Gender Perspectives on Human Rights

Spring 2017
3 Credit
Related Disciplines: Gender Studies, Legal Studies, Political Science
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Tuesdays & Fridays, 10.05-11.25
Location: Vestergade 10 A-32

Course Introduction
This course examines the human rights framework through a gender lens. We explore why and how women as a group continues to experience discrimination because of their gender and to what extent human rights can be useful to challenge the social, economic and political position of women.

Human rights are a political tool, a framework for law enforcement and a strategic context for creating social change. Human rights serve as an important discourse in foreign policy, development aid and even military interventions. Claiming that women’s rights are human rights provides a legal language for prosecuting violations and ensures strategies for improving women’s living conditions. It acknowledges the importance of existing legal concepts, but also highlights dimensions of discrimination that are gender-specific, and which need to be addressed if the human rights framework is to include and reflect the experiences of the female half of the world population.
The Women’s Rights Movement has been successful in advocating for a feminist approach in policy making and over the last decades women’s lives have been improved. Yet many challenges remain, as there can be a great divide between political intentions and actions. Women continue to be more likely to live in poverty, and a lack of access to education, formal work and political participation maintain their subordinate status. Child marriage, domestic labor, prostitution, the feminization of poverty and migration, sexual violence and reproductive rights are examples of current gender-specific issues, which we examine further throughout the course.

Though the legal and political structures are in place, women’s rights continue to be violated worldwide as states and the international community fail to hold perpetrators accountable. What social, economic and political interests challenge the human rights framework and how does it affect women? What can we learn from viewing women’s lives and experiences through a human rights lens?

**Learning Objectives**

- Develop a basic understanding of human rights, accountability mechanisms and obstacles to international human rights law
- Gain a historical and contemporary understanding of women’s rights and the potential impact of feminism as a political discourse
- Examine obstacles to gender equality and examples of gender-specific human rights issues
- Explore how human rights are used as a discourse in policy and campaigning
- Discover how social norms related to gender and sexuality impacts the rights of women

**Instructor**

Ane Krestine Larsen, BA and MA in Communication Studies from Roskilde University (2013) and MA in Human Rights and Democratization from European Inter-University Centre (2012). Ane has been involved with the implementation and evaluation of Danish prostitution policy at the Danish National Center for Social Research (SFI) and has done research on the representation of prostitution and prostitutes in Danish media and policy. Besides a full-time faculty position at DIS, Ane works as a counselor at *Sex & Samfund* (The Danish Family Planning Association), focusing on gender identity, sexual health and sexuality among youth. Moreover, Ane is connected to *Amnesty International* as a human rights educator.

**Teaching Methods**

This course will be taught through a combination of lectures, class discussions, group work, field studies, guest lectures and films. Throughout there will be a strong emphasis on your participation. The aim is to create a classroom space characterized by respect and willingness to listen/consider others’ perspectives, and where it is safe to explore ideas together and individually.

**SAFE SPACE**

Please note that the class is discussion-based and it is very important we all contribute to creating and maintaining a safe space throughout the semester. Your peers will come from a variety of backgrounds which we seek to use as an added value – be open, curious and respectful during your own and others’ learning process. Remember to challenge ideas, not people.
Evaluation

**To be eligible for a passing grade in this class you must complete all of the assigned work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage of Final Grade</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation - Preparation, and your active participation including final student presentations</td>
<td>30 %</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights and Gender in the News</td>
<td>15 %</td>
<td>Deadline two day before your short input in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop quizzes</td>
<td>25 %</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Piece (Including peer review)</td>
<td>30 %</td>
<td>March 17th (peer review March 14th)</td>
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Class Participation
The course heavily emphasizes your own engagement and active participation. Much of the learning in this course is dependent on how much effort you put into your own explorations and research, not least in connection with the different assignments.

The evaluation of this component will take into consideration the following aspects:

**Attendance:** attendance in all classes and field studies is mandatory. See academic handbook for further information. You are urged to be punctual, particularly where guest lecturers and/or films are concerned. Note that coming late to class will affect your participation grade.

**Preparation:** preparation for each class is a course requirement. See reading list included in this syllabus. Please be aware that there may be slight changes in the reading assignments during the course and various handouts will also be distributed, but you will be provided with ample time to properly prepare.

**Participation:** active participation in all class sessions is required, and forms an important part of your grade for this component. Participation should preferably reflect your critical capacities and knowledge of the course material. The aim should be to contribute constructively to forwarding meaningful, relevant dialogue and discussion among the group; in practice, this means that expression of one’s personal views should be backed up by references to pertinent readings, materials, etc. and that other viewpoints should be considered in a respectful manner. Note the rubric for participation grades in blackboard, which is a tool for you to understand what good participation includes.

**Computers and phones are NOT allowed in class** unless specifically agreed with Ane. You are therefore NOT allowed to keep your phone on the table throughout class. You are expected to take
notes throughout the semester in a notebook which you yourself are responsible of getting before the course begins (cheap ones are available in e.g. TIGER).

