Course Guide:  
Introduction to Middle Eastern Debates (CMEN03) 10 credits

Overview:

The aim of this course is to discuss the various ways in which the Middle East is constructed in and related to a number of debates in different disciplines. The course will cast a critical eye on the discourses about the Middle East with a particular focus on contemporary debates surrounding historical/contemporary developments in the region. The goal is to lay the conceptual and theoretical groundwork for a better understanding of the political and cultural dynamics of Middle Eastern societies. The course consists of seven lecture and five seminars. Students get the chance to engage with one another in critical and meaningful debate rooted in the course readings.

Grades Marking Scale:

Fail, E, D, C, B, A. The highest grade is A and the lowest passing grade is E. The grade for a non-passing result is F.

Scale of grades:

A = 92 - 100 % of total points
B = 84 - 92 % of total points
C = 76 - 84 % of total points
D = 68 - 76 % of total points
E = 60 - 68 % of total points
F = 0 - 59 % of total points.

All assessed course components are graded.

The grading criteria for written assignments roughly corresponds to those specified in CMES Master Thesis Guidelines (available at Live@Lund).

A: The written work is well-structured, has clear objectives and a well-defined and relevant research question, uses appropriate methods/data to answer this question, undertakes a thorough and critical literature review with references to key texts, provides a compelling discussion of the research question and/or the case at hand, shows how the selected theoretical perspective helps (or fails to help) us to understand the questions/case under study. **Keyword: Excellent.**

B: The written work is relatively well-structured, has clear objectives and a research question, uses somewhat appropriate methods/data to answer this question, undertakes an adequate literature review with references to a limited number of key texts, provides a satisfactory discussion of the research question and/or the case at hand, shows - to a certain extent - how the selected theoretical perspective helps (or fails to help) us to understand the questions/case under study. **Keyword: Good.**

C: The written work has some structural problems, is wanting when it comes to defining objectives and the research question, has problems regarding methodology, fails to undertake an adequate literature review, i.e. omits some important texts, does not offer a convincing discussion of the research question and/or the case at hand, does not engage fully with the selected theoretical perspective. **Keyword: Average.**

D-E: The written work is disorganized and incoherent, does not have clear objectives and a proper research question, fails to use appropriate methods/data, shows little, if any, familiarity with existing literature, does not address the research question and/or discuss the case at hand, fails to engage with the selected theoretical perspective. The difference between D and E is a matter of degree. **Keyword: Below average.**
F: The written work fails to fulfil any of the above-mentioned criteria regarding structure, aims and objectives, identifying and addressing a research question, using a proper methodology, showing some familiarity with existing literature and an ability to engage with theory, or a particular case for that matter. **Keywords: Inadequate, Fail.**

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**Examination:**

**Response Papers**: Three 600-800 word “response papers” (20% each) to be submitted electronically. Each response paper should critically engage with some aspect of the course readings for each week that caught your eye. It could be a sentence, a paragraph or a full article. For more information on how to write a response paper see: https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-write-a-response-paper-1857017

**Final Paper**: Final paper (40%) to be submitted electronically 4000-5000 words long (double spaced, Times New Roman font). The final paper should be a theoretically informed case study of your choice (subject to prior consent by the instructor). For more information on how to design a case study, see: http://www.arf-asia.org/resources/using_case_study_in_research.pdf

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**Introduction Lecture: Introduction to Middle Eastern Debates**  
**(Friday, 2018-10-05, HusP:115, 10-12)**

**Topic 1: Were or What is the “Middle East”?**

**Lecture 1: Were or What is the “Middle East”?**  
**((Monday, 2018-10-08, HusM:128, 08-10)**

This lecture will explore different contending visions of the Middle East, as well discuss how we conceptualize area studies. Can the Middle East be circumscribed geographically or should it be seen as a cognitive universe, of ideas without geographical constraints? Who are the actors that have the power to (re)define what can be perceived as the Middle East? Finally, can we speak of the politics of defining and reproducing the Middle East?

