

Transnational Feminisms 2012
WGSS 695A-1
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COURSE OVERVIEW

We are witnessing an election cycle in the US in which feminist issues like birth control, abortion, rape, health care, and neoliberal economic reforms have never seemed so relevant, and yet actual feminists are few and far between. At the same time, a punitive “imperial feminism,” as some have called it, is used to justify European laws banning conservative Islamic dress, the niqab and the burqa, and even war in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, in and outside the US, carceral states continue to grow, the product of all kinds of states. How does a focus on feminist concerns—gender, sexuality, the private, the domestic—help us interpret the current conjuncture? To get at these questions, this class will take up issues of secularism, neoliberalism, human rights, health, imperialism, epistemology, transnationalism, reproduction, and sexuality as they structure the relationship of the U.S. to the global south (particularly Latin America).

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 understanding better 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 . . . and we could add many other things.

Rather than use one or another of these approaches, the class will be organized by those the particular group of us need. We will start off each class by writing as many questions as we can think of on the board, and we will 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’s 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 stirring.

Academe has trained us all to think of learning as a competitive affair. One scholar is 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 one afford us the privilege and pleasure of reading together and learning from each other. Our job in this seminar is to create an intellectual community, one in which we all are enriched by each others’ readings and questions. 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).

GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS

Option one: Reading (Generally for MA students or undergrads)

class participation: 10%

papers: Two 2pp reading response 10% each

Two 5-7pp papers 20% each

Final paper: 30%

Due dates are on the week-by-week schedule.

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. They are due **before** class meets.

2. Write two 5-7 pp reading-response papers bringing together at least two of the readings in the weeks prior to the paper. They are due **before** class meets.

3. Write a 9 pp. conference paper that includes an argument based on an extensive review of the course material. Original research is welcome but not required.

Option two: Research (Generally for advanced graduate students)

Class participation: 30%

Research paper: 70%

Research paper. Use the course material in relation to something else, perhaps a thesis or dissertation topic. Develop a thoughtful, original argument using readings from class and 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. Final paper should be 25-35 pp.

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

Feminisms

September 6—course overview

September 13— Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*

Option 1: 2 pp reading response

Neoliberalism, Gender, and Securityscapes

September 20—David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*

Option 1: 2 pp reading response

September 27— Florence Babb, *After the Revolution: Mapping Gender and Cultural Politics in Neoliberal Nicaragua*

October 4-- Elana Zilberg, *Spaces of Detention: The Making of Transnational Gang Crisis between Latin American and El Salvador*

Option 1: 5-7 pp paper due

Option 2: 2 pp paper prospectus due

Transnationalisms

October 11—Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*

October 18-- Aiwha Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*

October 25— Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak”

November 1— Grewal and Kaplan, “Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxism/Poststructuralism/Feminism Divides”

M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Introduction,” *Feminist genealogies, colonial legacies, democratic futures*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Briggs et al., “Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis” in Gutiérrez and Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Nation and Migration*

Option 1: 5-7 pp paper due

Option 2: bibliography/sources/research report

The Problem with Liberalism and Secularism: Islam and Feminism

November 8— Afsaneh Najmabadi, "(Un)Veiling Feminism," *Social Text* 18:3 (Fall 2000): 28-45.

Mahmood, Saba. "The Subject of Freedom," from *The Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): 1-39.

Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others" *American Anthropologist* 104:3 (September 2002): 783-90.

Hindu Nationalism

November 15—Runa Das, “Nation, Gender and Representations of (In)Securities in Indian Politics: Secular-Modernity and Hindutva Ideology,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 15:3 (2008): 203-221.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, “Introduction,” *The Crisis of Secularism in India* (Duke, 2007): 1-44.

November 29— **Stratified Reproduction**

Shellee Colen, “‘Like a Mother to Them’: Stratified Reproduction and West Indian Childcare Workers and Employers in New York” in Ginsberg, Faye, Rayna Rapp, eds., *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*, (Berkeley: UC Press, 1995): 78-102

Eileen Boris and Rhacel Parreñas (2010) “Introduction” *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care* (Stanford UP): 1-12.

Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestine Avila, “I’m Here, But I’m There: The Meanings of Latina Transnational Motherhood” *Gender and Society* 11:5 (October 1997): 584-571.

December 6— María Josefina Saldaña Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Age of Development*

December 12— Option 1: 9 pp paper due

Option 2 Research paper due