

# MESAAS Courses 2023-24

## Fall 2023

### **GAME OF THRONES: ON EPICS AND EMPIRES**

**MDES UN1030, Professor Hamid Dabashi**

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

This undergraduate course offered in the context of the Global Core component of the Core Curriculum is an examination of the globally popular HBO series “Game of Thrones” as a prototype for a comparative understanding of the larger question of epics and empires. In this course we expand the domains of our interests and inquiries far wider and divide our syllabus into four parts: (1) Westeros: The Mythic Empire; (2) Persia: The First Empire, (3) America: The Last Empire; and (4) On Epics and Empires. Our objective will be to examine the main themes and overall arch of “Game of Thrones” into wider mythic, heroic, and transhistorical dimensions of our contemporary history.

### **INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION**

**ASCM UN2003, Professor Alison Vacca**

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

Lecture and recitation. Islamic civilization and its characteristic intellectual, political, social, and cultural traditions up through 1800. Note: Students must register for a discussion section, ASCM UN2113.

### **SOUTH ASIA AT THE CROSSROADS OF EMPIRES**

**MDES UN2042, Professor Isabel Huacuja Alonso**

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

In this course we will study the late colonial and early post-colonial periods of South Asian history together. Some of the events we will cover include: the climax of anti-colonial movements in South Asia, WWII as it developed in South and Southeast Asia, the partition of British India, the two Indo-Pakistan wars, and the 1971 Bangladesh War. While we will read selected secondary literature, we will focus on a range of primary sources, including original radio broadcasts and oral history interviews. We will also study artistic interpretations of historical developments, including short stories and films. In this course, we will strive to remain attentive to the important changes engendered by colonialism, while simultaneously recognizing the agency of South Asians in formulating their own modernities during this critical period. We will also seek to develop a narrative of modern South Asian history, which is attentive to parallel and/or connected events in other regions.

## **AFRICA BEFORE COLONIALISM**

**HSME UN2915, Professor Mamadou Diouf**

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

This course is an interdisciplinary exploration of the precolonial history of the African continent. It investigates in-depth the political, social, cultural and economic developments of different Africa communities, covering various regions and periods, from prehistory to the formation of the Indian Ocean and Atlantic worlds. Its focus is the intersection of politics, economics, culture and society. Using world history and Africa's location in the production of history as key analytical frames, it pays special attention to social, political and cultural changes that shaped the various individual and collective experiences of African peoples and states and the historical discourses associated to them.

## **THEORY AND CULTURE**

**MDES UN3000, Professor Debashree Mukherjee**

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

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.

## **INTRODUCTION TO ARMENIAN STUDIES**

**MDES UN3335, Professor Alison Vacca**

**Tuesday: 10:10 AM-12:00 PM**

Historians frequently situate Armenia between two powers: between Rome and Persia, then Byzantium and Islam. This class will shake up the usual "between-two-worlds" paradigm, which places Armenia and Armenians in the crosshairs of world powers. Instead, we will study Armenians as active participants in world dramas, at the center of global developments. Our main goal will be to draw upon a variety of sources to tell the story of Armenia and Armenians: histories, poems, art, coins, buildings, etc.

## **ANTICOLONIALISM, CONSTITUTIONALISM, AND DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH ASIA**

**MDES UN3622, Professor Shaunna Rodrigues**

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

How does anticolonialism shape the political present and future(s) of South Asia? This syllabus explores this question by reflecting on how political and social concepts formulated by anticolonial thinkers like M.K. Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar, and Muhammad Iqbal, among others, have impacted public life in South Asia in the last century. In particular, it explores how anticolonial concepts gain thicker meanings and implications through the experiences and

challenges of constitutionalism and democracy in postcolonial societies. This course explores themes such as Anticolonial Worldmaking, Anti-Caste Assertion, Founding Moments for Post-Colonial Democracies, Representation and Citizenship in Uneasily Secular Societies, the Everyday Life of the Law, Religious Nationalism, and recent debates on Environmental Rights and Data Privacy and Security. Each of these themes are designed to understand how anticolonialism, constitutionalism and democracy address the dilemmas of deep diversity in South Asia.

### **INTRODUCTION TO 20TH CENTURY SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE**

**MDES UN3632, Professor Sourav Chatterjee**

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

This class offers a survey of major works of twentieth-century South Asian literature. We will read Raja Rao, Rokeya Hossain, Ismat Chughtai, Viswanadha Satyanarayana, Amrita Pritam, and Romesh Gunesequera. Emphasis will be placed on studying the thematic, formal, and stylistic elements of works and developing critical skills necessary for literary analysis. Works will engage with questions of nation & nationalism, gender & sexuality, caste, environment, and literary history.

