

**WOMEN AND GENDER STUDIES - WMST 314-001
ENGLISH - ENG 310-001
NEW CENTURY COLLEGE - NCLC 375-005
CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND RESOLUTION - CONF 399-001**

**STORIES OF GENDER AND HUMAN RIGHTS:
NARRATIVES OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

**SPRING 2013
WEDNESDAYS 4:30- 7:10
UNIVERSITY HALL, ROOM 1202**

Dr. Paula Ruth Gilbert

Room 319 Aquia Building
(703) 993-1220 (Modern and Classical Languages)
(703) 993-2896 (Women's Studies)
Home page: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~pgilbert/>

Office Hours:

Tuesdays 2:45 - 4:00 p.m.
Wednesdays 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.
and by appointment
e-mail: pgilbert@gmu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, along with its 1979 Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other subsequent United Nations' declarations, reports, establishment of special "rapporteurs," and world conferences, was meant to protect both the integrity and the dignity of all human beings in both the private and public spheres. And yet, as the human rights' scholar, Marjorie Agosín, reminds us, in the introduction to her edited *Women, Gender, and Human Rights*, despite major changes in the concept of human rights and gender rights since 1948 and despite a substantial body of work by activists, grassroots leaders, writers, and thinkers, most governments and nongovernmental organizations continue to define human rights in terms of male models and patterns of thinking. What Agosín argues for is a redefinition and an expansion of the traditional view of human rights which has long focused on public actions (state-sponsored terrorism, for example) so that women's rights in both the public and private spheres can be included--rights that protect the female body from being an object of punishment and violation; universal, fundamental, and inalienable rights that go beyond cultural and religious traditions.

One of the ways by which women themselves have given a voice of dissent and struggle to their resistance to these violations is through literary expression. They have taken their personal and private stories of violation and tossed them into the public sphere, thereby disturbing the "natural" order of things. Seen as victims, they have become the site of both oppression and resistance, and their texts, often with a transnational readership, have become sites that offer different images of victimized women and girls--now as subjects and agents of their own history. The intellectual puzzle being explored in this course is how to insert gender, and specifically the representation of the female body, into discussions of narrative texts (not forgetting the visual) and human rights discourse. Can "truth claims" be made when the story is told in the form of a novel, poem, memoir, or film, or does fiction create its own set of truths that can subvert the truth claims of factual and philosophical representation? Fiction certainly inserts some non-fiction truth claims, but filtered through distance, space, memory, and language. Is there a difference between literarily constructed texts (fiction, poetry, theater, and film) and the constructed stories that find their way into memoirs and testimonies, between texts authored by

women and/about girls rather than by men about women (or about men)? Is there an advantage to reading about the "poetic" memories of outrages of human rights violations as opposed to historical accounts and to expressions of violence against women in news and police reports, oral accounts, and documents produced by human rights organizations? Ultimately can we and should we bring a gendered perspective by paying attention to women and girls over all violated peoples in the representation of human rights violations, and if so, why and how? Do women's experiences connect more powerfully the commonalities of women's status and global subordination, setting up for us ethical demands, imploring us to commitment and to action? Of course we can speak of the fact that there are many violations that specifically target the female body: female genital cutting; female infanticide; sati; honor killings; daughter selling, dowries, dowry killings; acid burning; foot binding; rape as a spoil of war; slavery; sexual trafficking. But does this deny the rights of all bodies in pain? The real issue here is not a lack of recognition of all bodies subjected to human rights violations if we focus on the female body, but rather what such a gendered approach toward the representation of human and gender rights violations can tell us, teach us, and how it can help us better understand the intersections between human rights and narrative discourse.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Keller, Nora Okja. *Comfort Woman*. London: Virago Press, 2001 (or Penguin, 1997).
[Also in Kindle edition.]

Mam, Somaly, with Ruth Marshall. *The Road of Lost Innocence: The True Story of a Cambodian Heroine*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2008 (or 2009).
[Also in Kindle edition.]

