

**Department: International Relations**

**Faculty: Social Sciences**

**Course Title: Feminist International Relations (MPhil/PhD, Optional)**

**Number of Credits: Four**

**Course Objectives:**

Using gender as the central category of analysis, feminist International Relations (IR) scholars have argued that masculine values associated with men (such as autonomy and rationality) define the scope and limits of political practice and discourse in international relations. This, it is argued, makes women, feminine values and indeed non-hegemonic masculine values invisible in the field of IR. Taking this problem of marginalization as their starting point, feminist scholars have made substantive interventions in theory-building as well as empirical analysis in the field of IR. Most strands of feminist IR have an explicit normative agenda wherein knowledge production is directed towards making the discipline gender inclusive, and transforming international practices and processes that are oppressive.

This course examines the rich body of feminist IR literature that has emerged in the last 25 years, focusing both on the debates between feminist and non-feminist IR scholars as well as the many differences within feminist IR. It employs gender in the study of IR in three ways, as a ‘variable in global politics’, ‘constitutive of International Relations’, and ‘transformative of International Relations’ (True, 2001). As a review course, the topics mainly follow the developments in the field taking account also of the critique that has emerged, especially from feminist scholars and practitioners from the Global South who have questioned the discourse of Western feminism and ‘global sisterhood’. Further, the growing study of masculinities (Connell 1995) as well as poststructural scholarship that de-stabilizes the concept of gender itself (Butler 1990), and implications of both for IR, are also discussed. Seeking to engage with world politics, the course will utilize identified feminist tools of analysis to examine the following: social movements and human rights; state and the nation; international organizations and global governance; international political economy; and, international security. Feminist interventions in, and their efforts to reframe, each of the subject areas are critically evaluated.

**Course structure with units, if applicable:**

**Unit I**

1) An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies: Standpoint epistemology, which is uniquely feminist, is used as an entry point into this discussion on feminist epistemologies. While a broad overview of the range of feminist ways of knowing is offered, the focus is on key ideas identified at the intersections between gender and knowledge (for instance, the notions of ‘situatedness’ and ‘positionality’).

2) Feminism and IR Theory: Identified as part of post-positivist theoretical traditions in IR, feminism has struggled to make its presence felt within the wider discipline. This week examines two early debates between feminist and mainstream IR scholars, with an

aim to highlight some tensions that marked the beginnings of feminist IR. Indeed, these are yet to be fully resolved.

3) An Introduction to Feminist Methodologies: Feminist IR has often been criticized for not having enough clarity on the question of methodology. In light of the diverse epistemologies that constitute the field, it is no surprise that feminist scholars rely on a range of methodological approaches. Helping student make the links between different epistemological and methodological approaches, this week also identifies certain shared understandings of doing feminist research.

4) Two Feminist Debates: Both classes in this week are organized as book discussions. Mohanty (2003) is an insightful critique of Western feminism, and Butler (1990) destabilizes the understandings of sex and gender dominant in feminist discourse. While neither book is identified with feminist IR per se, both have been highly influential in the development of postcolonial and poststructuralist feminist IRs.

## **Unit II**

5) Social Movements (and Human Rights): Keeping in mind the links between women's movements and feminist scholarship, this first discussion on practices in world politics focuses on social movements and their relevance for gender politics, as understood in feminist IR. Transnational feminism is particularly highlighted. The question of human rights for women has been a key component of these movements, and provides the empirical pivot.

6) States and Nation: From the outset, feminist IR scholars have critiqued the state and its status as the primary referent in mainstream IR. The state is understood to be a masculine construct, complicit in the marginalization of women and femininities in international relations. The related concept of nation is also used to produce women's subjectivities in the political sphere. This prevalent feminist suspicion (though there are detractors) of the state and the project of nation-building, as it relates to IR, is examined here.

7) International Organizations (and Global Governance): Critical of the state as an agent for political change, feminists have looked at international organizations (IOs) for addressing gender biases in all spheres of life. While IOs do offer transformatory possibilities, certainly in this age of global governance, feminist IR scholars have found these to be gendered organizations as well. Both these aspects are discussed in this week.

8) International Political Economy: Feminist interventions in the sub-field of international political economy have been an integral part of the evolution of feminist IR. The focus has been on the gendered nature of production and consumption, and the marginalization of women's reproductive labour. Studies into the 'feminization of poverty' also yield important insights into dominant discourses of economic growth and development. Particularly in light of rapid economic globalization, these issues are relevant for feminist IR.

9) International Security: Feminist scholars have argued for reframing the national security-oriented security discourse in IR from the very beginning. The emergence of the human security discourse in 1994 and the UN Security Council's recognition of the gendered nature of conflict and peacemaking in 2000 has further boosted feminist security scholarship. This week reviews what is arguably the most dynamic subject of feminist praxis at this time.

### **Unit III**

10) Decolonizing Feminist IR: Feminist IR scholarship has been dominated by white, western feminists, who have drawn primarily from western scholarly traditions. In pushing for a universalist feminist agenda, questions of race and neo-imperial relations between the Global North and the Global South have been marginalized. These are important concerns especially for feminist scholars based in the South. Building on Mohanty (2003) discussed in week four of the course, the discussions this week examine postcolonial feminist IR and intersectionality as an analytical tool to address the concerns identified above.

11) Men and Masculinities: As discussions in the previous weeks would have suggested, feminism is not just about women. It is about femininities and masculinities, and women, men and indeed those who do not identify with either subject category. This week draws upon some key insights from the masculinities literature, and also examines the understandings of men and masculinities in feminist IR.

12) Feminist Futures?: It has now been more than 25 years since feminist IR, as it is understood today, came into being. While there is a greater acceptance of gender analysis in IR, the impact has been limited. This final week celebrates the vibrancy of contemporary feminist IR, but also examines the ongoing tensions with mainstream IR. Students are invited to address questions such as: is feminist IR a viable project?; what is the potential for theoretical innovation?; and, what should be the agenda for feminist IR?

### **Reading suggestions:**

Ackerly, B., M. Stern & J. True, *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Butler, J. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1990).

Chowdhury, G. and S. Nair, eds., in *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender and Class*, edited by (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003).

Hawkesworth, M. E. *Globalization & Feminist Activism*, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

Marchand, M. and A. S. Runyan *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites and Resistances*, edited by (London: Routledge, 2000).

Jayawardena, K. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986).

Mohanty, C. T. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonising Theory, Practising Solidarity*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Loomba, A. and R. A. Lukose, eds. *South Asian Feminisms*, edited by A. Loomba (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2012).

Zalewski, M. and J. Parpart, eds., *The 'Man' Question in International Relations*, edited by (Oxford, Westview Press, 1998).

Meyer, M. K. and E. Prügl, eds., *Gender Politics in Global Governance*, edited by (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

Tickner, J. A. *Gendering World Politics: Issues and Approaches in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 36-64.