

# SAMPLE SYLLABUS—SUBJECT TO CHANGE



## SEX MATTERS: POLITICS of SEX IN the MODERN MIDDLE EAST

**Instructor:** Seçil Yılmaz

**Schedule:** MW 1:45-3:15pm.

**Location:** BENN 345

**Office Hours:** Mondays 3:30-4:30pm and Tuesdays 2-3pm & [by appointment](#).

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### Course Description

The course concentrates on the history of sexuality as it informed and shaped political and social change in the Middle East, and vice versa, in an engagement with global historical contexts. What does sexuality have to do with power, political rule, and mass movements in the modern Middle East? What can the study of sexuality and body politics teach us about colonialism and state formation over centuries of imperial rules and colonial regimes, as well as in the contemporary context of neoliberal capitalism? What is the relationship between studying LGBTQIA+ movements alongside with feminism and the use of sex and sexuality as an analytical category? This course will investigate selected themes such as modernity, nationalism, and colonization and connect them to harem lives, politics of veiling/unveiling, reproductive rights, race, polygamy, masculinity, and early modern concepts of same-sex desire in connection with modern queer thought and activism to ask questions about the preconceived notions about "Middle Eastern sexualities." The course focuses on discussing on some of the many roles that sex and gender politics have played in social and political change in the Middle East, while thinking about gender, history, and society comparatively and transnationally.

### Course Objectives

- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of key themes related to feminism, sexuality, and queerness in the history of Modern Middle East.

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- Acquire basic knowledge and develop analytical skills about the current literature on women, gender, and sexuality studies in the Modern Middle East.
- Comprehend different historical methodologies using gender as an analytical tool, as well as make differentiations between the categories of sexuality and gender.
- Develop analytical skills through discussion, research, and various writing assignments.

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Attendance, Participation, & Perusal & Discussion Questions	20%
Short Paper #1	15%
Short Paper #2	20%
Short Paper #3	20%
Final Paper (Exam Week)	25%

## COURSE EXPECTATIONS

### 1) Attendance, Participation, and Discussions: 20%

This is a discussion-intensive course. I expect you to attend the class regularly and come prepared to participate in discussion, having completed the assigned readings from the syllabus. You are required to actively participate in class discussions. Your performance and the quality of your questions and comments will significantly contribute to your participation mark, and hence, should demonstrate your critical engagement with the readings. (Please see Course Policies about Attendance)

### 2) Short Papers (1<sup>st</sup> Paper 15%, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Paper 20%)

The course is organized based on thematic modules periodical modules. The last session of each module is dedicated to a “workshop” session where we will reflect on the Module’s readings and discussions collectively based on your Short Papers which are due on the same days as Workshops. You are expected to complete your short papers and attend the workshop prepared. You are expected submit **3 short papers** on the readings **by the dates indicated on syllabus**. In your papers, please present a critical reading and analysis of the assigned texts and develop thoughtful questions about the main arguments of the readings. **We will peer-edit short papers in class during the Workshops. You will submit the Final version of your papers based on peer edit the following class day at 10 am.** All the assignment dates are available on Canvas and on the syllabus. Please upload your paper on Canvas on the day of Workshop at 10 am and also bring a printed copy for peer editing.

Short papers should be **4-page typed in Times New Roman font 12, and double-spaced**. Not meeting the required page limit will affect your grade negatively. Please don't forget to write your name on your paper.

### 3) Final Paper: 25%

The Final Paper will be in the same format as the Short Papers, and only longer-- **6-page typed in Times New Roman font 12, and double-spaced**. A prompt will be circulated in mid-November explaining the expectations.

## PAPER GRADING GUIDELINE

For your paper, you may choose the readings and non-text course material (of the relevant Module from the syllabus) you wish to write your papers about, but you should address at least three readings, from more than one class day (i.e., readings should not all come from the same class session). Papers should critically

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assess the main arguments raised by the readings and demonstrate their engagement/relatedness to one another. We will peer-edit short papers in class during the Workshops. The goal of the peer-editing is to prepare the ground for a discussion.

Papers will be graded according to the following considerations:

-Does the paper present a single, clear, and specific argument or critique about the readings to be discussed?

-Does the paper substantively engage at least three readings from at least two class sessions?

-Does the paper identify major themes and questions from the readings, and identify points of overlap and contradiction between them?

