

Study Afternoon: Women's Rights and International Law

Dates	Thursday 19 November 2020
Times	15.45 (16.00 start) to 18.00
Location	Zoom
Level	All levels

Course description

Join us for a study afternoon exploring the current landscape of women's rights in international law. The 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) enshrined women's rights in law. Since then, numerous international conventions, laws and agreements have been put in place to protect the human rights of women, including their rights in public and political life, health, migration, rights in conflict and crises, access to justice, and the prevention of violence against women and girls.

Three expert speakers will each present for 20 minutes, followed by the chance to ask questions in a Q&A.

The study afternoon takes place on Zoom. Your joining link will be included in your ticket, emailed to you when you book.

Live subtitles will be provided by Stagertext.

Programme

15.45 Zoom call begins

16.00 Welcome and Introductions

16.10 *Perspectives on International Law and Women's Rights*
Professor Jill Marshall, Royal Holloway, University of London

16.30 *Torture, Women's Experiences and International Law*
Dr Elaine Webster, Strathclyde Law School

16.50 *Women, Marriage and Family in International Law*
Dr Rajnaara Akhtar, Leicester De Montfort University Law School

17.10 BREAK

17.20 Q&A

18.00 Zoom call ends

All timings are approximate

Speaker biographies

Professor Jill Marshall is a Professor of Law at Royal Holloway, University of London where she co-directs the Centre for the Study of Emotion and Law and leads the Human Rights cluster on Global Challenges Research. A human rights lawyer, she works on the relationship between law, human flourishing and personal freedom, with a focus on women's human rights and empowerment. Current projects include infusing international law with the voices of survivors of conflict related sexual violence; analysing confidentiality in pregnancy and childbirth, 'baby boxes', 'children born of conflict', freedom of religion, expression and identity, especially through dress. She has written widely on these topics and is the author of three books including *Human Rights Law and Personal Identity* (Routledge 2014).

Dr Elaine Webster is a Senior Lecturer at Strathclyde Law School in Glasgow and Director of the Centre for the Study of Human Rights Law. She is also a Fellow of Strathclyde's Centre for Health Policy. Elaine has a background in law, international politics, and multidisciplinary human rights research. Elaine's interests are in interpretation of human rights by different actors and the concept of human dignity within human rights is a central theme in her work. She has a particular interest in the right not to be subjected to degrading treatment and its application across diverse contexts to a wide range of experiences, explored in her 2018 book *Dignity, Degrading Treatment and Torture in Human Rights Law: The Ends of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights*.

Dr Rajnaara Akhtar is an Associate Professor of Law at Leicester De Montfort University Law School and Visiting Associate Professor at Georgetown University in Qatar. Rajnaara's research focuses on family law and she has undertaken extensive empirical research on the issue of non-legally binding marriages, including a current project funded by the Nuffield Foundation. Her current research projects include exploring women's marriage and divorce experiences in the state of Qatar, a signatory to CEDAW with significant reservations against core treaty provisions. The project explores women's gendered experiences of engaging with the state family law system.

Previous skills, knowledge or experience

None required.

Accessibility

Live subtitles will be provided by Stagertext.

THIS COURSE TAKES PLACE ON ZOOM. PLEASE DO NOT COME TO THE BRITISH LIBRARY.

Talk abstracts

Professor Jill Marshall:

What do universal human rights mean in a world of cultural, national, regional and personal difference and contexts? How do these relate to gender equality and women's lives? This talk will explore the underlying purpose of international human rights law of freedom, dignity and equality, and the way women's lives can be restricted but also enriched by their social and cultural environments. Some examples include the ways women express themselves, through appearance, dress, voice, image and behavior. What is socially and legally 'permissible' and how does this connect to the international rights framework?

Dr Elaine Webster:

The human right to be free from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is often described as the most fundamental of individual rights in international law. At the same time, the harm of 'torture' in particular has been described as too restrictive because it excludes forms of suffering that resonate most with women's experiences, while 'cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment' tend to be overshadowed within the right. This talk will discuss the meaning of the human right to be free from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and consider the progress and challenges of pursuing women's human rights through this lens. It will include examples of the right being invoked in the European human rights framework in contexts such as child protection, prevention of gender based violence, and reproductive freedom.

Dr Rajnaara Akhtar:

Since CEDAW came into effect in 1981, numerous states parties have taken strides in implementing cohesive legal reforms to help overcome discrimination faced by women in multiple spheres. However, many states opted out of core treaty provisions utilising the treaty reservation framework, including Article 16 focussing on marriage and the family. This talk will focus on Article 16 and discuss whether a state opting out of these provisions undermines their commitment to non-discrimination against women, making this reservation incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty in contravention of Article 19 (c) of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.