

MESAAS Courses 2023-24

SPRING 2024

COLLOQUIUM ON MAJOR TEXTS

AHUM UN1399, Professor Sarah bin Tyer

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 Gandhis Autobiography.

CINEMAS OF INDIA

MDES UN2641, Professor Debashree Mukherjee

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

This course offers an expansive journey through the forms, pleasures, and meanings of Indian cinema. It explores the plural beginnings of popular film; the many competing cinemas produced across India; the diverse protagonists (from vamps to vigilantes) that populate the imagined entity named 'national cinema'; and the varied audiences addressed by these cinemas. Over the course of the semester, we will watch 15 of the most iconic narrative films produced in India, including Diamond Queen (1940), Awara (1951), Deewar (1975), Roja (1992), Mahanagar (1963), and Bandit Queen (1994). As we voyage with the dynamic, shifting codes and priorities of India's fiction filmmaking, we also shadow the emergence of the Indian nation and contestations of its coherence.

GANDHI & HIS INTERLOCUTORS

MDES UN2650, Professor Shaunna Rodrigues

Tuesday/Thursday: 11:40 AM-12:55 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.

LITERATURE & CULTURES OF STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA

MDES UN3121, Professor Jennifer Wenzel

Monday/Wednesday: 2:40-3:55 PM

Generations of resistance have shaped contemporary life in South Africa -- in struggles against colonialism, segregation, the legislated racism known as apartheid, and the entrenched inequalities of the post-apartheid era. Two constants in this history of struggle have been youth as a vanguard of liberation movements and culture as a weapon of struggle. As new generation of South African youth -- the born frees -- has now taken to the streets and social media to decolonize the university and claim their education as a meaningful right, this course traces the ways that generations of writers, artists, and activists have faced censorship, exile, and repression in an ongoing struggle to dismantle apartheid and to free the mind, the most powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressor according to Black Consciousness activist Steve Biko. This course traces the profoundly important roles that literature and other cultural production (music, photography, film, comics, Twitter hashtags like #rhodesmustfall and #feesmustfall) have played in struggle against apartheid and its lingering afterlife. Although many of our texts were originally written in English, we will also discuss the historical forces, including nineteenth-century Christian missions and Bantu Education, as well as South Africa's post-1994 commitment to being a multilingual democracy, that have shaped the linguistic texture of South African cultural life.

E AFRICA & THE SWAHILI COAST

MDES UN3130, Professor Laura Fair

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

This course provides an introduction to the social and cultural history of the Swahili coast and an overview of some of the major debates that have dominated this historiography.

RETHINKING MIDDLE EAST POLITICS

MDES UN3260, Professor Timothy Mitchell

Monday: 4:10-6:00 PM

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 AM-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.

Epic Narratives of South Asia

MDES UN3423, Professor Christine H Marrewa Karwoski

Thursday: 12:10-2:00 PM

This class introduces students to the living epics that form core literary, religious, and cultural traditions within South Asia: the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. “Epic Epics” will begin by examining the earliest narration of the Ramayana (in its modern Amar Chitra Katha comic redaction) and then will proceed to investigate how these stories of tragedy, valor, and divinity were and are adapted by different communities as they became an intrinsic part of almost every area of this region. As the heroes (and heroines) of these epics are often linked with the people producing and/or narrating them, the manner in which these epics are articulated reveals the priorities of its authors. Drawing on literature, film, graphic novels, journalism, podcasts, art, and performance, this class will explore the continuous reworking of these epics from their inception to the present day. Special attention will be paid to the controversies surrounding politics, caste, and gender that arise in the texts.

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 Alison Vacca

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.

PAN AFRICANISM

MDES 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.

War Narrative: The Arab World

MDES GU4160, Professor Muhsin Al-Musawi

Thursday: 12:10-2:00 PM

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.

Writing about Love in Arabic

MDES GU4214, Professor Sarah bin Tyeer

Monday: 2:10-4:00 PM

This course focuses on the expression of love in Arabic literature from the pre-Islamic, premodern, modern as well as the contemporary periods; how it was expressed, theorized, sung, transcended, utilized and metaphorized for other-than-love purposes, and/or modernized. We will look at various genres of writing from classical poetry, epistles, prose, as well as medical writing. We will aim to understand and appreciate how people grappled with the universal questions of love and its discontents, separation, and indubitably pain across different times, geography, and language.

