

MESAAS Courses Spring 2025

COLLOQUIUM ON MAJOR TEXTS

AHUM UN1399

Professor Sarah bin Tyeer: Monday: 10:10 AM-12:00 PM

Professor Wael Hallaq Tuesday: 4:10-6:00 PM

Readings in translation and discussion of texts of Middle Eastern and Indian origin. Readings may include the Quran, Islamic philosophy, Sufi poetry, the Upanishads, Buddhist sutras, the Bhagavad Gita, Indian epics and drama, and Gandhi's Autobiography.

INTRODUCTION TO SOUTH ASIA

MDES UN1630, Professor Jonathan Peterson

Monday/Wednesday: 1:10 AM-2:25 PM

This course introduces students to South Asia through an analysis of the heterogeneity, richness, and complexity of the region's conflicted pasts. Our historical scope is vast and ambitious, starting with the earliest urban settlements in about 2000BCE and ending in the present. Though focused on "South Asia," the course problematizes the bounded areal model by emphasizing the region's enduring connections to Eurasia, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the broader Indian Ocean world. With connected history as our method, the course asks students to grapple with South Asia's literary, religious, and political histories as kinetic processes. This allows us to ask probing questions about issues that have had, and continue to have, major implications for the region—and the world—today: sovereignty, power, gender, community, devotion, piety, secularism, democracy, violence, and the nation itself.

Slavery, Race, Racism

MDES UN2046, Professor Humeira Iqtidar

Tuesday/Thursday: 10:10-11:25 AM

Contemporary discussions about racism have tended to focus on the experience of North Atlantic slave trade, and theoretical debates tend to rely upon American experiences of racialization. However, there is substantial variation in the contours of racism across time and space. Relatedly, strategies for resistance to racism also vary significantly. It is important to think through the political and theoretical implications of potential differences in experiences and forms of racism in the global south. To this end, this course attempts to provide an insight into both historical and ideational variation. We will engage with historical research as well as the political ideas of particular thinkers grappling with the challenge of modern racism.

At the same time as exploring the variation in historical, regional and ideational debates we will pay considerable attention to the arguments proposed by many global south thinkers about

homogenization under global capitalism. The mutual imbrication of modern racism and capitalism has been an important concern for many 20th century Global South thinkers and it is useful to think through their arguments regarding simultaneous homogenization and differentiation built into capitalism. While 'non-Western' or Global South thinkers have addressed questions of race and racism in important ways, some have also voiced racist views of their own. The course draws upon scholarship in Postcolonial Theory, Black Marxist and Radical thought, and Comparative Political Theory, as well recent comparative historical research on questions of slavery and racialization.

GANDHI & HIS INTERLOCUTORS

MDES UN2650, Professor Sourav Chatterjee

Tuesday/Thursday: 1:10-2:25 PM

Gandhi is in two senses an extraordinary figure: he was the most important leader of anti-imperialist movements in the twentieth century; yet, his ideas about modernity, the state, the industrial economy, technology, humanity's place in nature, the presence of God - were all highly idiosyncratic, sometimes at odds with the main trends of modern civilization. How did a man with such views come to have such an immense effect on history? In some ways, Gandhi is an excellent entry into the complex history of modern India - its contradictions, achievements, failures, possibilities. This course will be primarily a course on social theory, focusing on texts and discursive exchanges between various perceptions of modernity in India. It will have two parts: the first part will be based on reading Gandhi's own writings; the second, on the writings of his main interlocutors. It is hoped that through these exchanges students will get a vivid picture of the intellectual ferment in modern India, and the main lines of social and political thought that define its intellectual culture. The study in this course can be followed up by taking related courses in Indian political thought, or Indian politics or modern history. This course may not be taken as Pass/D/Fail.

Palestinian and Israeli Politics and Societies

MDES UN3042, Professor Joseph Massad

Tuesday/Thursday: 2:40-3:55 PM

The History of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskala) in 19th century Europe and the development of Zionism through the current peace process between the state of Israel and the Arab states and the Palestinian national movement. Provides a historical overview of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict to familiarize undergraduates with the background of the current situation. No P/D/F or R credit is allowed for this class.