Matrubhoomi/A Nation without Women. Manish Jha, dir. Perfs. Tulip Joshi, Sudhir Pandey, Sushant Singh. Eros International, 2005. [Feature film on reserve in Johnson Center Library; on Netflix.]

McCormick, Patricia. *Sold*. New York: Hyperion (Harper), 2006. [Also in Kindle edition.]

Nazer, Mende. *Slave: My True Story*. New York: Public Affairs (Perseus), 2003.
[Also in Kindle edition.]

Parrot, Andrea and Nina Cummings. *Forsaken Females: The Global Brutalization of Women*. Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

Souad. *Burned Alive: A Survivor of an "Honor Killing" Speaks Out*. New York: Warner Books (Hachette), 2004. [Also in Kindle edition.]

The Stoning of Soraya M. Cyrus Nowrasteh, dir. Perfs. Shohreh Aghdashloo, Jim Caviezel, Mozhan Marno. Roadside Attractions/Lionsgate. DVD. 2009.[Feature film, on reserve in Johnson Center Library; on Netflix.]

Walker, Alice. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992 (or Perseus, 2008). [Also in Kindle edition.] [with selections in class from *Moolaadé*. Ousmane Sembene, dir. New Yorker Films, 2004.]

Water. Deepa Mehta, dir. Perfs. Seema Biswas, Lisa Ray, John Abraham. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2006. [Feature film, on reserve in Johnson Center Library; on Netflix.]

COURSE OBJECTIVES

To develop and demonstrate critical thinking skills.

To better one's ability in understanding, reading, and speaking.

To strengthen one's research skills and to use those skills to produce both written work and an oral presentation.

To become more aware of the serious issues surrounding human rights violations and the status of women and girls worldwide.

To understand more fully and profoundly the connections between narrative texts and historical and contemporary issues related to violence against women and girls.

To see connections between learning about these matters and social action.

Women and Gender Studies--Commitment to Diversity Statement

Women and Gender Studies seeks to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across identities. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Attendance and Participation: Much of the value that you will receive from this course will come from both your course readings and viewings and from your interactions with others. Your attendance and participation, therefore, are extremely important to the class and your learning process. Especially since this class meets only once per week, do not miss class!

Assignments: You are expected to complete all assignments on the assigned due date. No late assignments will be accepted. If you are having difficulties completing an assignment, contact me in advance.

Honor Code: George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee. See honorcode.gmu.edu for more detailed information.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using MLA or APA format (i.e. for this class, MLA format is strongly preferred). A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

E-Mail Accounts: It is important to have and use an e-mail account. According to guidelines established by the University, each student is to access and use her/his GMU e-mail account when corresponding with me and with other students in a given course. You can have your mail forwarded from gmU.edu to your current, active account. Although written assignments are to

be handed in both digital form and as a hard copy, e-mail accounts will allow each of you to be in touch with me and with the others regarding assignments, questions, and discussions.

Blackboard: There is a Blackboard site for this course where relevant materials from the course will be posted--the course syllabus, Power Points, a discussion board for current events, etc. Please be advised that you can access this Blackboard site only through the combined listing of the four sections of the course and not through any individual course listing.

RELEVANT CAMPUS AND ACADEMIC RESOURCES

Disability Support Services: If you are a student with a disability, and you need academic accommodations, please see me, and contact the Office of Disability resources at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Student Technology Assistance and Resources (STAR) Center: Johnson Center 229 / 993-8990

Writing Center: Robinson A116; 993-1200

Counseling Center: Student Union 1 (SUB 1), Rm. 364; 993-2380;
www.gmu.edu/departments/csdc

Sexual Assault Services: SUB I, Rms. 219L & 219M; 993-4364; www.gmu.edu/facstaff/sexual

Women's Studies Research and Resource Center: Johnson Center 240K; 993-2896;
jcweb.gmu.edu/communities/wrc

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING DATES

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes. (Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar's Website registrar.gmu.edu.)