Readings in Arabic Literature

MDES GU4243, Professor Matthew Keegan

Thursday: 12:10-2:00 PM

This course is designed to give students the tools necessary to conduct research that involves Classical Arabic Texts. Students will translate selected passages from al-Jurjani's *Dala'il al-I'jaz* and other texts on Arabic poetics. Each week, students will also complete a small research task, such as locating a biographical entry, anecdote, or poem within the encyclopedic works of the medieval period.

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.

Persian as a Philosophical Language

CLME GU4630, Professor Hamid Dabashi

Monday: 12:10-2:00 PM

The purpose of this course is to introduce advanced undergraduate and graduate students to a significant body of philosophical literature produced in Persian over the last millennium, with deep rooted origins extended even deeper into pre-Islamic and non-Islamic history. Ordinarily understood in the context of “Islamic philosophy” and given secondary status to works produced in Arabic, this body of philosophical literature that expands from the works of Avicenna in the 11th to those of Muhammad Iqbal in the 20th century and after, this body of philosophical literature demands and in this seminar receive an exclusive attention primarily based on the language in which it has been produced and thereafter posited a number of crucial epistemic and philosophical questions of its own.

Decolonial-Queerness and Abolition in SWANA

MDES GU4633, Professor Mohamed Abdou

Monday: 10:10 AM-12:00 PM

This reading-intensive seminar course will examine the continuing impact, since 1492, of a (neo)colonial/(neo)imperial Euro-American informed modernity animated by (neo)liberal-Enlightenment values (free will/humanity, secularism, racial capitalism) and

individualist identity politics on past and contemporary conceptualizations of family, kinship, and friendship in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities within the context of settler-colonial societies (as the U.S./Canada) as well as in postcolonial nations and regions (as Southwest Asia, Africa, and the Middle East) that arguably never underwent adequate decolonization. The course will explore kinship, intimacy, and friendship ties in a dynamic age where sexual and gender diversity is a hallmark of neoliberal ‘secular’ modernity, whose advent historically exposed all non-Europeans, to a plethora of false competing dualisms, such as secular/religious and heterogeneity/homogeneity, as well as discourses such as homonationalism (al-qawmiyyat al-mīthliyyat) and pinkwashing (al-ghaseel al-banafsajiy). We will examine selected themes such as racialized gender (including masculinities), sexuality, intimacy, class, age, power relationships, and their intersections. By drawing on transnational feminist discourses, queer Black, and Indigenous studies as well as queer of color critiques we will explore different manifestations of intimacy, familial, marriage, and friendship ties. What can friendship patterns - intimate, trustful, as well as voluntarily chosen ties that people maintain - tell us about societies and communal solidarities at present amidst polarizing ‘woke cultural wars?’ What role do geopolitical and social institutions and agency beyond them play when thinking about the violence of global nation-statist and racial capitalist gendered/sexualized systematic and systemic structures and what they provoke of reactionary Orientalist/Conservative impulses? Using intersectional/assemblage-based theories, what decolonial, gender-based, readings and formulations of feminisms/queerness exist that evade the apparent tidiness of European feminist and narrow LGBTIQ categories that characterizes most (non)Euro-American political queer-feminist scholarship beyond the depiction of queer BIPOC as co-opted and duped, colonized pawns of ‘Gay Empire’ towards elucidating critical discussions on identity, agency, subjectivity, and dissidence?

Sound and Listening Cultures of the Indian Subcontinent

MDES GU4634, Professor Isabel Huacuja Alonso

Monday: 2:10-4:00 PM

This course will explore major themes in the growing field of Sound Studies with a focus on the rich history of sound and varied cultures of sound and listening in the Indian subcontinent. The main questions that we will address include: how have political, commercial, and cultural movements shaped what the diverse populations of South Asia listen to and how they listen? How have different forms of media shaped/ informed listening experiences in South Asia? How do listening practices and cultures from the subcontinent differ from those in other regions? In this class we will listen to the human voice, rumor/gossip, gramophone, loud speakers, radio, film, and mp3. We will discuss the role political speeches, film songs, and devotional songs in shaping South Asian politics and culture in the twentieth-century as the subcontinent transitioned from colonial rule to nation-states. Drawing on the interdisciplinary nature of Sound Studies, we will read works from across the disciplines—anthropology, ethnomusicology, Religious Studies,

Media Studies, and history. Organized thematically, this course will focus on the twentieth century, but the readings will address earlier time periods.