RETHINKING MIDDLE EAST POLITICS

MDES UN3260, Professor Timothy Mitchell

Monday/Wednesday: 10:10-11:25 AM

This course examines a set of questions that have shaped the study of the politics of the modern Middle East. It looks at the main ways those questions have been answered, exploring debates both in Western academic scholarship and among scholars and intellectuals in the region itself. For each question, the course offers new ways of thinking about the issue or ways of framing it in different terms. The topics covered in the course include: the kinds of modern state that emerged in the Middle East and the ways its forms of power and authority were shaped; the birth of economic development as a way of describing the function and measuring the success of the state, and the changing metrics of this success; the influence of oil on the politics of the region; the nature and role of Islamic political movements; the transformation of the countryside and the city and the role of rural populations and of urban protest in modern politics; and the politics of armed force and political violence in the region, and the ways in which this has been understood. The focus of the course will be on the politics of the twentieth century, but many topics will be traced back into developments that occurred in earlier periods, and several will be explored up to the present. The course is divided into four parts, each ending with a paper or exam in which participants are asked to analyze the material covered. Each part of the course has a geographical focus on a country or group of countries and a thematic focus on a particular set of questions of historical and political analysis.

URBAN SPACE & CONFLICT IN MIDDLE EAST

MDES UN3331, Professor Khatchig Mouradian

Monday: 4:10-6:00 PM

This course explores how civil war, revolution, militarization, mass violence, refugee crises, and terrorism impact urban spaces, and how city dwellers engage in urban resilience, negotiate and attempt to reclaim their right to the city. Through case studies of Beirut (1975-present), Baghdad (2003-present), Cairo (2011-present), Diyarbakir (1914-present), Aleppo (1914-present), and Jerusalem (1914-present), this course traces how urban life adjusted to destruction (and post-conflict reconstruction), violence, and anarchy; how neighborhoods were reshaped; and how local ethnic, religious, and political dynamics played out in these cities and metropolises. Relying on multi-disciplinary and post-disciplinary scholarship, and employing a wealth of audiovisual material, literary works, and interviews conducted by the instructor, the course scrutinizes how conflicts have impacted urban life in the Middle East, and how civilians react to, confront, and resist militarization in urban spaces.

A HISTORY OF AFRICAN CITIES

MDES UN3915, Professor Mamadou Diouf

Monday/Wednesday: 11:40 AM-12:55 PM

This seminar examines African cities considering three periods: the pre-colonial, the colonial, and the postcolonial. Its focus is the intersection of politics, society, and geography. Using colonialism, empire, and globalization as key analytical frames of urban processes, the seminar explores the historical forms of urban cultures, politics, economies, leisure, and representations

which are shaped by – and are shaping - the various ways in which urban dwellers experience life in their cities.

IRAQ: WAR, LOVE, AND EXILE

MDES UN3930, Professor Muhsin Al-Musawi

Wednesday: 2:10-4:00 PM

This course studies and explores a number of Iraqi narratives that have appeared since 2003 and that have a distinctive stylistic and thematic richness with great bearing on social, economic, cultural, and political life in Iraq. Seen against a history of the country and the region, and in conversation with some Afro-Asian and Latin American narratives of war and displacement, these writings assume global significance in our reading of such thematic issues like war, love, exile, and loss. While always using the past as a background, a source and repository of recollections, the challenge of the 2003 Anglo-America invasion and its institutionalization of segregation and rupture to keep Iraq in perpetual chaos, is present in the texts. Every narrative sheds light on a number of issues, especially war, horror, loss, trauma, passion and dislocation. This richness in detail is brought up through a number of stylistic innovations that put this writing at the forefront of world cultures and human concerns. An introductory lecture builds up a genealogy for trauma since the Epic of Gilgamesh (2700 BC.) and the lamentations of Astarte.

HONORS THESIS SEMINAR PART II

MDES UN3961, Professor Hamid Dabashi

Monday: 12:10-2:00 PM

The MESAAS honors seminar offers the opportunity to undertake a sustained research project working closely with an individual faculty adviser. It also enables you, as part of a small group of MESAAS students working with the seminar instructor, to develop the skills of academic research and writing and learn how to collaborate with peers and create an engaged intellectual community. This 3-point seminar continues the work begun in the Fall semester of the senior year in MDES 3960 Honors Thesis Seminar Part 1.