### **ARABIC LITERATURE AS WORLD LITERATURE**

**CLME UN3221, Professor Sarah Bin Tyeer**

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

This seminar focuses on Arabic literature in the world, as World Literature. The focus will be on pre-modern and modern Arabic literary works that traveled and circulated and were adapted to and acquired individual meanings in different cultures. We will look at literary works that achieved 'worldliness' through either writing back to the center or through international literary prizes. We will consider how literary works travel and circulate through their fusion with regional concepts, or even take on new meanings at different times and places. Admittedly, also, we will look into the strengths, weaknesses, and criticism surrounding World Literature.

### **CONTEMPORARY CULTURE IN ARAB WORLD**

**MDES UN3920, Professor Joseph Massad**

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

This seminar, designed for seniors, aims to acquaint students with the notion and theoretical understanding of culture and to introduce them to a critical method by which they can study and appreciate contemporary culture in the Arab World. The seminar will survey examples of written and cinematic culture (fiction and autobiography), as well as music, dance, and literary criticism in the contemporary Arab world. Students will be reading novels, autobiographies and literary

criticism, as well as watch films and listen to music as part of the syllabus. All material will be in translation. Films will be subtitled. Songs will be in Arabic.

### **CENTRAL QUESTIONS IN ISLAMIC LAW**

**MDES UN3923, Professor Wael Hallaq**

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

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.

### **ARABIC PRISON WRITING**

**CLME UN3928, Professor Muhsin Al-Musawi**

**Thursday: 2:10-4:00 PM**

This course studies the genealogy of the prison in Arab culture as manifested in memoirs, narratives, and poems. These cut across a vast temporal and spatial swathe, covering selections from the Quran, Sufi narratives from al-Hallaj oeuvre, poetry by prisoners of war: classical, medieval, and modern. It also studies modern narratives by women prisoners and political prisoners, and narratives that engage with these issues. Arabic prison writing is studied against other genealogies of this prism, especially in the West, to map out the birth of prison, its institutionalization, mechanism, and role. All readings for the course are in English translations.

### **HONORS THESIS SEMINAR PART 1**

**MDES UN3960, Professor Hamid Dabashi**

**Monday: 10:10 AM -12:00 PM**

Prerequisites: minimum GPA of 3.5 in MESAAS courses. The MESAAS honors seminar offers students the opportunity to undertake a sustained research project under close faculty supervision. The DUS advises on general issues of project design, format, approach, general research methodologies, and timetable. In addition, students work with an individual advisor who has expertise in the area of the thesis and can advise on the specifics of method and content. The thesis will be jointly evaluated by the adviser, the DUS, and the honors thesis TA. The DUS will lead students through a variety of exercises that are directly geared to facilitating the thesis. Students build their research, interpretive, and writing skills; discuss methodological approaches; write an annotated bibliography; learn to give constructive feedback to peers and respond to feedback effectively. The final product is a polished research paper in the range of 40-60 pages. Please note: This is a one-year course that begins in the fall semester (1 point) and continues through the spring semester (3 points). Only students who have completed both semesters will receive the full 4 points of credit.

## **URBAN SOUTH AFRICA**

**MDES GU4142, Professor Laura Fair**

**Tuesday: 10:10 AM -12:00 PM**

The aims of this seminar are 1) to introduce students to the broad parameters of urban South African history 2) to familiarize students with the immense creativity and resilience of African peoples, even in the most difficult colonial contexts 3) to illustrate how race, class and gender were socially, historically and politically constructed in South Africa 4) to guide students in the completion of an original research paper on some aspect of black South African urban life 5) to enhance student appreciation for the ways in which a researcher's perspective and interests influences their interpretation of sources 6) to make visible the ways in which research outcomes are shaped by a researcher's choice of source material 7) to develop student research and writing skills. This course provides only a bare introduction to the history of South Africa. The chief aim is to provide students with a hands-on opportunity to conduct original research and to help students develop skills in documenting African agency and resilience in the face of colonial oppression, often by 'reading between the lines' of state-produced documents.

## **THE WAYS OF 'ILM: Scholarly Traditions in the Classical Islamic World (700-1300)**

**CLME GU4210, Professor Elaine van Dalen**

**Thursday: 2:10-4:00 PM**

This course covers the epistemologies and main theological and philosophical standpoints of a wide range of Islamic intellectual traditions. It will explore how different groups of scholars accumulated knowledge of God and the universe in the Classical Islamic world, a period which in many ways can be considered formative for contemporary Islam. We focus on various bodies of knowledge as these were developed from the 7th-c. 13th centuries AD. Each week covers a separate theological, philosophical, or scientific tradition, after which the class will explore the tensions and syntheses between various competing worldviews.

