

MEDIA REVIEW

FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP AND THE INTERROGATION OF SPATIAL FORMATION

Mapping as a Tool for Exploring Gender and Nation

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When I was a child, the shapes and forms on world maps in my grade school geography classes appeared to be matter-of-fact data. The maps seemed to contain information that could be easily accessed whenever necessary. Maps as straightforward, neutral representations held little interest for me. It was only when I discovered that maps could be representations of power, that I became curious about their usefulness beyond simple memorization of geography. Once I rejected the notion that maps merely reflected the physical world, I began to see the act of mapping as a dynamic negotiation of human relations and cultural ideas. This resulted in renewed appreciation for maps as significant pedagogical tools. As a teacher, I use maps for exploring not only issues of nation, but for examining circulating cultural discourses and the production of all knowledge as political.

I must admit I still am not particularly drawn to, nor comfortable with, reading and interpreting map data. I am not a trained geographer; yet as a feminist scholar, I recognize the importance of and am interested in visual representations of the globe. As spatial depictions of the physical world, maps are a visual resource for examining power relations, politics, and the formation of nation-states. Maps provide structural information about social, cultural, and geographical relations. Maps are a snapshot of the material world and a reflection of the dominant ideology circulating during the period the maps were created.

Over the past three decades, feminist geographers have produced extensive scholarship interrogating the notion of space as a neutral subject. The primary claim underpinning this work is that “geography matters” (Massey and Allen 49). Although the social significance of space and place is often “taken for granted” (Domosh and Seager 34), maps provide a visual context for analyzing the ways in which cultural ideas take shape within social spaces. According to Doreen Massey, “the geography of a society is a fundamental component of how that society will reproduce itself, develop, and be changed” (Massey 161). Massey points to the significance of geography as a major site for examining how cultural beliefs and practices interconnect with the organization and use of space. Geography provides a context for analyzing how space is used, by whom, under what conditions, and with what results. For example, in US his-

*The Penguin Atlas of
Women in the World.*

JONI SEAGER.

NEW YORK: PENGUIN, 2009.

toric divisions between public and private space, the philosophy of separate spheres influences how individuals participate in and contribute to society. It substantively shapes who occupies particular spaces and how individuals interact within those spaces. Marking domestic and public spaces as distinctly different, separate spheres ideology is rooted in the cultural idea that individuals are fundamentally different based on their assigned biological sex. The social world, as a result, has been organized in accordance with this belief. Geography, in this way provides a framework for human relations to develop in direct connection with the physical organization of space.

Teaching in a Gender and Sexuality program at a small liberal arts university in upstate New York, I assign Joni Seager's *Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* in almost every class I offer. I use this text to help students grapple with the complex ways that cultural relations are socially created and dynamically interconnected. Since few of my students have yet traveled outside the US, Seager's *Atlas* is an especially valuable resource. It prompts students to make connections between major political subjects while simultaneously providing detailed information about each topic. Visual presentation makes statistical information more vivid and understandable. One student found the maps on rape and domestic violence eye opening: "I never realized how prevalent these issues are in the world, especially in the US." The maps' data generates insights as students explore causes and consequences of historical and contemporary ideas about gender, sexuality, and nation.

Compelling pedagogical moments can be provoked by the use of maps in the classroom. During a class unit on sexual violence, a student disclosed to the class she had been raped twice, coupling her statement with a reference to the statistic in the Seager atlas of "up to 700,000 rapes are estimated to occur in the USA each year" (58). Considering rape as an issue of great magnitude helped her classmates see beyond the discourse that historically frames sexual assault as being caused by personal interaction. Many students referred to this statistic in their weekly journals, writing on ways to address sexual violence on our university campus.

Teaching about nation and nationality in my courses on gender and sexuality, I use maps to illustrate the connection between ideological constructs of class, race, and gender in everyday world situations. As a primary resource, maps provide a visual depiction of the ways that ideas about sex, gender, race, class, sexuality, and nationality operate in connection to the structuring and use of space. For example in the early part of the twenty-first century, divisions in the paid labor market between sexes are increasingly undergoing change. Historical shifts in boundaries and borders reveal multiple ways that gender, race, class, and sexual identities constrain and constrict or, conversely, open and expand a person's "experience of space" (Rose 34). Women in US society are currently pursuing professions in previously male-dominated fields. This shift in the labor market means that larger numbers of women are physically occupying

spaces and experiencing greater access to paid positions in “places” such as public office and professional sports. Boundaries in the work world traditionally determined by a person’s assigned sex are in flux. However, the opening of historically constricted female access to public spaces/places is not equally available to individuals. “As a proportion of white men’s earnings, white women earn 74%, African American women earn 64%, and Hispanic women earn 52%” (Seager 62). A person’s socioeconomic class, racial identity, nationality, and sexuality shape how individuals live, move, and negotiate physical spaces in the field of paid labor.

