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 ten 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](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](http://www.arf-asia.org/resources/using_case_study_in_research.pdf)

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

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:**


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

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:**


**Topic 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:**


Kahn, S. “The Case Against ‘The Case For Colonialism’”  

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/

Hira, A. “A decolonial critique of the racist case for colonialism”  

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**Topic 4: Debating a Discipline, Contesting Identities, and the Future of Islamic Studies**

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/

**Topic 5: Competing Social Explanations of Violent Islamism**

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:**


**Topic 6: Debating Islamophobia: background and context of a debated concept**

There has been intensive debates on the notion of Islamophobia over the course of the last two decades. Is there a specific brand of anti-Muslim and/or anti-Muslim prejudice? If so, what are the identifiable characteristics? Or does the notion of Islamophobia contribute to a further othering of Muslim communities? Or, again, is it a justified critique of Islamic radicalization, anti-Semitism, misogyny and homophobia among Muslim communities? The debates run high and are marred with strong sentiments and entrenched ideological positions. During this lecture, we will attempt to carefully contextualize and analyze the concept(s) of Islamophobia, and exercise our ability to both speak and write with academic nuance on one of the hottest issues in current social debate.

**Readings:**


**Topic 7: Conflict and Climate Change - the potential implications for the Middle East**

The Middle East region has been identified as potentially one the worst affected geographic regions when it comes to the lived effects of climate change and environmental degradation and its potential connection to conflict. The discussion has been criticized for its over simplification of a complex issue, one that concerns the use and management of natural resources, the question of effective governance, and inter-state relations. The lecture explores potential links between conflicts in the region, and worsening environmental conditions, and discusses the short and long-term implications from a social, political, economic and historical perspective.
**Topic 8: Is there a Future for Pluralism in the Middle East?**

Virtually all Middle Eastern countries have minority groups. Some are religious minorities, others are ethnic-linguistic minorities, and still others are a combination of both. This lecture discusses dynamics concerning different—often—marginalized communities in the Middle East such as for example Shabaks, Kurds, Druze, Alevi, and Alawis from historical, political, and anthropological perspectives.

**Readings:**


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**Topic 9: In what way can we speak about the Arab Spring and a “New” Middle East?**

In what ways did the Arab revolts in 2011 change the Middle East? Did the toppling of a generation of dictators set in motion significant social, political, and economic developments, and could these developments be lasting? Is it time to re-think how we conceptualize and discuss the Middle East as a geographic and conceptual space? Is it possible, and is it meaningful to speak about a “new” Middle East?

**Readings:**


**Topic 10: A “Clash of Civilizations”?**

In an exceptionally influential essay published 25 years ago, in the pages of *Foreign Affairs*, the late Samuel Huntington first sketched his clash of civilizations model. Huntington argued that “the fundamental source of conflict” in the post-Cold War era would be not ideological or economic but “cultural”. “The clash of civilizations” will overshadow global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future,” Huntington argued. Was he right? This lecture discusses Huntington influential theory from a Middle Eastern Studies perspective as well as the implications of “The clash of civilizations” on the region.

**Readings:**

