

# Gender & Citizenship in the Middle East

WGSS/MMES S430 / ANTH S441 | Summer 2025, Session A

Meeting Times: Mondays & Wednesdays 1 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

Meeting on Zoom:

[URL TBA]

*The [Yale University Recording Policy](#) prohibits recording any portion of our class.*

## Eda Pepi

Women's, Gender & Sexuality Studies  
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## Office Hours

Time [TBA]  
Location [TBA]

## Course Overview

This seminar invites students to explore how gender and citizenship intersect across the Middle East and North Africa, examining how these identities shape—and are shaped by—forces like nationalism, migration, capitalism, family, and religion. Drawing from ethnography, history, and literature, we trace how gender and sexuality simultaneously reify and trouble colonial legacies that uphold racialized ideas of “modernity.” And ask: How do global border regimes and the political economy of intimacies that sustain them reshape what it means to be—or not to be—a citizen? Our approach extends beyond laws to include everyday acts of citizenship across national and cultural divides. Readings highlight how people navigate their lives in the everyday, from the ordinary poetry of identity, love, and belonging to the spectacular drama of war and conflict.

## Course Requirements

- Attendance is required in all Yale Summer Session courses.
- Participation (20%): Actively participate in our seminar with questions about the readings.
- Presentation (22%): Sign up for a class to give a 5-10 minute presentation based on the assigned reading.
- Think Piece (22%): Choose another class to write a 2-page think piece based on the assigned reading. Guidelines for writing think pieces can be found on Canvas. **Due via email by 5pm the day before class.**
- Final Research Paper (36 %): Submit a 6-8 page final paper **via email by 5pm on June 27<sup>th</sup>**. For the research paper, combine analytical and empirical insights from our class readings with an issue or phenomenon in the Middle East and North Africa of your choosing.

*Always include your name, the date, class information, and a title that reflects your argument.  
Use 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spacing, and one-inch margins on all sides.*

## Writing Resources

Free tutoring services: <https://summer.yale.edu/admitted-students/summer-session-tutoring>

## Academic Integrity

The university imposes strict penalties on students who submit papers with plagiarized content. Sanctions often include suspension, but may also involve reduced or failing grades and even expulsion.

## Use of Artificial Intelligence

Any use of AI to complete an assignment must be cited, including the prompt submitted, the date of access, and the program's URL.

## Course Materials

All required readings are available under 'Files' or 'Course Reserves' on our Canvas course page.

# SCHEDULE

## *Week 1 – Session 1: Introductions/Interruptions*

- Helal, Marwa. 2022 *Ante body*. nightboat books.  
**3 copies available on electronic course reserve:**  
<https://yale.overdrive.com/media/8846646>

*Ante body* is a poetics of [un]rest. A project that started as an exploration of how the psychological impacts of migration and complex traumas manifest as autoimmune disease and grew into a critique of the ongoing unjust conditions that brought on the global pandemic. Stretching from Egypt to the United States, Helal's work breaches borders as they ought to be breached, refusing to recognize their validity and limitations. A treatise intended on speaking to notions of "power" from the gendered, raced, and colonized 'subject,' *Ante body* is driven by a voice embodied in the before and after. Continuing her use of the invented poetic form, the Arabic, and integrating Fred Moten's concept of "the ANTE," Helal creates an elliptical reading experience in which content and form interrogate the inner workings of patriarchy, capitalism, nationalism, and globalism.

## *Week 1 – Session 2: The Problem with Agency and the Feminist Subject*

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2013. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Harvard University Press: 27-53, 113-172.

Frequent reports of honor killings, disfigurement, and sensational abuse have given rise to a consensus in the West, a message propagated by human rights groups and the media: Muslim women need to be rescued. An anthropologist who has been writing about Arab women for thirty years, Lila Abu-Lughod challenges this conclusion. She delves into the predicaments of Muslim women today, questioning whether generalizations about Islamic culture can explain the hardships these women face. Abu-Lughod presents detailed vignettes of the lives of ordinary Muslim women, and shows that the problem of gender inequality cannot be laid at the feet of religion alone. Poverty and authoritarianism—conditions not unique to the Islamic world, and produced out of

global interconnections that implicate the West—are often more decisive. The standard Western vocabulary of oppression, choice, and freedom is too blunt to describe these women's lives.