As a primary resource, maps provide a visual depiction of the ways that ideas about sex, gender, race, class, sexuality and nationality operate in connection to the structuring and use of space. Studying how sexuality impacts spatial movement and interaction, David Bell and Jon Binnie (2000) note that “Possession of the city’s streets, one’s comfort in asserting one’s sexual identity in public space, is a marker of sexual citizenship” (90). In Iran, “Since 1979, more than 4,000 people have been executed for homosexuality, ” Seager notes. (27). In contemporary societies, space is predominantly produced as “naturally” heterosexual (Butler 35). Because maps document structural divisions between urban and rural living, they can reveal how heterosexuality is normalized as a mode of social interaction in the creation of both nation and city (Bell and Valentine 295). An analysis of sexuality in connection to urban and rural living foregrounds this issue. Historically, urban spaces have provided an area for people of diverse sexualities to congregate and interact. Mapping makes it possible to identify geographical spaces where queer communities claim visibility and assert their identities in public space. The urban/rural distinction that is visible on maps thus provides a framework for examining how experiences of space interact with dominant notions of citizenship and nation.

The representation of space via the art of cartography, or mapmaking, communicates both geographical information and specific political, cultural, and ideological beliefs of a particular historical moment. Maps make circulating cultural ideas visible in their depiction of the social world. In its unique approach to the exploration of global gender relations, Seager’s *Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* brings together information about prominent issues faced by women around the globe. First published in 1986, this atlas, now in its fourth edition, offers insight into changes and improvements in girls’ and women’s lives. The book’s eight sections provide visual, statistical, and narrative data on topics ranging from work and body politics to families and power relations. Rather than offering a single, clear-cut perspective more typical of conventional atlases, Seager’s maps challenge readers to critically engage with the political organization of global social relations and the role of human interaction in the structuring of physical space.

In the classroom, I typically begin conversations with students about tensions between political policies, practices, and cultural ideologies using maps in the first part of the atlas (16–19). This section focuses on the nation–

al commitments around the world to equality for women and girls. It specifically explores information about life expectancy, legally imposed state restrictions on women regarding mobility, dress, and behavior, and countries that have signed and/or ratified the UN treaty CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women).

In my introductory class on gender and society I often start with the map, “States Against Discrimination” (14). This map visually designates governments committed (on paper) to full equality for women. Students in my classroom who identify as “American” are regularly dismayed by the information provided in this map. Through its coloring and contrast between countries, the map shows the US as the only country that has signed the CEDAW treaty without ratifying it. After analyzing this map for a written course assignment, one student expressed consternation and shock at learning his perception of the US as a place where equality is a high priority was not entirely accurate. In our class discussion about the map, this student expressed his puzzlement that so many countries he had expected would not have participated in the CEDAW treaty had ratified it, while the US had not. Our in-class group analysis of this map helped facilitate a debate between students about their assumptions regarding the US as a country. In order to support students in examining the map further, I divide the class into small groups and assign each group a state identity. Each group is asked to discuss and identify specific reasons why particular states may have ratified CEDAW while others have not. After approximately eight minutes, I invite each small group to take a turn sharing with the entire class the reasons they conclude for their state’s ratification or nonratification of the CEDAW treaty. The map thus provides a context for broad group critical reflections and considerations of relational power dynamics between nation-states.

While the maps invite a complex reading of political issues stretching across the globe, and their presentation of statistics through colors and descriptive information make material accessible, as with many other college texts, students benefit from guidance as they develop the skills to read and comprehend the map information. In-class discussions of the maps assist students in more readily engaging in spatial analysis of map content and comparative analysis between maps. Some students find grasping and processing information presented in the unfamiliar visual format of maps challenging. The maps are thus generally most valuable and accessible to students when they are complemented by course readings on the same topic. When we discuss suffrage and the US women’s movement, I ask students to look at the Seager *Atlas* maps on “The Vote” (#35), “Property” (#32), and “Women in Government” (#36). They write in their weekly journals about these maps and read Stanton’s “The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, Seneca Falls,” the “1998 Declaration of Sentiments,” Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman,” Kerber’s “The Meanings of Citizenship,” and Lerner’s “The Meaning of Seneca Falls.” Later in the term, when I teach my class unit on cultural beauty ideals

