

# Ethnology

**Relevant for: Developmental sociology, cultural studies, regional sciences**

Course: Ethnology

Group of courses: Humanities

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## Course objectives:

One of the course objectives is the recognition of gender as an essential category for understanding social, political and economic structures and practices in non-European societies. Gender skills are necessary in order to analyse power differentials, spheres of influence and systems of symbols. They also provide a hermeneutic approach to the realities of life of individuals and groups living outside the Western world.

A second objective is to reflect on our own gender beliefs in the light of the diversity of cultural gender constructions.

## Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content:

The studies content must be geared towards the different areas of the subject and integrated into them. The basic classes in kinship and social anthropology, economic, legal, religious and political ethnology/anthropology should take gender issues into account. These can then be examined in more depth in dedicated gender seminars in which appropriate profiling of students can take place.

### Kinship and Social anthropology

- A society's organisation in terms of kinship is an expression of specific gender relations and in turn influences these. Various models (e. g. patrilineal, matrilineal or bilateral descendency, virilocal, uxorilocal or neolocal residence) are more than just structural modes that can be depicted graphically they also impact on the everyday lives of men and women, girls and boys. The linking of model and real life should be considered along with changes due to urbanisation and national family programmes organised by the state.

### Economic anthropology

- The focus of this area is the gender-specific division of labour, access to earnings, property and ownership relationships, time budgets, gainful employment, subsistence and household work and opportunities and risks for women and men due to modernisation and globalisation. Other possible topics include the feminisation of poverty, migration, households led by women, etc.

### Legal anthropology

- Women and men are treated differently in all societies in terms of inheritance, criminal and family law. Legal systems thus constitute both a clear expression of the gender relationships existing in the society and an important instance of their stabilisation and perpetuation. What is more, the gender-related norms and values of a society can be easily read from its laws and regulations. Many countries practise legal pluralism, in which local, national and/or religious laws coexist. This is highly significant for the negotiation of gender relations, particularly as the globalisation of legal discourse leads to demands for innovations. An example of such modernisation of legal systems can be seen in the implementation of principles of gender mainstreaming or by contrast the introduction of Shari' a law in many Islamic areas.

### Religious anthropology

- Religions legitimise not only systems of symbols but also gender-specific power relationships

and gender constructions. Oral traditions and sacred texts, mythologies, stories from the lives of the founders of religions, saints and martyrs, tales of past incidents and modern events with a religious connotation substantiate gender systems and give them an eternal, unalterable significance. In a time of "religious revival" these dimensions become increasingly important. The example of the revitalisation of Islam in which young, educated women are required to adhere to gender norms that were valid for 7th-century Arabia makes it clear how ambivalent such developments are. They act in favour of a strict segregation of the sexes and the veiling of women and argue against the idea of equality as being typical of the West. One movement that is in opposition to this Islamism is Islamic feminism. Those involved in this movement seek to reinterpret the Qur'an from the point of view of a modern model of emancipation. The treatment of the legal status of ethnic and religious minorities and minorities defined in terms of their sexuality (homosexuals, transsexuals) could also form part of this block.

### **Political anthropology**

- In many indigenous societies, politics is a masculine space. Men give their opinions in public debates, organise associations and parties and implement their ideas by means of both diplomacy and force. Women appear to be largely excluded from this process. However, they often have an indirect influence on the decisions taken by men. Women ethnologists have recognised this "hidden" power option by developing their own power theories. Key words: multi-focal power structures, gender symmetry.  
Today, women in non-Western societies are openly participating in political power as NGO activists and politicians. However, the mechanisms underlying these activities often differ from those of our society. One must therefore differentiate between outward appearances and actual actions. One example is female presidents in Asia who function as the representatives of their deceased husbands or fathers (a dynastic element).

