- Partha Chatterjee, “Whose Imagined Community,” in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*
- Ali Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*, pp. 1-35
- Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, Introduction, in *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation*
- Farzin Vejdani, “The Place of Islam in Interwar Iranian Nationalist Historiography,” in *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*
- Kamran Aghaie, “Islam and Nationalist Historiography: Competing Historical Narratives of the Iranian Nation in the Pahlavi Period”
- Aghaie, “Islamic-Iranian Nationalism and Its Implications for the Study of Political Islam and Religious Nationalism,” excerpts

Recommended:

- Michael P. Zirinsky, “A Panacea for the Ills of the Country: American Presbyterian Education in Inter-War Iran”

- Rasmus Christian Elling, “Matters of Authenticity: Nationalism, Islam, and Ethnic Diversity in Iran,” in *Iran: From Theocracy to the Green Movement*

WEEK FIVE

“The City of Nowhere”: When Authenticity is Ignored

Tuesday, February 18

- James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, pp. 1-8, 53-179

Thursday, February 20

- Watch the short clip, “[Motifs of Movement and Modernity](#)”
- Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, pp. 219-248, 312-348
- Alexis de Tocqueville, “Concerning the Philosophical Approach of the Americans” and “Concerning the Principal Source of Beliefs Among Democratic Peoples,” in *Democracy in America*
- Adam Seligman, *Modernity’s Wager: Authority, the Self, and Transcendence*, pp. ix-14

Screening, Ashgar Farhadi, *Jodai-e Nadar az Simin (A Separation)*, **February 23, 8 pm.**

WEEK SIX

Gender, Binaries, and the Matter of Bounded Freedom

Tuesday, February 25

- Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, selected chapters

Thursday, February 27

- Najmabadi, *Professing Selves*, selected chapters
- Shervin Malekzadeh, “It’s Raining Iranian Men, Hallelujah”

Recommended

- Narges Bajoghli, “How Women, the Green Movement and an App Shaped Iran’s Elections”

Screening, Masud Kimiai, *Qeysar (Gheisar)*, **March 1, 8 pm.**

WEEK SEVEN

The *Mashruteh* Movement: Turning Point in History

Tuesday, March 3

- Ali Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*, pp. 179-230
- Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran’s Intellectual Encounter with Modernity*, pp. 61-72

Thursday, March 5

- Nader Sohrabi, “Revolution and State Culture: The Circle of Justice and Constitutionalism in 1906 Iran”

Second short essay assigned, due March 15.

WEEK EIGHT

Modernity’s Wager, Lost?

Tuesday, March 10

- Adam Seligman, *Modernity’s Wager: Authority, the Self, and Transcendence*, pp. ix-14, 24-26, 34-40, 49-52, 72-77, 124-141

Thursday, March 12

- Seligman, *Modernity’s Wager*, continued
- Alexis de Tocqueville, “Concerning the Philosophical Approach of the Americans” and “Concerning the Principal Source of Beliefs Among Democratic Peoples,” in *Democracy in America*

March 14 – March 22, Spring Break!

Please read *The Blind Owl* and *Notes from the Underground* over break.

WEEK NINE

Our Modernity, Our Malaise

Tuesday, March 24

- Sadegh Hedayat, *The Blind Owl*
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*

Thursday, March 26

- Ruhollah Khomeini, “Islamic Government” and “Capitulations,” in *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980)*

Screening of Abbas Kiarostomi, *Nema-ye Nazdik (Close Up)*, Sunday, March 29, 8 pm.

Please clear your final project with me this week!

WEEK TEN

Religious Intellectuals and Islamic Government

Tuesday, March 31

- Ruhollah Khomeini, “Islamic Government” and “Capitulations,” in *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980)*

Thursday, April 2

- Sami Zubaida, “The Ideological Preconditions for Khomeini’s Doctrine of Government,” *Islam, the People, and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*
- Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*, 96-128
- Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran’s Intellectual Encounter with Modernity*, 113-181, 198-217
- Mehrzad Boroujerdi, “Gharbzadegi: The Dominant and Intellectual Discourse of Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Iran”

Recommended

- For a blow-by-blow account of the 1953 coup and its relationship to the current political situation in Iran, see Mark J. Gasiorowski and Malcolm Malcolm Byrne, editors, *Mohammad Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*

Precis due April 8!

WEEK ELEVEN

Beyond the Guarded Domains: Iran in the World

Tuesday, April 7

- Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar, *Religious Statecraft: The Politics of Islam in Iran*

Thursday, April 9

- Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, selected chapters
- Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Kourosch Rahimkhani, “The Office of the Supreme Leader: Epicenter of a Theocracy,” in Daniel Brumberg and Farideh Farhi, editors, *Power and Change: Politics of Contention and Conciliation*

Highly recommended

- Dina Esfandiary and Ariane Tabatabai, *Triple Axis: Iran’s Relations with Russia and China*

WEEK TWELVE

The Legacy and Trauma of the War of Holy Defense

Tuesday, April 14

- Narges Bajoghli, *A Social Revolution: Politics and the Welfare State in Iran*

Thursday, April 16

- Bajoghli, continued
- Orkideh Behrouzan, “The Psycho-Politics of Wellbeing”

WEEK THIRTEEN

A Late Developing Country Like Any Other: The Politics of the Welfare State

Tuesday, April 21

- Kevan Harris, *A Social Revolution: Politics and the Welfare State in Iran*

Thursday, April 23

- Shervin Malekzadeh, “Education as Public Good or Private Resource: Accommodation and Demobilization in Iran’s University System,” in Daniel Brumberg and Farideh Farhi, editors, *Power and Change: Politics of Contention and Conciliation*
- Shervin Malekzadeh, “The New Business of Education in Iran”
- Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi, “From Evangelizing to Modernizing Iranians: The American Presbyterian Mission and its Iranian Students”
- Michael P. Zirinsky, “Render Therefore unto Caesar the Things Which Are Caesar’s: American Presbyterian Educators and Reza Shah”
- Zirinsky, “A Panacea for the Ills of the Country: American Presbyterian Education in Inter-War Iran”
- Shervin Malekzadeh, “How Elections Are Secularizing Iranian Politics”

Recommended

- Shervin Malekzadeh, “How Elections Are Secularizing Iranian Politics”

WEEK FOURTEEN

Our Modernity, Our Malaise

Tuesday, April 28

- Laura Secor, *Children of Paradise*, selected chapters

Thursday, April 30

- Secor, *Children of Paradise*, selected chapters

Presentations

Final paper due on May 12.

