

# MESAAS Courses Spring 2026

## **COLLOQUIUM ON MAJOR TEXTS**

**AHUM UN1399**

**Professor Elaine van Dalen**

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: 11:40 AM-12:55 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.

## **What is Islam?**

**MDES UN1630, Professor Wael Hallaq**

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

One in four people in the world is a Muslim. Yet, here in the Western hemisphere, we mostly know next to nothing about Islam and its followers. Whatever is spread around as knowledge of this culture and religion is the work of a media that is highly politicized and biased, often perpetuating negative and even racist images of Muslims and their ways of life. This picture becomes even more complicated and complex in academia, in the West in particular but in Islamic countries as well. The story of "What is Islam?" begins in the 19th century, when the bulk of the Muslim world fell under European control, be it direct colonialism or (remote-control) coloniality. Almost everywhere, so-called reform was undertaken, with the view of modernizing institutions and subjectivities along Western lines. With secularization and unprecedented forms of politics and political organization, Islamic cultures all over the world began to undergo epistemic transformations, leading to a wholesale reevaluation of the Islamic traditions themselves, and their meaning in late modernity. Various groups would attempt to

redefine Islam in fundamentalist terms – in unconscious emulation of American Fundamentalist movements – while others took it in different directions, not excluding Marxism, socialism, and nationalism. But the hegemonic and almost “natural” force driving the Islamic world over the last half century has been liberalism, a powerful way of seeing and evaluating the world that deeply affected even the Islamist movements. Islam for modern Muslims has become many disparate things, often if not always incompatible with each other.

## **History of South Asia II**

**HIST BC2811, Professor Anupama Rao**

**Day/Time TBA**

## **THEORY AND CULTURE**

**MDES UN3000, Professor Hamid Dabashi**

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

Required of all majors. Introduces theories of culture particularly related to the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Theoretical debates on the nature and function of culture as a symbolic reading of human collectivities. Examines critical cultural studies of the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Enables students to articulate their emerging knowledge of Middle East, South Asian, and African cultures in a theoretically informed language.

## **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.

### **IRAQ: WAR, LOVE, AND EXILE**

**MDES UN3930, Professor Muhsin Al-Musawi**

**Tuesday: 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 TBA**

**Monday: 2:10-4:00 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.

## **Arabic War Narrative**

**MDES GU4239, Professor Muhsin Al-Musawi**

**Wednesday: 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.

## **Readings in Urdu Lit**

**MDES GU4636, Professor Aftab Ahmad**

**Tuesday/Thursday: 6:10-8:00 PM**

Two semesters of prior coursework in Urdu for Heritage Speakers (Urdu for Heritage Speakers I and II) or one semester of Advanced Urdu or the instructor's permission. This course is a literary course, with in-depth exposure to some of the finest works of classical and modern Urdu poetry

i.e. genres of ghazal and nazm. This course is open for both undergraduates and graduates. No P/D/F or R credit is allowed for this class.

**READINGS IN PERSIAN TEXTS**  
**MDES GU4726, Professor Mana Kia**  
**Day/Time TBA**

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**  
**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, 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.

### **READINGS SUFI TEXTS**

**MDES GR6236, Professor Wael Hallaq**

**Tuesday: 4:10-6:00 PM**

This seminar is based entirely on the primary sources of Ṣūfism, including the writings of Qushayrī, Nūrī, Muḥāsibī, Sarrāj, Ghazālī, Hujwīrī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Suhrawardī, Sha‘rānī, and al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī. We will explore how the leading Ṣūfīs saw themselves and the ways in which they articulated their identity. This is also articulated in the ways they organized their works and constructed the biographies of their ethical exemplars. We will study their major concepts and descriptions of their own experiences, and then theorize their subjective formations as “hermeneutics of the subject.” Inasmuch as this seminar is about how we study and view Ṣūfism, it is also as much about the various ways this conception of the world can inform a basis of a set of critiques of modernity and its epistemologies and practices.

### **Orientalism and Postcolonial Theory**

**MDES GR6600, Professor Sudipta Kaviraj**

**Day/Time TBA**

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.

## **STUDY GENDER/SEXUALITY-ARAB WORLD**

### **MDES GR8280, Professor Joseph Massad**

**Tuesday: 4:10-6:00 PM**

This course aims to familiarize graduate students with the different methods and approaches that US and European scholars have used to study gender and sexuality in other societies generally, and the way they study them in the context of the Arab World specifically. The course will also explore how Arab scholars have also studied their own societies. We will survey these different approaches, both theoretical and empirical, outlining their methodological difficulties and limitations. Readings will consist of theoretical elaborations of these difficulties and the methodological and empirical critiques that the field itself has generated in order to elaborate how gender and sexuality in the Arab World have been studied, or more accurately, not studied, and how many of these methodological pitfalls can be avoided.

## **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 GU4220 Arabic Linguistic Tradition

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 UN1402, 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