-Does the paper make points, arguments, and observations that go beyond discussions we have had in class?

-Does the paper marshal appropriate and detailed evidence (citations, sources, quotations) to support the arguments?

-Does the paper include appropriate citations of sources? Chicago and MLA options are fine. Citations can be either in text (Najmabadi, 13) or as a footnote.<sup>1</sup>

**\*\*\*Revisions of the Syllabus:** I reserve the right to revise this syllabus at any time during the semester. Materials may be added or subtracted after the start of the term.

## COURSE CONTENT

### Week 1

**Wednesday, August 31:** Introduction

## MODULE I: FUNDAMENTALS

### Week 2

**Monday, September 5:** No Class Labor Day

**Wednesday, September 7: Historicizing Sex**

**Readings** Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1-35.

### Week 3

**Monday, September 12: Historicizing Sex: Responses to Foucault**

**Readings** Halperin, David M. "Is There a History of Sexuality?" *History and Theory*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1989, 257-74.

Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (1995), 1-18.

**Wednesday, September 14: The Queer**

**Readings** Nikki Sullivan, "Queer: A Question of Being or Doing?" in *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (2003) (37-56)

### Week 4

**Monday, September 19: Historicizing Sex in the Middle East: Orientalism**

**Readings** Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1-9)

Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" (1-7)

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<sup>1</sup> Najmabadi, 13.

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**Watch in Class** Documentary “Orientalism” (40 min)

**Wednesday, September 21: Fundamentals Workshop**  
**Short Paper #1 Submission for Peer Editing**

## MODULE 2: BEFORE MODERNITY

### Week 5: Foundational Discourses

**Monday, September 26: Islamic Law and Sexuality**

**Readings** Judith Tucker, Chapters “With her consent: Marriage,” (37-77) and “If She were Ready for Men: Sexuality and Reproduction,” (148-178) in *In the House of Law*.

**Short Paper #1 Final Submission**

**Wednesday, September 28: In the Court**

**Readings** Paula Sanders, “Gendering the ungendered body: hermaphrodites in medieval Islamic law,” in *Shifting Boundaries: Women and Gender in Middle Eastern History*, ed. Nikki Keddie and Beth Baron (Yale University Press, 1991), 74-95.

### Week 6: The Harem

**Monday, October 3: The Imperial Harem**

**Readings** Leslie Pierce, “Introduction” (3-14) and “The imperial Harem Institution” (113-152) in *The Imperial Harem*.

**Wednesday, October 5: Harem Stories**

**Readings** Demetra Vaka, *Haremlique*, Ch 4: Valide Hanum, the Resigned First Wife, and Ch.5 “The gift-wife from the Sultan’s Palace.”

### Week 7: Poetics of Bodies and Sexualities in Early Modern

**Monday, October 10: Bodies and Sexualities in Early Modern**

**Readings** Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Introduction,” and “Early Qajar,” in *Women with Mustaches, Men without Beard*.

**Podcast** Elyse Semerdjian, Naked Anxieties in the Baths of Ottoman Aleppo

<https://www.ottomanhistorypodcast.com/2015/10/bathhouse-aleppo.html>

**Podcast**

**Assignment** Please submit your “Questions” and “Comments” on the Discussion Board on Canvas}

**Wednesday, October 12: Before Modernity Workshop**

**No Readings**

**Short Paper #2 Assignment Submission for Peer Editing**

## MODULE 3: MODERN TIMES

### Week 8 Colonialism and Sexuality

**Monday, October 17: Colonizing Sex**

**Readings** Judith Surkis, “Polygamy, Public Order, and Property,” *Sex, Law, and Sovereignty in French Algeria, 1830-1930*. pp. 55-89.

**Short Paper #2 Final Submission**

**Wednesday, October 19: Colonizing Sex**

**Readings** Judith Surkis, “Making the Muslim Family,” in *Sex, Law, and Sovereignty in French Algeria, 1830-1930*. pp. 90-118.

**Watch before the Class** Franz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask (71 min)

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**Film Assignment** Please submit your “Questions” and “Comments” on the Discussion Board on Canvas}

## **Week 9: Colonizing the Body**

### **Monday, October 24: Colonizing the Body**

**Readings** Marie Grace Brown, “Introduction” (1-14) and Ch. 2 “Forty White Tobes: Enclosures and the Campaign for Pure Bodies” (43-80) in *Khartoum at Night*.

