

CARLETON UNIVERSITY
WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EAST SOCIETIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
SOCIO 4039 COURSE OUTLINE
WINTER 2026



Figure 28.9 Text on the wall: ***Al-bint zay al-Walad*** (Girls and boys are equal), depicting the iconic actress Suad Hosny in graffiti on Muhammad Mahmud Street, off Tahrir Square, Cairo (Joseph and Zatar, 2023)

Instructor: Zainab Amery

Class Meets: Thursdays 2:35 - 5:25

Course Modality: This course is being offered as Blended. Classes will be **synchronously** in real-time **on** Zoom for presentations and discussions. Some individual film viewing and podcasts will be assigned **asynchronously**.

Office Hours: Wednesday 1- 2:30 by appointment (or alternative times by appointment)

E-mail: ZainabAmery@cunet.Carleton.ca Please allow for a 24-hour response time Monday through Friday

Prerequisites: Prerequisite fourth year standing.

In this course, you are expected to learn from your texts, your teacher and from one another. This requires striving towards understanding each other, but it does not imply striving towards finding agreement. Our class will be racially, religiously, politically, culturally, generationally, and economically diverse. We will be of different gender identifications and sexual orientations and our lived experiences and reactions to the course material will reflect this diversity. Sharing our perspectives and interpretations on the course material will enhance everyone's learning experience and you are encouraged to openly express any disagreements with the authors you will read, with your fellow classmates, or with the Professor in the different participation fora that are available for this course. However, you are expected to conduct yourself in such a way that shows the utmost respect to others who may – or may not – share your views. Derogatory comments and hateful behavior towards others (and their views) will not be tolerated.

Trigger Warning: Some content in this course may be disturbing and/or emotional. You are encouraged to prepare yourself before proceeding, particularly in terms of the videos. Please let me know should you encounter this difficulty, to identify a remedy.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

The instructor acknowledges the location of Carleton University campus on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin nation. We acknowledge our responsibility to the Algonquin people and a responsibility to adhere to Algonquin cultural protocols.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

In recent years, interest in understanding Middle Eastern societies especially the experiences of women, has grown across academic and policy circles. Responding to this need, this seminar explores the diverse positions, challenges, and forms of agency shaping the lives of women in the Middle East. We will examine not only the internal dynamics within Middle Eastern societies, but also how external perspectives often stereotype or misrepresent women's lived realities.

The course will focus on the transformative social, political, and economic changes influencing women's lives, with particular attention to the roles of the state, cultural practices, education, employment, and religion. Through both historical and contemporary case studies, students will explore debates on how gender and sexuality are constructed and negotiated across the region.

We begin by considering colonial and Orientalist legacies and how they continue to shape our modern understandings of what is referred to as the Middle East. We then move to the study of gender and sexuality in relation to key themes such as modernity, secularism, nationalism, colonialism, security policies, and the post-9/11 climate.

This course seeks to situate women's experiences within the rich and layered contexts of Middle Eastern societies. Students will be encouraged to question widely held narratives and thoughtfully reflect on their own beliefs about tradition, modernity, religion, and social transformation. To understand the broader social, legal, political, and economic contexts, we will explore themes including state policy, war and conflict, class structures, legal systems, family formations, and the historical influences of colonialism and imperialism. Although the course will prioritize contemporary issues, relevant historical backgrounds will also be incorporated.

Throughout the course, readings and discussions will draw from an interdisciplinary range of scholarship and employ feminist approaches that challenge Eurocentric and Orientalist portrayals of Middle Eastern women. By the end of the course, students will have developed a nuanced understanding of the rich diversity, resilience, and complexity that characterize women's lives across the Middle East.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Through a combination of, literary texts, visual mediums and individual presentations and research, students will

- Identify and critically engage with key issues, questions, debates, and theoretical frameworks developed by Middle Eastern feminist scholars.
- Critically reflect on and analyze their own assumptions, perceptions, and representations of Middle Eastern women.
- Analyze how texts and films represent and at times misrepresent Middle Eastern women and evaluate the implications of these representations.
- Demonstrate an expanded understanding of the diverse roles Middle Eastern women play within their societies, including their agency in shaping lived realities and producing varied self-representations.

Please read your course syllabus carefully as in most cases, the information you are looking for is in the syllabus. Big questions should be attended to through office hours and will therefore receive a response of this nature by email. This is normally to your benefit. You are required to include the following information in all your e-mail communication: Full name, your student ID number, and the course name and number pertaining to your question(s).

Communication will only be through Carleton accounts. Your Connect account can be forwarded to any other account. Do not respond to emails sent to the class through my Brightspace; the system will often send these to my junk/spam folder. Save a copy of all e-mail correspondence for the duration of the course, until you receive your final letter grade. Should it be necessary, I reserve the right to change this syllabus in consultation with the students.

Dropbox: All assignments will be submitted online through Brightspace in the designated dropbox under tools - assignments online. Please ensure to include your name, student number, course code and instructor's name on the title page.

