WOMEN, WAR, AND LEARNING

AEC 1146

Fall Session 2006

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When  Tuesdays   My Office 7-116

Where  7-192   Telephone 923-6641, ext. 2242

Time  5:30-8:30   E-mail smojab@oise.utoronto.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVE

There is no region of the world not engulfed in war and conflict. While it is easy to draw the borders of ‘zones of conflict’ or ‘war zones’, it is rather difficult to discern how these borders divide, save, protect or destroy new communities, identities, nations, and ethnicities. Even more difficult is the tracing of people’s displacement and dispersal as a result of war. For example, in Canada, in the last three decades most of the refugees and immigrants have come from the war zones of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This massive displacement from the three continents and the emergence of new diasporas pose a serious challenge to social institutions including the educational system. For instance, war-zone immigrants and refugees require social services from ESL to workforce integration, to access to higher education, which may bridge their lived experiences in ruptured times and spaces. To understand this complexity, we need theoretical positions, which can explain the conflictual, gendered, and racilized nature of this process, and its interconnectedness to the global structures of capitalism, imperialism and colonialism. This course will, thus, draw on theoretical positions such as Marxism, critical transnational feminism, and critical pedagogies.

The course will cover such general topics as war and violence, women’s participation and role in war and militarism, feminist peace, neo-liberal ideologies of ‘post-war’ reconstruction and ‘democracy,’ the role of women’s NGOs in re-building shattered lives of women in the aftermath of war, women anti-war resistance and activism, and women, violence and learning. More specifically, the course focuses on the impact of war-based violence on women’s learning, and the factors which enhance or impede women’s learning. While there is a vast literature on learning, we are just beginning to inquire about learning under condition of war, displacement and re-rooting. Accounting for the impact of war on women’s learning demands a focus on the role of ‘experience’ in the process of learning. Adult learning theories consider ‘experience’ as the critical element for learning. It has been argued that learning from an experience occurs when it personally affects the learner, either by resulting in an expansion of skills and abilities, sense of self and life perspective, or by precipitating a transformation that involves the whole person, and is also subjectively valued by the learner. This relationship between experience and violence has not yet been theorized in the literature on learning. Although there is no literature that inter-relates women to learning-war-diaspora, we try in this course to take a step beyond the fragmented theoretical domain, and engage in analysis that draws on theoretical insights of
(adult) education, women’s studies, and diaspora studies. The approach will, therefore, be interdisciplinary.

There is unequal regional representation. Simply, it is impossible to cover the globe which is burdened with many war related issues. While the covering of war zones is selective, the course takes a theoretically integrated approach by linking the ubiquity of war and displacement with capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy, and the requirements of these interconnected systems to produce and reproduce globally.

Familiarity with critical feminist theories, adult education learning theories, diaspora theories, critique of resettlement and integration processes in Canada, and the political economy of war, capitalism, and imperialism are an asset for those who take the course. Extra reading and help will be provided for students who need it.

APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

In teaching/learning settings, I see my role primarily as an analytical and reflective practitioner, planner and facilitator. We all will be involved in a participatory learning effort; your experience and input are as significant as the accumulated knowledge on the topic. You are, therefore, expected to actively contribute to the learning process. Your learning needs and agenda will be incorporated in the course as well.

CLASS FORMAT

Class sessions will operate as seminars. In collaborative learning we depend on one another to make the experience rich and useful. Therefore, I expect you to attend all class sessions and to actively participate in discussions. In order to enrich your participation, you are expected to devote sufficient time to reading and accomplishing learning activities prior to class session.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Besides class participation, two other learning activities are considered: Monthly journals and a major research project.

Class Participation: The aims is to encourage more collaborative and active involvement in the process of learning. It will give you an opportunity to critically analyse and discuss some of the readings related to a topic of the course. The feedback from the class will, in turn, help you in shaping your ideas and thoughts on this course. Class Participation constitutes 10% of the total grade.

Monthly Journals: It will give you an opportunity to read and record your reflections on the assigned readings and class discussions. This engaged and closed reading of the literature will assist you in formulating your thoughts and articulating your theoretical approaches to the topic of this course. You are expected to complete three (3) journals. There is no length limit.
Due dates: October 3, November 7, and November 28. Each journal constitutes 15% of the total grade (total for 3 journals is 45%).