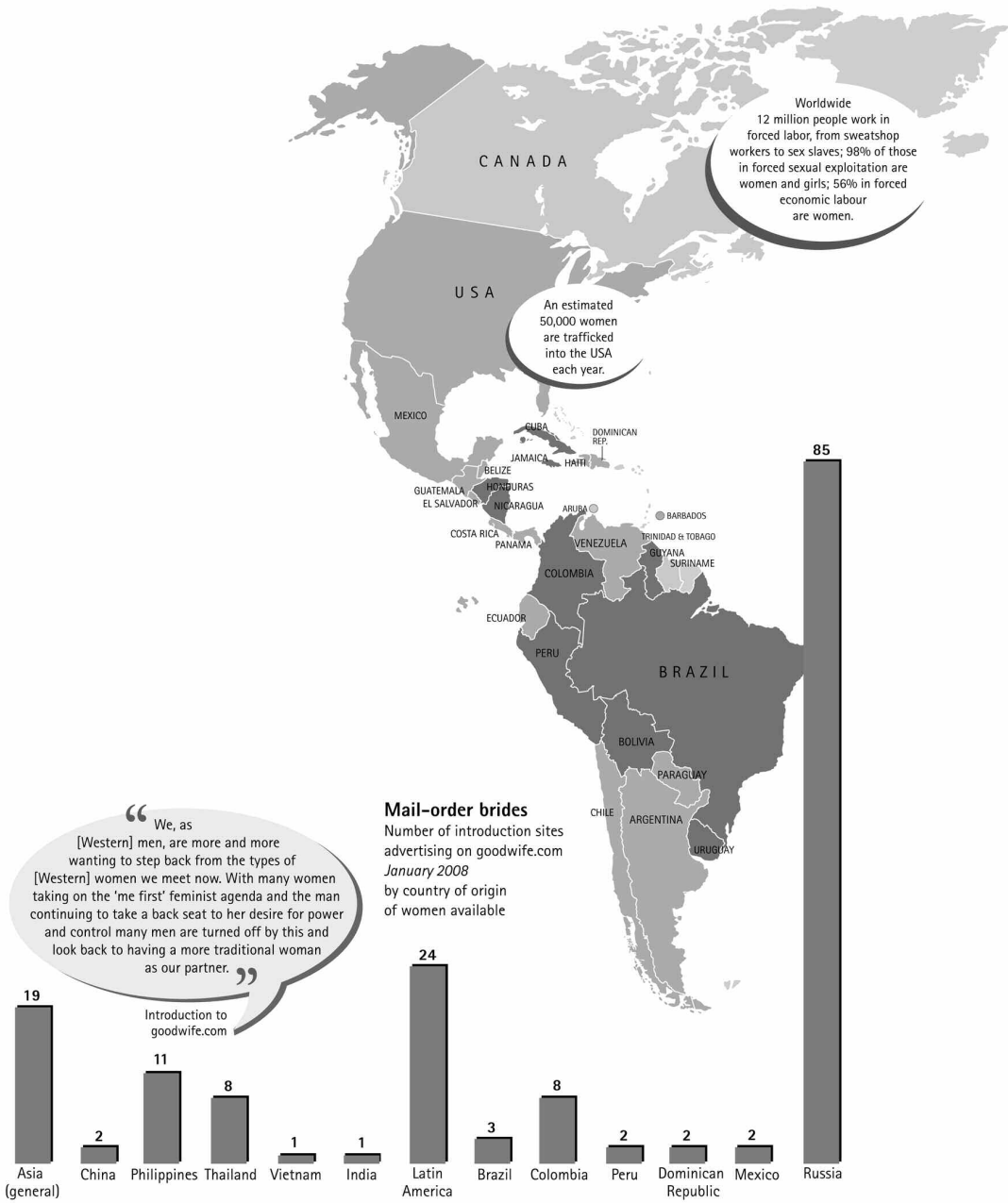
and consumer capitalism, I ask students to look at *Atlas* maps “Under the Knife” (#18) and “Global Sex Trafficking” (#19). I assign these maps in conjunction with these readings: Brumberg’s “Fasting Girls: The Emerging Ideal of Slenderness in American Culture,” Bordo’s “Reading the Slender Body,” Peiss’s “Making Faces: The Cosmetics Industry and the Construction of Gender, 1890-1930,” Bunch et al.’s “International Networking for Women’s Human Rights,” and Schulman’s “Effective Organizing in Terrible Times: The Strategic Value of Human Rights for Transnational Anti-Racist Feminisms.” The wide range of map subjects included in the Seager atlas supports a plethora of possible academic explorations of nation and nationality. For framing my class discussions of sexual freedom and the control of women’s bodies in Gender and Sexuality courses I find two maps particularly useful: “Global Sex Trafficking” (Figure 1) and “Women in Government.” Both these maps contain qualitative and quantitative information, presented spatially and visually. While the maps address topics that would not necessarily be considered in relation to one another, the *Atlas* helps students to move between topics in order to identify intersections between political information about girls’ and women’s lives .

