

IMAGES OF THE FEMININE AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN

Intercollegiate Sri Lanka Education Program (ISLE) Program

Suggested US semester credit hours: 4

IFSA-Butler Course Code: GWS282-10 and SO282-10

Delivery method: Face to Face

Language of Instruction: English

Coordinator: Prof. Carmen Wickramagamage, cwickramag@yahoo.com

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an *introduction* to the forces—cultural, social, economic, and political—that shape women’s options and life-experiences in Sri Lanka today, “Sri Lanka” being conceptualized as a fractured and fragmented entity (along ethnic, class, religious and caste lines) that is, even as we speak, trying to find some common grounds for cohesion and unification. As the title implies, the course looks at women in both the cultural and material realms of Sri Lankan society in order to highlight the dialectic between the “real” (i.e., the actual material conditions, including the “War”) and the “imagined” (i.e., stereotypes and images) that shapes the gendered status-quo and women’s options. While the first half of the course will mainly look at the production and reproduction of women in the realm of culture, the second half will examine the materiality of women’s lives as determined by prevailing legal, economic and political structures, the attempt being to tease out the concordances and discordances between the two in shaping women’s lives. In the process, the ‘Sri Lankan’ or ‘Lankan’ as prefacing adjective for “women” too will come under scrutiny and interrogation as what it means to be “women” in Sri Lanka today is shaped by multiple locations and hegemonies. The course might therefore be seen as more a survey of key factors that inform women’s gendered status in Sri Lankan society—factors that *must be* considered in any attempt at understanding the gendered status-quo—than an in-depth study of one or two key aspects.

At the end of the course, the students should have a better understanding of the organizing principles and principal features of the gendered status-quo of Sri Lankan society that will be their home for the next few months. Since the course is part of a study abroad program, the aim of which is to take the students out of the comfort zone of “home” to an “elsewhere” for the purpose of expanding the students’ cultural and political horizons, it will encourage students to examine the social and political fundamentals of where *they* come from in light of what they discover and experience here. It is hoped that students will have a better grasp of and appreciation for the diversity that characterizes our world, at least in gender terms, by the end of the course.

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EVALUATION METHODS

Assignments:

1. 3 Response papers
2. Comments/Questions for Class
3. Critical essay on films
4. Field Notes
5. Research-based paper

Grading Breakdown:

3 Response papers: 30%
Questions/comments for class: 5%
Critical Essay on Films: 20%
Field Note: 10%
Final Essay: 25%
Class Participation: 10%

3 response papers (3 pages, double-spaced) in which students reflect on their understanding of the topic and subject-matter for the day. The “ideal” response would not simply summarize the readings and the discussion but include critical commentary and further reflections on what was said and read. Students are free to evaluate or reflect on what was said in class in terms of their own experiences and observations here in Sri Lanka and in terms of what they’ve gathered in other courses both here in Sri Lanka and back home in the US. This particular assignment aims at capturing how well students process what they read for class and is discussed in class, and what independent perspectives they bring to bear on that process. **Due Date: Exactly one class session from the day on which the topic is discussed.**

Comment/Question/s for Class: *On a day of the student’s choice, s/he can pose a question or questions for classroom discussion based on the readings for the day. It could be questions that are raised by the essays themselves for the reader or questions that arise for the reader pursuant to reading the essays. You may highlight how the readings mesh with or speak to your own observations and experiences and what has been said in class on the topic [or similar topics]. The question/s should be thought-provoking and able to engage the attention and interest of the class. [*Please avoid the 3 class sessions for which response papers are due in selecting the date for this assignment].*

Field Note: Based on notes taken during your visit to the Shelter for Women in Kandy, write a short piece [not more than 2 pages] in which you process and give some shape to the inchoate feelings and thoughts that you may have experienced during the visit. The piece need not take the form of an academic essay—a more personal tone is perfectly okay. **Due Date: TBD**

