

Feminism, Postcoloniality and Development
University of Toronto
JPG 1509S/Spring 2008

Instructor: Katharine N. Rankin, Associate Professor
Place & Time: Tuesdays, 11a – 1p, Sidney Smith Hall, Room 2124A

Course Description:

This course takes up the challenge for feminist theory posed by the postcolonial condition, for the sake of articulating a critical theory of development (and geography/planning more generally) that engages issues of socio-cultural difference. By now 'gender' has been thoroughly accepted as a legitimate domain of intervention in mainstream development circles, and we will briefly consider how liberal, Marxist and post-colonial feminisms have contributed to its institutionalization. But we will also view these developments critically, asking how they might be implicated in wider-scale political-economic processes such as imperialism, neoliberalization and associated patterns of socioeconomic and cultural injustice. To do so requires theorizing the postcolonial condition, with recourse not only to postcolonial theory but also to more materialist engagements with cultural politics and political economy. We conclude by exploring how we might build on this analysis to claim development (and planning/geography) as a feminist practice.

Course Organization:

Classes will be conducted as seminars. Students will be expected to lead in-class discussions by turn and to prepare critical comments or questions about the readings prior to class each week. The latter is intended to encourage a habit of thinking-through-writing, as well as help facilitate discussion in class. The instructor will offer supplemental short lectures as necessary to provide further context on the readings, the authors or debates in the literature. Students will also write a term paper on a topic of their choosing in consultation with the instructor. This assignment involves several incremental submissions, beginning with a proposed topic and outline, followed by a paper draft to be reviewed by the instructor and a peer reader, and the final paper due at the end of term.

Readings:

The course readings will be organized around key themes and to the extent possible will involve reading full books. The course is geared to graduate students with interests in critical development studies—whether PhD students seeking to choose a research focus and prepare for comprehensive exams, or Masters students with more applied interests in development policy and planning. Examples of themes the course will engage include: neoliberalization; governmentality; social reproduction; postcolonial theory and its critique; feminist critique of 'social capital', 'participation', 'civil society' & 'empowerment'; the politics of difference; resistance and social movements; the politics of development institutions; masculinities in development; feminist practice; and feminist methodology.