WS 360 A1 Global Feminism: Race and Gender in International Perspectives

Course Syllabus

Contact Information:
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Course Information:
Seminar schedule: Tuesdays 4:00 PM–7:00 PM
Course Website: blackboard.bu.edu

Course Overview:
This seminar will explore various concepts in relation to women globally. We will study in detail:
the concepts of sexism, race and culture; public policies in relation to reproductive rights and their impact on women; the global women’s movements and global womanhood; the global economy and its impact on women. The seminar will further analyze two critical and controversial issues in the international feminist discourse—one on veiling and the other on sex trafficking and prostitution. Our study will focus on debates among feminists globally as well as debates around public policies in a number of countries. Further, we will delve into the issues of women in war and women in the military and study the situation of women as victims and perpetrators. We will end the course with a discussion of women’s political participation in and outside of the political system. The course will examine and encourage understanding of if not possible involvement in the national and international groups and movements that are thinking about and acting for change. Throughout the course, we will explore, analyze and discuss these issues through lectures, readings and films.

Required Readings:

Academic Code of Conduct:
Handing in someone else’s work as your own, failing to properly cite words and ideas taken from others, and copying answers and unauthorized conversation are violations of the academic code that can lead to dismissal from the university. Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the standards outlined in the Boston University Academic Conduct Code:
http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/

Technology Policy:
Cell phones should be silenced and put away during class. Laptop computers are allowed only for theory presentations. They should be put away during discussions. Texting is not allowed.
Late Policy:

If you have any problems with a due date, you must speak with me beforehand. Extensions are always a possibility, but you must work out an agreement with me first.

Requirements:

1. Attendance and Class Participation (20% of final grade).

The quality of the course depends on your active participation. You are expected to come to class prepared to thoughtfully discuss the assigned readings. In preparing for class, you should analyze the arguments of the authors, compare and contrast the perspectives of different articles, reflect on personal experiences related to the issues raised by the readings, explore new avenues of thought suggested by the readings, and analyze your own emotional and intellectual reactions to the readings. Your comments and questions should deepen and strengthen class discussion. All students, even those slower to seek to participate, are encouraged to share their ideas in class. However, you should not speak more than twice unless everyone in the class has spoken at least once.

Since the course meets only once a week, only one absence is allowed. If you are absent more than once, you must discuss the circumstances with me.

2. Four Reflection Papers (40% of final grade)

Write four out of the five reflection papers described below. Each reflection paper should be 4-6 pages and should address a different topic and should contain proper citations. Keep a separate copy of each paper for your records.

   i. Sexism, Culture and Race (choose one)

   Pick an issue(s) concerning sexism faced by women where Western bias results in a perspective in marked conflict with that of a non-Western culture. Analyze the issue(s) from both perspectives, and explain how colonialism and racism may play a role in the differences. Some examples include arranged marriage, sex segregation in religious practices, other aspects of religious practices, and the One Child Policy in China. OR

   Interview two or three women from non-western countries. Ask them to share their experiences about social forms related to sexism that are different in their home country from the United States (clothing, dating/marital practices, etc.) How do they evaluate the sexism in their home country versus the sexism in the United States. What are your reflections on what you learned from these interviews?

   ii. Global Womanhood and the International Women’s Movement (choose one)

   What does it mean to have a global women's movement, which integrates international womanhood with intersectionality of groups and countries/localities? How does the conflict between the global female identity and other identities play out in relationship to this “movement”? OR

   Describe what women's rights as human rights means in theory and in practice. How did this concept evolve and what does it mean? Evaluate whether and how this been an advance for women in terms of the development of women’s rights, and the battle against
sexism and racism? OR

Discuss briefly the history of international women's conferences. What has been achieved and what has not? What are the stumbling blocks? Discuss how these issues could be resolved within the international framework.

iii. Reproductive Rights and Public Policies

Reproductive rights include a wide variety of issues such as abortion, birth control, reproductive technologies and childbirth. Public policies concerning reproductive rights vary widely throughout the world. Compare and contrast how an issue is addressed by public policies in two to four different countries. How are the policies implemented in each country and what are the effects on women? How would you evaluate the policies in terms of their effectiveness and equity vis-à-vis women?

iv. Controversial Issues

In class we have discussed three major controversial issues—international prostitution, the one child policy and the veil. Choose one of these or choose a controversial issue that was not discussed in class. Analyze the different approaches to these issues taken by two or more countries/governments or political parties/organizations. Which argument do you support and why? Explain. Examples of issues besides the ones introduced in class include political quotas, and women in the military, women and religious practices, or others.

v. Women, Politics and Change (choose one)

How do women effect political change in and outside of the political system? What are different approaches taken by women internationally? Examine two countries. Compare and contrast their backgrounds and the changes achieved. If the efforts for change have not succeeded, describe how women are organizing change in and outside of the political system. Evaluate their efforts. OR

Give two or more examples of outstanding women leaders who have worked in and outside of political systems and internationally. How have these women fought sexism, changed the situation for women, and how have they been role models for others?

3. Final Paper (40% of final grade)

At the end of the seminar students are required to turn in a 12 page, double-spaced, typed research paper on a critical issue related to the subject of this course. You should integrate course materials, class discussions, independent research and your own original ideas in this paper. Sources can include primary and secondary sources, interviews, publications and other reliable sources. Endnotes and bibliography should be included on a separate page(s) and do not count towards the 12 page requirement.

Choose one from the following: (If you have written a reflection paper on any of these topics, you cannot use the same topic for your final paper.)