READING (S)/TEXTBOOK (S)

All course readings are available in Brightspace through **Library Reserves/ ARES**. **The primary text will be the online book by**

Joseph, Suad, and Zeina Zaatari, eds. *Routledge Handbook on Women in the Middle East*. Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315165219>.

Additional readings have been selected by the course instructor and compiled using online sources (noted by the hyperlinks), library journal sources (Access online) and PDFs. If the link disappears, please notify me immediately as I maintain copies of all the materials and can make them readily available. Please note that I reserve the right to make changes, should it be necessary, in consultation with the class. Novels and films should be available online. If unavailable in the library or online, your selection should be available for a minimal cost online if your chosen selection is unavailable and should cost no more than \$30.

BLENDED COURSE STRUCTURE AND METHODS

This course will be delivered entirely online, through the course management system. Once a week we

will meet online, for discussion and questions as designated in the syllabus. During the remainder of the class time, required asynchronous Brightspace activities will include listening to recorded lectures, readings, and watching videos, as well as participating in online discussion forums.

Online activities and in-class activities are designed to build on each other. Active participation in the online activities and completion of all coursework is required in this course for you to be successful. It will have a combination of lectures, films, and presentations. It requires reading, critical thinking, and active participation.

There will be approximately 40-60 pages of required reading for each 3-hour class. Students are expected to have read the material in advance and come prepared to offer thoughtful insights and questions related to the topic under discussion. Students are expected to actively participate in the discussion. The success of the class lies in the participatory nature of all individuals. Consequently, despite being online, the most stimulating discussions will happen when you complete the assigned readings, come prepared to participate when there are Zoom meetings, and not just listen when we do meet synchronously.

Announcements will be posted to the course Brightspace whenever necessary. If there is any other information, I think is important, I will also send it to your Carleton email address. It is your responsibility to check your email regularly. If you are having trouble with this course or its material, you should contact me via email as soon as possible to arrange an appointment to discuss issues or concerns you may have.

COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS:

Reliable Internet access is required. You will need a smartphone, tablet, or laptop with a working camera and microphone. EDC suggests that headphones with a microphone are preferable. Audio and video are required to participate in the Zoom environment. Some of the documents in this course will be available to you in PDF form. If you do not have Adobe Acrobat Reader software on your device, you should download it before the start of the course.

COMPUTER HELP:

Should you have computer hardware and/or software problems, you can contact IT Services for any assistance with technology issues at: call ITS Service Desk at 613-520-3700 or email ITS Service Desk at its.service.desk@carleton.ca. Unfortunately, computer issues cannot be resolved by me (I wish). I am NOT a computer technician, nor am I an expert on most software. We also must be patient with each other since we are dependent on our WIFI and telephone data plans to keep us connected.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & METHODS OF EVALUATION

Assignment	Weight	Due Date and Specifics
Book Review	10%	Due Feb. 1, 11:59 pm in the Online Dropbox

Proposal and Annotated Bibliography	15%	February 14th, 2026 Dropbox by 11:59 pm
Video Analysis Paper	10%	Pick one of the videos to write your analysis paper on. Due March 13th, 2026, 11:59
Presentation	15%	Reading Selection
Participation	10%	Participation will be based on project work in class and discussion
Final Paper	40%	Submitted online by April 3rd at 11:59 pm.
Total Grade	100%	

COURSE EVALUATION

Important: Keep electronic copies of all essays and assignments in case those you submit are misplaced. Also hold on to graded assignments until your final mark is received to guard against any potential errors made in tabulation or on Brightspace.

Paper: 40%

You will be responsible for handing in a final scholarly paper on a topic related to the course content based on your initial proposal. Ideally, the topic should be the same as the proposal that was submitted earlier in the term. Should you decide to research a different topic, please discuss it with me in advance. The specifics are as follows:

The final term essay is **to be submitted online through BRIGHTSPACE by 11:59 pm on April 3rd 2026.** It must have a **title page that includes the course name, my name, your name, and student number.** *You are expected to keep a copy of your essay in case of a problem opening it.* Essays submitted after the due date will be docked **5%** per day and this includes weekends, unless you have a good reason for being late and/or an extension has been granted at least three days in advance.

Form and Style

Your research paper should be **12-14 pages** double-spaced (not including cover page, headings, and references), with regular margins (**1" on each side and 1" top and bottom**) set up) and **12-point type**. Please don't add extra space between paragraphs (this means that you will have to indicate paragraphs by indenting the first line), **please number the essay's pages**. The paper will have **5%** deducted for each page (pro-rate) that falls below the minimum required.

Your essay should:

- Be 12-14 pages (12-point font, Times Roman, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, fully cited)
- Use a **minimum of 6 academic sources**, of which **at least 3 must be drawn from the course materials**. Other sources such as videos, films, etc. are acceptable as are web resources.

- The Chicago author-date citation style (17th edition) is to be used in the assignments and papers of this course. For more information, please see:
https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html

A rubric will be posted online for evaluation in advance of submission.

Evaluation

The paper will be evaluated with regards to **CONTENT, ORGANIZATION and STYLE**.

