

Honors Seminar: SEXING THE GENDER OF WAR

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Prof. Zillah Eisenstein

Muller 316

Eisenste@Ithaca.edu

Office Hours:

Tues/Thurs 11:30-12:30

And by appt.

I. THEORETICAL FRAMING OF THE COURSE

This course examines the historical, political, and cultural construction of gender in its racialized formulations within the context/construct of militarization. We will attempt to see and understand the integral relations of war as part of politics; that “war is politics in another form”, and see what new meaning can be found in viewing war and its relationship to a wider militarization as part of articulating the racial and sex/gender hierarchy of the nation and globe.

We will focus on the singularity of U. S. capitalism and its militarist phase, or what can be termed “war capitalism” and the way it reconstructs patriarchal relations through a re-divisioning of the relationships between: war and peace, public and private, combatant and noncombatant, civilian and citizen. Given that these relationships are key to the practices of patriarchy across the globe; given that women and girls disproportionately make up the new global proletariat; given that women and girls are a majority of refugees and migrants; given that there is a great increase of women in the U.S. military; given that suicide bombers are increasingly girls/women in Israel, Palestine, and Chechnya; given that rape is continually used as a part of war we will theorize the centrality of gender (re)formulation for human rights work being done by the United Nations.

Part of our examination of gender will involve an inquiry into the relationship between sex and gender; between the relationship of being female and becoming a woman—and being male and becoming a man. We will explore pluralizing sex beyond the usual notion of male and female; as though there are more than two sexes. And we will pluralize the notion of gender to more than two—meaning man and woman—as well. What happens when both sex and gender are more fluid and multiple and how is this defined in times of war?

I want students to be able to better ‘name’ the present system of power relations usually defined as globalization. You will therefore examine the sexed, gendered and racialized constructions of present day capitalist market ‘fundamentalism’. I term the extremist embrace of the privatized market and its neo-liberal justification ‘market fundamentalism’. This phrase is meant to bring critical viewing to the way neo-liberal ‘fundamentalism/extremism’ is used to justify constrained and regulatory notions of men

and women's lives. You will be asked to think through and find your thoughts in this arena.

Besides bringing attention to the structural relations of patriarchy within the global economy we will continue to seek a better way of representing and understanding the multiple and varied expressions of women's resistance to their oppression and exploitation. We therefore will trace the multiple and varied practices and resistances by women to this moment of globalized war economies. I hope to give voice to the myriad practices committed to women's rights, justice, equality, determination, and liberation. We will query whether feminisms, as a term, although plural, is a terminology that sufficiently grasps the cacophony of practices and beliefs that embrace women's struggles for self-determination in multiple cultural forms.

This then leads to our main intellectual query for this course that is to clarify the difference between cultural relativism and polyversal humanism. Polyversal humanism is the term I have developed in my last two books for moving beyond a singular universal standard for democratic and feminist practices while recognizing the requirements of human rights while not denying cultural particularities. Culture and rights are not locked in opposition here.

Some more particular concerns will focus on the tension between diversity (pluralism) and equality (sameness) that will interface with the discourse of cultural relativism. Interestingly, affirmative action initially was developed to create equality of access, not diversity per se. So how does pluralism embrace the universal recognition of human equality? A connected issue to explore is the way the wars of/on 'terror' underpin the justification of the new militarism. Yet the war on terror led by the United States is bringing more terror to the majority of women's lives in Afghanistan, Iraq, Algeria, India, etc. I want to theorize this and engage in the international dialogues surrounding this discussion as a citizen of the United States in order to flesh out the present restructuring of the U.S. state for war capitalism. This seems particularly interesting with a president who fully embraces and engages in a new militarism and masculinism, while he has done no military service and rallies for 'wars on terror'.

II. COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

Each student is expected to attend every class session prepared. There will be two analytic papers based on the course readings required for course credit.

Please buy the books listed below at the I.C. Bookstore.

REQUIRED READING:

1. Anne Fausto Sterling. Sexing the Body
2. Michel Foucault. Society Must be Defended (omit 115-180; and 218-246)

3. Cynthia Enloe. Maneuvers
4. Richard Trexler. Sex and Conquest
5. Zillah Eisenstein. HATREDS
6. Arundhati Roy. War Talk
7. Mahmood Mandani. When Victims Become Killers
8. Yoshimi Yoshiaki. Comfort Women
10. Brenda Moore. Serving Our Country; Japanese American Women in the Military in WWII
11. Sunita Mehta. Women for Afghan Women
12. Zillah Eisenstein. Against Empire