**Readings:**


**Seminar 1: Were or What is the “Middle East”?**  
**((Wednesday, 2018-10-10, HusR:240, 10-12)**

**Topic 2: Orientalism: Edward Said and his Critics**

**Lecture 2: Orientalism: Edward Said and his critics**  
**((Monday, 2018-10-15, HusM:128, 08-10)**

One of the most widely discussed critical theories of how Western imperialism has extended its power over the Middle East is Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, first published in 1978. Said posits a Western tradition of thought, dating back to the ancient Greek tragedy *The Persians*, as containing an inherently expansionist, imperialistic, and exclusionary agenda under the mask of universalism. How does Said argue for this remarkable claim? How historically accurate is his narrative? How comprehensive is his empirical scope? How useful is it for the project of anti-imperialist emancipation? Since its publication, Said’s text has given rise to a raft of responses addressing these questions. In this section, we will look at Said’s arguments and the counter-arguments of Daniel Varisco, a recent astute critic.
Readings:


Seminar 2: Orientalism: Edward Said and his critics (Wednesday, 2018-10-17, HusR:236, 10-12)


Lecture 3: A case for colonialism?

In the end of 2017 the academic journal Third World Quarterly published a viewpoint article titled “The case for colonialism”, by Bruce Gilley, a professor of Political Science at Portland State University in Oregon. The publication of the article led to widespread furor in the global academic community, with angry petitions demanding the retraction of the published article. According to critics the article not only glorifies the earlier colonial rule but also advocates for the recolonization of certain ex-colonies. As a protest against the publication, 15 of the 34-member editorial board resigned, stating in an open-letter that they had not been consulted about the publication of this article, and that even after requests, the reviews were not made available to them. Following a number of complaints and threats the publisher Taylor & Francis, withdrew the article at the request of the academic journal editor, and in agreement with the author. This lecture discusses both the content of the article, issues of academic freedom and diversity of viewpoints within academia.

Readings:


Dupraz, Y & Rueda, V. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2017/10/17/there-is-no-case-for-colonialism-insights-from-the-colonial-economic-history/


Seminar 3: A case for colonialism? (Wednesday, 2018-10-24, HusR:236, 10-12)
Topic 4: Debating a Discipline, Contesting Identities, and the Future of Islamic Studies

Lecture 4: Debating a Discipline, Contesting Identities, and the Future of Islamic Studies (Friday, 2018-10-26, HusR:236, 10-12)

This lecture seeks to analyze a recent American academic debate about the state of Islamic studies — especially the study of Islam within religious studies — sparked by a heated exchange between two prolific scholars, Omid Safi and Aaron W. Hughes. The lecture will outline the main arguments and conflict lines in the debate and apply them to a broader discussion on the allure, danger and power of the discipline.

Readings:

Safi, O. “Reflections on the State of Islamic Studies”

Hughes, A. “When Bad Scholarship Is Just Bad Scholarship: A Response to Omid Safi”

Mas, R. “Has Politics Let Us Off the Hook?: Reflections on Islamic Studies”
http://bulletin.equinoxpub.com/2014/03/has-politics-let-us-off-the-hook-reflections-on-islamic-studies/

Hammer, J. “Changing the World: Reflections on Islamic Studies”
http://bulletin.equinoxpub.com/2014/06/changing-the-world-reflections-on-islamic-studies/

http://bulletin.equinoxpub.com/2014/05/ode-to-islamic-studies-its-allure-its-danger-its-power-reflections-on-islamic-studies/

Seminar 4: Debating a Discipline, Contesting Identities, and the Future of Islamic Studies (Monday, 2018-10-29, HusR:236, 10-12)

Topic 5:
Lecture 5 Competing Social Explanations of Violent Islamism (Wednesday, 2018-31-10, HusR:236, 10-12)

Britain, France, Spain, Belgium, Germany, and Sweden have all seen terrorist attacks committed by violent Islamists who were often born and raised in Europe. What causes European Muslims to join violent Islamist groups and perform terrorist attacks? Is it long-standing social, economic, and cultural marginalization? Is it because of an essential violent element in Islam as a religious doctrine? Or is it a generational revolt against society that can be likened to the terrorist attacks committed by groups such as the Red Brigades and the Red Army Faction in the 1970s? In this section, we will look at how two leading scholars of political Islam, Olivier Roy and Gilles Kepel, offer radically different answers to these highly salient questions.

Readings:


Succeeding in a Seminar

Darcy Thompson (Teacher here at CMES) has compiled this excellent text about good seminar culture. It contains some pointers for you to think about when attending seminars during this course (and other seminars in academic settings). Some of you might find it self-evident but I still think it serves as a good reminder what seminars is all about.

Some of your most important and impression-forming interactions with your classmates and teachers will occur in seminars. Seminars are the building blocks for your knowledge; they give you an opportunity to discuss topics discussed in course lectures and course readings. In other words, students are required to learn actively and engage with the literature and with one another. Simply understanding the content of the readings and lectures is not enough at this level. Students need to come prepared to:

- Practice posing critical questions
- Practice using subject-specific language (appropriate discourse)
- Practice articulating your own interpretations
- Practice actively listening to your peers.