Research Paper: This learning activity will indicate your grasp of topics covered in this course, your ability to critique and apply theoretical knowledge. In addition to an adequate knowledge of theory, your paper should demonstrate good writing and research skills. You can be creative and innovative about this project. For example, you can use one of the following short stories books listed below to write a reflective paper where you draw on some of the theoretical debates covered in the weekly reading lists. An alternative is to view films or documentaries relevant to the subject of this course and write a reflective paper. The following books are available in the UT and OISE libraries and Toronto Women’s Bookstore:


Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling website provides Eye Witness stories of Palestinian women.

There are also many NGOs and women’s groups within the Toronto area active on issues related to this course. You may wish to visit them, to collect their resources and learn from their experience. These, among many others, include:

Canadian Tamil Women’s Community Services

Canadian Centre for Victims of Torturers

Afghan Women’s Association

Immigrant Women Health Centre

Riverdale Immigrant Women’s Centre

Somali Women and Children’s Support Network

Women’s Health in Women’s Hands Community Health Centre

The Internet can also be a valuable source of information for analysing, assessing, and critically engaging with official documents of international organizations such as various UN agencies,
Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and many women’s groups. The following documents, for example, provide helpful information:


The research paper is due no later than **Tuesday, December 12.** The length is maximum 20 pages, double spaced and typed. This learning activity constitutes 45% of the total grade.

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*Please keep a copy of all your assignments and put your phone number and email address on the covering page. Electronic version of assignments, that is, fax, email messages, or attachments will NOT be accepted.*

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**Learning Evaluation**

Class Participation 10%

Monthly Journal 45% (for three journals)

Research Papers 45%

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**SEMINAR TOPICS AND READINGS**

Reading assignments include book chapters and articles from diverse sources. Other readings may be assigned during the conduct of this course. You are encouraged to bring other readings to the course. The readings are arranged under specific topics; however, all the topics are interconnected and they should be read as such. We may also cover topics other than the ones listed for each week. In planning the seminar readings, I have made arrangements for the use of additional resources including video, film, or documentary presentations or guest speakers.

**September 12 & 19 The Condition of War**

*Selected Topics:* How modern wars are linked with capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, militarism, and patriarchy? What analytical tools do we need to understand the nature of this interconnectedness? How to explain the relationship between war, economy, and the expansion of the ‘culture of rights’ and reconstruction industry? Is identifying ‘neo-liberalism’ as the ideological foundation for the condition of war adequate?


September 26  War as a Capitalist, Colonialist & Imperialist Project

Selected Topics: The condition of war since September 11, 2001; colonial legacy of war, war as an imperialist project.

6. Documentary Why We Fight (2005)


October 3  The War on Women

Selected Topics: What does ‘cultural war’ mean? How the rise of religious fundamentalisms and nationalism is linked to the increase of violence against women? How ‘culture of terror’ and ‘security culture’ is affecting women?


October 10  Harm of War to Women

Selected Topics: Women as displaced, refugees, or immigrants; women as political prisoners, detainees, or sex workers; poor women, widows, depressed, addicts, or slaves. Women as ‘freedom fighters,’ resisters, story tellers, witnesses, survivors, activists, and artists.


October 17 & 24  Colonial, Oriental, and Imperial Feminisms

Selected Topics: What are the theoretical roots of ‘colonial feminism’ and ‘imperialist feminism’? What has been feminist responses to fundamentalism, terrorism, militarism and the US global ‘women’s emancipation’ agenda? How fundamentalisms and terrorism are linked to orientalism, colonialism, and capitalism?


**October 31 Women’s NGOs and the Neo-liberal Ideology of ‘Democracy’ and ‘Reconstruction’**

*Selected Topics*: Reading NGOization in the context of foreign policy. How do women participate in peace negotiation, reconstruction, and rights-based politics? How do NGOs capitalize on women’s experience and knowledge as ‘native informants’ ‘experts,’ or ‘skilled labour’ for reconstruction, humanitarian projects, and re-building nation-states?


**November 7 Women, War and Peace**


**November 14 Women, War, Violence and Learning**

*Selected Topics*: How war and violence affect women’s learning? How learning theories explain women’s experience of war, displacement, resettlement, and diaspora? How to understand, assess, measure, or evaluate learning?


November 21  Resistance and Survival Learning

Selected Topics: What is the significance of alternative learning models such as ‘art-based’ or ‘in-formal’ methods for women? What about learning for emancipation or liberation? How about revolution and national liberation as sites of learning?


November 28  Learning in Diaspora

Selected Topics: How do women re-root themselves in diaspora? Diaspora and ‘hostland’ as new texts and sites of learning? How to theorize the emerging women’s organization from war zones in the diaspora and their transnational feminism?


December 5  Reflection, Closure, Party!