The Novel in Africa

MDES GU4122, Professor Jennifer Wenzel

Monday: 2:10-4:00 PM

The main task of this course will be to read novels by African writers. But the novel in Africa also involves connections between the literary genre of the novel and the historical processes of colonialism, decolonization, and globalization in Africa. One important question we'll consider is how African novels depict those historical experiences in their themes and plots—we'll read novels that are about colonialism, etc. A more complex question is how these historical processes relate to the emergence of the novel as an important genre for African writers. Edward Said went

so far as to say that without imperialism, there would be no European novel as we know it. How can we understand the novel in Africa (whether read or written) as a product of the colonial encounter? How did it shape the process of decolonization? What contribution to history, whether literary or political, does the novel in Africa make? We'll undertake a historical survey of African novels from the 1930s to the present, with attention to various subgenres (village novel, war novel, urbanization novel, novel of postcolonial disillusion, Bildungsroman). We'll attend to how African novelists blend literate and oral storytelling traditions, how they address their work to local and global audiences, and how they use scenes of characters reading novels (whether African or European) in order to position their writing within national, continental, and world literary space.

PAN-AFRICANISM

HSME GU4154, Professor Mamadou Diouf

Thursday: 12:10-2:00 PM

“Pan Africanist” ideologies were very diverse from Garveyism, Negritude to the various African America, Caribbean and African discourses of “neo-pharaohism” and “Ethiopianism.” This seminar explores how Black leaders, intellectuals, and artists chose to imagine Black (Africans and people of African descent) as a global community from the late 19th century to the present. It examines their attempts to chart a course of race, modernity, and emancipation in unstable and changing geographies of empire, nation, and state. Particular attention will be given to manifestations identified as their common history and destiny and how such a distinctive historical experience has created a unique body of reflections on and cultural productions about modernity, religion, class, gender, and sexuality, in a context of domination and oppression.

Arabic War Narrative

MDES GU4239, Professor Muhsin Al-Musawi

Tuesday: 2:10-4:00 PM

This course works along a number of axial structures that aim to let texts voice their informing theoretical, political, and poetic strategies. It draws on war narratives in other parts of the world, especially Vietnam, insofar as these find their way into Arabic writing. A poetics of prose gives these narratives the power of literary production that makes them more readable, appealing, and provocative than ordinary journalistic reporting.

Through close readings of a number of Arabic war novels and some long narrative poems, this course proposes to address war in its varieties not only as liberation movements in Algeria and Palestine, but also as an engagement with invasions, as in Iraqi narratives of war, or as conflict as was the case between Iran and Iraq, 1980-1988, as proxy wars in other parts of the region, or ‘civil’ wars generated and perpetuated by big powers. Although writers are no longer the leaders of thought as in the first half of the 20th century, they resume different roles of exposition, documentation, reinstatement of identities, and geographical and topographical orientation. Narrators and protagonists are not spectators but implicated individuals whose voices

give vent to dreams, desires, intimations, and expectations. They are not utterly passive, however. Behind bewilderment and turbulence, there is a will to expose atrocity and brutality. Writing is an effort to regain humanity in an inhuman situation.

