Objectives

Women’s rights globally have come into public awareness in recent years in ways we have not seen before, with both interesting and troubling consequences. Our seminar will explore these changing understandings and critically examine their impact. Today women’s rights are being variously depicted as critical to addressing problems of third world poverty; women’s education is being described as an essential component in the fight against global terrorism; women politicians are seen by some as a key defense in the fight against government corruption; and gender equality, some argue, serves as the crucible in the clash of civilizations and fight against extremism and Islamic fundamentalism. While these are not new ideas, they have increasingly captured the popular imagination, influencing policy makers, foundations and even military strategists. This seminar takes a critical look at implications of these new discourses surrounding women’s rights.

The influences on these public discourses are diverse. Journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, for example, have made the powerful argument that saving the world’s women from sex trafficking, bride burnings, female genital cutting, and mass rape is the paramount moral challenge of this century, in the same way slavery was in the 19th century and totalitarianism in the 20th century. Leading political scientists Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris have claimed in various publications that the “true clash of civilizations” is the major gap between the West and Islam in how people regard gender equality, which for them explains why Muslim countries are particularly unsupportive of women as leaders. A World Bank study found that countries with higher numbers of women parliamentarians have lower levels of governmental corruption and another Inter-Parliamentary Union survey of female politicians in 65 countries found that the majority felt that increased female representation renewed public trust in government.

While the United Nations and bilateral donors have long incorporated gender concerns within their agendas, women’s rights is making its way into new policy arenas and at a level not previously seen. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said she is placing women’s issues at the center of American foreign policy and has created a new State Department Office of Global Women’s Issues and there is a new subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that deals with women’s issues. President Obama himself has appointed a new White House Council on Women and Girls. The interest in gender policy has even made its way into unexpected corners, as the Joint Chiefs of Staff and international security specialists ponder how to increase girls’ education in countries like Afghanistan. At the global level, one of the eight UN Millennium Development goals is to promote gender equality and empower women. Leading philanthropic institutions like the Gates Foundation have placed gender as a cornerstone of their efforts and Bill Gates, for example, has argued that women’s empowerment is the key to AIDS prevention.
In this seminar we will ask: What accounts for these shifts in emphasis in the US and around the globe and what is their significance? How should we evaluate the claims made regarding the importance of women’s rights? What are the implications of the expectations being formed regarding women as central to the fight against terrorism, corruption and poverty? What does this new international attention mean for women’s movements around the world? And how do the above-named discourses, so often fixated on dichotomous relationships (e.g., the “Islamic world” vs. the “West”) or essentializing assumptions, relate to ongoing discussions among scholars of gender and women that have sought to create more nuanced understandings of not only women as a group, but also of the relationships between gender, sexuality, race, class, nation and ability? We address these questions by drawing on both social science and humanities perspectives and by examining the historical, political, sociological, cultural and economic dimensions of these trends.

Requirements

Readings: Students are required to do the readings and come prepared to the seminars to discuss the readings and engage the speakers.

Leading discussion: Students taking the course for 3 credits will sign up to take the lead in discussions for seminars in which we do not have outside speakers.

Research paper: One major research paper is required. The paper will provide you with an opportunity to explore in greater depth a substantive area relating to themes of the seminar. A paper proposal in abstract form will be due October 14. Your paper (excluding bibliographic references) should be about 20 pages in length, double-spaced with one-inch margins, due November 30 (note the earlyish deadline). See website wiki for additional suggestions regarding the paper. Coming up with an interesting research puzzle will be one of the main goals of this exercise.

Grade Criteria

Participation, including talking in seminars, serving as discussant, leading seminar, writing on wiki, etc. (50%); paper (50%).

Office Hours

Please use the wiki to sign up for appointments with Professor Tripp, Tuesdays 9 – noon or by appointment. The link is on the wiki.

Wiki

You are strongly urged to explore the course wiki, which is a key resource for course updates, sources for your paper, links to additional readings, and other useful information. The wiki is also a great place to reflect on readings and discussions in the seminar (See “Express Yourself”).
Special Accommodations

People with disabilities will be fully included in this course. Please inform the professor if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments of this course to enable you to participate fully. Confidentiality of the shared information will be strictly maintained. Certain accommodations may require the assistance of the McBurney Disability Office on campus. The McBurney Disability Center can be reached at (608) 263-2741 or via email at mcburney@odos.wisc.edu.