Option 1.
Choose a topic that explores how sexism and male domination function in institutions globally. Examples of topics include: Women and religion, women and politics, reproductive health, women and violence, women’s health, marriage and childrearing, the beautification industry, the sex industry, women and work, women and education, and
women and war. For instance, if your chosen topic is women and religion, you can analyze the way sexism/male domination operates in various religions. Compare and contrast. Discuss how women have challenged those practices. Analyze ways in which they were successful or not. You can also bring in intersectionality with matters of race, class and nationalism. OR

**Option 2.**
Choose one or more women’s organizations/movements outside of the United States that are working to change the situation for women. Your paper should be an in-depth study of that organization(s) that covers its/their history, present situation(s), issues focused on, successes, failures, leadership, etc. You can compare and contrast various organizations. These organizations can be either local grassroots organizations, or established national NGOs. OR

**Option 3.**
Discuss ways in which political change is effected for women within political systems. Examples include quota systems in various countries, women's political parties, legislation and advocacy. Evaluate their methods and compare them with other countries. You may choose two or more countries.

4. **Individual Conferences**

Students are encouraged to meet with me at least once during the semester. This is a chance to talk about your individual participation in the seminar and any help you may need.

5. **Events Outside of Class**

Students should attend two events that focus on women in the international arena. Listings of such events can be found on the BU Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program website. You should write a paragraph on each event and submit them with your final paper.

**Summary of Important Dates:**

- October 2: First reflection paper due
- October 7: Paper topic for the final paper due
- October 28: Second reflection paper due
- November 4: Third reflection paper due
- November 11: Outline for the final paper due
- November 25: Fourth reflection paper due
- December 2: Final paper due
- December 9: Fifth reflection paper due

**Calendar and Course Readings:**

**Week 1 (September 2) Introduction to the Seminar**

We will go over the syllabus, and discuss the requirements for the course. We will also cover basic concepts and themes that will be used in the class going forward.

**Week 2, 3 & 4 (September 9, 16 & 23) Sexism, Culture and Race**

Understanding how gender and race intersect is critical for analyzing global feminism. In this
section, we will look at the power of racial oppression as it impacts gender. We will study in detail what is meant by global/universal womanhood, i.e. how much do we, as women, have in common, and what our differences are. Using the examples of Female Genital Mutilation and China’s One-Child Policy, we will explore the divide between feminists from the dominant Western culture and those from non-Western cultures. In this process, we will examine the critical debate between the cultural relativist approach and the universal human rights approach.

Readings:  Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, *Women’s Lives*, chapter 3, pp. 104-111 (Blackboard)  Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny*, chapter 2 (Blackboard)  WAC chapters 1 & 2, and p. 45-49  Five readings on Female Genital Mutilation and China’s One-Child Policy (Blackboard)

Week 5 (September 30) Women in the Global Economy

The globalization of the world economy has had major effects on women’s lives in both developing and developed countries. In this section, we will study, among others, the feminization of poverty; gender-based divisions of household and care labor; the restructuring of women’s work; migration of women; sexual tourism and sex trafficking; women working in sweatshops; the gender pay gap; and women’s inequality in the global workforce.

Readings:  WAC chapters 5-7  WAP chapter 8  Ehrenreich and Hochschild, *Global Woman*, “Introduction” and “Maid to Order” (Blackboard)

Recommended:  WAP chapter 4 & 5

Week 6 & 7 (October 7 & 21) Global Womanhood and the International Women’s Movement

In this section, we will explore the history of the international women’s movement, particularly the UN’s World Women’s Conferences. We will delve into the concept of women’s rights as human rights, and consider whether women’s issues globally are limited to issues of gender, or whether broader issues of economic and political change also need to be considered. We will study whether international conferences have had a crucial role to play in changing women’s situation, what women have gained so far and what challenges they face going forward. We will also explore the issue of Western bias that informs the understanding Western women have of the experiences of women from non-Western cultures.

Readings:  WAC chapter 11  Unfinished Revolution chapters 1-2  Antrobus, *The Global Women’s Movement*, Chapters 2-6 (Blackboard)

Week 8 (October 28) Reproductive Rights and Public Policies

In this section, we will explore the critical issues of women’s health and reproductive rights. We will compare and contrast public policies as they relate to reproductive rights in various countries, and discuss the impact these policies have had on the lives of women. Issues we will study will include state policies on abortion, birth control, overpopulation and child birth.

Readings:  WAC chapter 3
Week 9 & 10 (November 4 & 11) Controversy over International Prostitution and Sex Trafficking

In this section, we will look at the abolitionist and pro-sex work approaches to prostitution and sex trafficking together with countries that have instituted corresponding policies. We will examine laws in the U.S. as they relate to these issues. We will compare the legal approaches in various countries. We will explore the paradox of empowerment versus oppression.

Readings:     Jeffreys, *The Industrial Vagina*, all chapters
              “Stopping the Traffic in Women—Power, Agency, and Abolition” (Blackboard)
              Federal and state laws on prostitution:
              http://prostitution.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=000119#1

Week 11 (November 18) Controversy over the Veil

In this section, we will study debates surrounding the veil through the perspectives of Western and Muslim feminists. We will compare the legal approaches in various countries. Here we will also explore the paradox of empowerment versus oppression.

Readings:     Six readings on the Veil on Blackboard

Week 12 & 13 (November 25, December 2) Women, Politics and Change

Women have made important strides in becoming involved in institutional as well as non-institutional politics around the world. In this section, we will study women’s journey from the struggles for suffrage to gaining positions of power in legislatures, bureaucracies, cabinets, and as executives. In the non-institutional sphere, we will look at women’s involvement in social movements and interests groups.

Readings:     WAC chapters 9 & 10
              WAP chapters 1, 2, & 3
              Unfinished Revolution

Week 14 (December 9) Students’ presentations (continue on the day of the final exam)