Colonial Cities in the French Empire

ARCH GU4260, Professor Ralph Ghoche

Tuesday: 4:10-6:00 PM

French colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries was marked by a relentless and often oppressive pursuit of overseas territories. Colonial cities, the focal points of the French empire, were erected in the nation's image and characterized by wide boulevards, impressive parks and squares, and monumental buildings echoing the elegance of Paris. These urban centers, scattered across Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean, often served as administrative, economic, and cultural hubs for the colonial administration. This seminar will explore the profound impact of colonial cities as laboratories for experimenting with new ideas in city planning, infrastructure, architecture, and civic governance. Once tried and tested in the colonies, these innovative "norms and forms" were often imported back to metropolitan France, where they helped shape various aspects of its society, culture, and economy. The seminar is chronologically structured around six French colonial cities: Cap-Français, Cairo, Algiers, Casablanca, Dakar, and Hanoi. Each city is examined through the lens of a distinct set of colonial policies and practices. Cap-Français is studied from the perspective of the universalist values of the French Enlightenment and the double standard evident in the terror of the Atlantic slave trade. Cairo, while colonized for only a brief period, ignited new passions for the East and is viewed as a repository of exotic fantasies and a site for infrastructural modernization. Algiers is studied through the policy of assimilation and the destruction of Algerian religious identity. Casablanca is considered in relation to new planning practices and colonial policies of association. Hanoi is examined through cultural and architectural forms of hybridity. Finally, Dakar is viewed through colonial theories of acclimatization and hygiene policies. As we traverse the diverse landscapes of these colonial cities, this seminar invites participants to critically reflect on the enduring echoes of French colonialism, exploring how the urban experiments of the past reverberate in the present and influence our perceptions of global cities and their histories..

Beyond Human in Modern Hebrew Literature

MDES GU4532, Professor Naama Harel

Wednesday: 2:10-4:00 PM

"The possibility of pogroms," claims Theodor Adorno, "is decided in the moment when the gaze of a fatally-wounded animal falls on a human being. The defiance with which he repels this gaze—'after all it's only an animal'—reappears irresistibly in cruelties done to human beings." This course traces the development of Modern Hebrew literature, from its fin-de-siècle revival to contemporary Israeli fiction, through the prism of animality and animalization. We will focus on human-animal relations and animalization/dehumanization of humans in literary works by prominent Hebrew authors, including M.Y. Berdichevsky, Devorah Baron, S.Y. Agnon, Amos

Oz, David Grossman, Orly Castel-Bloom, Almog Behar, Etgar Keret, and Sayed Kashua. Employing posthumanist and ecofeminist theoretical lenses, we will analyze the bio-political intersections of species and gender, as well as animalization as a process of otherization of marginalized ethnic groups. Throughout the course, we will ask questions, such as: why animals abound in Modern Hebrew literature? Are they merely metaphors for intra-human issues, or rather count as subjects? What literary devices are used to portray animals? How has the depiction of human-animal relations changed in Hebrew over the last 150 years? How do cultural and political frameworks inform representations of human-animal relations? No prior knowledge of Hebrew is required; all readings and class discussions will be in English. Course participants with reading knowledge of Hebrew are encouraged to consult the original literary texts, provided by the instructor upon request.

POLITICS IN INDIA

MDES GU4601, Professor Sudipta Kaviraj

Thursday: 2:10-4:00 PM

This course will combine study of long-term historical sociology with more short term understanding of policies and their possible effects. Though its main purpose will be to provide students with an understanding of politics after independence, it will argue, methodologically, that this understanding should be based on a study of historical sociology – plotting long-term shifts in the structure of social power. The course will start with analyses of the structures of power and ideas about political legitimacy in pre-modern India, and the transformations brought by colonialism into that order. After a brief study of the nature of political order under the colonial state, the courses will focus primarily on the history of the democratic state after independence.

CINEMA & COLONIALISM IN SOUTH ASIA

MDES GR4637, Professor Debashree Mukherjee

Wednesday: 4:10-6:00 PM

Leaving the Ottoman Empire

MDES GU4952, Professor Nora Lessersohn

Tuesday: 10:10 AM-12:00 PM

This course will examine the experience of Ottoman American communities before, during, and after their migration to the United States, with a particular focus on Ottoman Armenians pre- and post-genocide. Through close readings of the scholarship on Ottoman Armenian, Turkish, Jewish, Arab, and Greek immigration, we will ask: what global forces compelled Ottoman journeys to America (e.g. economic opportunity, Christian imperialism, state-sponsored violence, interethnic strife)? And what ideologies informed the way these migrants were received in a new country (e.g. nativism, nationalism, Orientalism, philhellenism)? In answering these questions and raising new ones, we will also aim to understand how Ottoman American immigration stories both fit into and challenge the existing scholarship on “American immigration” as well as

race, whiteness, and citizenship studies. Throughout the course, we will pay special attention to the experience of Ottoman American immigrants in New York City through field trips, museums, and other primary and secondary source materials.

