Middle Eastern Studies: Debating a Discipline, 7.5ECTS
Advanced Level, autumn semester 2016
Teacher: Isa Blumi (isa.blumi@su.se)

Course Description:
This seminar introduces students to the interdisciplinary field of Middle Eastern (and Islamic) Studies in the broader context of the history of area studies in the humanities and social sciences. Why and when did the Middle East become an area of study? What are the approaches and topics that have shaped the development of this field? And what are the political, ethical, and socio-economic implications of contending visions for its future? The readings sample canonical and alternative works and classes may feature occasional guest lectures by leading scholars who research and write on this region.

Learning outcomes
After completing the course, the student is expected to:

In terms of knowledge and understanding:

- Show in-depth knowledge about Middle Eastern studies as an academic field
- Show in-depth knowledge about the historical development of the field
- Show in-depth knowledge about current debates within and about Middle Eastern studies as an academic field
- Show ability to, in a critical and independent way, reflect on Western social science theories and the narrative of Western modernity in relation to the study of the Middle East as a region.

Instruction
Readings should be done for each class. Each class will consist of a lecture (45 minutes), a break (15 minutes) and general discussion (1 hour). The discussion will be started by one or several students, who will present the week’s readings in the form of a critique of assigned material. The exact way that this will be organized, depends on the participants and their number but it should aim to engage the scholarship covered throughout the seminar and lead the rest of the participants to engage in debate around the quality of analysis around the type of sources discussed in the assigned readings.
Lessons plan

Lesson 1
An Introduction to the Middle East Studies
Teacher: Isa Blumi
Viewing assignment: Edward Said On Orientalism
Themes:
• Introduction to region as historic crossroads
• Role of Islam in reshaping political, administrative, economic, and spiritual patterns
• Exploring how these historical processes led to seeing the peoples in this part of the world as part of an “Area.”

Lesson 2
Liberalism’s Imprint on Middle East Studies
Teacher: Isa Blumi
Reading: Massad (2015)
Themes:
• Considering Rise of “Arab” politics what has Euro-Atlantic Liberalism done to our reading Islam.
• Politics of popular resistance and interpreting it through prism of our era
• Mediums of distributing knowledge and the various forms of “reading”
• The Embodiment of Knowledge in modern Middle East

Lesson 3
Colonial Studies come to the Middle East*
Teacher: Isa Blumi
Reading: Mitchell (1991); Cooper (2005), 3-203.*
Themes:
• The Embodiment of Knowledge in modern Middle East
• Use (and abuse) of postcolonial theory in Middle East (and Area) studies
• Utility of mobilizing Foucault and theory of power in Middle East Studies

Lesson 4
The Ottoman Empire and the Rise of Middle East Developmental Ontologies
Teacher: Isa Blumi
Themes:
• Challenging Conventional Time Frames
• Teleological approach
• Background to Rise of Modern Era Ottoman Empire: A short overview of the History of Ottoman Rule of Middle East and North Africa region until the 19th Century
• Introduction to main historiographical debates over periodization
• Reconceptualising Ottoman “Decline” and “Rise” of the West
Lesson 5
The Colonial Effect Revisited: Palestine vs Egypt*
Teacher: Isa Blumi
Reading: Gribetz (2014), Fahmy (2011)*

Themes:
• What importance can we give to the expressions of informal culture in the transformations of the Modern Middle East?
• What role does the colonial enterprise play in shaping modern identities?

Lesson 6
Environment and our Subjectivity
Teacher: Isa Blumi
Reading: Mikhail (2012); Wick (2016) *

Themes:
• Considering the environment as theme in study of Middle East.
• A Middle East view of the sea

Lesson 7
The Humanitarian Turn: Regulating Suffering
Teacher: Isa Blumi
Reading: Watenpaugh (2015); Rodogno (2015) *

Themes:
• What is distinctive of modern humanitarianism and the Middle East?
• How does the Middle East become object of European investment in charity?

Lesson 8
Sexuality and Masculinity in Middle East Studies
Teacher: Isa Blumi
Reading: Massad (2008); Amar (2011); Abu Lughod (2001)

Themes:
• The disruptive role of binaries distinguishing Middle East and West and how sexuality plays into them.
• Is there a gender approach to reading Middle East Studies?

Lesson 9
Hearing the Hitherto Silent: The Anthropological Turn
Teacher: Isa Blumi
Reading: Deeb and Wineger (2015); Asad (2009)

Themes:
• What particular insights into Middle East Studies may be gained through an Anthropologist’s lens?
Lesson 10
Genealogies of Religion: Talal Asad
Teacher: Isa Blumi
Reading: Asad

Themes:
• What importance can we give to the expressions of informal culture in the transformations of the Modern Middle East?
• What role does the colonial enterprise play in shaping modern identities?
• Does Islam, Secularism, Religion have a role to play, conceptually, in the way we study the Middle East?