My objective for each lesson unit is to assist students in developing a complex understanding of political issues. For example, one writing assignment requires students to build an argument connecting the assigned reading on Plattner’s “The Status of Women Under International Human Rights Law and the 1995 U.N. World Conference on Women, Beijing, China” to data on the documented flow of international sex trafficking in the “Global Sex Trafficking” map (#20). Specifically, I ask students to notice source countries, destination countries, and countries that are both source and destination sites of trafficked people. Students write one-page responses to this assignment:

Seager suggests that the international sex trade thrives on economic disparity—between men and women at all scales, and between regions on a global scale (56). Using the map on “Global Sex Trafficking,” explain one pattern that you observe and any systemic forms of inequality that may be integral to the transfer of bodies for sexual consumption.

In order to help students think about the issue of sex trafficking in relation to political policy and governmental regulations, the second part of this assignment requires students to analyze the Seager map, “Women in Government” (#36). Like other maps in the *Atlas*, this map uses colors to code information. The map illustrates the increasing numbers of women elected to public office; it shows that the representation of women in national government is growing world-wide and “in only very few countries do women represent 25 percent or more of elected legislators” (96). Drawing on the data from these two maps, students are asked to build an argument that either supports or refutes Seager’s claim that “electing

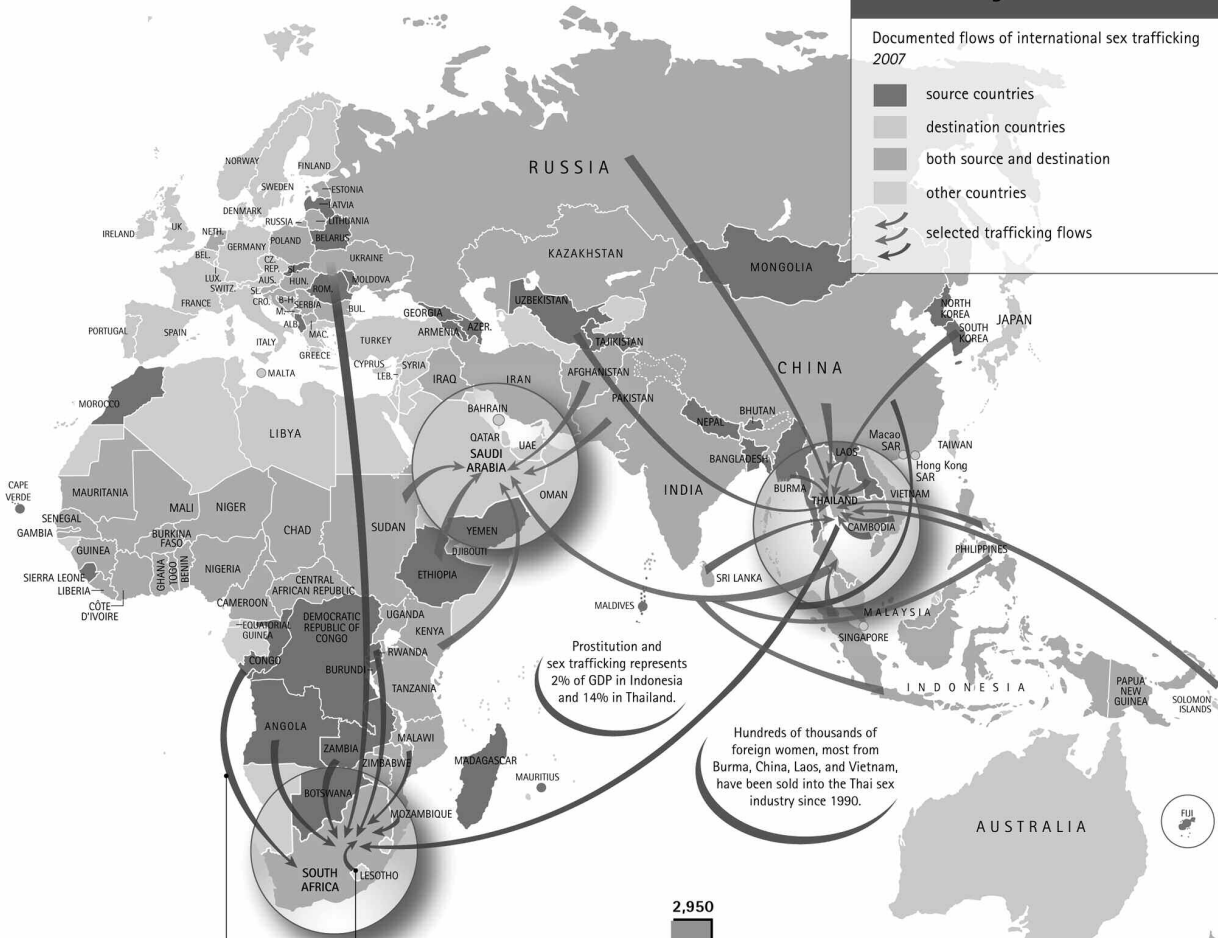
FIGURE 1



Sex trafficking

Documented flows of international sex trafficking 2007

- source countries
- destination countries
- both source and destination
- other countries
- selected trafficking flows

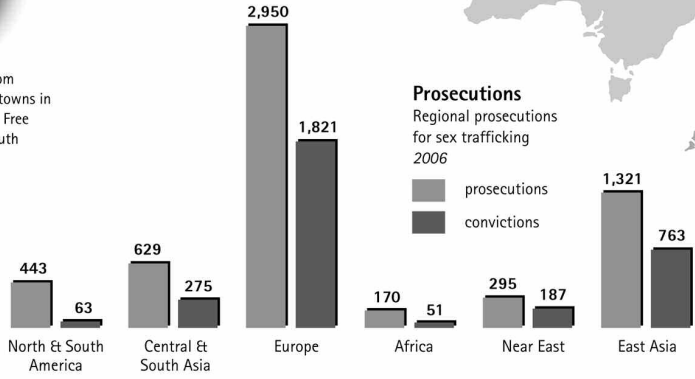


Prostitution and sex trafficking represents 2% of GDP in Indonesia and 14% in Thailand.

Hundreds of thousands of foreign women, most from Burma, China, Laos, and Vietnam, have been sold into the Thai sex industry since 1990.

From refugee-producing countries: Mozambique, Angola, Rwanda, Congo, Zambia.

