

IRW/IWL Seminar 2001-2002
Gender-Race-Ethnicity in Local and Global Contexts

Project Abstracts

Isabelle Barker

Political Science

“Disenchanted Feminists: Secularism and Global Inequalities in Transnational Feminist Human Rights Theory and Activism”

This project traces the obstacles that transnational feminism faces in relying on the human rights framework. Feminists have turned to theories of intersectionality in response to critiques regarding the limits of making universal claims of human rights on behalf of a unified category of women. The project suggests that intersectionality is insufficient in that it cannot critique the conflictual structural and discursive positionings of basic identifications. Indeed, these may be elided in favor of pluralism that conveys a unified demand for women’s human rights. Human rights theories and institutions have played a significant and useful role in bettering women’s lives; feminists should not reject the human rights framework. However, in the interest of recognizing the philosophical baggage of human rights, the study discusses the secularism of human rights as a way of critiquing the inequalities that undergird feminist human rights theories and practices.

Julianna Barr

History

“The ‘Seductions’ of Texas: The Political Language of Gender in the Conquests of Texas, 1690-1810”

This project examines the intercultural borderlands of colonial America and the dynamics of Spanish-Indian political interaction in the eighteenth century. Texas presents a unique arena for the study of colonial relations in the history of North America because its contestations put Indians as well as Europeans in the role of conqueror. Its stories of conquest coalesce around four major invasions--that of Apaches from the west, French from the east, Spanish from the south, and Comanches and Wichitas from the north. Because no group ever achieved dominion over the others, a general political stalemate was the result. This singular situation found reflection in the form and idiom the Spanish and Indians used to communicate and negotiate their power relations. Because survival was often contingent upon understanding and being understood by one another, Europeans and Indians had to find a common ground by which to relate to one another. Adopting the theory that people seek to relate the unknown to the world they know using characteristics that appear recognizable or familiar to them, this study argues that when the Spanish and Indians looked for something recognizable in the other, they latched onto representations of gender. Both groups used constructions of masculinity and femininity to allocate power in their own civil, economic, and political systems, and they recognized the existence of such distinctions in the other’s social relations. In cross-cultural encounters, markers of gender became what in linguistic terms might be deemed cultural cognates, by which Europeans and Indians read and interpreted one another’s words, signs, gestures, and behavior.

Vilna Bashi

Sociology

“Getting a job (within Limits): Immigrant Social Network Employment within Racial- and Gender-Stereotyped Labor Markets”

This project examines the gendered, racial, and ethnic aspects of network migration to the United States and Britain using qualitative (ethnographic) research methods to detail the migration experience of black West Indian immigrants to New York and London. These immigrants receive help from their co-ethnics in immigrant social networks, and this help enables them to cross international borders, enter labor and housing markets, and achieve some degree of social mobility on a global scale. This project expands that analysis to critically reflect upon the ways that gender (particularly the gendered structure of the labor market) affects immigrant social network configurations and operations.

Marian Eberly

ESL/PALS/FASCE

"Social Network Characteristics and their Influence on Acculturation and Culture Identity"

This research project uses social network analysis to explore the strategies of coping with transition to a new cultural environment, and to trace changes in identity with respect to culture, gender, race and ethnicity. It takes as research subjects 5-10 newly arrived foreign graduate students. Tracking the development and use of their social networks in conjunction with their adaptive strategies and relative 'success' in the new culture allows the researcher to observe connections between the social networks and the subjects' perceptions and experiences in the new culture. This study adds the feature of cultural density to the three commonly studied social network characteristics (size, density and composition). The study takes what is known from the literature about social network analysis and cultural transition and applies this knowledge to a population of foreign graduate students. It projects a model linking characteristics of the social network to the place and degree of acculturation and to changes in identity.

Christina Ewig

Political Science

"Gender Equity in Health Policy Reform in Peru"

The dissertation's central finding is that the poor in Latin America have risen in political importance. Their influence is felt to such an extent that the reform of social policy sectors, including health and education policy, is marked by an emphasis on the needs of the poor. Additionally, Poverty in and of itself is a highly gendered and racialized condition. Therefore, the focus of politicians and bureaucrats on the poor not only has important implications for the issues of class, but also for inequalities based on gender, race and ethnicity. Through research carried out on health care reform in the Peruvian Andes region from January 1998 to April 1999, clues several clues were provided towards understanding the multiple issues at stake when policy changes such as health sector reform are introduced. Moreover, both poverty and reform are felt differently by every member of a household due to the influence of implicit gender hierarchies.