## **ARABIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY: GLOBAL DIMENSIONS**

**CLME GU4226, Professor Muhsin Al-Musawi**

**Wednesday: 2:10-4:00 PM**

This course draws a map of Arab thought and culture in its multiple engagements with other cultures. It works globally along two lines: a theoretical one that accommodates conceptualizations of self-narrative in relation to shifting categories of center and margin; and a thematic one that selects a number of Arabic autobiographical texts with strong thematic concerns that cut across multiple cultures. Although Europe sounds at times more conspicuous in early 20th century autobiography, the Afro-Asian and Latin American topographical and historical itinerary and context are no less so, especially in writings we associate with societal and cultural transformations. More than historical accounts, these intellectual itineraries speak for the successes and failures of the secular ideology of the Arab nation-state. They convey the struggle of intellectuals-- as self-styled leaders, for an ideal state on the ruins of the past. The course studies a number of autobiographical works; memoirs and reminiscences that are meant to

rationalize and reproduce a writer's experience. Probably self-censored, these serve nevertheless as trajectories for a secular journey rather than one from denial to affirmation. Staunchly established in modernity and its nahdah paradigms, most of these writings are secular itineraries that rarely end in a search for faith. They are the journeys of a generation of Arab intellectuals who are facing many crises, but not the crisis of faith. They provide another look at the making of the Arab intelligentsia- and probably the Afro-Asian and Latin American one, since the early 20th century, and help us discern not only achievements on the level of education and public service , but also the mounting discontent with failures that have been wrapping the formation of the nation state. No prior knowledge of Arabic language is required.

### **WAR, GENOCIDE, & AFTERMATH COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

**MDES GU4357, Professor Khatchig Mouradian**

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

This 4000-level course examines how societies grapple with the legacy of mass violence, through an exploration of historical texts, memoirs, textbooks, litigation, and media reports and debates on confronting the past. Focusing on case studies of the Herero Genocide, the Armenian genocide during WWI, and the Holocaust and the Comfort Women during WWII, students investigate the crime and its sequelae, looking at how societies deal with skeletons in their closets (engaging in silence, trivialization, rationalization, and denial to acknowledgment, apology, and repair); surveying responses of survivors and their descendants (with particular attention to intergeneration transmission of trauma, forgiveness, resentment, and the pursuit of redress); and dissecting public debates on modern day issues that harken back to past atrocities.

### **GENDER, SEXUALITY, RELIGION, & POWER IN INDIA**

**MDES GU4626, Professor Christine Marrewa Karwoski**

This course is a broad cultural history of gender, sex, religion, and power in South Asia over the longue durée. Readings will examine these topics in early modern and modern Indian cultures and have been chosen not so much with a view toward comprehensiveness but for variety—allowing us to explore gender and sexuality in diverse topics such as religion, literature, politics, visual culture, and historiography.

### **THEORY AND METHODS I**

**MDES GR5000, Professor Timothy Mitchell**

**Tuesday: 10:10-12:00 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.

### **COLONIALISM**

**CLME GR6020, Professor Timothy Mitchell**

**Wednesday: 6:10-8:00 PM**

The seminar on Colonialism examines questions of political economy and politics through the study of colonial regimes of power and knowledge. It explores the genealogy of modern forms of property, law, finance, debt, administration, and violence. In Spring 2022 the seminar will examine what happens if we replace the history of capitalism with the study of "capitalization." The seminar is intended primarily for Ph.D. students interested in interdisciplinary approaches to the study of politics, political economy, and colonial history, but is also open to MA students with sufficient background to contribute to the course. Any interested student is welcome to attend the first session. Places in the class depend on the permission of the instructor, and will be confirmed immediately after the first session.

### **READINGS IN AFRICAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY**

**MDES GR6144, Professor Mamadou Diouf**

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

### **READINGS IN SUFI TEXTS**

**MDES GR6236, Professor Wael Hallaq**

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

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 Ṣūfis 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.