Seminars are collaborative. The success of a good seminar is not only based on its content (in terms of the themes and subjects being explored) but also on the way in which the seminar group works together.

Below are some practical strategies to help students succeed in the course seminars:

1. **Preparation**

   It is important to come to each seminar prepared to take a full part in discussion. This is not only a requirement to do well in the course, but to benefit the most from the seminar discussions and debates. If you have a basic understanding of the topic you will be better able to participate in discussion and understand the material being explored.

   - Begin by identifying the main issues that will be discussed. Look at the lecture topic corresponding to the seminar, as well as the essential and recommended reading lists.

   - If necessary, carry out background reading/research to develop your understanding and interest. You will find a host of resources on the internet – supplementary readings, lectures posted on Youtube, etc. – use these to develop your understanding of the main ideas/concepts. Always feel free to contact me for further reading if you are searching for a more explanatory approach to an issue.

   - Think about making notes as you read – it helps to focus your thoughts.

   - Record any questions/points of confusion you that arise while working through the assigned readings. Feel free to post these questions on the LUVIT discussion forum which will allow your classmates as well as me to respond. Remember – class participation is assessed by student’s participation in-class and/or online.
• Remember to prepare your Q-question (a question or point of discussion you have developed based on the assigned reading which you will write down on an index card or a small piece of paper and bring to the seminar).

Remember, the key to successful discussion is for everyone to be fully engaged, **not** for everyone to have fully developed ideas. A questioning approach to your preparation opens your mind and creates fertile ground for discussion and debate.

### 2. Engagement in Discussion

It is not always easy to contribute to seminar discussions, even if you have prepared thoroughly. Many students are self-conscious when it comes to what they did not understanding about the assigned readings. They feel they may have got something ‘wrong’ in their preparatory work and that everyone else has the ‘right’ answer. But this is not how it works! There are no correct or incorrect ideas, questions or reflections, and it is the coming together and sharing of such insights that makes a seminar dynamic. To help overcome nerves and anxiety, it is worth remembering the following points:

- Don’t wait until you arrive at a ‘big idea’ - say something simple and often to help build discussion;
- Share responsibility with the group: don’t dominate the discussion or leave others to do all of the talking;
- Be positive and respectful of other people’s ideas.

With these principles in mind, remember that there are a variety of different ways in which students can contribute to the group discussion. Consider using these strategies to help ease you into full involvement:

**I. Verbal/non-verbal acknowledgements**

Show that you are a good listener by paying close attention to what is being said. Acknowledge other people’s contributions by saying “yes” or nodding your head. Speakers find such signals reassuring as they show their ideas are being listened to and valued. These listening strategies will also keep you active and involved, giving a good starting point for more substantial contributions.

**II. Agreements**

Agreeing with a point someone has made can take your contributions to the next stage. Statements like “That’s a good idea” or “I had not thought of that” offer non-threatening speaking strategies. You can then build this to more complex levels of agreement, stating where and why you agree, for example: “Yes, it’s important to realise that Kushner has been read out of context.”

**III. Presenting alternative views**

Offering alternative points of view indicates a high level of involvement and can be a very effective way of helping to develop your own ideas and the ideas of others. Do not be afraid to disagree with someone, simply make sure that you do so in a constructive way. First express your disagreement by showing you understand the point that was being made and then explain why you disagree. If you are unsure as to why you disagree, try doing so with a question: “But doesn’t that contradict with...?”

**IV. Fostering positive group dynamics**

In addition to your contribution to the seminar in terms of ideas, helping to build a positive, supportive and inclusive group dynamic is also very valuable. This might entail trying to bring other people into the discussion, inviting comment or drawing upon someone with relevant experience.

**Remember:** Seminars are supposed to be interactive, dynamic and stimulating. It is your chance to really engage with the reading material and your classmates. Have fun – this is what graduate education is all about!
ALL DAY NAPPING IS ACCEPTABLE

THERE IS CONSTANT ADULT SUPERVISION

HOW GRAD SCHOOL IS JUST LIKE KINDERGARTEN

YOU GET COOKIES FOR LUNCH

MOST COMMON ACTIVITY: CUTTING AND PASTING

THERE ARE NO GRADES (YOU JUST HAVE TO PLAY WELL WITH OTHERS)

CRYING FOR YOUR MOMMY IS NORMAL