History 753—Seminar in Comparative World History: Gender and Popular Rebellion

Florencia E. Mallon
Mary Lou Roberts

Course Description:

This course explores the ways in which both tropes of gender and women's actions structure colonial power, and hence play an important role in imperial crises of authority. The approach is thematic and comparative. The first third of the course looks at various issues concerning women, including sex, prostitution, rape, "native" cultural practices, and orientalist photography, examining how they serve as grounds for debate on colonial hierarchies of authority.

Second, we investigate the gendered elements of large-scale rebellions and revolutions as well as more everyday acts of resistance to colonial power. What roles do women play in such upheavals as Mau-Mau? How does gender as a cultural system both mark and affect challenges to authority in France, Nicaragua and Cuba? What role do notions of masculinity play in these rebellions? How do they inform male revolutionary identity, and structure the partial inclusion of women in nationalist movements?

In the last part of the course, we look at immigrant, transnational populations in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to evaluate how gender relations continue to shape post-colonial societies. We also survey more contemporary forms of female rebellion that involve direct "street" democracy, and finally, explore the newly "colonized" lives of women in a globalized international economy.

Requirements:

1) Active participation in class. The core of our work in the course will be reading and discussion of abundant materials. Taking the time and energy to contribute to class discussion, whether with a comment, question, doubt, or criticism, is a crucial component of this. Active participation does not always mean speaking a lot, but it does mean listening to and engaging other people's ideas and comments, and being willing to risk asking a "stupid" question in order to move the discussion forward. The seminar's success depends on it!

2) Written work: Students are required to write thirty pages over the course of the semester, in one of three forms:
   • three ten page papers;
   • two fifteen page papers, or
   • one thirty page paper.

The topics of these papers are to be decided by the students, according to their own research interests and intellectual agenda. However, they must get approval for their plan of writing from both professors by presenting it in writing by October 1.
The deadlines for the papers are as follows, and the papers are due by NOON on the designated day:

- Three paper plan: October 7, November 11, December 19
- Two paper plan: October 28, December 19
- One paper plan: December 19

3) **Grading:**
   - Class participation: 40%
   - Written Work: 60%

**AVAILABILITY OF READINGS:** The books assigned are available at the University Bookstore, and on 3-hour reserve at the College Library in Helen C. White Hall; they are designated with an * on the syllabus. The articles or book chapters are part of a Xerox Packet available at the Humanities Copy Center, 1650 Humanities, and on 3-hour reserve in Helen C. White Hall.

**SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS AND READINGS:**

Sept. 7- Introduction and Organizational Meeting

UNIT I- GENDER AND COLONIALISM

Sept. 14- Women Go-Betweens Under Colonialism: Mexico and *La Malinche*
   **Reading:** *Sandra Messinger Cypress, La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).


Sept. 21- Women as Ground for Colonial Debates: India and Kenya
   **Reading:** Lata Mani, *The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*, Chapters 2 and 5, pp. 42-82, 204-11; 158-90, 221-24.


Sept. 28- Race, Gender, Modernity: A Visual Economy of Colonialism


Oct. 5- Race, Sexuality, Colonialism: Prostitution


Oct. 12- Gender and "Regimes of Intimacy"

Jenny Sharpe, "The Civilizing Mission Disfigured," in *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp.57-82; 174-178.
UNIT II- GENDER, REBELLION AND REVOLUTION

Oct. 19- Gender and Everyday Forms of Resistance


Oct. 26- The "Family Romance" of the French Revolution


Nov. 2- Postcolonial/ National Liberation in Latin America


Nov. 9- Gender and Anticolonial Revolts: Mau Mau in Kenya


Nov. 16- Discourses of Masculinity, Discourses of Rebellion


UNIT III- GENDER AND POSTCOLONIALISM

*Shot on the border of Iran and Afghanistan, Kandahar is the story of a young female journalist named Nafas who escaped Afghanistan with her family but must return and race against time in an attempt to rescue her sister. The sister, maimed by a landmine and distraught over the constant persecution simply for being a woman, has written to Nafas vowing that she will commit suicide by the*
next solar eclipse. Nafas must disguise herself as an Afghan wife by wearing the traditional head-to-toe covering of the burka in order to find her sister in the Taliban-controlled city of Kandahar.

The film is inspired by the real-life experience of actress Nelofer Pazira, who plays Nafas. In 1989, she fled her homeland of Afghanistan and later received a similar letter not from a sister, but from a long-time friend who wanted to end her life.


Nov. 30- Race, Migration and Transnationalism: Costa Rica in Comparative Perspective


Dec. 7- Gender, Memory, and Mobilization


Dec. 14- Gender, Labor, and Globalization


Please note: Half the class will be responsible for a close reading of each book, and for a skim read of the other one, TBD.