Anthropology and Sociology (ANSO)
Academic year 2019 - 2020

Anthropological Perspectives on Reproductive Politics in the 21st Century

ANSO099- Autumn- 6 ECTS

Course Description

The course examines why human reproduction becomes a subject of intense gender discrimination and local, state control. The course is grounded in contemporary anthropological and sociological debates. It critically examines dimensions as wide ranging as conception, childbirth, infertility, abortion and population control to demographic security. The course interrogates how the 20th century gender bias in global population and reproductive politics continues to reverberate in the 21st century. Previous Medical Anthropology courses are recommended but not prerequisites, as we expect students from a diversity of backgrounds to foster interdisciplinary learning.

Syllabus

Grading

Assessment for the course is based:

15% Attendance and class participation

20% Class presentation

65% Final written assignment of 4000-4500 words, this word count includes footnotes/endnotes but excludes bibliography.

Guidance on writing the assignment is provided.

The assignment must be submitted by Friday 20 December 2019.
Guidelines for the writing assignment

Students are encouraged to write on a topic of their choosing. This should be discussed in advance with the course convener. You are encouraged to make a brief class presentation on the chosen topic.

Please note that references underneath are recommended readings. However, this is not an exhaustive list and further materials will be suggested in class. You are also encouraged to undertake topic specific searches in the library catalogue and e-journals such as: Reproductive Health Matters, Medical Anthropology, Medical Anthropology Quarterly, Sociology of Heath and Illness, and Social Science and Medicine.

The written assignment should include all of the following elements:

1. Formulation of a topic or problem.
2. Explanation of how the topic is linked to a broader problem, relevant to the problem/topic.
3. Breakdown of the problem/topic in sub-problems/parts.
4. Analytical review of the appropriate literature showing how others have approached this problem. Review literature along the lines/dimensions you have identified in #3.
5. Comment/state position on each subpart of your analytical review.
6. Conclusion: summarize findings and state their importance/consequences. How does your analysis contribute to understanding the issue at stake? Which future research directions do they point at? Try and formulate and state your own theoretical argument/position in the conclusion.

Your written assignment will be marked according to the following criteria:

1. **Relevance:** The relevance of the question chosen and the extent to which the assignment addresses the question set
2. **Material Used:** The substance of the assignment, that is, the selection and use of relevant material gained from a variety of sources. Evidence of reading as well as empirical facts and illustrations.
3. **Argument:** The extent to which the assignment sets out a clearly structured discussion and analysis of the issues raised. Evidence of clear and independent thinking (i.e., signs that you can weigh up evidence, think through and assess arguments for yourself).
4. **Scholarship:** Basic literacy, fluency and quality of presentation as well as scholarly attribution of references and use of notes.

### 1. Monday, 23 September 2019:

10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 | Course Introduction and Overview

### 2. Monday, 30 September 2019:

10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 | Stratified Reproduction: The Global Politics of Reproduction

Power relations across societies have empowering and disempowering effects on different segments of populations and categories of citizens. Social stratification along the lines of gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation and nationality creates differing opportunities for reproductive decision-making. The lecture will show how stratified reproduction involves adjudication of how, who, when and under what conditions people are allowed to reproduce.
Readings


3. Monday, 07 October 2019:
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 |

Contested Reproduction: Birth in Medical Settings

Birth, long considered and debated as ‘natural,’ has become one of the most socially contested sites. Medical interventions in ‘managing childbirth’ has prompted critical (re)assessment of the growing medicalisation of the birthing process and the consequent disempowerment of women as ‘birthing subjects’. This lecture examines how childbirth has oscillated between the medical and domestic settings in the Euro-American countries in direct response to women’s movement and greater demands for autonomy and control by women in shaping their birthing experience.

References

5. Davis-Floyd, R.E. 2017. Ways of Knowing about Birth: Mothers, Midwives, Medicine, and Birth Activism. Waveland Press.

4. **Monday, 14 October 2019:**
   - 10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 | F

**Birthing Mothers: Home, Hearth and Health**

The experience of childbirth in the developing south significantly departs from the Euro American experience of home and institutionalized births. A severe lack or absence of medical management of birth is a leading cause of high and preventable maternal and infant mortality around the globe. While international policy initiatives and local state sponsored development thinking have ‘birthed’ safe motherhood programmes, vast majority of birthing mothers remain inextricably tied to home and hearth or entangled in the local and global medicalizing impulses. The lecture interrogates the urgent need to humanize and render accessible safe childbirth practices in the developing world. In so doing the lecture shows how culture, power, class and gender routinely shape the reproductive lives of women in resource poor settings.

