

# **New MESAAS Courses Spring 2024**

## **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.

## **Armenians and the Modern World**

**MDES GU4360, Professor Cevat Dargin**

**Thursday: 12:10-2:00 PM**

This course provides an introductory overview of modern Armenian history, spanning from the 19th century when Armenians lived across the Ottoman, Iranian, and Russian empires up to the present. It covers key historical events, including Ottoman reforms, Armenian revolutionary movements, the Armenian Genocide, periods of independence, Soviet rule, and the emergence of the Republic of Armenia in 1991. While the history of modern state in Armenian experience is a crucial aspect of the course, it also places a substantial focus on understanding Armenians as an intersectional community crossing imperial, national, and regional boundaries and belongings. The course employs innovative methods, primary sources, and digital materials to provide a comprehensive understanding of Armenian history and culture in a global context.

## **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?

## **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?

## **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.

## **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.