Content includes *description* (identification and clear presentation of the main points) and *analysis* (indicating key concepts and crucial arguments, evaluating contending arguments, making your own argument, and providing supporting evidence and reasons for your argument). **Please note that you must examine contending positions and address those arguments that would challenge your own position.**

Organization includes an introduction with a *clear statement of purpose* (the problem you are addressing) that includes a thesis statement or a particular question to be debated, the body of the essay with a logical progression of points, and a conclusion synthesizing the arguments made throughout the paper. Your paper will also be evaluated for citation style and bibliography. If you are citing electronic sources, you should consult style guides pertaining to this, including those which can be found online at the Carleton University Library homepage.

Proposal and Annotated Bibliography: 15%

The proposal is an opportunity for you to engage your essay topic and for me to offer insight, direction and encouragement. Remember that a proposal is not the final project, but rather a starting point, a work in progress or a framework so to speak. It's important that you present a strong vision of what you intend to explore with your essay, but you need not have worked out all the problems, details and nuances of your argument. **It is to be no longer than 2 pages long** (12-point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins), and should include a brief discussion of your main argument and the supporting critiques and evidence you will be using for your position. You may find that this plan needs to change as you do further reading and as you write the final paper. That's okay, however if you are concerned about this, please feel free to come and discuss it with me before you hand it in. **It is not an outline. You must use paragraph form and proper citations.** This evaluative component is directly related to your paper. You will be required to put together a tentative annotated bibliography of **three (3) referenced materials** that you intend to use for your final paper from outside the course syllabus. A bibliography of sources will be posted on Brightspace. For each reference, you need to provide the full bibliographic citation for the work in question and a brief description. This description should be approximately 75-100 words long and **should not use course source material that is required readings.** Bibliography and outlines not handed in on time are **penalized at a rate of 5% per day** unless you have a valid and documented excuse and/or you have spoken with me in advance.

Seminar presentation - 15%

Throughout weeks 2-12 students individually will be responsible for presenting **one** of the readings for that week including raising questions and issues and leading the discussion each week. Students are encouraged to discuss the readings and their seminar format with the instructor the week before their presentations if they have any questions. Attention should be paid to the key concepts and terms identified for each week's readings including the following:

- A summary of the main argument – including analytical, theoretical and methodological foundations.
- What is the principal theme of the article?
- What is his/her argument? How convincing is it? What insights does it provide and what are its limitations (look for contradictions, bias, oversights)? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments presented?
- Does reading challenge or reproduce, contradict or elaborate on assumptions within the context of that week's subject matter?
- What are the issues that the reading is trying to address?
- What questions, concerns or insights did you have when you read the article?
- Why is the author writing in this way or about this topic? What does his/her argument tell you about the positioning of the author?

You must submit a copy of your PowerPoint on the day of your presentation and a one-page summary to be emailed to me before your presentation for your peers.

Video Review 10%

One way to explore issues related to women in the Middle East is through an analysis of their representation in film and media. Films often provide powerful insights into gender roles, socialization, identity formation, inequality, and lived realities within specific cultural and political contexts. For this assignment, you will critically analyze how women and girls are represented in a Middle Eastern film, using concepts and theoretical frameworks discussed in class. This assignment requires critical engagement rather than a simple summary of the film. Choose one film from the approved videos in the syllabus (You may select another one in consultation with me).

Films should address themes relevant to women and girls.

Write a critical film review that analyzes the representation of women and/or girls in the chosen film. Your review should examine how women and girls are portrayed in relation to themes such as:

- Gender inequality and power relations
- Identity and self-representation
- Family and social relationships
- Education, development, and agency
- Sexuality, norms, religion and culture
- Negotiating cultural diversity, disability, or social constraints

- Coping with crisis, conflict, or social change
- Engage with theoretical concepts, debates, or frameworks from the course readings and lectures (e.g., feminist theory, representation, Orientalism, agency, intersectionality).

Critically assess whether the film challenges or reinforces stereotypes and dominant narratives about Middle Eastern women.

Book Review - 10 %

A critical review of a book which is not a summary but rather, it must reflect on and **evaluate** the work in the light of specific issues and theoretical concerns in relationship to this course. It can not be an edited piece. Your book review that should address the following types of questions. What is the specific topic of the book? What overall purpose does it seem to have? For what readership is it written? What role does the background of the author play in the writing of the book? Does the author state an explicit thesis? Do they noticeably have a bias? What are the theoretical assumptions and frameworks? Are they discussed explicitly? How is this material used to argue their positionality? What are your own reactions and considered opinions regarding the work? A list will be provided and posted on Brightspace for you to choose from.

Class Participation -10%

Each student is expected to participate regularly in class discussions. As a seminar course, active engagement from every member of the class is both essential and required. You are responsible for completing all assigned readings before each class and for coming prepared to contribute meaningfully to group conversations. Participation should be balanced and respectful, and may include asking questions, clarifying points from the readings, responding to issues raised in class, and being open to rethinking your position.

Attendance is vital. It will be recorded at the instructor's discretion, and frequent absences will result in a significantly lower participation grade.