Please do not leave jackets and bags on the table throughout class – you are not going anywhere for the next 80 minutes anyway and we need the space to work.

Please be aware that failure to comply with these rules will negatively affect your participation grade.

Academic Honesty

DIS expects that you abide by the highest standards of intellectual honesty in all academic work. DIS assumes that all students do their own work and credit all work or thought taken from others. Academic dishonesty will result in a final course grade of “F” and can result in dismissal and your home university will be notified. DIS reserves the right to request that written student assignments be turned in electronic form for submission to plagiarism detection software. Much plagiarism happens because students are not aware that they had to cite a text or idea. See the Academic Handbook for more information, or ask your instructor if you have questions.

Disability and Resource Statement

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of Academic Support (acadsupp@dis.dk) to coordinate this. In order to receive accommodations, students should inform the instructor of approved DIS accommodations within the first two weeks of classes.

Class Representatives and Comfort Groups

In the beginning of the semester two class representatives will be elected. The class reps will meet the course instructor twice during the semester and are responsible for providing feedback and ideas for improvement. Moreover, the class will be divided into comfort groups (3 people). Your comfort group is meant to be a help with practical questions and note taking if you are ill as well as a safe space for discussions and peer reviews. Please make use of these two institutions throughout the semester.

Written Assignments

Written assignments are a significant component of your learning process and grade. Ané will be available for guidance but it is extremely important you make use of your peers as well. As part of the assignments you are expected to participate and contribute fully to the peer review processes. Remember to always respect the deadline, hard copy/email policy as well as word limit.

Human Rights and Gender in the News

At the beginning of the semester you will be divided into smaller groups. For each class (which does not include a guest lecture), one group is asked to give a short presentation for max 10 minutes on a current human rights/gender topic related to the class. The topic is to be found in the media stream and part of the assignment is to post two news articles at least two days before your presentation. With the account/update you are to provide a short analysis of what the core of the issue is in your opinion and how it relates to gender and human rights.

The format is up to you – you are welcome to make a short power point, show video clips, etc. Part of the assignment is a short paper (max. 2 pages), which should include a description of the topic, short summary of the articles and your analysis of how the topic relates to gender and human rights. Groups will be organized and posted on Canvas in the beginning of the semester.

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Readings

Course readings can be found on Canvas. **Before each class, you are expected to read the texts assigned for that class and write one question about each text to discuss in class.** Please note some readings are to be found in the ‘links’ document.

*Schedule is subject to change if necessary with as much notice as possible*

**Course Plan:**

**Friday January 20th**  
*(Session 1)*

**Introduction**  
We will discuss learning expectations, go through the different themes of the course and practical formalities. You will be asked to introduce yourself and your reason for studying Gender Perspectives on Human Rights to give all of us an idea of how your different backgrounds can contribute positively to the learning process.  
*Readings: the syllabus*

**Tuesday January 24th**  
*(Session 2)*

**What are Human Rights?**  
What role has human rights played throughout history, how can human rights be enforced and to what extent are human rights universal? We will look into the history of human rights, legal frameworks and discuss cultural relativism and conflicting rights.  
*Readings:*
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

**Friday January 27th**  
*(Session 3)*

**Women’s Rights**  
In theory, women’s rights are protected under human rights law – and yet there has been a need to define a legal framework specifically addressing the discrimination women face. That human rights are women’s rights ought to be a given – but why was this notion a radical idea at first?  
*Readings:*
- ‘Women’s Rights’, Human Rights Watch (read short articles in ‘Explore Women’s Rights’)  
  [https://www.hrw.org/topic/womens-rights](https://www.hrw.org/topic/womens-rights)  
- Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

**Tuesday January 31st**  
*(Session 4)*

**Gender Equality**  
What does gender equality mean and how can it be measured? What instruments can be used to create equal access to political
participation and the work market, and how can gender equality in the private sphere be influenced?

Readings:


Friday February 3rd
(Session 5)

Men’s Role in Gender Equality

Gender equality is often viewed as a women’s issue – how can the notion be understood as gender holistic, including and integrating men in the fight for equal and just societies?

Readings:

- Barker, Gary et al.: ‘What Men Have to Do With It’, report from International Center for Research on Women, 2010 (1-14)
- Watch TEDTalk ‘Why Gender Equality is Good for Everone, Men Included’ by Michal Kimmel: [https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_kimmel_why_gender_equality_is_good_for_everyone_men_included](https://www.ted.com/talks/michael_kimmel_why_gender_equality_is_good_for_everyone_men_included)

-------------------------- CORE COURSE WEEK --------------------------

Tuesday February 14th
(Session 6)

Feminism as a Political Discourse

What is feminism and is it still relevant? We will look at the role of feminism as a political discourse and discuss the potential of the contemporary women’s movement.

