



ZMO-Kolloquium

“New Perspectives on Gender and Globalization”

Thursday, 25 March 2010, 6 pm

Cyberspace, Diaspora, and the Public Sphere: Gender and Eritrean Politics Online

Lecture by Prof. Victoria Bernal

Venue

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33
Conference Hall

14129 Berlin

Both diaspora and cyberspace offer new opportunities and possibilities for transforming citizens' relationship to the state, women's access to the public sphere, and discourses and practices of national belonging. The lecture focuses on the websites that Eritreans in diaspora have developed as an online public sphere for analyzing, debating, and participating in Eritrean politics. It explores the relationship of cyberspace to the problem of women's integration into and exclusion from the nation. How is authority exercised in the online public sphere and who is authorized to speak or silenced by what means? How is gender represented and performed online? In what ways might diaspora and cyberspace open new possibilities for gender relations and for women's political enfranchisement? If women are fought for and fought about in the public sphere, where is the space for women to participate in their own right? Does cyberspace offer Eritrean women new opportunities to bring their gendered experiences and concerns to light? Exploring how gender relations are reproduced and contested by Eritreans online reveals the contradictions inherent in women's problematic membership in the nation. The analysis of gender and online politics can contribute to perspectives on citizenship and sovereignty and to our understanding of the internet as a tool for democracy more generally.

Prof. Victoria Bernal is affiliated with the Department of Anthropology of the University of California, Irvine. Her research has addressed a range of issues relating to gender, migration, nationalism, transnationalism, development, cyberspace, and Islam. She has carried out ethnographic research in Eritrea, Tanzania, and the Sudan. Bernal has been the recipient of a number of prestigious grants and fellowships from Wenner-Gren, Fulbright, and Rockefeller Foundations among others. Her book analyzing rural transformations and the complex interplay of development policies, labor migration and peasant households, *Cultivating Workers: Peasants and Capitalism in a Sudanese Village*, was published by Columbia University Press (1991). Her articles and chapters have appeared in numerous collections as well as in anthropological, African Studies, and interdisciplinary journals, including *Cultural Anthropology*, *American Ethnologist*, *American Anthropologist*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *African Studies Review*, and *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*.

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