Tuesday 29 January: Last day to drop with no tuition liability
Tuesday 29 January: Last day to add classes
Tuesday 12 February: Last day to drop classes with 33% tuition penalty
Friday 22 February: Final drop deadline (with 67% tuition penalty)

After the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

REQUIREMENTS FOR FINAL GRADE

Class Participation (25% of the final grade):

It is important that students in this class find their own voice. As you will soon learn, I see this class as collaborative and participatory; we shall all benefit not only from our readings and viewings, but also from our class discussions to which each of us will bring an individual

perspective. Through class discussions and individual assignments, you will have the opportunity to discover new perspectives and examine ideas that were previously unchallenged. Open discussion depends on the development of trust and safety among participants, as well as risk-taking and effective facilitation. It is, therefore, essential that class members attend all scheduled classes and participate in class discussions. In addition, I encourage you to aid your oral participation by bringing to class relevant materials from newspapers and other media forms. I shall be giving each student a class participation grade approximately 3-4 times during the semester, and these grades--as all grades--are available for each of you to see. Progress in class participation throughout the semester will be taken into consideration for your final participation grade.

Quizzes on Readings and Viewings (10% of the final grade):

The purpose of these announced quizzes is to make sure that you are keeping up with the reading and viewing assignments and understand the theoretical texts, the novels, the short stories, and the films. The format will vary from short-answer questions to brief in-class writing.

Oral Presentation on the Texts (25% of the final grade):

We shall be considering each literary and filmic text/narrative in its historical, regional, social, cultural, traditional, legal, economic, religious, racial, class, age-related, sexual preference, and gendered contexts. Consequently, oral presentations in this class will be done as group work. We shall be studying nine different narratives in the form of novels, memoirs, and films. Each text addresses nine different types of human rights violations against women and girls. For each narrative, a group of approximately four students will present the background for the text, dividing up the research as indicated in the listing above (i.e. historical, regional, social, cultural, and so on). With this background presented to the class, the rest of us will then move to an analysis and discussion of the given text and its effectiveness in transmitting to the reader/viewer the particular human rights violation. Each group can present in any way that they wish: formal presentations; audio-visual; power point. Each presentation should last approximately 30 minutes. Groups should be formed as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester, so it is important to read over the names and topics of the texts/human rights violations and to choose something that particularly interests you. In addition, group work can be complex and difficult (although also very rewarding), given individuals' schedules and work styles. It is incumbent on each member of a group to work collegially and fully.

Final Research Paper (40% of the final grade):

Each student will choose, research, and write a final research paper of 8 - 10 pages. Your chosen topic can be an extension of something that we have discussed during the course of the semester, or it can be a new topic related to a different form of human rights violations against women and girls. Each paper must also use for its central analysis another narrative (novel, short story, poem, theater, feature film, documentary, visual arts, performance art)—that is, a text that we have not discussed during class. This will also be a research paper, requiring a minimum of five outside sources, in addition to the central text. Please choose this topic as early as possible in the semester. All topics must be approved in advance. I'll be giving you suggestions of both primary texts and topics that you may want to use. You will be required to submit an outline of your paper in advance, along with a list of your outside sources. The outline and list of research sources will be due on 3 April, and the your paper is due on 24 April.

You can use either MLA or APA format, although MLA format is preferable for this class. Do not forget to indicate (in parentheses) all page numbers from which you cite directly or paraphrase. All papers must be typed and corrected for errors in grammar and typing. Each paper must be double-spaced, using an 11-12 point font, with page numbers, and one-inch margins. You do not need a cover sheet. Simply start on page 1 (although the first page is not numbered), and place your name at the top right-hand corner of each page. No folder is necessary; just staple the pages together. It is absolutely necessary to be consistent in your citations and documentation. You must follow MLA or APA format for quotations, references, and Works Cited (MLA)/Bibliography (APA), starting on a separate page. Please use endnotes for explanatory purposes only, and do not use footnotes with notations such as "Ibid."