Children from Lesotho to towns in the Eastern Free State of South Africa.



women even to weak legislatures can have considerable symbolic significance” (96) (Figure 2: Women in Government). The purpose of this assignment is to help students think about how participation in public office is directly linked to policy making. It requires students to consider the maps comparatively, noting the prevalence of sex trafficking while recognizing who is in a position to make political changes regarding specific social issues. The activity encourages students to identify themes and patterns between map contents in relation to the course readings, while going beyond these links to build a cohesive argument. The readings for this assignment include Naber’s “Arab American Femininities: Beyond Arab Virgin/American(ized) Whore,” Smith’s “Rape and the War Against Native Women,” Ussher’s “Sexual Science and the Law: Regulating Sex—Reifying the Power of the Heterosexual Man,” McGlen’s “Women’s Political Participation,” and Bertone’s “Sexual Trafficking in Women: International Political Economy and the Politics of Sex.” Students use these maps and readings to pose questions about how representation in government is related, if at all, to public policy, enforcement, and regulation practices. Drawing from the maps and assigned reading, students are encouraged to make connections between issues of nationality, privilege, and the political consumption of human bodies.

In describing her course experience using the Seager atlas for class assignments, one student commented on the benefits of “connecting the Seager atlas to other course materials. I found that oftentimes I would get caught up in the maps while looking for connections, and find other facts that I found personally fascinating” (Woolf, 2009). Another student remarked that she used the Seager atlas in her class journal entries, where she “loved finding [a map] to sort of ‘sum-up’ my findings. The atlas usually took my thoughts and then backed them up with statistics.... [I]t took very complicated information and displayed it simply” (Sanford, 2009). Shifting between collective and individual work with the maps thus enriches students’ understanding of complex political and social issues.