Nancy Gerber

Literatures in English

“Portrait of the Artist as Mother: The Figure of the Mother-Artist in Contemporary American Fiction”

This project studies a fictional heroine that has gone unnamed in our literary tradition: the figure of the mother-artist. Through readings of selected contemporary texts by American women writers, this project discusses the creativity of this heroine and map the impact of gender, race,

accomplished through a stratification based on race, class, gender, and nationality and further considers how this stratification has been destabilized by transnational social movements through the strategic reappropriation of globalization.

Mary Hawkesworth
Institute of Politics

"Congressional Enactments of Race-Gender: Towards a Theory of Race-Gendered Institutions"

American politics hold a history of being raced and gendered. The hundreds years old American political experiment has been dominated by the doings of men and white individuals. That being said, women of color, namely black women, have been doubly excluded from the political arena. Several efforts made to explain the marginalization of elected women of color prove unhelpful. The nature of this particular research is to draw up legislative practices during the 103rd and 104th Congresses and interviews with Congresswomen of color about their experiences in the Democratically controlled 103rd Congress and the Republican controlled 104th Congress to illuminate how race-gender operates within a political institution officially committed to deliberative decision making among equals. Examining the operations of race-gender in circumstances of official institutional equality may help to illuminate processes of inequality that are masked by institutional rhetoric and by the received view in political science. Also, an investigation into the variances in race-gender norms and practices between Democratically-controlled and Republican-controlled Congresses will contribute to this discussion of political race-gender equity.

Nancy Hewitt

History

"Origin Stories: Recasting Woman's Rights in America, 1835-1875"

The Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Conventions and women's suffrage were significant events and the narrative linking them, reiterated by scholars for many years, captures an important thread in American women's political history. But that thread needs to be seen as simply one path through a complicated tapestry that includes more diverse understandings of both rights and politics. A history of the first wave woman's rights movement that is attenuated, distorted or incomplete limits our sense of possibilities in the present. Building on the work begun by European historian Bonnie Anderson, this project seeks to illuminate the multiple sites, visions, and advocates of woman's rights, globally and locally, from the 1830's to the 1870's. The purpose is to provide a richer, multifaceted legacy that can open our eyes to new possibilities as we confront contemporary challenges to racial, economic, gender and human rights.

Daphne Lamothe

English

"African-American Literature and the Ethnographic Imagination"

This project examines the ethnographic perspective that, it argues, is a central preoccupation of African-American writers during the first third of the twentieth century. Writing at a moment in American history in which the social sciences were envisioned as tools which should be deployed to contest the nation's racist legacy, intellectuals and artists such as W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Sterling Brown, Zora Neale Hurston and Katherine Dunham often self-consciously assumed the roles of translator and explicator of African-American and African diasporic folk cultures to western, largely white audiences. Beginning with DuBois' declaration in *The Souls of Black Folk* that "Leaving then, the world of the white man, I have stepped within the Veil," these writers mediated between cultures that, according to then prevailing wisdom, were separate and discrete. Because they inhabited positions both inside and outside the

There is noteworthy progress in women's political participation recently in Taiwan, especially in Taipei City. In the 1998 election in Taipei, 17 (32.7%) female city councilors were elected. Based on the "critical mass" theory, the hypothesis of this research is that the election of more women to politics has the potential to make more than just a symbolic difference. However, though many studies in Scandinavian, US and British politics have identified the potential for gender to influence policy attitudes, priorities, and leaderships, empirical evidence in Taiwan and Asia is still rare. By examining major urban policies and local political activities through a feminist lens, this project proposes an analysis of how advocacy of women's political representation has been justified and received within the context of Taiwan's patriarchal but changing culture. In particular, this project will examine both the discourse surrounding the presence of women in decision-making positions and the effect their presence has on decisions.