Readings

One required book is available for purchase from the A Room of One’s Own, 307 W Johnson St; phone: (608) 257-7888. Copies are also on reserve at the Social Science Reference Library, 8432 Social Sciences. The articles will be available from the wiki and will be available for purchase from the Social Science Copy Center (6th floor of Sewell).


Recommended (maybe use library copy):


COURSE OUTLINE

Introduction to Seminar
Friday, September 2
Discuss readings for “Global and Local Discourses on Women and Islam”

Global and Local Discourses on Women and Islam
Friday, September 9, 2011
Lila Abu-Lughod, Joseph L. Buttenwieser Professor of Social Science, Anthropology, Columbia University
Rachel Rinaldo, Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Virginia
Elora Shehabuddin, Associate Professor of Humanities and Political Science, Rice University
Ousseina Alidou, Associate Professor, Department of African, Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Literatures and Department of Women’s and Gender Studies, Rutgers University

General Topics and Framing Women in Foreign and Multilateral Assistance
Friday, September 16, 2011
Discuss readings

Framing Women in Foreign and Multilateral Assistance
Friday, October 7, 2011
Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg, Assistant Professor of Politics, University of San Francisco
Muadi Mukenge, Regional Director for Sub-Saharan Africa, Global Fund for Women
Framing Women in Foreign and Multilateral Assistance  
Friday, October 14, 2011  
Discuss readings

Framing Women in Foreign and Multilateral Assistance  
Friday, Oct 21, 2011  
Andrea Cornwall, Professor, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK  
Kate Bedford, Senior Lecturer, Law School, University of Kent, UK

Global Gender Politics: How Local and Global Discourses Influence One Another  
Friday, October 28, 2011  
Discuss readings

Discourses on Women and Political Representation  
November 4  
Discuss readings

Global Gender Politics: How Local and Global Discourses Influence One another  
Saturday, November 5, 2011 [NOTE CHANGE OF DAY]  
Sylvia Tamale, Associate Professor of Law, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda  
Sally Merry, Professor of Anthropology, Law and Society, New York University  
Doris Buss, Associate Professor of Law, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada  
Millie Thayer, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Massachusetts Amherst  
Dorothy Hodgson, Professor of Anthropology, Rutgers University

Discourses on Women and Political Representation  
Friday, November 11, 2011  
Mala Htun, Associate Professor of Political Science, New School for Social Research  
Laurel Weldon, Professor of Political Science, Purdue University  
Mona Krocket, Assistant Professor of Political Science and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Washington University in St. Louis  
Pamela Paxton, Professor of Sociology, Christine and Stanley E. Adams, Jr. Centennial Professor in the Liberal Arts, University of Texas at Austin

Wrapup Session  
Friday, December 2, 2011

READINGS

Global and Local Discourses on Women and Islam  
September 2


Rinaldo, Rachel. “Muslim Women, Moral Visions: Globalization and Gender Controversies in Indonesia”

Alidou, Ousseina. “Muslim Women’s Leadership and Constitutional Reforms in Kenya”


Saving the World’s Women (links on wiki) New York Times Magazine August 17, 2009 Links on wiki

Kristof, Nicolas and Sheryl WuDunn, “The Women’s Crusade”
Filkins, Dexter “A School Bus for Shamsia”
Landler, Mark “A New Gender Agenda”
Questions for Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Madame President


Framing Women in Foreign and Multilateral Assistance
September 16


Framing Women in Foreign and Multilateral Assistance
October 14


Global Gender Politics: How Local and Global Discourses Influence One Another
October 28


Hodgson, Dorothy. 2011. “‘These are not our priorities’ Maasai Women, Human Rights, and the Problem of Culture.” In Hodgson, Dorothy, ed. Gender and Culture at the Limit of Rights. (Studies in Human Rights Series, University of Pennsylvania Press)


Discourses on Women and Political Representation
November 4


