

GENDER AND WAR IN FILM

WGS400/500, Winter 2005

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I. Course Description:

This class is designed to explore the relationship between race, gender, and militarization by paying close attention to how they are represented in both feature films and documentaries. By focusing on both historical and contemporary stories of war, conflict, and people's ways of coping with them around the world, we seek to identify patterns of similarity and difference across cultures and contexts and to highlight strategies that have been successful in confronting militarization.

II. Course Requirements and Format

Students taking the class for credit are expected to attend the entire series, arrive on time and stay until class is over. Class would consist of an introduction, film(s) and discussion. The films will be introduced and discussed by selected faculty in the Women and Gender Studies Program. In the case of films that are longer than the duration of the class, we will watch selected clips from the film and students will have the option to watch the entire film on their own.

III. Course Schedule and Themes:

1. Race, Gender and Militarization in the Age of Empire

January 5: 1984
January 12: The Battle of Algiers
January 19: Apocalypse Now

2. Confronting Militarization Across the Globe

January 26: Regret to Inform
February 2: Sin City Diaries and The Women Outside
February 9: Calling the Ghosts
February 16: Daughters of War and Hidden Warriors
February 23: The Sky and Black Kites

3. Between Resistance and Hope

March 2: Women of Vieques and Well-Founded Fear

March 9: Frontiers of Fears and Dreams

IV. Film Descriptions

1984 (1991)

This feature film is an adaptation of George Orwell's classic carrying the same title. Winston Smith endures a squalid existence in totalitarian Oceania under the constant surveillance of Big Brother. But his life takes a horrifying turn when he begins a forbidden love affair and commits the crime of independent thought. Sent to the chillingly labeled "Ministry of Love," he is placed at the mercy of O'Brien, a coolly treacherous leader determined to control his thoughts and crush his soul.

The Battle of Algiers (1966)

Director Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 movie *The Battle of Algiers* concerns the violent struggle in the late 1950s for Algerian independence from France, where the film was banned on its release for fear of creating civil disturbances. Certainly, the heady, insurrectionary mood of the film, enhanced by a relentlessly pulsating Ennio Morricone soundtrack, makes for an emotionally high temperature throughout. Decades later, the advent of the "war against terror" has only intensified the film's relevance. Shot in a gripping, quasi-documentary style, *The Battle of Algiers* uses a cast of untrained actors coupled with a stern voiceover. Initially, the film focuses on the conversion of young hoodlum Ali La Pointe (Brahim Haggiag) to F.L.N. (the Algerian Liberation Front).

Apocalypse Now (1979)

Based on Joseph Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness*, this is a controversial addition to the multitude of Vietnam war movies in existence. We follow Captain Willard on his mission into Cambodia to assassinate a renegade Green Beret who has set himself up as a God among a local tribe. The film is a dense satire of the Vietnam war, modern government and the military-industrial complex. But the satire is only window-dressing on a deep incursion into the manufacturing of civility and an inquiry of the standards we all agree to in times of war and civilization-building.

Regret To Inform (1998)

Venturing to Vietnam twenty years after her husband was killed in a mortar attack, filmmaker Barbara Sonneborn finds a mesmerizing landscape filled with the psychic remnants of war. Getting beyond the physical and emotional devastation, she talks to those on all sides of the struggle, discovering a common bond in loss and ultimately understanding.

Sin City Diary (1992)

This powerful documentary explores the lives of women who work as prostitutes around the U.S. Navy base at Subic Bay in the Philippines. The program takes the form of a diary to

incorporate Rachel Rivera's own experience as a Filipina American. *Sin City Diary* raises important questions about America's responsibility to its former colony, and the complex relationship between women, prostitutes and the economy.

The Women Outside (1995)

This candid film questions U.S. and Korean military policy and its tacit acceptance of sexual exploitation. Mixing interviews and archival footage, the film allows these Korean women to speak out about their lives for the first time. They tell heart-wrenching stories of being beaten, raped and abandoned with interracial and stigmatized children. Some who marry American soldiers and emigrate to the U.S. find happiness. Others find only abuse, discrimination and a return to the camp-town-like conditions they thought they left behind in Korea.

