

MESAAS Courses Spring 2026

COLLOQUIUM ON MAJOR TEXTS

AHUM UN1399

Professor Sarah bin Tyeer

Professor Wael Hallaq

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

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.

Palestinian and Israeli Politics and Societies

MDES UN3042, Professor Joseph Massad

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

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

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.

CENTRAL QUESTIONS IN ISLAMIC LAW

MDES UN3923, Professor Wael Hallaq

Through detailed discussions of certain landmarks in Islamic legal history (e.g. origins; early formation; sources of law; intellectual make-up; the workings of court; legal change; women in the law; legal effects of colonialism; modernity and legal reform, etc.), the course aims at providing an introductory but integrated view of Islamic law, a definition, so to speak, of what it was/is. Please note, this course must be taken for a letter grade.

HONORS THESIS SEMINAR PART II

MDES UN3961, Professor Debashree Mukherjee

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.

MAJOR DEBATES IN THE STUDY OF AFRICA

MDES GU4160, Professor Mahmood Mamdani

This course will focus on key debates that have shaped the study of Africa in the post-colonial African academy. We will cover six key debates: Historiography; Slavery: Premodern and Modern; State Formation; Colonialism and Difference; Nationalism; Political Identity and Political Violence. The approach will be multi-disciplinary. To the extent possible, readings will be illustrative of different sides in the debate.

India after 1947: Democracy and Majoritarianism

MDES GR4655, Professor Isabel Huacuja Alonso

This course will explore recent histories of post-independence India, focusing on the first three decades of independence (1947-1977) following the end of British colonial rule. Until rather recently, most histories of South Asia concluded with independence, casting, perhaps unconsciously, the end of British rule as the end of history in the region. However, in recent years, we have witnessed a boom of historical writing on post-independence India. In this class, we will analyze this emerging scholarship and focus on the themes of democracy and majoritarianism. We will read about the establishment of universal franchise in 1950s India, the writing and implementation of the constitution, and the country's experiments with various economic plans. At the same time, we will study the Indian state's often violent integration of regions originally outside Britain's direct domain, including the princely states of Kashmir and Hyderabad, and the development of what scholars have described as new forms of colonialism in the region after 1947. Likewise, we will study the growth of majoritarian ideologies and the continued struggle against caste oppression, all while considering India's place in the larger Cold War. Throughout the class, we will remain attendant to aesthetic developments in media and literature during this period. While the course focuses on India—or more specifically on various communities' interactions with the Indian state—we will also study developments in Pakistan (and Bangladesh after 1971) and other neighboring states, recognizing that their shared histories did not end with Partition.

READINGS IN PERSIAN TEXTS

MDES GU4726, Professor Mana Kia

May be repeated for credit; content varies.

Prerequisites: Must have completed MDES 2702, equivalent two years of Persian or the instructor's permission.

This course provides experience reading and analyzing Persian language texts, as well as translating them into English. We will also spend some time learning how to read different kinds

of paleography, and about various manuscript and print conventions and practices. Supplementary scholarly readings in English will situate the Persian texts. There will be a translation workshop at the end of the semester with related texts of the students choosing, in preparation for a final translation project. No P/D/F or R credit is allowed for this class.

THEORY AND METHODS II

MDES GR5001, Professor Sudipta Kaviraj

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, Alison Vacca

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.

COLONIALISM

MDES GR6020, Professor Timothy Mitchell

The seminar on Colonialism examines questions of political economy and politics through the study of colonial regimes of power and knowledge. It has a particular focus on the genealogy of the business corporation, a colonial form of power that became central to the modern world but often escapes the attention of critical political theory. The readings cover the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa, across the period from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century. The seminar is intended primarily for Ph.D. students interested in interdisciplinary approaches to the study of politics, political economy, and colonial history. For course requirements and other

information, see CourseWorks.

NATIONALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST AS IDEA AND PRACTICE

MDES GR6031, Professor Joseph Massad

Intends to familiarize students with the most recent theories dealing with nationalism from a variety of angles and perspectives.

Orientalism and Postcolonial Theory

MDES GR6600, Professor Sudipta Kaviraj

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

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.

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 UN2102, Intermediate 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