### ***Week 2 – Session 1: Migrant Conversions Across National Boundaries***

- Ahmad, Attiya. 2017. *Everyday Conversions: Islam, Domestic Work, and South Asian Migrant Women in Kuwait*. Duke University Press: 37-66, 101-124, 157-190.

Why are domestic workers converting to Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf region? In *Everyday Conversions*, Attiya Ahmad presents us with an original analysis of this phenomenon. Using extensive fieldwork conducted among South Asian migrant women in Kuwait, Ahmad argues domestic workers' Muslim belonging emerges from their work in Kuwaiti households as they develop Islamic piety in relation—but not opposition—to their existing religious practices, family ties, and ethnic and national belonging. Their conversion is less a clean break from their preexisting lives than it is a refashioning in response to their everyday experiences. In examining the connections between migration, labor, gender, and Islam, Ahmad complicates conventional understandings of the dynamics of religious conversion and the feminization of transnational labor migration while proposing the concept of everyday conversion as a way to think more broadly about emergent forms of subjectivity, affinity, and belonging.

### ***Week 2 – Session 2: Genetics, Race, and Nation***

- Burton, Elise K. 2021. *Genetic Crossroads: The Middle East and the Science of Human Heredity*. Stanford University Press: 183-242.

Early in the twentieth century, technological breakthroughs in human genetics coincided with the birth of modern Middle Eastern nation-states, who proclaimed that the region's ancient history—as a cradle of civilizations and crossroads of humankind—was preserved in the bones and blood of their citizens. Elise K. Burton follows the field expeditions and hospital surveys that scrutinized the bodies of tribal nomads and religious minorities. These studies, geneticists claim, not only detect the living descendants of biblical civilizations but also reveal the deeper past of human evolution. *Genetic Crossroads* is a history of human genetics in the Middle East, from its roots in colonial anthropology and medicine to recent genome sequencing projects. It illuminates how scientists from Turkey to Yemen, Egypt to Iran, transformed genetic data into territorial claims and national origin myths.

### ***Week 3 – Session 1: The Reproductive Politics of Nationalism***

- Kanaaneh, Rhoda Ann. 2002. *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*. University of California Press: 1-80

Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh examines the changing notions of sexuality, family, and reproduction among Palestinians living in Israel. *Birthing the Nation* contextualizes the politics of reproduction within contemporary issues affecting Palestinians, and places these issues against the backdrop of a dominant Israeli society. Based mainly on fieldwork in her hometown, the author provides discussions of babies, boundaries, bodies, contraception, gender, and politics. Drawing on strong connections—family, relatives, neighbors, teachers, and friends—she provides an intimate view of how men and women view and negotiate their preferences for the ideal family size, happy

childhood, safe and controlled sex, and beautiful bodies.

**Week 3 – Session 2: *The Sins of the Fathers... in Times of Postcolonial Suspicion***

- Crapanzano, Vincent. 2011. *The Harkis: The Wound that Never Heals*. University of Chicago Press: 15-34, 57-80, 143-164.

In this chronicle of betrayal and abandonment, ostracism and exile, racism and humiliation, Vincent Crapanzano examines the story of the Harkis, the quarter of a million Algerian auxiliary troops who fought for the French in Algeria's war of independence. After tens of thousands of Harkis were massacred by other Algerians at the end of the war, the survivors fled to France where they were placed in camps, some for as long as sixteen years. Condemned as traitors by other Algerians and scorned by the French, the Harkis became a population apart, and their children still suffer from their parents' wounds. More than just a retelling of the Harkis' grim past and troubling present, *The Harkis* is a resonant reflection on how children bear responsibility for the choices their parents make, how personal identity is shaped by the impersonal forces of history, and how violence insinuates itself into every facet of human life.

