### Sexualities in the Middle East

**Instructor Details**

- **Class code**: HBRJD-UA or IDSEM-UG 9550
- **Instructor**: Dr. Ofri Ilany

**Class Details**

- **Location**: To be confirmed
- **Dates**: Wednesday, 15:00pm to 18:00pm
- **Location**: Confirmed to be in the Middle East

**Prerequisites**

- None

**Class Description**

Questions of sexuality are central to the public debate on the Middle East. Scholars, politicians, and journalists are engaged intensively with issues such as Islamic laws of modesty, persecution of LGBT Arab countries, and the separation of men and women within religious communities in Israel. To comprehend these questions, one must understand the sociological and cultural characteristics of contemporary Middle Eastern communities, but also the historical development of sexual attitudes in this area.

In the present era, the Middle East is seen as a space of sexual repression and even "Sexual misery." However, this was not always the case. Since the late 18th century, European powers tightened their military, political and economic grip of the East – from Egypt to India. Europe has established its superiority over "The Orient" through the representation of this diverse territory as backward, fanatical and religious. But simultaneously, the East was an object of desire, including sexual desire. European travelers, scholars, and intellectuals characterized the Orient as a space of unlimited sexual freedom. Ironically, while in the past, the West condemned the Muslim world’s alleged sexual licentiousness, the modern West today criticizes the Muslim repression of sexual freedoms.

The course will tackle those questions from a historical perspective. Applying methodologies of queer theory, it will discuss the complex history of sexuality in the Middle East and sketch the genealogy of Western attitudes towards both Arab and Jewish sexuality, with a focus on LGBTQ. Relying on theorists and historians like Michel Foucault, Khaled El-Rouayheb, Samar Habib, and Joseph Massad, we will explore the essential role that sexuality in general, and the queer issue in particular, plays in the contemporary politics of the region.

**Desired Outcomes**

Students are expected to attend class regularly and arrive on time. Students must complete all assigned readings before the class meeting and be prepared to participate actively in discussions of the readings and current events. Students are required to turn in all written assignments on the dates scheduled. Late work will be penalized.

**Assessment Components**

Students will be evaluated on the following basis:
1. Three two-page reports on the weekly readings (30%)
2. Two twenty-minutes oral presentations (20%)
3. Final project, 10-15 pages (40%)
4. Participation (10%)

Failure to submit or fulfill any one of the required course component results in failure of the class.

**Assessment Expectations**

**Grade A:** Full attendance, thoughtful participation, assignments turned in on time and meet assigned grading criteria

**Grade B:** Full attendance, thoughtful participation, assignments turned in on time but partially meet assigned grading criteria

**Grade C:** Partial attendance, little participation, assignments turned in late and/or partially meet assigned grading criteria

**Grade D:** Partial attendance, no participation, assignments turned in late and/or do not meet assigned grading criteria

**Grade F:** Poor attendance, no participation, assignments turned in late and/or do not meet assigned grading criteria

**Grade conversion**

A=94-100
A-=90-93
B+=87-89
B=84-86
B-=80-83
C+=77-79
C=74-76
C-=70-73
D+=67-69
D=65-66
F=below 65

**Grading Policy**

No-shows for in-class presentations and assignments submitted after the deadline without requesting an extension will receive zero grades.

If a student believes an inadvertent error was made in the grading of an individual assignment or in assessing an overall course grade, a request to have the grade re-evaluated may be submitted. To appeal an assigned final grade, the student should first email the course instructor requesting clarification about how the grade was determined. If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of the discussion and wishes to appeal the grade further, a formal written appeal should be submitted to the site director. **This appeal must be submitted within 30 days after the grade has been posted; appeals that are submitted after this deadline will not be considered.**
Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

All medical-based absence requests MUST be presented to the Manager of Student Life and Housing (MSLH). In the case of illness, contact the MSLH within seven (7) days of the absence or as soon as practicable and provide medical documentation. Non-medical requests should be made to the Assistant Director for Academics (AD/Academics) in advance of the intended absence. Your instructors will be informed of any excused absence; they are not authorized to approve your absence, and they are required to report any absences to the AD/Academics.

**NYU Policy on Religious Holidays**

1. Students who anticipate being absent because of any religious observance should, whenever possible, notify faculty and the AD/Academics in advance of such anticipated absence.

2. Whenever feasible, examinations and assignment deadlines should not be scheduled on religious holidays. Any student absent from class because of his/her religious beliefs shall not be penalized for any class, examination, or assignment deadline missed on that day or days. In the event that examinations or assignment deadlines are scheduled on a religious holiday, any student who is unable to attend class shall be permitted the opportunity to make up any examination or to extend any assignment deadline missed on that day or days.

3. That no adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to any student who avails him/herself of the provisions of the resolution.

4. A violation of these policies and principles shall permit any aggrieved student to bring forward a grievance, provided under the University Grievance Procedure.

