Women Studies 305  
Feminism in an International Context  
http://courses.washington.edu/women305/  
Spring 2005  
Instructor: Sasha Su-Ling Welland

Office: Padelford B-110S  
Office Hours: T 3:30-5:00 and by appt.  
Email: swelland@u.washington.edu  
Time: T/Th 1:30-3:20  
Classroom: Loew Hall 205  
Class email: women305a_sp05@u.washington.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the heterogeneous processes involved in the cultural construction of gender, and therefore, in feminist praxis. “Gender” indicates the way societies organize people into female and male categories—within families, workplaces, communities, and nations—and the meanings produced around those categories. Our focus on how gender categories vary across cultures will form the basis for a critical examination of diverse feminist theories and practices as culturally and historically situated. Framed by critiques of “universal sisterhood” launched by women of color and Third World feminists, this course aims to dismantle the conventional Western story of feminism as something that began here and then spread elsewhere. As we analyze the workings of power and gender in different cultural contexts and within international feminist discourse, we will also focus on the creative cultural practices women use to negotiate their lives and consider various challenges and strategies of transnational feminist projects.

Addressing these issues requires an understanding of how gender intersects with race, class, and sexuality; and of how movements such as nationalism, colonialism, and transnational capitalism affect these identity constructs and related material differences. In analyzing these intersections through the course readings, we will consider the following questions:

- How are feminist movements culturally and historically situated?
- How do representations of women shape knowledge, as well as agency?
- When and how does gender change? How do feminist theory and practice relate and respond to such shifts?
- How does a serious appreciation of differences among women in the world impact our understanding of gendered and other forms of inequality? In other words, why does thinking internationally matter?

Included within the course schedule are more specific versions of these questions designed to focus attention on particular issues for each class meeting. Please review these weekly queries, keep them in mind as you do the readings, and start thinking about them on the class EPost discussion board. Class lectures, discussions, and presentations will be structured around these guideposts. They are intended, in a cumulative fashion, to help you address the big questions of the course and to develop ideas for the class papers.
The course is organized around four books, with additional complementary readings and films. We will start, in a way, at home (and in the feminist classroom) with an ethnography that addresses questions of gender and intersectional difference in a California high school, before moving to book-length works based in Egypt, Zimbabwe, and China. This selection of readings is not meant, by any means, to be geographically exhaustive, but will enable us to gain basic knowledge about the historical and geographical contexts of these regions necessary for engaging with the theoretical concerns of the course. Finally, the course is designed to hone students’ analytic, writing, and speaking skills.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) **Readings and Class Participation:** Attendance and active participation in class discussions by all students will be crucial to the success of our class meetings. You are expected to complete the readings by the day they are listed in the syllabus and be prepared to discuss them in depth by raising relevant questions, concerns, insights, and responses. Students are encouraged to contribute postings to the on-line class EPost discussion board as another means of exchanging ideas and collectively reflecting upon issues raised in class. Your class participation grade is based on your preparation for and contributions to class discussion, and is judged not by the quantity of your comments but by their quality. This means that the more time you spend reading and thinking about the issues in the readings, the better your final grade will probably be. Failure to attend more than two classes will seriously jeopardize your ability to pass this course.

2) **Collaborative Student Presentations:** Students will sign up for one of four student presentation groups (each subdivided into three smaller groupings of 3-4 students). I will circulate a sign-up sheet on the first day of class, during which time you can choose the class you’d like to help facilitate. These groups will collectively lead a 15-minute class discussion or activity focused on one of the books covered in the course. I will help guide each group by suggesting themes or topics to focus upon. Each group will be expected to generate reading responses and questions that they will post one day in advance on the on-line class EPost discussion board. For the presentation, groups should bring in at least one visual and one other source—newspaper, magazine, video clip, etc—and relate it to the class discussion. Please let me know in advance if you have any A/V needs.

3) **Midterm Exam:** Students will take one in-class exam during the first 45 minutes of class on Thursday, April 14. The exam will include definitions and short essay questions.

4) **Short Papers:** Students will write three 5-page papers. You will be given four possible paper topics and deadlines to choose from. Paper topics/questions will be handed out one week before they are due. Deadlines for each of the four possible papers are indicated in the course schedule.
EVALUATION

Each student’s performance will be evaluated as follows:
Attendance and Class Participation 10%
Collaborative Student Presentation 15%
Midterm Exam 15%
3 Short Papers (20% each) 60%

REQUIRED TEXTS

Course Reader: Available at Rams Copy Center, 4144 University Way
(Articles in the reader are indicated with an R in the syllabus.)

Books: Available at The University Bookstore (and on reserve at Odegaard)
Lila Abu-Lughod, Writing Women’s Worlds
Julie Bettie, Women Without Class
Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nervous Conditions
Lisa Rofel, Other Modernities

ADDITIONAL LIBRARY RESERVES (ODEGAARD)

If you are interested in doing further reading on particular issues raised in class, especially as you work on your short papers, the following are suggested books to explore.


CLASS FILMS:
Ingrid Sinclair. 1996. *Flame*. (90 min.)
Ana Maria Garcia. 1982. *La Operacion*. (40 min.)

CLASS POLICIES

No assignments will be accepted by email without permission. Failure to attend more than two class meetings will seriously jeopardize your ability to pass this course. Please inform me in advance if you expect to miss a session, be late, or leave early. Please bring your books to class. Papers submitted late without prior permission will be penalized by half a grade for every day. Plagiarism will be treated as a serious offense.

Practice respect and consideration for your peers. Throughout the quarter, you may be presented with material unfamiliar to you. During lecture and discussion, you may hear very diverse opinions from the instructor and other students. You are not expected to agree, but before commenting on a practice or belief foreign to you, please reflect on how to present your opinion in a respectful and open manner.