Students’ independent written reflections on specific points from the maps helps prepare them for our small and large group discussions. It also allows me to productively engage in conversation with my classes about the formation of nation-states, the creation of national identities, and the collective processing of student uses and interpretations of the data. The combination of individual and group processing of the maps further supports students in mentoring their peers while inviting them to generate varied perspectives on the information that each map provides. Continually opening space for students’ critical conversations, I use the *Atlas* to highlight statistical information that directly complements our specific course materials.

Maps in the Seager atlas provide a framework for critically analyzing the material impact of gender on global subject matters ranging from population policies, access to technology, women in the military, and the global sex trade. Offering complex considerations of gender and its nego-

tiation spatially, the *Atlas* facilitates an exploration of historically specific social, cultural, and political dimensions of the physical world. As a teaching tool for examining the role of gender in the shaping of and negotiations between nation-states, the Seager atlas supports students in moving between their analysis of complex topics and identification of large-scale patterns. For example in my class unit on body politics and national relations, I ask students to consider the statistic from the Seager “Global Sex Trafficking” map (#19) that “Worldwide 12 million people work in forced labor, from sweatshop workers to sex slaves; 98% of those in forced sexual exploitation are women and girls; 56% in forced economic labor are women” (56). Students extend their learning by making links between the course reading and maps, helping one student, for example, “connect and further understand” (Houle, 2009) the topic of sexual and physical abuse through the atlas’s maps and statistics.

Feminist Pedagogy and the Use of Maps in Teaching Nation

Map reading is central within academic disciplines such as geography, environmental studies, and anthropology. The spatial representation of place provides a framework for analyzing the ongoing ecological and social production of nations and peoples. The ability to critically read and analyze maps, however, is an invaluable skill for processing data in the everyday world from many other interdisciplinary perspectives as well. Drawing from *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World*, I use maps in feminist studies courses to examine concepts of race, gender, and nation and to facilitate class discussions guided by collective, creative, and critical thinking about nation and nationality and their interaction with cultural notions of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

As I assist students to develop what Cynthia Enloe refers to as a feminist curiosity (Enloe 1), I ask them to reflect on their own identities and social positions in the world. This reflective work represents essential background to understanding concepts and implications of nationhood. Reflecting on their own multiple, shifting, intersecting identities, I encourage students to analyze how these influence what they see and how they interact with the social world, simultaneously considering where they go (or don’t go) and why. Intersectionality is central to feminist analyses of social relations. The term itself is historically rooted in a refusal by pioneering feminists of color to accept gender as a primary influence on women’s experiences in the socio-political world (Collins, 9). Intersectionality requires everyone in the feminist classroom, students and teachers alike, to acknowledge the privilege(s) and power embedded in identity statuses; it situates individual experiences of the social world as directly connected to culturally shifting and contextually variable power relations. Thus, Seager’s atlas is a pedagogical tool for beginning