Readings:

- Valenti, Jessica, ‘When everyone is a feminist, is anyone?, The Guardian, 2014. [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/24/when-everyone-is-a-feminist](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/24/when-everyone-is-a-feminist)
- Watch TedTalk ‘We Should All Be Feminists’ by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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Men Right’s Movements and Discrimination of Men
Men as a group also face gender-specific challenges – what are they? What does the Men’s Rights Movement fight for and how is the political group a response to feminism?
Readings:
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Men

Sexual and Reproductive Rights
What are sexual and reproductive rights? We will discuss how gender, bodies and sexuality can be understood through a human rights lens.
Readings:
- IPPF Charter Guidelines on Sexual and Reproductive Rights
- Irvine, Janice, ‘Politics of Sex Education’

Documentary – ‘It’s a Girl’
In India, China and many other parts of the world today, girls are killed, aborted and abandoned simply because they are girls. This documentary sets out to discuss the root causes of gendercide and what can be done to stop violating the rights of (unborn) girls and women.
Readings TBA

-------------------------- TRAVEL BREAK / LONG STUDY TOUR --------------------------

Feminization of Migration
Women are increasingly moving across borders to be able to provide for their families, causing new dynamics in families and the work market – the feminization of migration. How is migration an issue of gender? To what extent can we talk about migrating women making free choices in a context of social and economic inequality?
Readings:

FIELD STUDY – 8:30-12:30 TBA

A Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) to Development
How can human rights influence political prioritization, corporation and development aid? What does the feminization of poverty mean
and how are human rights related to poverty reduction? Are women key to development?

Readings:

- Sustainable Development Goals  
- UNHCHR - HRBA publication - Read # 8, 16, 17 and 18.  
  (What is the relationship between HR and development? What is a HRBA? What value does a HRBA add to development? What is the relationship between a HRBA and gender mainstreaming?)

Tuesday March 14th  
(Session 12)  

GUESTLECTURER – Karen Ansbæk ActionAid DK  
ActionAid Denmark is a development organization that works for just and democratic governance and empowerment of the world’s poorest. Women are one of ActionAid’s focus areas, and Karen Ansbæk, International Partnership Coordinator, will tell us how the organization educates women to know and fight for their rights and how gender is part of AA’s development work.

Friday March 17th  
(Session 13)  

Child Marriage  
Each year, millions of girls get married before the age of 18. Child marriage disproportionally affects girls and mostly happens in a context of poverty, gender inequality and lack of education. Child marriage is a human rights violation, that serves to control girls and their sexuality. Why do governments fail to protect girls from child marriage and what is the outcome of marrying children that are too young to consent to wed?

Readings:

  - Watch documentary: ‘Too Young To Wed: The Secret World of Child Brides’  
    [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYleXcpbzKY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYleXcpbzKY)
- Watch talk National Geographic Live, ‘Secret World of Child Marriage’  

-------------------------- TRAVEL BREAK / LONG STUDY TOUR --------------------------

Tuesday March 28th  
(Session 14)  

Women’s Rights and Islam  
Islam is often criticized for undermining the societal position of women. The *Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam* (CDHRI) is a response to the UDHR, which is often claimed to be a western interpretation of rights. How is gender addressed in the CDHRI? What role does honor and shame play in relation to the female body in Muslim culture? Is religion compatible with human rights and gender equality? Can religion be used to promote women’s status and enhance social equality?

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Readings:

- The Cairo Declaration of Human Rights

Friday March 31st
(Session 15)

Student Debate – Human Rights Clashes
The human rights framework is full of contradictions – though human rights in theory all are equally important, this is very difficult to respect in praxis. Students make debate videos in groups which will set the frame for the days discussions - more information will be given in class.

Tuesday April 4th
(Session 16)

Guest Lecturer - TBC
More information will be given in class.

Wednesday April 5th
(Session 17)

Guest Lecturer – A Trans* Experience
More information will be given in class — NB! Evening event
Reading:


Friday April 7th
(Session 18)

Workshop wrap up
More information will be provided in class.

Tuesday April 11th
(Session 19)

Selling Sex – Work or Violence?
The sex industry fuels many debates among human rights activists – can prostitution be compatible with human rights? Who are responsible for sex workers’ rights – and how is trafficking and migration related to sex work?
Readings:

- Chart: The Feminist Position on Prostitution
- Sex Workers Rights Declaration

-------------------------- TRAVEL BREAK -------------------

Tuesday April 18th
(Session 20)

GUESTLECTURER – Ahlem Chemlali, DIGNITY
Dignity is the Danish Institute Against Torture. Program Leader Ahlem Chemlali will tell us about the health implications and social consequences of sexual violence, and give us an overview of the international legal framework and relevant war crime cases. Readings TBA

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Rape as a Weapon of War

Sexual violence and mass rape have always been used as a weapon of war, but not until the 21st century has rape been categorized as a war crime and is now included in the international human rights framework. Is sexual violence an expression of desire or power? How are victims stigmatized and what are the legal consequences for the perpetrators? We will watch the documentary ‘Weapon of War’ about the conflict in Congo.

Readings:

- MSF, ‘Enough is Enough, Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War’, 2004

Tuesday April 25th
(Session 22)

Workshop on final presentations

We will wrap up the final topics and plan the student presentations.

April 26th

FIELD STUDY – 13:00-17:00 FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Friday April 28th
(Session 23)

Final Class

Final discussion and wrap up of the semester