Please feel free to email me or speak with me for further clarification of assignments, if you have questions about the material, or if you have personal concerns that will affect your academic performance. If you are unable to meet during my scheduled office hours, I am happy to arrange an appointment with you in order to discuss an issue at greater length.
T · Mar 29  Introduction: Reassemblage

Q: How do representations of women, especially “other” women, influence our understanding of them? What does this film take apart and reassemble?


PART I:  Homework—Feminism in the Classroom

Th · Mar 31  Imagining Feminism Differently

Q: What is feminism? For whom? Where? When?


Sarah J. Cervenak, Karina L. Cespedes, Caridad Souza, and Andrea Straub, “Imagining Differently: The Politics of Listening in a Feminist Classroom,” in This Bridge We Call Home. R

Rebecca Hurdis, “Heartbroken: Women of Color Feminism and the Third Wave,” in Colonize This! R

T · Apr 5  Intersectional Difference

Q: How does gender intersect with other identity constructs, such as race, class, and sexuality?


DUE: COLLABORATIVE STUDENT PRESENTATION I (Group 1)

Th · Apr 7  Intersectional Difference (cont.)

Q: How does intersectional analysis in an ethnography of US high school girls relate to thinking about feminism in an international context?

Women Without Class. Chapters 4-7.

DUE: COLLABORATIVE STUDENT PRESENTATION I (Groups 2 & 3)
PART II: **Culture, Agency, and Representation**

**T Apr 12** **Representing Other Women**

*Q: How are feminist movements culturally and historically situated? What problems can cross-cultural representations raise?*


**Th Apr 14** **Beyond West and the Rest**

*Q: What is “writing against culture”? Why and how does Abu-Lughod attempt this writing praxis?*


EXAM: **IN-CLASS MIDTERM (FIRST 45 MINUTES OF CLASS)**

**T Apr 19** **Culture and Agency**

*Q: What is agency? How do women (and men) in these stories exert it? Does how women are represented affect their agency?*

*Writing Women’s Worlds: Bedouin Stories*. Chapters 1-2.

DUE: **COLLABORATIVE STUDENT PRESENTATION II (Group 1)**

HANDOUT: **PAPER 1 QUESTION**

**Th Apr 21** **Culture and Agency (cont.)**

*Q: When and how does gender change?*

*Writing Women’s Worlds: Bedouin Stories*. Chapters 3-4.

DUE: **COLLABORATIVE STUDENT PRESENTATION II (Group 2)**
PART III: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Feminism

T Apr 26 Critiquing “Save the Women” Discourse
Q: What do neat cultural icons used to represent “other” women repress? What are the implications of such icons for transnational feminist praxis?

*Writing Women’s Worlds: Bedouin Stories.* Chapter 5.


DUE: COLLABORATIVE STUDENT PRESENTATION II (Group 3) PAPER 1

Th Apr 28 Colonialism and Gender
Q: What are the “nervous conditions” of colonialism? How does colonialism affect gender relations?

Tsitsi Dangaremba, *Nervous Conditions.* Chapters 1-5.

DUE: COLLABORATIVE STUDENT PRESENTATION III (Group 1) HANDOUT: PAPER 2 QUESTION

T May 3 Colonialism and Gender (cont.)
Q: What is liberation? Liberation from what? Liberation for men and women?


DUE: COLLABORATIVE STUDENT PRESENTATION III (Groups 2 & 3)

Th May 5 Women and National Liberation

FILM: Ingrid Sinclair. 1996. *Flame.* (90 min.)

DUE: PAPER 2
PART IV: Gendered Subjects

**T May 10 Producing Gender: Modernity & Labor Politics**
*Q: What is modernity? What are “other modernities”? How are gender categories (and gendered yearnings) produced through various narratives of modernity? Through various labor relations?*


**Th May 12 Producing Gender: Liberation Cohort**
*Q: What does labor represent for the women of this cohort? What is the importance to their identity as women of speaking or narrating the past?*

*Other Modernities*. Part I: Chapter 1-3.

DUE: COLLABORATIVE STUDENT PRESENTATION IV (Group 1)

**T May 17 Producing Gender: Cultural Revolution Cohort**
*Q: How do different cohorts (or generations) of women interpret their form of marginalization or oppression? With what types of politics do their interpretations intersect?*

*Other Modernities*. Part II: Interlude & Chapters 4-6.

DUE: COLLABORATIVE STUDENT PRESENTATION IV (Group 2)
HANDOUT: PAPER 3 QUESTION

**Th May 19 Producing Gender: Postsocialist Cohort**
*Q: What are allegories of postsocialism? Of modernity? How do they shape gendered expressions of femininity and masculinity?*

*Other Modernities*. Part III: Chapters 7-8 & Coda.

DUE: COLLABORATIVE STUDENT PRESENTATION IV (Group 3)

**T May 24 Reproducing Gender: Body Politics**
*Q: How are gendered bodies constructed, performed, and disciplined?*


FILM: Ana María Garcia. 1982. *La Operacion*. (40 min.)
Th May 26  Gender Bending
   Q: What is a sex/gender system? How do gender ideologies produce particular social and political selves?


HANDOUT:  PAPER 4 QUESTION

T May 31  Gender Bending (cont.)
   Q: What are the politics of androgyny? How have they changed over time? Does subversion of dominant gender ideology lead to change in conditions of women’s lives?


Th June 2  Conclusion: Feminist Bridgings
   Q: What are dilemmas, possibilities, and strategies of feminism in an international arena, or of feminism as a transnational practice?


DUE:  PAPER 4