Critical Essay on Films [5/6 pages]: This essay gives you an opportunity to reflect on the topic of Women, War and Conflict, specifically, the Civil War in Sri Lanka which garnered “western” media attention for the “exotic” phenomenon of the female “suicide bomber.” But you will approach it through the medium of film. Write a critical essay on 2 of 3 films that feature the Sri Lankan Tamil women at the center of the Tamil militancy and Civil War: *My Daughter the Terrorist* [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apU30zDB4N4>], *The Terrorist* by John Malkovich and *A Peck on the Cheek* by Mani Ratnam. Students should address the following questions: how do the films portray the role of Tamil women in

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the militancy and conflict? What representative devices specific to the medium of film does the film-maker employ for this purpose? Look not so much at the stated or the obvious but for what remains 'unsaid' or 'unspeakable.' In other words, a la Gayatri Spivak, you may engage in an 'against-the-grain reading' as much as an 'along-the-grain reading.' ***Two of the films will be available for borrowing with ISLE Program Assistant. *My Daughter the Terrorist* is available on youtube. Please be informed that, of the three movies, *My Daughter* in particular contains some disturbing raw footage.*** You should consider incorporating into your reading the insights into SL Tamil feminine subjectivities and experiences that Prof Sivahoman's lectures will afford. I will make available some other material on female LTTE combatants in order to help you gain a more nuanced understanding of and background to the issue. **Due Date: TBD**

Research based paper [5/7 pages]: This essay invites you to engage with and reflect on an issue that is attracting media and public attention in the US as well as in Sri Lanka currently: Violence against women and children [particularly young girls]; Women in electoral politics; Women in "conflict/war" zones [America's involvement in wars abroad and Sri Lanka's Civil War]; Reproductive Rights; Sexuality/ies. You are free to consider other topics. Regardless of the topic you choose, adopt a comparative perspective, look at what is similar and different in the way the two societies regard the issue and the solutions that are being proposed and in place; ground your observations in the material domain through 'facts', experience, observation; make the final analysis/reflection your own, make the tone as personal as you wish. Feel free to run the topic by me. **Due date: TBD**

Guidelines for the Papers: Type-written, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, 1-inch margin on left and right. All sources consulted must be acknowledged using a standard documentation style.

*Papers may be emailed to cwickramag@yahoo.com. This is to minimize the hassle associated with last-minute printing! If emailing, please observe the deadlines given.

ATTENDANCE

Students studying on an IFSA-Butler program are required to attend all regularly scheduled classes, studios, recitations, workshops and laboratory sessions. Failure to attend classes may result in a loss of credit and a fail on your transcript. The specific application of the attendance guidelines is at the instructor's discretion. Lateness or absence can affect the student's grade.

COURSE OUTLINE

(Date TBD) Introduction: Gender, Society, Culture

Required Reading:

- Fatima Mernissi, "Scheherazade Goes West."
- Carmen Wickramagamage, "The Story of the Sari"

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(Date TBD) “Motherhood and Family”

Required Reading:

- Michele R Gamburd, “Milk Teeth and Jet Planes: Kin Relations in Families of Sri Lanka’s Transnational Domestic Servants.”
- Malathi de Alwis, “Motherhood as Space of Protest.”

(Date TBD) “Gender & Sexuality/ies”

Required Reading:

- Malathi de Alwis, “Embodiment of Respectability”
- Jodie Miller, “Violence and Coercion in Sri Lanka’s Commercial Sex Industry: Intersections of Gender, Sexuality, Culture and the Law.”

(Date TBD) “Gender & Sexuality/ies” contd.

Required Reading:

- Sandya Hewamanne, “Negotiating Sexual Meanings: Global discourses, local practices, and Sri Lanka’s Free Trade Zone (FTZ) Factory Workers.”
- Jayanthi Kuru-Utumpala, “Butching it Up: An Analysis of Same-Sex Female Masculinity in Sri Lanka.”

RESPONSE PAPER ON ABOVE TOPIC DUE BY NEXT CLASS SESSION

(Date TBD) “Gendering Religion”

Required Reading:

- Susanne Mrozik, “We Love Our Nuns,” Affective Dimensions of the Sri Lankan *Bhikkuni* Revival.”
- Farzana Haniffa, “Piety as Politics amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka”.