All works must be submitted on time, unless you have received an explicit extension. Any late submission may result in grade deduction at the sole discretion of the instructor.

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

Plagiarism is the presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Plagiarism constitutes an academic offence for which you can be disciplined. Punishment may include a failing grade, suspension or expulsion. In all confirmed cases, a report will be sent to the student’s Dean at NYU or, in the case of a non-NYU student, to the home institution.

All readings are available on NYU Classes
It is hard to overestimate the importance of the internet to the build up of contemporary knowledge of the world around us. But it needs to be used wisely. This means that one must be selective and careful when relating to internet-based sources, identifying and distinguishing opinions from facts, and journalism from academics. One should make clear reference to internet sources, allowing the reader the opportunity to consult these resources as and if required. As with all sources of information, use the internet critically.

Please also note that the ‘world-wide web’ exists in many languages. Many sources about Israel in English, for instance, will be aimed at tourists or readers living primarily in English-speaking regions of the world. Sources might differ when reading them in other languages.

Established in coordination with NYU's Expository Writing Center, NYUTA's Writing Center is available to help you with all genres of writing, from senior theses to smaller response papers; from personal statements to cover letters; from PowerPoint presentations to creative assignments. The Center can help you at any stage of the writing process, from figuring out the demands of an assignment, to working with or researching sources, to brainstorming a thesis and outline, to finalizing a project or reviewing a draft. However, please note that writing sessions are held as a joint session, an active exercise between the student and writing advisor -- this is not a proofreading service!

Please view the Writing Center as an opportunity, not a punishment. It is meant equally for student-writers who are not confident in their skills as well as students who are quite talented and strong, but recognize the value of a second look. Moreover, rest assured that your instructors will value and appreciate your initiative to visit the writing center.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please contact NYUTA's AD/Academics, Edan Raviv (room 201; edanr@nyu.edu).

None

**Session 1**

- **Feb. 5**
  - How to Do History of Sexuality?

**Session 2**

- **Feb. 12**
  - Conceptions of Sexuality in the Pre-Modern Arab World (I)
  - Historical perceptions of the East-West divide

**Session 3**

- **Feb. 19**
  - Conceptions of Sexuality in the Pre-Modern Arab World (I)
  - Representations of homoerotic desire

Optional:

Everett K. Rowson, “Homoerotic Liaisons among the Mamluk Elite in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria”, in Babayan & Najmabadi (eds.) Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire, pp. 204-38


Session 4

Feb. 26

“Arab Sexuality” and the Orientalist Imagination (I)

The seduction of the Harem


Optional:


Session 5

Mar. 4

“Arab Sexuality” and the Orientalist Imagination (II)

“The Oriental Vice”


Optional:


Session 6

Mar. 11

Modernization and Sexual Reform

Gay rights: A colonial project?


George Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe. New York: Howard Fertig, 2001


Session 7

Mar. 18

Field Trip

Michael Berkovitz, “Rejecting Zion, Embracing the Orient: The Life and Death of Jacob Israel De Haan”, in Kalmar & Penslar (eds), Orientalism and the Jews. NH: Brandeis University Press, pp. 109-24

Session 8

Queer Life in Contemporary Middle East

Persecution & resistance
Session 9

Zionism and Sexuality

Discourse & performance


Session 10

Women Rights, Feminism and Lesbian Struggle

Arab-Israeli Sisterhoods


Session 11

Gay Icons, Social Media and the Construction of Sexual Identities

Queer Life in the Digital Middle East


Optional:
Grant Walsh-Haines, “The Egyptian Blogosphere: Policing Gender and Sexuality and the Consequences for Queer Emancipation”, Journal of Middle East Women's Studies, Vol. 8, No. 3, (Fall 2012), pp. 41-62

Session 12

Middle-Eastern Sexuality: Cinematic Representations

Bodies & Images

Remi Lange, Tarik El Hob (2001)

Desiree Akhavan, Appropriate Behaviour (2014)


Session 13

“A Gay Haven”, after all?

Pinkwashing and its Opponents


Optional:

**Session 14**

**Concluding Session**  
Queer Walking Tour in Tel Aviv

May 20

**Classroom Etiquette**

**Required Co-curricular Activities**

**Your Instructor**

Dr. Ofri Ilany is a historian and journalist, teaching at NYU Tel Aviv and Tel Aviv University. His book, *In Search of the Hebrew People: Bible and Enlightenment in Germany* is to be published in at Indiana University Press. The book describes the use of the ancient Hebrew cultural and political ideal as a model for German nation-building. His Articles have been published at the *Journal of the History of Ideas, Naharaim* and other journals.

Ilany's research interests include the history of sexuality, Orientalism and Bible research. His column, "Under the Sun", is published at *Haaretz Weekly Supplement*. 