In addition to this structure based on the traditional division of areas within the subject and relevant above all for the study of fundamentals it would be desirable to offer opportunities for more detailed study in the following areas:

- Intercultural comparisons of gender relations in indigenous and/or complex societies. These sessions can include debates on the possible gender universals that dominated gender studies up until the 1980s. This would also demonstrate the wide range of possible gender constructions. The sessions could also look at gender dichotomy and the existence of alternative genders.
- Post-colonial gender discourses. These see themselves as explicit critiques of Western ideas. It would therefore be possible to reflect on our models of masculinity and femininity.
- The significance of gender in transformation processes. State and nation-building, programmes for development cooperation, wars and conflict all have an impact on local gender constellations. The gender perspective here opens up new opportunities for gaining insight into the relationship between politics and culture, both for the individual and the collective.

Gender sensitivity can form a special part of the teaching of ethnographic methodology. Comparisons between that which is foreign and that which is one's own can help students recognise and question their own cultural and/or gender stereotypes. Methodological training (ethnographic field work with participant observation and other methods of qualitative investigation) should enable students to reflect critically on such prejudices, helping them to contextualise and relativise their own role and identity.

## Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum:

Gender is one of the basic categories for culture and society, entering into and affecting all areas. It should therefore be integrated into all possible modules. Overview lectures, such as those given in many institutions, should give due space to the importance of the category of gender in the various areas of the subject.

In addition, a special module on gender involving more detailed study could be offered as part of the main course of study. This is also desirable as a qualification for careers in development assistance and such like.

## Degree Stage:

Content should form part of overview sessions within bachelor's programmes. It should also be incorporated into specific modules and individual sessions. Specialisation should also be possible within Master's programmes.

## Basic Literature/Recommended Reading:

- Abu-Lughod, Lila (1998): Remaking women. Feminism and modernity in the Middle East. Princeton
- Atkinson, Jane Monning/Shelly Errington, Hg. (1990): Power and difference. Gender in island southeast Asia. Stanford
- Blackwood, Evelyn/Saskia E. Wieringa, Hg. (1999): Female desires. Same-sex relations and transgender across cultures, New York
- Hauser-Schäublin, Brigitta/Birgitt Röttger-Rössler, Hg. (1998): Differenz und Geschlecht. Neue Ansätze in der ethnologischen Forschung; Berlin
- Herdt, Gilbert H., Hg. (1994): Third sex, third gender. Beyond sexual dimorphism in culture and history, New York
- Kaplan, Caren/Norma Alarcon/Minoo Moallem, Hg. (1999): Between women and nation. Nationalism, transnationalist feminism and the state. Durham
- Karim, Wazir Jahan (1995): Male and female in developing Southeast Asia. Oxford
- Kevane, Michael (2004): Women and development in Africa. How gender works. Boulder
- Lenz, Ilse/Ute Luig, Hg. (1990): Frauenmacht ohne Herrschaft. Geschlechterverhältnisse in nichtpatriarchalischen Gesellschaften. Berlin
- Kulick, Don/Margaret Willson, Hg. (1998): Taboo. Sex, identity and erotic subjectivity in anthropological fieldwork. London
- Lamphere, Louise, Helena Ragoné and Patricia Zavella, Hg. (1997): Situated Lives: Gender and Culture in Everyday Life. New York and London
- Moore, Henrietta (1988): Feminism and anthropology. Cambridge: Polity Press
- MacCormack, Carol P./Marilyn Strathern, Hg. (1980): Nature, culture, and gender. Cambridge
- Naples, Nancy/Maniska Desai, Hg. (2002): Women's activism and globalization. Living local struggles and transnational politics. New York
- Ramet, Sabrina Petra, Hg. (1996): Gender reversals and gender cultures. Anthropological and historical perspectives, London
- Schröter, Susanne (2002): FeMale. Über Grenzverläufe zwischen den Geschlechtern. Frankfurt
- Shohat, Ella, Hg. (1999): Multicultural feminism in a transnational age. Cambridge

## **Journals:**

Interdisziplinäre Zeitschriften mit Bezügen zu ethnologischen/regionalwissenschaftlichen Themen:

Gender and Society, Austin: University of Texas

Gender, Technology and Development, Selangor (Malaysia): Women's Development Collective

Feminist Theory. An Interdisciplinary Journal. University of Hull

Indian Journal of Gender Studies, New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies