History 72200 The Geopoliticization of Sex: Histories and Theories

Prof. Dagmar Herzog, Graduate Center CUNY, Fall 2018, Tuesdays 2-4, Room 5212

Aug. 28 Introduction to the class. There will be 9 weekly sessions with intensive reading; then 2 sessions for student presentations. 2 questions per text due each week by 8 am Tuesday; 1 formal conference paper with ppt images due at end; final research paper an alternate option.

1 Sep. 4 Sex? Rights? Causation?


Also see: The Yogyakarta Principles, https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/.

Sep. 11 and Sep. 18 No classes – CUNY rearranged schedule. Start research on your independent projects (mix one present with two pasts and two theoretical approaches).

2 Sep. 25 Family Planning


3 Oct. 2 LGBTQIA


4 Oct 9 Sexual Violence and the Problem of Pleasure in Genocides and Military Conflicts

5 Oct 16 12 noon to 2 just this day!!! Colonialism<->Postcolonialism

6 Oct 23 Slavery’s Legacies
7 Oct. 30  Saving “Others”

8 Nov. 6  Disability/Welfare/Eugenics

9 Nov. 13  Religion and Secularization, Sex and Sexism

Nov. 20 No class

Nov. 27 Project presentations #1-6

Dec. 4 Project presentations #7-12 Dec. 11 No class. Final papers due Dec. 18.
Learning Objectives:

- To acquire – and to generate – new insights into causal processes and dynamics in history, and into the historians’ craft more generally
- To work intensively with primary source evidence as well as with a variety of conceptual-theoretical models and tools
- To improve the ability to express ideas in ways both sophisticated and accessible, in both written and – informal and formal – verbal form

Course Abstract:

In the early twenty-first century, sexual matters saturate high politics: from the giving or withholding of billions in development aid to the preoccupations of supranational human rights treaties and juridical institutions to the reasons given for nations to intervene in wars to the shapes taken by welfare states or their dismantling to transnationally organized activism and social media-fueled social movements across the ideological spectrum. We are living through an era of “the geopoliticization of sex,” involving levels of imbrication of sex with global politics to an extent that Michel Foucault could not have imagined when he was writing in the 1970s about sex as “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power.” We confront as well the double fact that, on the one hand, sexual rights of all kinds turn out to be fragile and contested, not just at state levels and within revitalized religious traditions but also popularly (as they are the focus of apparently considerable ambivalence for many people) while, on the other, the so recently hard-won ideals of sexual rights can, it turns out, be misused for other purposes entirely. Meanwhile, we encounter new questions about what exactly “sexuality” or “sex” even is, as well as recurrent skepticism about the very concepts of “rights,” “individual autonomy,” and “self-determination.”

The legacies of multiple pasts hang over all the current struggles. This is evident whether we are considering the ravages of HIV/AIDS or Zika or family planning programs or novel reproductive technologies, the persistence of sexual aggression and harm in war and peace, the instrumentalization of either support or hostility to LGBT individuals for other political agendas, the international concern with sex trafficking at the intersection of prostitution and wider migration processes, the growing affirmative visibility of individuals with disabilities concomitantly with the onslaught of neoliberal austerity projects, or the centrality of sexualized themes in the resurgence of xenophobia and right-wing populism worldwide.

This course will combine historiography and scholarship from adjacent disciplines (from military history and the history of economics to the histories of emotions and of the modern self, and from the histories of human rights law and NGOs to the sociology and anthropology of violence, of religion, and of disease and public health) with relevant theoretical readings with the pursuit of exploratory independent projects presented either as conference talks or as research papers. The theoretical readings will include texts concerned with psychoanalytic and decolonial approaches as well as epistemology, ontology, temporality, and causation. Foucault, in short, will be supplemented not only with Freud but also with Guattari, Laplanche, Moyn, Stoler, Shepard, Scott, and deLauretis.

Together we will consider: What has changed even in the last five years in the questions we pose to the past? How can we make sense of recursive returns, deferred effects, and unexpected repercussions between different moments in time? And above all, a conceptual puzzle relevant to all historians: What should count as the pertinent backstories to which subsequent developments? We will thus spend significant time exploring the intersections of aspects of the history of sexuality with the histories of slavery, colonialism, Cold War conflicts, and past wars and genocides.