FIGURE 2



Iraq

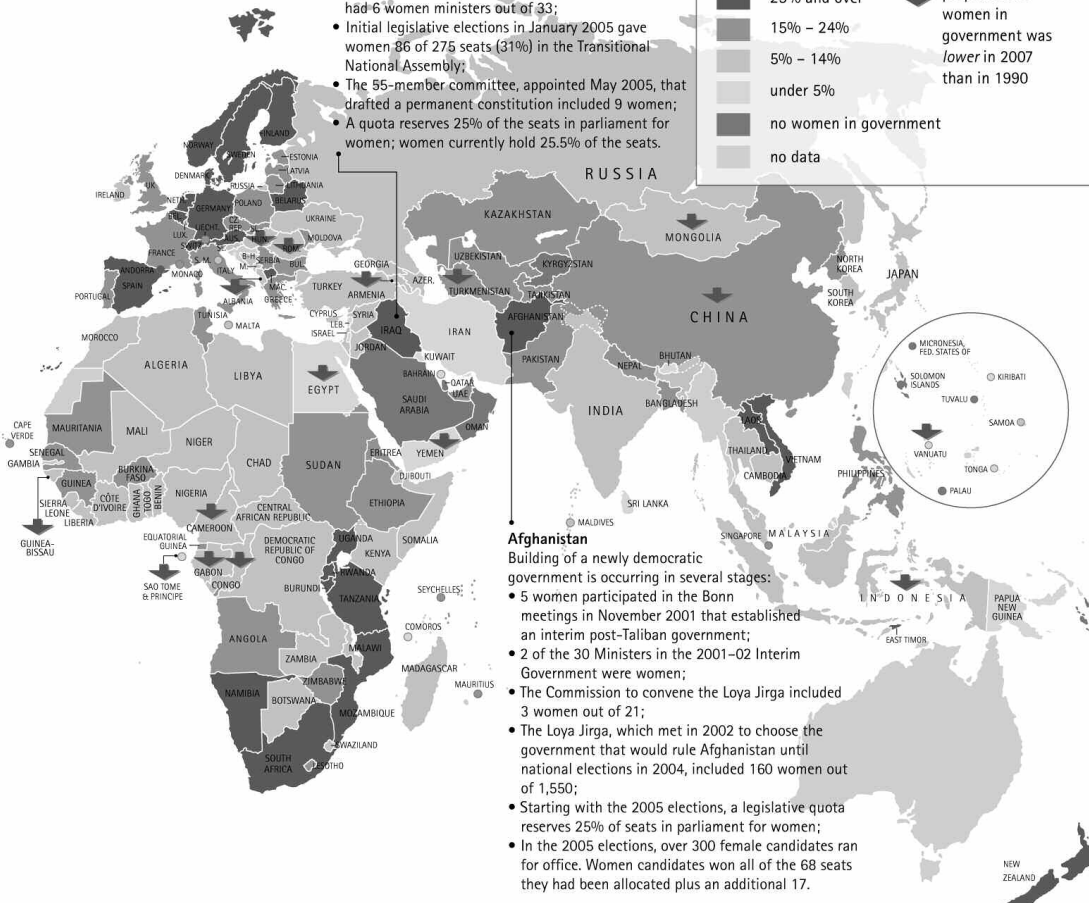
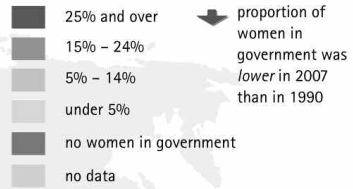
Building a new government:

- Three women served on the initial 25-member Iraqi Governing Council, appointed in July 2003. One of these women was assassinated, replaced by another woman;
- No women served on the 9-member committee, appointed in March 2004, that drafted the Transitional Administrative Law which served as the interim constitution;
- The Iraqi Interim Government, established June 2004, had 6 women ministers out of 33;
- Initial legislative elections in January 2005 gave women 86 of 275 seats (31%) in the Transitional National Assembly;
- The 55-member committee, appointed May 2005, that drafted a permanent constitution included 9 women;
- A quota reserves 25% of the seats in parliament for women; women currently hold 25.5% of the seats.

Women in government

As a proportion of elected officials in national government (in lower house if a two-house legislature) *November 2007*

World average: 17.4%
Highest: Rwanda 49%



Afghanistan

Building of a newly democratic government is occurring in several stages:

- 5 women participated in the Bonn meetings in November 2001 that established an interim post-Taliban government;
- 2 of the 30 Ministers in the 2001-02 Interim Government were women;
- The Commission to convene the Loya Jirga included 3 women out of 21;
- The Loya Jirga, which met in 2002 to choose the government that would rule Afghanistan until national elections in 2004, included 160 women out of 1,550;
- Starting with the 2005 elections, a legislative quota reserves 25% of seats in parliament for women;
- In the 2005 elections, over 300 female candidates ran for office. Women candidates won all of the 68 seats they had been allocated plus an additional 17.

1st 1960
 First woman prime minister in the world: Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Sri Lanka

1st 1975
 First black woman prime minister of an independent state: Elisabeth Domitien, Central African Republic.

1st 1999
 Sweden became the first country to have a majority of female government ministers.

1st 2005
 First woman in Kuwaiti parliament

conversations with students about intersectionality and positionality. Students' awareness of privilege and power sharpens with their use of Seager's maps, because the maps capture the interconnectedness of humans and their environments. It shows how girls' and women's lives are shaped differently around the globe. As a student in an introductory course on gender and society pointed out, the Seager atlas let her "see the real-life effects of some of the issues we talk about in class. It gave me a variety of statistics on issues world-wide" (Knapp, 2009) and thus allowed cross-national comparisons.

