

Transnational Feminisms 2014
WGSS 695A-1
Dr. Laura Briggs
Bartlett 314
Thursdays 2:30-5:00
University of Massachusetts Amherst

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course will explore the way the field of Transnational Feminisms has developed over the past two decades. What has emerged is a profoundly heterogeneous field. Luminaries in transnational feminism from Political Science—figures like Leela Fernandes, Sonia Alvarez, Amanda Lock Swarr, and Richa Nagar—negotiate a terrain of states, NGOs, and human rights. Their collective work, however, is only barely intelligible to those in Cultural and Literary Studies, like Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, or Norma Alarcón. This latter group prioritized questions of political economy, the symbolic meaning of the nation, and the (psychic and lived) postcolonial condition. In History, Anthropology, and American Studies, feminist scholars of gender and empire, like Antoinette Burton, Ann Laura Stoler, and Amy Kaplan, developed still a different vocabulary and set of questions, taking up the multiplicity of empires. They closely observed the micro-politics of empire in relations among servants, mistresses, and orphans. They also attended to the macro-politics of how colonies and metropolises mutually shaped one another. Yet, another genealogical root of Transnational Feminism emerged at the intersection of women of color feminism, internationalism, and postcolonial questions in the edited and authored works of Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres, Jacqui Alexander and Ela Shohat, while still others have insisted that “decolonial feminisms” is a different field altogether.

Rather than try to sort out these conflicting directions, in this course we will take a simpler and more practical approach: we will read recent books by scholars working in transnational feminisms, and use them to identify what we value—what kinds of writing, epistemologies, and methodologies.

Given that we will be approaching the work from several disciplines and interdisciplinary fields, and with a range of theoretical expertise, we will be emphasizing the methodological and historical contexts for each of the works we will be discussing in class.

DAY-TO-DAY BUSINESS OF THE COURSE

There are many things we could do in this or any graduate seminar. We can locate readings in relationship to broader scholarly fields. We can engage in a rigorous critique of how books are put together—evidence and argument—in hopes of better understanding how to write good books (and dissertations). We can read closely. We can hold up arguments or turns of phrase that seem particularly smart and wonderful, or

conversely, those that we particularly disagree with. We can look at books or articles for what they offer for our own research, teaching, activism, or ethical engagement . . . among other things.

Rather than use one or another of these approaches, the class will be organized by the approaches that are specific to each of this particular group's needs. We will start off each class by writing as many questions as we can think of on the board and we will then orient our subsequent discussion around those questions. The goal is to build intellectual friendships and community through the work of naming our honest questions and particular agendas. It is also my hope that the seminar will be fun, even occasionally thrilling, in the way an elegant idea or a particularly provocative conversation can be exhilarating.

Academe has trained us all to think of learning as a competitive affair. One scholar right, another wrong; students compete against each other for the highest grade. In truth, though, all learning and thinking takes place in the context of intellectual communities—written, virtual or face-to-face. Institutions of higher education like this afford us the privilege and pleasure of reading together and learning from one another. Our job in this seminar is to create an intellectual community, one in which all are enriched by each other's readings. Of course, some of this is difficult material, without a doubt, which is exactly why we need each other's help to read it as well as to try to understand how it can (or fails to) speak to our situation in the context of the world. This imposes on each of us the responsibility of reading carefully, speaking up about our insights and questions, and listening respectfully to each other (which is not to say always agreeing).

BOOKS

GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS

Option one: Reading (Generally for MA students or early-career PhDs)

class participation: 15%

papers: Four 2pp reading response 5% each
 Two 5-7pp papers 20% each
 Final paper: 25%

1. Write four 2 pp. reading response papers. These will be frontloaded in the beginning of the semester to help you get quick feedback and help on your reading and writing, and correspondingly less pressure to speak up in class than on more advanced graduate students. Due dates: 9/16, 9/23, 9/30, 10/7

2. Write two 5-7 pp reading-response papers bringing together at least two of the readings in the weeks prior to the paper. Due: 10/21, 11/4

3. Write and present a 9 pp. conference paper that includes original research on a subject of your choosing related to the course material. Subject matter might include historical research (relying on an archive of published or unpublished sources), a reading of a novel or a play, a reading of public policy problem or feminist issue using fresh sources (that is, tell us something new that we did not already know, based on your own research). This list is meant to be suggestive rather than inclusive. Due 12/18.

Option two: Research Only (Generally for advanced graduate students)

Class participation: 30%

Research paper: 70%

Research paper. Use the theoretical material in relation to something else, perhaps a thesis or dissertation topic; 15-20pp. Due 12/18

Attendance Policy

You're expected to come to class with the reading done. If you must miss a class, email the instructor. Two absences are a cause for concern. If you miss three or more classes, plan on meeting with me to discuss options related to making up the work, taking a grade reduction, or repeating the course.

WEEK-BY-WEEK SCHEDULE

Week One: September 9. Genealogies

1. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan. 1994. "Transnational Feminist Practices and Questions of Postmodernity," in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
2. Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Boundary 2* (1984): 12/13 (3/1): 333-358
3. Marcelle Maese-Cohen, "Introduction: Toward Planetary Decolonial Feminisms," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18, no. 2 (2010): 3–27.
4. Kiran Asher, "Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui on the Dilemmas of Representation in Postcolonial and Decolonial Feminisms." *Feminist Studies* 43, no. 3 (2017): 512-24.

Week Two: September 16 Slavery

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2008).

Option one: 2pp reading response paper

Week 3. September 23 Race and Colonial Modernity

Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Duke, 2015).

Ebook in the Umass library

Option one: 2pp reading response paper

Week 4. September 30 Capitalism, Species, and Survival

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton UP: 2017)

Ebook in the Umass library

Option one: 2pp reading response paper

Week 5. October 7 Transnational Activism

Jocelyn Olcott, *International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness Raising Event in History* (New York: Oxford, 2017)

Option one: 2pp reading response paper

Week 6 October 15 The Timelines of Feminism

(*Please note Tuesday meeting; Monday is Indigenous People's Day)

Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter* (Duke UP, 2010)

Week 7. October 21 Militaries, the US War in Indochina and White Nationalism

Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Harvard, 2018)

Option one: 5-7pp paper due

Week 8. October 28 Migration and Care Labor

Wendy Vogt, *Lives in Transit: Violence and Intimacy on the Migrant Journey* (New York: Ingram, 2018)

Week 9. November 4

Lisa Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*

Option one: 5-7pp paper due

November 11—Veterans Day holiday. NO CLASS.

Week 10. November 13—Wednesday—WE WILL NOT BE HAVING CLASS ALTHOUGH THIS IS A MONDAY SCHEDULE DAY AT UMASS.

Week 11: November 18 Writing for a Popular Audience: Puerto Rico

Naomi Klein, *The Battle for Paradise*

November 25—Thanksgiving holiday week. No class.

Week 12: December 2 Writing for a Popular Audience 2: Prisons and Genders

Eric Stanley, Nat Smith, Cece McDonald, *Captive Genders*

Week 13: December 9

TBD

Final Papers due: December 18

