

AMSS 41st ANNUAL CONFERENCE

“Religious Dimensions of Democratization
Processes in Muslim-Majority Nations”

Cosponsored By:
Yale Divinity School
&

Council on Middle East Studies - The MacMillan Center
Yale University, New Haven, CT

Saturday, September 29, 2012

ABSTRACT

“Political Islam and the Egyptian Awakening: Re-Imagining
Political Identity, Media Narratives and the Future of Democracy”

By: Christian L. M. Watkins
(Graduate Student, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT)

Identity, media, and democracy constantly inform each other. The Egyptian Revolution affords a unique opportunity to investigate these interconnections and simultaneously analyze societal perceptions based on news media and scholarship. Political Islam’s ability to mobilize a strong political base has led to the confrontation, even rejection, of secular nationalist narratives fundamental to Egypt’s national identity. Do narratives of political Islam delineate trends uncommon to nationalism? What effect does Islamist political identity place upon the future of Egyptian democracy? How does Islamic political identity challenge scholarship? Political identity is informed by unique cultural circumstances and interpreted by news media. The Egyptian Revolution of January 25, 2011 considerably fanned the flame of the Arab awakening; causing the world’s eyes to be fixed upon Egypt through media and accompanying reports. America is no exception, leaving the American media a powerful agent in public perception. How do assumptions made by the American media affect constructive analysis of state power? Dialogue regarding democracy is pivotal in Egypt’s revolution. What does political Islam and differing definitions of state power mean for the future of democracy in Egypt? How does this reframe conceptions of democracy in scholarship? The Egyptian Awakening re-narrates boundaries of national identity, definitions of state power and democracy that challenge and expand the impact of political Islam. Thorough investigation of the Egyptian Revolution illuminates cultural perceptions that potentially expand beyond Egypt’s boundaries which have future implications regarding the Arab awakening.