**Watch before the Class** “Letters from Baghdad” (95 min.)

**Film Assignment** Please submit your “Questions” and “Comments” on the Discussion Board on Canvas

### **Wednesday, October 26: Colonizing the Body**

**Readings** Marie Grace Brown, Ch. 3 “The Schoolmistress’ Ribs: Dress, Discipline, and Progress” (81-112), Conclusion and Postscript (173-84) in *Khartoum at Night*.

## **Week 10: Responses to Colonialism & Empire**

### **Monday, October 31: The Feminist Future**

**Readings** Leila Ahmed, “The First Feminists” (169-209) in *Women and Gender in Islam*.  
Demetra Vaka, *Haremlique*, Ch 7: Suffragettes of the Harem.

### **Wednesday, November 2: Formation of the Idea of Nation**

**Readings** Beth Baron, Ch. 2 “Constructing Egyptian Honor,” (40-56) and Ch 3 “Nationalist Iconography,” (57-81) in *Egypt as a Woman*.

## **Week 11: Discourses of the Veil**

### **Monday, November 7:**

**Readings** Elizabeth Thompson, “The Veil and the Dual Legal System,” in *Colonial Citizens*, pp.127-140.

**Watch in Class** “They Call me Muslim” by Diana Ferrero

### **Wednesday, November 9**

**Readings** Joan Scott, “Symptomatic Politics: The Banning of Islamic Head Scarves in French Public Schools,” 106-127.

Elif Batuman, “The Head Scarf, Secularism, and Modern Turkey.” *New Yorker*. (2016): 42-48.  
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/02/08/cover-story-personal-history-elif-batuman>

## **Week 12: Formation of Masculinity**

### **Monday, November 14:**

**Readings** Murat C. Yıldız, “‘What is a Beautiful Body?’ Late Ottoman ‘Sportsman’ Photographs and New Notions of Male Corporeal Beauty,” 192-214.

Liat Kozma, “‘We, the Sexologists . . .’: Arabic Medical Writing on Sexuality, 1879- 1943.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* vol. 22 no. 3 (2013): 426-44.

### **Wednesday, November 16: Modern Times Workshop**

**No Readings**

**Short Paper #3 Submission for Peer Editing**

## **MODULE 4: POST-EMPIRE SEXUALITIES**

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## **Monday, November 21: Divergent Voices**

**Readings** Leila Ahmed, "Divergent Voices," in *Women and Gender in Islam*

**Short Paper #3 Final Submission**

## **Wednesday, November 23: Development and Gender in Cold War Middle East**

**Primary Sources** Florence Spencer Duryea. *Arab Women Awake: A First-Hand Account of the First Arab Women's Congress*. Sophia Smith Collection, 1930. (On Canvas)

Today's Arab Woman,' Special Issue of 'The Arab World,' Volume VI, Nos. 5-6. Cairo: Sophia Smith Collection. Women's History Archive, 1958. (On Canvas)

**Listen before Class** Sara Pursley, Crisis and Development in 20th Century Iraq  
<https://www.ottomanhistorypodcast.com/2019/01/crisis-and-development.html>

**Podcast Assignment** Please submit your "Questions" and "Comments" on the Discussion Board on Canvas

## **Week 14: Queer Middle East**

### **Monday, November 28**

**Readings** Joseph Massad, "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World." *Public Culture*, vol. 14 no.2, 2002, pp. 361-385.

**Watch in Class** Amanpour "Sex and Love Around the World" Episode: Beirut

### **Wednesday, November 30 Queer Migrations**

**Readings** Elif Sarı "Lesbian refugees in transit: The making of authenticity and legitimacy in Turkey," *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 24:2, 140-158.

**Watch before Class** "Be like Others" by Tanaz Eshaghian (74 min)

**Film Assignment** Please submit your "Questions" and "Comments" on the Discussion Board on Canvas

## **Week 15: Queerness, Translation in the Age of Neoliberalism**

### **Monday, December 5**

Evren Savci, *Queer in Translation*, Selected Chapters.

### **Wednesday, December 7**

Evren Savci, *Queer in Translation*, Selected Chapters.

## **Week 16: Wrap Up**

### **Monday, December 12: Post-Empire Sexualities Workshop**

Final Paper Draft Submission

**Final Paper Submission:** Mid-December, Exam Week TBA