

New MESAAS Courses Fall 2024

PREMODERN ISLAMIC WORLDS

MDES UN1003, Professor Sarah bin Tyeer

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.

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN SOUTH ASIA

MDES UN2044, Professor Humeira Iqtidar

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

This module is designed to provide students with a thorough understanding of conceptual and empirical debates about religion and politics in South Asia. The rise in public manifestations of religions in the last two decades in almost all parts of the world has led to much rethinking and reconsideration of the relationship of religious thought and practice to political structures and dynamics. We will take a theoretically informed and empirically grounded look at the imbrication of religion and politics in the wider South Asia region, including Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The course allows an insight into the diversity of religious ideas and practices in the region, historical variations, influence of colonialism and the relationship with globalization. We will engage with scholarship on these themes from the disciplines of history, anthropology and political science. Prior familiarity with the region is not required.

RETHINKING IMPERIALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

HSME UN3252, Professor Nadeem Mansour

Wednesday: 6:10 -8:00 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 with them.

Curb Your Enthusiasm: The Global History of Laughter

MDES GU3634, Professor Sourav Chatterjee

Thursday: 2:10-4:00 PM

Writers have long considered laughter subversive, shocking, undermining, disturbing, agitating, and even demonic. While Henri Bergson considered laughter to emanate from the sight of a falling man, Baudelaire regarded laughter as a sign of the perpetually fallen state of humankind. Laughter's medium of expression navigates the verbal, visual, literary, performative, and theatrical. Humans have invoked it for the purposes of entertainment, critique, social bonding, therapy, protest, and navigating repressive regimes. Laughter, therefore, assumes a communal quality whereby it connects an individual to a group, an audience, and a crowd. Bergson famously declared: "Our laughter is always the laughter of a group." In this course, we will take an interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon and affect of laughter. We will examine laughter's history and historicity and the genres it has produced through its incorporation into the public sphere, thus shaping the history of the modern world. The course covers the ribaldry of the Fool's Literature during the Protestant Reformation, the zaniness of Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, Gaganendranath Tagore's political cartoons, the films of Charlie Chaplin and Marx Brothers, writings of Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson, Mikhail Bakhtin, and John Morreall, Larry David's television sitcom, Curb Your Enthusiasm leading up to contemporary internet memes. Course assignments will focus on developing writing skills through weekly blog posts on the class Instagram page, two short close-reading assignments, a midterm essay, and a final paper.

Race and Racism in the Global South

MDES GU4059, Professor Humeira Iqtidar

Thursday: 4:10-6:00 PM

Contemporary discussions about racism have tended to focus on the experience of North Atlantic slave trade and theoretical debates tend to rely upon American experiences of racialization. However, there is substantial variation in the contours

of racism across time and space. Relatedly, strategies for resistance to racism also vary significantly. It is important to think through the political and theoretical implications of potential differences in experiences and forms of racism in the global south. To this end, this course attempts to provide an insight into both historical and ideational variation. We will engage with historical research as well as the political ideas of particular thinkers grappling with the challenge of modern racism.

At the same time as exploring the variation in historical, regional and ideational debates we will pay considerable attention to the arguments proposed by many global south thinkers about homogenization under global capitalism. The mutual imbrication of modern racism and capitalism has been an important concern for many 20th century Global South thinkers and it is useful to think through their arguments regarding simultaneous homogenization and differentiation built into capitalism. While ‘non-Western’ or Global South thinkers have been addressed questions of race and racism in important ways, some have also voiced racist views of their own. The course draws upon scholarship in Postcolonial Theory, Black Marxist and Radical thought, and Comparative Political Theory, as well recent comparative historical research on questions of slavery and racialization.

Reading Marx Historically

MDES GU4060, Professor Sudipta Kaviraj

Thursday: 2:10-4:00 PM

The historical significance of Marx lies not only in his reception in Germany or Europe, but across the world. But Marx’s thought emerged from a highly specific intellectual context of European thought. Therefore, reading Marx must have a contextual, German and European side, and, equally, a global reception side. The purpose of this course will be to read Marx’s texts closely, and to follow the trajectory of his ideas historically and therefore globally. In one sense, we understand what ‘doing’ political theory means more clearly in studying the struggles of Marx’s readers in addressing the question: how can reading Marx illuminate the historical analysis of very different societies – societies which were not in Europe, societies which were not based on a capitalist economy, societies that were not yet ‘modern’ in their economy, politics and culture. A part of the course will be about the Marxism of the ‘others’: American Black thinkers, and

thinkers in China, India, Africa, the Middle East. To follow Marx's thought historically is to read his thought globally.

India after 1947: Democracy and Majoritarianism

MDES GR4655, Professor Isabel Huacuja Alonso

Wednesday: 12:10-2:00 PM

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.

Indo-Islamic Culture in Literature

MDES GU4825, Professor Timsal Masud

Friday: 10:10-12:00 PM

This course will focus on the Indo-Islamic literary traditions in South Asia, and particularly in what is now India and Pakistan, focusing on Urdu literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The course will emphasize the rhetorical and performative history of poetic forms in the subcontinent (including the forms of the

Ghazal and Nauha, among others) and will consider how classical poetic tropes continue to inform contemporary mass culture in India and Pakistan—particularly in the song lyrics of Hindi/Bollywood cinema. The course will also consider more contemporary prose genres of Urdu-language writing (in English translation), including the literature of the Partition and the works of contemporary authors such as Naiyer Masud and Saima Iram. Through a comparative study of texts in different genres and at different moments in history, students will consider questions such as: What aspects of contemporary literary culture in India and Pakistan can be traced to early establishment of Islamic culture in the region? How have the poetic conventions of Indo-Islamic poetry continued to resonate? How did the interaction of Hindu and Muslim literary, musical, visual, and religious cultures in the Mughal era help to generate the rich profusion of literature and music and cultural tolerance in this period?

Most of our readings in this course will be Urdu literature in English translation. We will also, however, read some secondary sources in order to help us better understand the primary sources.

South Asians in East Africa, 1750-1970

MDES GR6150, Professor Laura Fair

Tuesday: 2:10-4:00 PM

This graduate seminar examines the intersection of two MESAAS areas, South Asia and Africa, examining the long-term economic, social, cultural and political links between South Asia and East Africa, largely through the experience of South Asian immigrants to East Africa. Although connections between the regions have occurred for millennia, we will focus primarily on period after 1750. In addition to providing a general introduction to some of the themes and issues in the historiography, the course requires students to substantially engage with a range of primary source materials over the course of the term, from colonial archival documents, to newspapers, autobiographies and literature.