(Date TBD) Hegemonic Nationalisms and Sinhala (Buddhist) Women

Required Reading:

- Michele Gamburd, “Economics of Enlisting.”
- Sandya Hewamanne, “Duty Bound? Militarization, Romances and New Forms of Violence among Sri Lanka’s Free Trade Zone Factory Workers.”

(Date TBD) “Female Subjectivity in relation to Tamil and Muslim Women” [Guest Speaker: Prof. Sumathy Sivamohan]

Required Reading:

- Rajani Thiranagama, “No More Tears, Sister”. Sittarelega Maunaguru, “Gendering Tamil Nationalism.”

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(Date TBD) “Female Subjectivity in relation to Tamil and Muslim Women” contd. [Guest Speaker: Prof. Sumathy Sivamohan]

Required Reading:

- Sumathy Sivamohan, “Spoonful of Sugar.”
- Selected Poetry [will be handed out closer to the date], short film [to be screened in class].

(Date TBD) “Gendering Violence”

Required Reading:

- Chulani Kodikara, “Only until the Rice is Cooked? Domestic Violence Act, Familial Ideology and Cultural Narratives in Sri Lanka.”
- Farzana Haniffa, “Sex and Violence in the Eastern Province: A Study in Muslim Masculinity.”

RESPONSE PAPER ON ABOVE TOPIC DUE BY NEXT CLASS SESSION

(Date TBD) “Gender, Development and the Economy”

Required Reading:

- Dulini Fernando & Laurie Cohen, “Respectable Femininity and Career Agency: Exploring Paradoxical Imperatives.”
- Amali Philips, “Rethinking Culture and Development: Marriage and Gender among the Tea Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka.”

(Date TBD) VISIT TO SHELTER FOR WOMEN [maintained by Women’s Development Center, Kandy]

CRITICAL ESSAY ON FILMS DUE

(Date TBD) “Gender, Development and the Global Economy” contd.

Required Reading:

- Caitryn Lynch, “Good Girls or Juki Girls? Learning and Identity in Garment Factories.” Elizabeth Frantz, “Of Maids and Madams: Sri Lankan Domestic and their Employers in Jordan.”
- Michele Ruth Gamburd, “Breadwinners no more: Masculinity in flux,” (Ch. 7)

****FIELD NOTE ON VISIT TO SHELTER DUE****

(Date TBD) “The ‘Woman Factor’ and the Legal Imaginary in Sri Lanka” [Guest Speaker: Dr Deepika Udagama]

Required Reading:

- “Parliament’s Representation of Women” [read Chapter 4 only]
- Supreme Court Judgment

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(Date TBD) “Sri Lankan Muslim Women and Identity Politics” [Guest Speaker: Ms Shreen Saroor]

Required Reading:

- Shreen Saroor, “The Struggle Within.” “Sharmila Sayyid: Hounded and Harassed.”
- Farzana Haniffa, “Under Cover: Reflections on the Practice of “Hijab” amongst Urban Muslim Women in Sri Lanka.”

(Date TBD) “Women in/and Politics” [Guest Speaker: Prof. Kamala Liyanage]

Required Reading:

- Wickramasinghe & Kodikara, “Representation in Politics.”

RESPONSE PAPER ON ABOVE TOPIC DUE BY NEXT CLASS SESSION

(Date TBD) “Women’s Activism and Feminist Politics in Sri Lanka”

Required Reading:

- Kanchana Ruvanpura, “Awareness and Action: The Ethno-gender Dynamics of Sri Lankan NGOs.”

****(Date TBD): FINAL ESSAY DUE****

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Any academic endeavor must be based upon a foundation of honesty and integrity. Students are expected to abide by principles of academic integrity and must be willing to bear individual responsibility for their work while studying abroad. Any academic work (written or otherwise) submitted to fulfill an academic requirement must represent a student’s original work. Any act of academic misconduct, such as cheating, fabrication, forgery, plagiarism, or facilitating academic dishonesty, will subject a student to disciplinary action.

IFSA-Butler takes academic integrity very seriously. Students must not accept outside assistance without permission from the instructor. Additionally, students must document all sources according to the instructions of the professor. Should your instructor suspect you of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty, you may receive a failing grade for the course and disciplinary action may result. The incident will be reported to the IFSA-Butler resident director as well as your home institution.