Imelda Martin-Junquera

Modern Languages

"Oppositional Magic Realism in the Writing of U.S. Women of Color"

The chief objective of this study is to continue to develop the theory of magical realism as a Pan-american phenomenon. Further, to continue to argue that magical realism may prove useful for minority women writers to utilize as a vehicle to express irony and subversion, while fighting verbally against patriarchy. To put the study into context historically it should be noted that minority women, specifically Native American and Chicana women, have suffered a triple colonization (race, class and gender) in which the fact of being a woman is the least oppressive of all. On the contrary, feminism's conception is due to white, middle class women both in Europe and in the U.S. By looking towards the similar literature of Marquez, Allende, Fuentes and Cortazar, etc, the narrative mode of magical realism and its depictions can be explored as attempts to overcome and denounce the situation of inferiority in which female authors have been immersed in the United States.

Jasbir Puar

Women's Studies and Geography

"Global Circuits: Transnational Sexualities and Queer Tourism"

The first organized gay tours were started in the 1950's. Today, over 300 travel providers run gay and lesbian trips, fuelled by an increase in gay and lesbian consumption in the early 1990's. Several recent developments during the last three years emphasize the growing importance of examining local/global sexualities in relation to tourism and globalization. These include a shift from domestic to international travel along with a growing interest in gay and lesbian tourists by national tourist boards. The national tourist offices of Germany, Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Puerto Rico have all produced extensive marketing campaigns targeting overseas gay and lesbian travelers. Through these tourist practices, the pervasive globalization of neo-liberal notions of sexualities is bringing increasing numbers of queer bodies in contact with each other. This interdisciplinary project seeks to answer: how is the construction of community created through and against such encounters? What global and local sexualities are foregrounded? The multiple sites of tourism suggest several overlapping and diverging circuits of globalization, illuminating certain conundrums to the relationships between globalization and sexuality.

Renée Römken

Visiting Scholar and Visiting Professor, Columbia University; Social Sciences,
Utrecht University

"Protecting Prosecution and the Power of Law"

abuse provides challenging opportunities and at the same time highlights a significant question regarding the possibility of successful interdisciplinary responses to domestic violence victims. Data collection will initially target the victims and legal and social service professionals involved in this program. The research project will result in a systematic analysis of the program's dynamics and how they affect the program's effectiveness. It will clarify how different disciplinary cultures and traditions interrelate with psychological and social-cultural dynamics inherent in the gendered nature of domestic violence.

Ben Sifuentes Jáuregui

Spanish & Portuguese

“Bound Textualities: Gender, Masochism, and Melodrama in Latin American Narrative”

"Bound Textualities" will explore a series of master figures (gender, masochism and melodrama) and their relation to subject formation in contemporary Latin American narrative. The project combines critical readings of works by Cortázar, Elizondo, Lezama Lima, Lispector, Puig, Pizarnik, Poniatowska, Rulfo, among others. Additionally, it looks at recent debates on the figuration of subjectivity in gender and queer theories (namely, works by Freud, Foucault, Butler and Sedgwick). This double reading will help gauge critically--exploring the possibilities and limitations of--the universalist claims of theory *vis-à-vis* the particularist (and culturally specific) challenge of the Latin American literary texts. More exactly, this *inter*-implication of literature and theory, of cultural difference and theoretical disciplines, is a constant (aesthetic, political, social, economic and cultural) negotiation that will guide us in the articulation of a theory of gender that recognizes postmodern as well as postcolonial considerations in Latin American narrative.

Stacey Sutton

Sociology and Urban Planning

“Black Women Entrepreneurs: The Reflexive Relationship Between Community and Identity”

The purpose of this research is to study the collective identities of “blackness,” “womanness,” and entrepreneur, in order to understand how the confluence of race, gender and social position are enmeshed in the social construction of community. This research seeks to examine the reflexive relationship between community and identity to gain insight into the ways that geographical spaces become home places. By exploring the symbolic meaning of black community-based entrepreneurship, as opposed to merely focusing on the economic contribution of these institutions and social actors, this research will provide a conceptual framework of community attachment, one suggesting that attachment is not solely to physical locations. Rather, for marginalized or otherwise oppressed groups of people, community attachment is to a conceptual or idealized space but manifests in a physical place. Therefore, this project will argue, to understand how meaning is bestowed on spatial locations one must explore complex identities and the ways identities shape places.