Muslims and Hindus

MDES GU4644, Professor Jonathan Peterson

Tuesday: 4:10-6:00 PM

This course examines Indo-Islamic and Hindu cultures in South Asia up to the early colonial period. We use a wide range of sources, including Sanskrit and Persian literature, inscriptions, travel writing, court chronicles, translations, material culture, and more. This material allows us to critically engage questions that shape both current academic debates as well as popular and political discourse: How do contemporary historical accounts project perceptions of insiders and outsiders back into South Asian pasts? What was the role of power in both the rhetoric of conflict and examples of cultural borrowing and influence? What can we learn from the representation of the other in Sanskrit, Persian, and vernacular literature? What strategies were employed to understand and overcome difference? How have the categories ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ been shaped historically, and are they sensible to think with?

MUGHAL INDIA

MDES GU4652, Professor Christine Marrewa Karwoski

Tuesday: 12:10-2:00 PM

Contested Histories: A Medieval Jewish Empire?

MDES GU4945, Professor Alison Vacca

Monday: 10:10 AM-12:00 PM

In the tenth century, the Jewish physician Hasdai b. Shaprut wrote a letter in Hebrew from his home in Islamic Spain. He asked about the veracity of the stories he had heard from Khorasani merchants: could it be true that a Jewish empire existed far afield that could hold its own against the Roman Empire and Islamic Caliphate alike? The response to Hasdai’s query was discovered in the geniza of the synagogue in Old Cairo, answering in the affirmative. Some modern scholars read the correspondence as evidence of the Jewish empire; others dismiss the correspondence as the same vein of the Prester John narratives among European Christians or, worse, an anti-Semitic theory about Jewish control over trade routes. For both medieval and modern observers, the line between fact and fiction in the history of this empire has never been particularly clear.

In the modern world, the ethnonym “Khazar” has been coopted into anti-Semitic discourse. While this course will trace the changing meaning of the term, we will focus mainly on the medieval Khazars themselves. The Khazar Khaganate—an empire that stretched over eastern Europe and the north Caucasus from the eighth to the tenth centuries—caught the imagination of historians, litterateurs, missionaries, and philosophers over the centuries. The extant evidence

about the Khaganate is vast, but usually contradictory, frequently sensationalist, and invariably contested. Given the sheer quantity of information preserved about the Khazars, narrating their history becomes an exercise in imaginative reflection. As a result, this course offers a deep dive into the extant sources, asking what practical challenges emerge from reading the contested history of the Khaganate across the wide array of Greek, Arabic, Persian, Georgian, Armenian, and Hebrew sources. After engaging with the sources available for Khazar history, the last few meetings of the class will open the conversation to potential models for embracing medieval imagination and grappling with modern accretions to Khazar histories.

THEORY AND METHODS II

MDES GR5001, Professor Sudipta Kaviraj

Thursday: 10:10-12:00 PM

The main purpose of this course is to acquaint students with different theories and methodological approaches to reading and interpretation of texts. This course may not be taken as Pass/D/Fail.

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.

Settlers and Natives

MDES GR6410, Professor Mahmood Mamdani

Thursday: 10:10 AM-12:00 PM

This course is designed to introduce the student to key debates in the study of societies marked by the centrality of settler-native relations: We shall focus on four key debates: (a) how to conceptualize extreme violence, as criminal or political; (b) the relationship of perpetrators to beneficiaries; (c) the significance of human rights institutions, from the Nuremberg Court to the International Criminal Court to the question of decolonization; and (d) the making of a political community of survivors after catastrophe. The class will be organized around several case studies: (a) Ireland; (b) the Americas; (c) Haiti; (d) Australia; (e) the Nuremberg Court; (f) South Africa; and (g) Israel / Palestine.

Orientalism and Postcolonial Theory

MDES GR6600, Professor Sudipta Kaviraj

Thursday: 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.

Media Materialisms

MDES GR6631, Professor Debashree Mukherjee

Tuesday: 2:10-4:00 PM

This graduate seminar offers a survey of debates on materiality and object-oriented ontologies that are currently revitalizing the humanities and social sciences. How does the physical world of objects and things affect our social and perceptual reality? Is it possible to imagine a world with the non-human at its center? Should we learn to study a “thing in itself” or is it better to approach matter as always-already entangled in networks and relations? In this interdisciplinary seminar we will keep media objects and contexts at the center of our study and travel through a long history of critical interest in materialism. The seminar begins with foundational debates from Marx to McLuhan and gradually moves through modules on materialism as understood vis-a-vis things, actors, relations, bodies, images, infrastructures, aesthetics, and ecologies. Weekly sessions combine historical and philosophical approaches to media forms and their material lives. A special emphasis is placed on complicating dominant disciplinary frameworks with theories and case studies from the South and insights from feminist theory. This is an interdisciplinary weekly course that will be relevant to students interested in media, film, cultural history, material culture, object histories, infrastructure studies, and environmental humanities.

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.

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.