Calling the Ghosts: A Story about Rape, War, and Women (1996)

This is an intimate story of survival of two women caught in a war where rape was as much an everyday weapon as bullets and bombs. Jadranka Cigelj and Nusreta Sivac, childhood friends and legal professionals, lived the lives of ordinary modern women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, until one day their neighbors became their tormentors. The film chronicles the transformation of those women as their personal struggle for survival turns into a larger fight for justice. Putting rape into the international lexicon of war crimes becomes their mission. Due to their brave efforts, their very torturers now stand indicted by the International War Crime Tribunal.

Daughters of War (1998)

How does a 17 year old mother and leader of a girl gang survive in a region where violence and abuse has become the norm? In "Daughters of War" Peruvian director, Maria Barea, documents Gabriela's life in Ayacucho, Peru, the former Maoist guerrilla stronghold ravaged by civil war in the 1980's. As Gabriela's story unfolds, we witness first hand the effects that war, drugs and poverty have had on this generation of youths in Peru and will have on generations to come.

Hidden Warriors: Women of the Ho Chi Minh Trail (2002)

Karen Turner's documentary examines the experiences of Vietnamese women who served during the war as well as the conflict's continuing impact on their lives. Through interviews and film material previously unavailable in the United States, the film conveys rarely glimpsed aspects of Vietnam's wartime history.

The Sky: A Silent Witness (1995)

This film evokes, in a dramatic and impressionistic style, the world situation of women as human rights campaigners and as victims of human rights violations. It includes stunning footage from Guatemala, documenting a burial procession of indigenous Indians carrying the exhumed remains of their loved ones who had been killed and buried in a mass grave in Plan de Sanchez in 1987. Woven throughout the telling of this story is riveting black-and-white footage of testimony from five women activists including a Tibetan Buddhist nun, a Tiananmen

Square demonstrator, and an African American civil rights worker, testifying about human rights abuses in their own countries.

Black Kites (1995)

This short film is based on the 1992 journals and drawings of Sarajevan visual artist Alma Hajric, who, with friends from an arts collective, was forced into a basement shelter in order to survive the lengthy siege of Sarajevo. The film explores the artist's interior landscape--her hopes, fears and dreams--and interweaves them beautifully with the brutal truths of her daily existence.

Women of Vieques (2000)

The film documents the involvement of Puerto Rican women in the continuing protest movement against U.S. Navy use of the island of Vieques as a military training site. Members of the Vieques Women's Alliance tell their stories, their strategies and their everyday struggle to fight the U.S. Navy and for a better community without bombings, without cancer, and with better education and health facilities.

Well-Founded Fear (2000)

This documentary provides a rare glimpse of the U.S. asylum granting process through the perspective of the Immigration and Naturalization (INS) asylum officers responsible for reviewing asylum applications. According to INS guidelines, the applicant must possess an immediate and "well founded fear" of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion. However, asylum granting is subject to individual biases and inclinations, as officers grapple with discerning the truth in each claim presented to them.

Frontiers of Fears and Dreams (2001)

This documentary touches on life in the refugee camps of Shatilla in Lebanon and Deisha near Bethlehem, Palestine through the eyes of children growing up within the camp walls. Focusing on 2 young girls, Mona, 13 years old from Shatilla, and Manar, 14, from Dheisha, the lives, dreams and experiences of the girls, their families and peers are touchingly presented to the viewer. Although living within the economic and Israeli military oppressions affecting daily camp life, the girls find ways to live as normal teenagers, enjoying birthdays, taking care of daily chores, attending schools when open, and discussing fashion, love and other teenage concerns. The message sent by the film is not one of despair but that of hope. Hope for goodness, dignity, and solidarity.