THEORY AND METHODS II

MDES GR5000, Professor Timothy Mitchell

Monday: 4:10-6:00 PM

This course will be the first part of a two part introduction to theoretical approaches to modern social science and cultural studies in Asian and African contexts. The first course will focus primarily on methodological and theoretical problems in the fields broadly described as historical social sciences - which study historical trends, and political, economic and social institutions and processes. The course will start with discussions regarding the origins of the modern social sciences and the disputes about the nature of social science knowledge. In the next section it will focus on definitions and debates about the concept of modernity. It will go on to analyses of some fundamental concepts used in modern social and historical analyses: concepts of social action, political concepts like state, power, hegemony, democracy, nationalism; economic concepts like the economy, labor, market, capitalism, and related concepts of secularity/secularism, representation, and identity. The teaching will be primarily through close reading of set texts, followed by a discussion. A primary concern of the course will be to think about problems specific to the societies studied by scholars of Asia and Africa: how to use a conceptual language originally stemming from reflection on European modernity in thinking about societies which have quite different historical and cultural characteristics.

MESAAS RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM

MDES GR6008, Professor Mana Kia

Thursday: 4:10-6:00 PM

This course provides a structured setting for stand-alone M.A. students in their final year and Ph.D. students in their second and third years to develop their research trajectories in a way that complements normal coursework. The seminar meets approximately biweekly and focuses on topics such as research methodology; project design; literature review, including bibliographies and citation practices; grant writing. Required for MESAAS graduate students in their second and third year.

Major Debates in South Asia

HSME GR6056, Professor Humeira Iqtidar

Tuesday: 4:10-6:00 PM

This graduate seminar will expose students to major themes and issues in the study of South Asia. The course will provide a serious intellectual foundation for students wishing to pursue specialized, directed research in the region. Broadly speaking, themes for consideration include: cultural history and early modernity; capitalism and political economy; genealogies of political thought; anticolonialism; caste and religion; and gender and feminist history. The thematic focus

of the seminar will change each time it is taught. However, the pedagogical aims of the seminar will remain constant. That is, to maintain a focus on discussions about the archive; conducting field research; framing a robust research question, and more.

SHARIA TEXTS

MDES GR6237, Professor Wael Hallaq

Wednesday: 4:10-6:00 PM

This seminar aims to introduce graduate students to the major subfields making up the Sharīʿa system, both in its theoretical as well as practical and institutional manifestations. We will be dissecting representative texts from each genre, all in the Arabic original, ranging from works on the psychoepistemic foundations of the law, to legal theory, the judiciary and juridico-political practice, legal education, biographical constructions of authority, and economic and political management by the Sharīʿa. Theoretically, we will be drawing on historical and cultural anthropology, political theory, Critical Theory, the theories of the subject, and constitutional studies, among others. A reasonable success in this course will permit the student to comfortably specialize in any Sharīʿa subfield.

Orientalism and Postcolonial Theory

MDES GR6600, Professor Sudipta Kaviraj

Wednesday: 2:10-4:00 PM

This course will seek to analyze some philosophical and interpretative problems raised by recent works in a field generally described as 'postcolonial theory'. At the center of the discussion would be the themes of Eurocentrism and Orientalism. While the questions associated with this field are highly significant, there is much that is indeterminate about this area of social theory. The course will start with an historical analysis of the original debates about 'Orientalism' and the nature of its arguments. It will start with a preliminary reading of Said's Orientalism. It will then take up for a direct critical examination textual traditions that were the objects of the Orientalism debate – representative examples of European Orientalist literature – which claimed to produce, for the first time, 'scientific' studies of Oriental societies (work of linguists like William Jones, or historians like James Mill), studies of Middle Eastern Islamic societies analyzed by Said, segments of philosophies of history which dealt with non-European societies and found a place for them in a scheme of 'universal history' (Hegel, Marx, Mill, Weber). We shall then turn to ask if social science knowledge about non-European societies still carry the methodological features of Orientalism. As Orientalism spread across different fields of modern culture – not just academic knowledge, but also art and aesthetic representations, the next two weeks fictional and visual representations will be taken up for critical analysis. This will be followed by a study of texts in which intellectuals from non-European societies from Asia and Africa responded to the cognitive and cultural claims of the European Orientalist literature. In the last section the course will focus on three aspects of the postcolonial critique:

1. the question of representation ,
2. the question of the writing of history, and

3. the logic of basic concepts in social sciences.

