

SOAN 0304 Women, Culture and Power

Ellen Oxfeld
Munroe 204

Spring 2010
Ext. 5300

Office Hours: Wednesday mornings, 9 to 11:00; Tuesday afternoons, 1:30 to 2:30.

This course offers an introduction to the issues involved in the study of women and gender cross-culturally. Such an endeavor raises a number of difficult and delicate issues. What explains the diversities and similarities in women's roles across societies? How do we assess women's status and power, and how do we decide which standards to use in doing so? What forces create changes in women's roles? How do gender constructions help shape communities and even nations?

Through readings, discussions and films, we will attempt to answer these questions and to compare and contrast women's roles and the importance of gender constructions in a variety of societies. The issue of "power" – how do we assess it, how is it exercised, what are its implications, how is it constructed – will underlie all our examinations.

We will rely primarily on ethnographic studies of several interrelated domains of culture. These include kinship and exchange, production and reproduction, ideology, language and the nation. Our examination will therefore range from a focus on the minutest details of family life to the actions of nation-states. Course readings will deal primarily with non-Western societies, but not exclusively so.

COURSE READINGS

The following books are available for purchase at the bookstore and also on reserve at Starr Library. All articles that are not in these books are available through e-reserve (3334eo).

Peggy Sanday
Lila Abu-Lughod
Maria Mies

Rhoda Kanaaneh
Sarah Lamb
Michaela DiLeonardo
Nicole Constable
Jane Collins
Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt

Women at the Center
Veiled Sentiments
Patriarchy and Accumulation on
a World Scale
Birthing the Nation
White Saris and Sweet Mangoes
Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge
Romance on a Global Stage
Threads
What Kind of Liberation: Women and the
Occupation of Iraq

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course is both reading and writing intensive. Although there will be some lectures, most classes will be based on discussion of assigned readings and/or written work. There will be no outside readings in this course. Therefore, participants in the course should be prepared at all times to discuss actively the issues being considered. Course requirements and their proportion in your final grade are listed below:

1. Prepare all assigned readings, attend all classes and films, and participate actively in class discussion. Failure to do so will negatively affect your grade.
2. Write three response papers (no more than 2 pages each). These can be chosen from ten topics provided throughout the semester and **MUST** be handed in on the day these topics serve as the focus of class discussion. Tight organization, clarity of expression, and willingness to ask probing questions will set the standard for these papers. Since they can only be two pages long, they will demand careful editing (20% for all three).
3. Write three longer essays. Two of these essays will be approximately five pages long (25% each), and the final essay will be 10 to 12 pages long and ask you to synthesize and reflect upon material from throughout the course (30%).

There will be no final exam in this course.

Film Locations: All films will be in Warner 207 and will be shown at 7:30 PM.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

PART ONE: ARE THERE UNIVERSALS?

September 8

Sperling, "Baboons with Briefcases vs. Langurs in Lipstick: Feminism and Functionalism in Primate Studies" (in DiLeonardo).

Leibowitz, "Perspectives on the Evolution of Sex Differences" **ER**

Response Paper #1: How useful to you think it is to examine our primate ancestors or earlier human societies for clues about contemporary gender roles?

September 13

Rosaldo **ER**, Ortner **ER**
Peacock, "Rethinking the Sexual Division of Labor"
(in di Leonardo)

PART II. KINSHIP, EXCHANGE, AND WOMEN'S ROLES

A. Patriliney and patrilocality in South Asia

September 14th (Tuesday)

FILM: "Dadi's Family"

September 15

Lamb, pp. 27-69

September 20

Lamb, pp. 70-111, 181-238

Response Paper #2: What kinds of powers (or lack thereof) do Bengali women exercise? How does this compare with what you know of American culture?

B. A matrilineal example

September 22

Sanday, pp.1-47, 79-99

September 27

Sanday, pp. 100-148, 173-187, 207-240

Response Paper #3: Do you agree with Peggy Sanday that the Minangkabau are a matriarchy?

C. Further issues of exchange and gender

September 29

Rubin "The Traffic in Women" **ER**

October 1 (FRIDAY)

ESSAY #1

October 4

Constable (pp. 13-90)

October 6

Constable (pp. 91-174)

Response Paper #4: Do you agree with Constable that the term "mail-order brides" does not describe the transnational relationships she studies? If so, why? If not, why not?

PART III. GENDER IDEOLOGIES AND SOCIAL STATUS SYSTEMS

October 11 Whitehead “The Bow and the Burdenstrap” ER

Yalman, "On the Purity of Women in the Castes of
Ceylon and Malabar" **ER**

FILM: “A Veiled Revolution”

October 13 Abu-Lughod, Chapters 1 – 4

MIDTERM BREAK

October 20 Abu-Lughod, Chapters 5 – 8

Response Paper #5: Is oral poetry a form of protest (counter-hegemonic discourse) amongst Bedouin women, or does it simply reinforce their powerlessness?

PART IV. PRODUCTION REPRODUCTION AND POLITICS

Some Pre-Capitalist Examples

October 25	Brown, "Iroquois Women: An Ethnohistoric Note" ER Okonjo, "The Dual-Sex Political System" ER
------------	--

A. Gender and Colonial Expansion

October 27 Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power"
 (in di Leonardo)
Mies, pp. 74-111

Response Paper #6: Choose one idea from either Mies or Stoler that links gender to colonialism. Did this idea shed new light on colonialism for you? How so?

October 29 (Friday) **ESSAY #2 DUE**

B. Women and the Global Reach of Capitalism

November 1

Mies, pp. 112-142
Collins, Chapters 2 and 3

FILM: “China Blue”

November 3

Collins, Chapters 4 and 5

Response Paper #7: Did Collins' book make you think about our own fashion practices and predilections in a different way? How so?

November 8

Chatterjee, *A Time for Tea*, Chapters 2 and 4 **ER**

FILM: "Through Chinese Women's Eyes"

A. Socialism and Women's Roles

November 10

Rofel, "Liberation Nostalgia and a Yearning for
Modernity" **ER**
Mies, pp. 175-202

Response Paper #8: Reflect on the connections between socialism and women's roles based on the readings and films for April 19-20. How did the socialism (in its Chinese Communist form only) affect women in China? Do you think it liberated them?

B. Nationalism, Militarism, Gender

November 15

Kanaaneh (Introduction and Chapter 1)

November 17

Kannaneh (Chapter 3)

November 21 (Sunday)

FILM: "Pray the Devil Back to Hell"

November 22

Enloe, "All the Men Are in the Militias, All the Women are Victims. **ER**

Enloe, "Filling the Ranks" **ER**

Response Paper #9: Talk about one way in which national liberation and women's liberation either reinforce each other or work at cross-purposes.

November 29

Al-Ali and Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation?*
Pp.1-85

December 1

Al-Ali and Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation?*
Pp. 121-180

Response Paper #10: What do you think of Ali-Ali's and Pratt's argument that war and women's liberation work at cross-purposes?

December 8

FINAL ESSAY DUE