Examination
The student’s performance in the course is examined by her/his submission of two essay assignments. The assigned papers should be no less than 5 pages each, and they must reflect on the primary questions raised in the designated week, marked by *. As such, if the student were to choose, for instance, to reflect on the issues of Sexuality and Masculinity in MES (Lesson 8), s/he would engage the readings of Massad, Amar, and Abu Lughod and consider the “disruptive role of binaries” and if there is a gender approach to studying the Middle East. Of course, the better grade is given to students willing to use other readings outside the assigned readings to help reflect on the effectiveness of these readings. The grading on the course will be based on the essay assignments, but to pass the student must attend all lessons and actively participate in the seminars.

Fomialia:
About 10 pages (12p. 1.5 line spacing), 2x.

Submission deadline Nov 6, 2016

Course Readings
(The books to read depends on the choice on the exam assignment)

Books:


Articles:


Grading Criteria
This course uses a seven-point, goal-related grading scale: A-F. The grading will be based on the following grading criteria.

A: The student has shown a very good ability to, independently and in a critical way, analyse relevant examples of regional studies and theoretical and methodological standpoints in relation to these, with a special focus on assigned materials that deal with developments in the Middle East and North Africa.

The student has shown a very good knowledge of the distinctive aspects of studies covering different themes in Middle Eastern Studies and has demonstrated a very good ability to, independently and critically, relate to the methodological concerns relevant for the study of the region.

The student has demonstrated a very good knowledge of how the most common social scientific methods are applied in the study of the region’s history as well as the challenges this can entail and about the current discussions around the value of knowledge of language, history and culture as a basis of regional studies.

B: The student has shown a good ability to, independently and in a critical way, analyse relevant examples of regional studies and theoretical and methodological standpoints in relation to these, with a special focus on assigned materials that deal with developments in the Middle East and North Africa.

The student has shown a good knowledge of the distinctive aspects of studies covering different themes in Middle Eastern Studies and has demonstrated a very good ability to, independently and critically, relate to the methodological concerns relevant for the study of the region.

The student has demonstrated a good knowledge of how the most common social scientific methods are applied in the study of the region’s history as well as the challenges this can entail and about the current discussions around the value of knowledge of language, history and culture as a basis of regional studies.

C: The student has shown an ability to, independently and in a critical way, analyse relevant examples of regional studies and theoretical and methodological standpoints in relation to these, with a special focus on assigned materials that deal with developments in the Middle East and North Africa.

The student has shown knowledge of the distinctive aspects of studies covering different themes in Middle Eastern Studies and has demonstrated a very good ability to, independently and critically, relate to the methodological concerns relevant for the study of the region.
The student has demonstrated knowledge of how the most common social scientific methods are applied in the study of the region's history as well as the challenges this can entail and about the current discussions around the value of knowledge of language, history and culture as a basis of regional studies.

**D:** The student has shown an ability to, independently and in a critical way, analyse relevant examples of regional studies and theoretical and methodological standpoints in relation to these, with a special focus on assigned materials that deal with developments in the Middle East and North Africa.

The student has shown knowledge of the distinctive aspects of studies covering different themes in Middle Eastern Studies and has demonstrated a very good ability to, independently and critically, relate to the methodological concerns relevant for the study of the region.

The student has demonstrated knowledge of how the most common social scientific methods are applied in the study of the region's history as well as the challenges this can entail and about the current discussions around the value of knowledge of language, history and culture as a basis of regional studies.

The students fulfils the criteria above, but in a somewhat superficial way and/or with some minor flaws as to his or her ability to work independently and/or in a critical way.

**E:** The student has shown an ability to, independently and in a critical way, analyse relevant examples of regional studies and theoretical and methodological standpoints in relation to these, with a special focus on assigned materials that deal with developments in the Middle East and North Africa.

The student has shown knowledge of the distinctive aspects of studies covering different themes in Middle Eastern Studies and has demonstrated a very good ability to, independently and critically, relate to the methodological concerns relevant for the study of the region.

The student has demonstrated knowledge of how the most common social scientific methods are applied in the study of the region's history as well as the challenges this can entail and about the current discussions around the value of knowledge of language, history and culture as a basis of regional studies.

The student has fulfilled the criteria above, but in a somewhat superficial way and/or with some minor flaws as to his or her ability to work independently and/or in a critical way. The student has fulfilled the criteria with some smaller misconceptions.

**Fx:** The student has not fulfilled some of the criteria for a passed grade.

**F:** The student has not fulfilled the criteria for a passed grade.