DISSERTATION COLLOQUIUM

MDES GR8008, Professor Gil Hochberg

Thursday: 4:10-6:00 PM

The dissertation colloquium is a non-credit course open to MESAAS doctoral students who have completed the M.Phil. degree. It provides a forum in which the entire community of dissertation writers meets, bridging the departments' different fields and regions of research. It complements workshops outside the department focused on one area or theme. Through an encounter with the diversity of research underway in MESAAS, participants learn to engage with work anchored in different regions and disciplines and discover or develop what is common in the departments post-disciplinary methods of inquiry. Since the community is relatively small, it is expected that all post-M.Phil. students in residence will join the colloquium. Post M.Phil. Students from other departments may request permission to join the colloquium, but places for non-MESAAS students will be limited. The colloquium convenes every semester, meeting once every two weeks. Each meeting is devoted to the discussion of one or two pre-circulated pieces of work (a draft prospectus or dissertation chapter). Every participant contributes at least one piece of work each year.

ADVANCED TOPICS IN COMPARATIVE MEDIA

CMPM GR8024, Professor Debashree Mukherjee and Professor Brian Larkin

Tuesday: 6:10-8:00 PM

This course explores in depth a particular topic in the history and theory of media. The topic is studied comparatively across geographies. Content varies from year to year.

PSYCHOANALYSIS, IDENTITY, AND CULTURE

MDES GR8206, Professor Joseph Massad

Tuesday: 4:10-6:00 PM

This graduate seminar aims to introduce students to Freud and Freudian Psychoanalysis and the integration of both in critical theory. The main question the seminar aims to study is the formation of identity in psychoanalysis and how it relates to civilization and culture more generally, whether in its gender, sexual, or national configurations. The influence of Social Darwinism and Developmentalism more generally on Freudian psychoanalysis will be discussed as well as the importance of related temporal concepts deployed in psychoanalysis' insistence on the divide between primitivism and culture. We will discuss a number of major scholarly works engaging Freud's theories on all these questions and their relevance to social and cultural analysis.

Language Courses

MDES UN1210, First Year Arabic I
MDES UN1211, First Year Arabic II
MDES UN2201, Second Year Arabic I
MDES UN2202, Second Year Arabic II
MDES UN 2209, Arabic Heritage Speakers II
MDES GU4211, Third Year Arabic II
MDES GU4213, Fourth Year Modern Arabic II
MDES GU4216, Advanced Arabic Grammar Review

MDES UN1501, First Year Hebrew I
MDES UN1502, First Year Hebrew II
MDES UN2518, Hebrew Heritage Speakers II
MDES UN2501, Second Year Hebrew I
MDES UN2502, Second Year Hebrew II

MDES UN1602, Elementary Hindi-Urdu II
MDES UN1609, Hindi for Heritage Speakers II
MDES UN1615, Urdu for Heritage Speakers II
MDES UN2602, Intermediate Hindi-Urdu II
MDES GU4625, Advanced Hindi II

MDES UN1702, Elementary Persian II
MDES UN2702, Intermediate Persian II
MDES GU4711, Advanced Persian II

MDES UN402, Elementary Sanskrit II
MDES UN2402, Intermediate Sanskrit II

SWHL UN1102, Elementary Swahili II
SWHL UN2102, Intermediate Swahili II
SWHL UN3302, Advanced Swahili II

MDES UN1102, Elementary Tamil II

MDES UN1902, Elementary Turkish II

MDES UN2902, Intermediate Turkish II

MDES GU4912, Advanced Turkish II

WLOF UN1102, Elementary Wolof II

WLOF UN2102, Intermediate Wolof II

WLOF UN3302, Advanced Wolof II