The designation of maps according to topic is especially useful for designing course activities. The section of maps in the *Atlas* that focuses on body politics explores topics ranging from breast cancer and HIV/AIDS to sports, beauty, female genital cutting, global sex trafficking, and rape. In my course on gender and society, I assign a small-group project requiring each group to focus on its own map within the Body Politics section of the *Atlas*. Each cluster of four or five students prepares a class presentation explaining key points of their map. For example, a map on breast cancer provides information about incidences of illness and death rates. Seager notes, "in the USA, the diagnosed incidence of breast cancer is higher among white women than black, but black women are more likely to die from it" (46). Students in this group must use course readings, such as L.A. Newman, et al.'s "Meta-Analysis of Survival in African American and White American Patients with Breast Cancer: Ethnicity Compared with Socioeconomic Status" and M.T. Bassett's "Social Class and Black-White Differences in Breast Cancer Survival," to explain marked patterns and discrepancies between racial groups.

An additional requirement of the task asks students to identify how race operates in similar or contrasting ways in data from two other maps in the *Atlas* Body Politics section, which they present to the class. This activity gives students an opportunity to work collaboratively in small groups and analyze specific map data. Next, the class reconvenes as a whole and each small group presents its findings and observations to the entire class. These types of exercises provide an occasion for students to listen, reflect, and discuss each of the small group interpretations of map data. They also offer students an opening to make connections between findings that emerge in one group that may be parallel (or in tension with) the conclusions of another group. I find interactive map analysis activities most successful when students meet with me prior to their in-class presentations and submit a written rationalization for connections they have made between maps in the *Atlas*. As students gain the aptitude to read and assess the data provided by the *Atlas*, the maps are invaluable visual tools for comprehending complex world relations. As Rex Buchanan notes, maps are a medium by which scientists "distribute their ideas and pass them on to future generations" (66). Maps are culturally produced depictions of the social world, and have historically functioned as a rationale for colonizing and imperializing entire continents and peoples.

Conceptualizing and Contesting Ideas of Nation in the Classroom

Maps from the Seager atlas support engaged discussions of the reading materials I assign. When I address issues of nation in a classroom setting, I select map combinations that add complexity to critical considerations and collective conversations about specific course topics such as human trafficking, the labor market, and cultural notions of idealized beauty. Encouraging students to develop their quantitative literacy skills, the maps in the Seager atlas serve as a resource for analyzing the various ways that ideas about gender and nation take shape throughout the world.

In preparation for seminar-style discussions in my upper-division course, "Sexual Citizenship," I ask students to make connections between the maps in section two and three of the Seager atlas entitled *Families* and *Birthrights*. The maps in this part of the text provide a context for class discussions about what defines a family, how family structure is changing in different places around the world, and what factors contribute to these changes. Taking a comparative approach, I ask students to look at several of the maps in relation to one another while drawing from the provided data on legal rights, marriage, and divorce. Using this information students participate in building evidence-based arguments about the role of gender and nation in human relations. Starting with the map entitled "Households," students learn that family size is currently shrinking in the wealthiest countries around the world (22). Using quantitative and qualitative data only from these two sections, I ask students to construct an argument explaining why and how family shrinkage may, or may not, be related to the statistical data provided in the maps that follow about Marriage and Divorce, Lesbian Rights, Domestic Violence, Murder, Motherhood Conception, Abortion, Maternal Mortality, and Son Preference. Students often creatively extend their analysis of the map data, gaining a richer understanding of how information in the text applies to their own lives. One student wrote in a weekly journal entry after this assignment, "Never before had I really thought about a gendered balance of power within households. I grew up in a house where my mom and dad always appeared to have equal roles in making decisions about family matters. After looking at these maps, I was inspired to ask my parents about why they had stopped having children after I was born. I'm an only child" (Anonymous, 2009). Reflecting on the map in terms of family structure and household power dynamics, this student's words suggest that s/he is able to explore how data in the *Atlas* may be meaningful beyond the classroom walls. Content that at some level could be perceived as remote, textbook information, engages the student to think about the substance of the map statistics in order to examine not just the external world but also immediate world and family relations. As Seager notes, "Mapping is a powerful tool; in showing not only what is happening but where, patterns are revealed on maps that would never be

apparent in statistical tables or even in narratives” (10). Maps help students better understand the relations between structural power and geographical distribution of peoples and resources. Through use of the Seager *Atlas* students gain an appreciation for the politics embedded in the physical organization of the world.

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