**Communism and Gender: Historical and Global Perspectives**

GENS 5019 - Department of Gender Studies

Fall AY 2018-19, 4 CEU credits, 8 ECTS.

Cross listed with History Department

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**Course Description:**

This is an introductory course in the developing field of studies on communism, women and gender, in which we will explore historical, theoretical and global perspectives on the topic.

We will discuss the complex question of what communism was (or is), emphasizing the need to distinguish between communism as an ideology, a political movement, or a regime, and, regardless, to carefully historicize and contextualize the phenomena in question. The dominant anti-communist discourse homogenizes “communism” and tends to conflate it with the dictatorships of Stalin and Mao. Such a view leaves out large parts of the history of communism worldwide. For many decades of the twentieth century, millions of women and men around the world were active in communist or communist-inspired or supported political movements for social justice, and many gave their lives in struggles to establish or defend socialist or communist states. As well, for millions of people around the world, the Soviet Union, the first socialist state, was a land of hope. The Soviet Union had achieved impressive economic growth by the 1950s, it promoted women’s emancipation, anti-racism and anti-colonialism, and supported progressive movements worldwide. An understanding of either the Soviet Union or China as one-dimensional totalitarian and patriarchal states cannot explain their achievements in promulgating and implementing women’s rights nor where their “women-friendly” legislation and policies came from. The history of communism cannot be understood either without taking into account the impact of the military and economic campaigns the USA waged against (alleged) communist movements and countries worldwide.

This course will therefore explore what we can learn about the history of communism if we move beyond the still common totalitarian, Eurocentric, androcentric, and gender-blind focus and include questions about women and women’s organizations, and about gender and “race” in this history; if we explore the role of communists in European and global struggles against fascism, racism, colonialism and imperialism; and if we consider the various attempts to undermine communism. This will allow us to begin to rethink the meaning of “communism” for women and men around the world in more complex and encompassing ways.

**Learning outcomes:**

The course provides students with a basic knowledge of the main socialist and communist ideas on women’s emancipation. They will learn to critically engage with mainstream, generally male-centered and Euro-centric narratives on the history of communism and understand the importance of applying a critical and global perspective to this topic. Students will also become acquainted with key recent publications in this rapidly developing field.

**Assessment:**

Your grade will comprise of the following elements:

* Active participation in class: 25% of the grade
* One reaction paper: 25% of the grade
* Term paper: 50% of the grade