Here are some links that will provide the necessary format to follow:

<http://www.mlahandbook.org>

(where you can buy access--and a print copy will also be mailed to you--or purchase a print copy online)

<http://www.docstyles.com/mlacrib.htm>

<http://www.mla.org/style>

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/instruct/guides/citations.html>

<http://www.mendocino.edu/mendocinocollegelibrary/text/mlaworks.pdf>

Remember that Wikipedia is not considered a critical source, although you can consult that source for basic information. Similarly any encyclopedia of any sort is not to be considered as one of your 5/10 outside sources. You are expected to locate and use critical sources: scholarly monographs; scholarly essays in recognized journals. You may, of course, use the Internet for critical sources but not exclusively and--be careful--it is often difficult to confirm what is accurate and what isn't accurate on the Internet. Check with me if you are not sure!

[Grading Scale: A+ = 97-100; A = 94-96; A- = 90-93; B+ = 87-89; B = 84-86; B- = 80-83; C+ = 77-79; C = 74-76; C- = 70-73; D+ = 67-69; D = 64-66; D- = 60-63; F = below 60.]

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

23 January	Welcome to Course Introductory Remarks: Theorizing the Female Body: Gender, Human Rights, and Narrative Texts; Female Autobiography and Life-Narratives
30 January	Introductory Remarks (continued) Universal Human Rights and the Rights of Women/Girls Parrot, Andrea and Nina Cummings. <i>Forsaken Females: The Global Brutalization of Women</i> . "Preface"; "Cultural Quotes Perpetuating Violence"; "Part I: Understanding the Context of Violence against Women: Chapters 1 and 2." [Other selections from this text will be assigned throughout the semester] Selection(s) from human rights/women documentaries (in class)
6 February	The (Historical) Status of Widows (India) <i>Water</i> . Deepa Mehta, dir.

Parrot, Andrea and Nina Cummings. *Forsaken Females: The Global Brutalization of Women*: Chapter 8: "Intimate Partner Violence," pp. 158-64.

- 13 February Female Genital Cutting (Africa):
Walker, Alice. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*.
Parrot, Andrea and Nina Cummings. *Forsaken Females: The Global Brutalization of Women*: Chapter 4: "Female Genital Cutting: Clitoridectomy, Female Circumcision, FGM, or Rite of Passage."
- 20 February Female Genital Cutting (continued):
Walker, Alice. *Possessing the Secret of Joy*.
Selections from *Moolaadé*. Ousmane Sembene, dir.
(in class)
- 27 February Female Infanticide (India):
Matrubhoomi/A Nation without Women. Manish Jha, dir.
Parrot, Andrea and Nina Cummings. *Forsaken Females: The Global Brutalization of Women*: Chapter 3: "Femicide Infanticide and Feticide."
- 6 March Modern-Day Slavery and Sexual Slavery (Sudan):
Nazer, Mende. *Slave: My True Story*
Parrot, Andrea and Nina Cummings. *Forsaken Females: The Global Brutalization of Women*: Chapter 6: "Sexual Slavery."
- 13 March Spring Break--no class
- 20 March Modern-Day Slavery and Sexual Slavery (continued):
Nazer, Mende. *Slave: My True Story*
- 27 March Wartime Rape Camps (Korea/Japan):
Keller, Nora Okja. *Comfort Woman*
Parrot, Andrea and Nina Cummings. *Forsaken Females: The Global Brutalization of Women*: pp. 8-9, 102-06, 125-30; Chapter 5: "Sexual Violence."
- 3 April Wartime Rape Camps (continued):
Keller, Nora Okja. *Comfort Woman*
[Outline and list of outside research sources due.]
- 10 April Honor Killings and Acid Burning (Palestine):
Souad. *Burned Alive: A Survivor of an "Honor Killing" Speaks Out*
Parrot, Andrea and Nina Cummings. *Forsaken Females: The Global Brutalization of Women*: Chapter 9: "Honor Killing"; Chapter 8: "Intimate Partner Violence," pp. 157-58.