### **CAMERA IN THE TROPICS**

**MDES GR6625, Professor Debashree Mukherjee**

**Thursday: 2:10-4:00 PM**

This graduate seminar situates the history of photography within the history of colonial productions of tropicality, and the concomitant occupation of tropical places. Specific regimes of vision accompanied the European conquest of peoples and lands, undergirded the racialization of bodies, and colluded in epistemic binaries of centers and peripheries. At the same time, modern visual media did not possess an intrinsically “colonial gaze.” Rather, many of the same apparatuses of seeing and representation proved to be powerful tools in the assertion of minoritized selves, be it in fugitive, playful, or explicitly confrontational forms. Our focus will be on 19th -20th century lens-based image production, particularly photography. Each week we will acquaint ourselves with concepts and methods that will help us read images, situate current decolonial debates in visual studies within older foundational debates on vision and visibility, and read key texts in historiography. Weekly readings are curated as per a spatial logic, retracing the itineraries of colonial adventurism and control: from the ship to the island, the plantation, the prison, and the laboratory. This seminar is designed mainly for doctoral students; Masters students can join with instructor permission. **LEARNING OUTCOMES** • Familiarity with foundational debates in photography studies. • Ability to articulate the relationship between a history of vision, the production of space, and the epistemic techniques of colonialism. • A comparative history of colonized islands and archipelagoes construed as “tropical.” • Methods in postcolonial, anti-colonial, and decolonial reading of texts and images.

### **SWAHILI COAST: ISSUES, METHODS, HISTORIOGRAPHIES**

**MDES GR8150, Professor Laura Fair**

**Tuesday: 2:10-4:00 PM**

This course is designed to introduce graduate students to some of the key issues and terrains of scholarship in Swahili Coastal historiographies. Students will become familiar with some of the central intellectual debates and cornerstone texts, although the reading list is far from exhaustive. We will examine how some of the key issues and locations of research have shifted over time and discuss how and why national politics have shaped regional historiographies in the ways that



they have. Of equal, or likely greater, importance is attention to how changes in intellectual theory and methods have impacted the form that scholarship has taken.

**PSYCHOANALYSIS, IDENTITY, 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.

# Spring 2024

AFCV UN1020, African Civilizations, Laura Fair  
AHUM UN1399, Major Texts, Sarah bin Tyeer, Elaine Van Dalen  
ASCM UN2008, Contemporary Islamic Civilization, Alison Vacca  
MDES UN2641, Cinemas of India, Debashree Mukherjee  
MDES UN3042, Palestinian & Israeli Politics, Joseph Massad  
MDES UN3121, Literature and Culture of South Africa, Jennifer Wenzel  
MDES UN3130, East Africa & Swahili Coast, Laura Fair  
MDES UN3267, Decolonizing the Arabian Nights, Muhsin al-Musawi  
MDES UN3915, History of African Cities, Mamadou Diouf  
MDES UN3960, Honors Thesis Seminar, Alison Vacca  
CLME UN3930, Iraq: War, Love, and Exile, Muhsin al-Musawi  
MDES GU4154, Pan Africanism, Mamadou Diouf  
MDES GU4532 Beyond Human in Modern Hebrew Literature, Naama Harel  
CLME GU4634, Persian as a Philosophical Language, Hamid Dabashi  
MDES GU4634, Sound and Listening Cultures of South Asia, Isabel Huacuja Alonso  
MDES GU4637, Cinema and Colonialism in South Asia, Debashree Mukherjee  
MDES GR5001, Theory and Methods, II, Sudipta Kaviraj  
MDES GR6008, MESAAS Research Colloquium, Mana Kia  
MDES GR6600, Postcolonial Theory, Sudipta Kaviraj  
MDES GR6631, Media Materialisms, Debashree Mukherjee  
MDES GR8008, Dissertation Colloquium, Gil Hochberg  
MDES GR8280, Studying Gender and Sexuality in the Arab World, Joseph Massad

## **Spring 2024**

### **CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION**

**ASCM UN2008, Professor Alison Vacca**

Lecture and recitation. No previous study of Islam is required. The early modern, colonial, and post-colonial Islamic world studied through historical case studies, translated texts, and recent anthropological research. Topics include Sufism and society, political ideologies, colonialism, religious transformations, poetry, literature, gender, and sexuality. Note: Students must register for a discussion section, ASCM UN2118.

### **CINEMAS OF INDIA**

**MDES UN2641, Professor Debashree Mukherjee**

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.

### **PALESTINIAN-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**

How should we understand the political worlds of the Middle East? It is common to see the region's modern and contemporary history as a succession of failings: the slow pace of reform in the nineteenth century; the failure of modernization and economic development in the twentieth century; and today, the lack of democracy, the inability to achieve peace, the breakdown of military security, and the failure of states.

This course takes a different approach. It asks how we came to approach politics as the measuring of success according to a certain set of goals, such as development, peace, and security. Who defined those goals and how are they measured? How have others seen the problems of collective life, including intellectuals and political actors from the Middle East itself? Are there alternative ways to understand the present predicaments of peoples of the region and the paths towards a less precarious life? Can other accounts of the recent past, not framed as the failure of development or the inability to make peace, support alternative futures?

**MESAAS RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM**

**MDES GR6008, Professor Mana Kia**

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