**References**


5. **Monday, 21 October 2019:**
   - 10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 |

**Reproduction Gone Awry: Infertility, Childlessness and Other Social Disruptions around the Globe**

Infertility or involuntary childlessness is a deeply painful and stigmatising experience in the lives of countless women and men around the globe. This lecture explores why this is so. The lecture asks why infertility is a “private secrete stigma” in some societies and cause for “public ostracism” in some others? We will also understand what happens when reproduction goes awry and how reproductive disruption gets framed as responsible for a multitude of socio-cultural disruptions.
References


6. Monday, 28 October 2019:
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 |

Assisted Reproduction: Science, Technology and Cross-Cultural Conceptions

Ever since the birth of Louise Brown, world’s first test-tube baby in 1978, in-vitro-fertilisation (IVF), or assisted reproductive technologies have become a global phenomenon. In this lecture we will explore how ‘induction of conception’ is achieved through application of science and technology in various global locales. We will also learn how the medicalisation of infertility has led to renewed social, ethical and political problems in defining and understanding questions about life, kinship, marriage, sexuality and governance of ‘artificially induced life’. We will explore the global contours of the burgeoning rise in the demand for assisted reproduction, it’s commercialization, global transactions in reproductive materials - like human eggs, sperm and embryos - and medical tourism involving a global search for cheaper IVF and surrogate wombs to gestate human embryos.

References


7. **Monday, 04 November 2019:**

➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 | **The ‘Other’ Mother: The Emergence of Transnational Gestational Surrogacy**

The developing South has emerged as the global commercial hub of transnational gestational surrogacy. The lecture unpacks the notion of being supplementary and surrogate in the domain of assisted conception. The predicament of supplementary women, imagined as surrogates in media and policy domains, and the role of globally dispersed states enabling the ‘the other mother’ to become a commercial service provider and a fictive kinship misnomer are some of the themes analyzed in this lecture.

**References**


8. **Monday, 11 November 2019:**

- 10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 |

**Men and Reproduction: Masculinities, Fatherhood and**

Men and masculinities have taken centre stage in international and national reproductive, population and development policies. The lecture examines critical issues in men's reproductive health concerns and needs. In so doing the lecture weaves together fatherhood, sexuality and masculinity to examine how men ought to emerge as equal partners in reproductive health care planning and delivery practices.

**References**


9. **Monday, 18 November 2019:**

- 10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 | F

**Birth of the Pill: Contraception and Contradiction**

The birth of the pill redefined fertility control. The lecture shows how the notion of ‘control’ can be understood as: (a) an ability to rein in fertility and defining one’s reproductive destiny (b) an ironic detachment of human sexuality from the burden of reproduction. The lecture will also examine ways in which ‘the pill’ entangles gender, sexuality, local governance and global policy together with pharmaceutical and corporate interests. As a mediator between reproduction and sexuality, the pill is analysed as an object of agential expression and structural control.

**References**

2. Eig, Jonathan. 2014. The Birth of the Pill. Pan Macmillan
or https://www.smithsonianmag.com/health-medicine/science-behind-abortion-pill-180963762/

10. Monday, 25 November 2019:
➢10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 | f

Reproductive Rights and Procreative Wrongs: MTP/Abortion Around the Globe

The medical termination of pregnancy (MTP) is mired in a landscape of reproductive rights and procreative wrongs. The lecture outlines the fraught trajectory of abortion debates and it double edged existence around the globe. From feminist politics and right to choose activism to evangelical resistance and criminalization of abortion under certain political dispensations, through to the brutal foetal sex selective abortions as patriarchal procreative ideology, MTP sharply separates ‘rights’ from ‘wrongs’. The lecture aims to explore possible routes out such an impasse.

References


11. Wednesday, 02 December 2019:
➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 |

Reproducing the Future: State and Reproductive Health Matters

States around the globe have developed a concerted and vested interest in their citizen’s reproductive potential. In controlling or encouraging reproduction the manifest polices of the State get directly mapped on to the reproductive bodies of the citizenry and becomes an important way to ‘imagine’ the future of the nation itself. Through the course of this lecture we will learn what kinds of reproductive futures are valued and what kinds despised, neglected or controlled by the State.

References


12. Monday, 09 December 2019:
➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S2) ANSO099 | F

Birth of Reproductive Control: Population and “Planning”

The population planning is intimately linked to the twentieth century development discourse. While the post Cairo declaration has precipitated a shift away from aggressive population
control policies around the globe, the fallout of these policies still reverberate and shape reproductive control enmeshed in powerful institutions like the state and biomedicine. The lecture interrogates population planning, policy and control to ask what kind of biopolitics is at play?

References

13. Monday, 16 December 2019:
   ➢ 10:15 to 12:00pm (S3) ANSO099 | F

Demographic Security: Developing, Securing and Reproducing the Nation

Demographic security policies are rapidly replacing population policies around the globe. The fear of declining population is impacting both law and policy. The lecture assesses the potential impact of such neo pronatalism on women’s reproductive rights and health. Apocalyptic fears of dying nations and withering gene pool to perceived threats from unchecked fertility of minority groups or imagined dangers stalking and overwhelming national identity because of unchecked immigration through to angst of utter failure and economic ruin on account of plummeting numbers, continue to rescript state policies and attitudes towards reproduction. The lecture shows how by turning reproduction into a national security issue, nation states can rapidly displace the conflated burden of nationalism and pronatalism on women’s bodies.

References