**Week 4 – Session 1: *Security and the Multi-National State***

- Ochs, Juliana. 2011. *Security and Suspicion: An Ethnography of Everyday Life in Israel*. University of Pennsylvania Press: 19-34, 64-78, 99-118, 138-160.

In Israeli cities, customers entering gated urban cafés open their handbags for armed security guards and parents circumnavigate feared neighborhoods to deliver their children safely to school. Suspicious objects appear to be everywhere, as Israelis internalize the state's vigilance. *Security and Suspicion* is a closely drawn ethnographic study of the way Israeli Jews experience security in their everyday lives. Observing security concerns through an anthropological lens, Juliana Ochs investigates the relationship between perceptions of danger and the political strategies of the state. Based on intensive fieldwork in Israel during the second intifada, *Security and Suspicion* charts a new approach to issues of security while contributing to our appreciation of the subtle dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

**Week 4 – Session 2: *Suspicious Sexuality and the Bureaucratization of "Truth"***

- Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 2013. *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran*. Duke University Press: 163-230.

Since the mid-1980s, the Islamic Republic of Iran has permitted, and partially subsidized, sex reassignment surgery. In *Professing Selves*, Afsaneh Najmabadi explores the meaning of transsexuality in contemporary Iran. Combining historical and ethnographic research, she describes how, in the post-revolutionary era, the domains of law, psychology and psychiatry, Islamic jurisprudence, and biomedicine became invested in distinguishing between the acceptable "true" transsexual and other categories of identification, notably the "true" homosexual, an unacceptable category of existence in Iran. Najmabadi argues that this collaboration among medical authorities, specialized clerics, and state officials—which made transsexuality a legally tolerated, if not exactly celebrated, category of being—grew out of Iran's particular experience of Islamicized modernity. Paradoxically, state regulation has produced new spaces for non-normative

living in Iran, since determining who is genuinely "trans" depends largely on the stories that people choose to tell, on the selves that they profess.

**Week 5 – Session 1: Friendship & Medicine in Revolutionary Times**

- Hamdy, Sherine and Nye, Coleman. 2017. *Lissa: A Story About Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution*. Toronto University Press.

*Lissa* is a graphic novel that traces an unlikely friendship between two young women from drastically different worlds. Anna and Layla must learn to come to terms with illness, faith, and political resistance against the backdrop of Egypt's Arab Spring. Years later, Anna learns that she may carry the hereditary cancer gene responsible for her mother's death. Meanwhile, Layla's family is faced with a difficult decision about kidney transplantation. Their friendship is put to the test when these medical crises reveal stark differences in their perspectives...until revolutionary unrest in Egypt changes their lives forever. *Lissa* brings anthropological research to life in comic form, combining scholarly insights and accessible, visually-rich storytelling to foster greater understanding of global politics, inequalities, and solidarity.

**Week 5 – Session 2: Love Across Difference**

Deeb, Lara. 2024. *Love Across Difference: Mixed Marriage in Lebanon*. Stanford University Press: 27-53, 143-175, 232-251. [Available under 'Course Reserves']

Lebanon may be the most complicated place in the world to be a "mixed" couple. It has no civil marriage law, fifteen personal status laws, and a political system built on sectarianism. Lebanon has the most interreligious marriages per capita in the Middle East. What constitutes a mixed marriage is in flux as social norms shift, and reactions to mixed marriage reveal underlying social categories of discrimination. Through stories of Lebanese couples, *Love Across Difference* challenges readers to rethink categories of difference and imagine possibilities for social change. Drawing on two decades of interviews and research, Lara Deeb shows how mixed couples in Lebanon confront patriarchy, social difference, and sectarianism. In the drama that ensues as women and young men make their own marital choices, they push gender boundaries and reveal the ultimately empty nature of sect as a category of social difference. Love won't end sectarianism, but it can contribute to reducing sect's social power.