

Feminist Theory in Transnational Context

Fall 2020, Online Synchronous TF 11:15am—12:30pm

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Office Hours: By appointment, TF 3-4 pm

Description:

What is feminist theory and what is its relevance to our world today? What compulsions and reservations do some people have around the “F” word? Can gender be theorized across cultures in ways that adequately address inegalitarian sociopolitical and economic conditions? A body of thought that arose to explain how gender creates social meaning, feminist theory has evolved to address the political impacts of gender’s intersection with race, class, nationalism, sexual orientation, and other categories. Its interdisciplinarity allows for broad applicability and has secured ongoing relevance for global civic engagement. The course begins with a look at “first wave” or “liberal” feminism’s battles for women’s economic, political, and domestic parity with men before examining how post-structural feminist and queer theory has questioned the very basis of gender difference as social construct. How have rights-based approaches to equality provoked socialist and Marxist, postcolonial, or Islamist critiques? Can feminist theory confront the ethical imperative for global citizens to improve conditions for everyone regardless of sex, gender, race, class, or creed? Can #MeToo be #UsToo?

Teaching Methodology:

This will be a discussion-based class, where assigned weekly readings will be discussed collectively in class. I will offer some initial comments and opening questions and then students are expected to respond to these and add their own questions and responses. Students will be put into pairs/groups, which will be expected to lead class discussions for each unit, and provide Internet leads on topics/films/current relevant news items pertaining to issues under consideration.

Anticipated Learning Outcomes:

- 1) This course will provide students with a knowledge of the history and evolution of feminist (and to some extent, queer) theory and practice.
- 2) Through exposure to different schools of feminist theory and activism within and beyond the US and Europe, students will learn to evaluate past and current models of thought, social organization and behavior, in order to imagine potentially more integrated, justice-oriented transnational futures.
- 3) The course will sharpen students’ critical abilities to conceptualize their own lives and the life paths they follow outside of the classroom well beyond their university years, in light of the theoretical models developed by different strands of feminisms in the West and elsewhere.
- 4) Exposure to interdisciplinary theoretical lenses will help students understand how race, class, religion, national and ethnic affiliations and sexual orientations, intersect with gender to create

social meaning and political impact in our world, helping students to arrive at more intersectional understandings of the world around them.

- 5) By learning to recognize connections between unexamined assumptions of women, gender, sexuality and the sociopolitical and economic conditions that are in place because of such assumptions, students will feel encouraged to become agents of social change to improve these conditions for everyone
- 6) Competency in gender-literacy skills developed in this course will lead students to thoughtful civic engagement in the global community.

Texts:

We will read excerpts (posted online) from several of the following books, as well as essays (indicated with an *):

Mary Wollstonecraft. **Vindication of the Rights of Women** (1792)

Simone de Beauvoir. **The Second Sex** (1949)

Andrea Dworkin. **Woman Hating** (1974)

Judith Butler. **Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity** (1990)

L.J. Nicolson, ed. **Second-Wave Feminist Reader** (1997)

Heywood, Leslie and Jennifer Drake, eds. **Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism**. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Hosseini, Rokeya S. "Sultana's Dream." (1908)

Shah, Sonia, ed. **Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire**. Boston: South End Press, 1997.

Alexander, Jacqui and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds. **Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures**. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Fernea, Elizabeth Warnock. **In Search of Islamic Feminism: One Woman's Global Journey**. NY: Anchor Books, 1998.

Adrienne Rich "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) *

Sue Cobble, Ann Gordon and Astrid Henry, eds. **Feminism Unfinished** (2014)

Mary Hawkesworth. **Political Worlds of Women: Activism, Advocacy and Governance in the 21st Century**. (2012)

"Combahee River Collective Statement" (1977) *

Cherrie Moraga. **A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness** (2011)

Oliver, Kelly ed. **French Feminist Thought** (2005)

“Postcolonial Feminism“ by R.K. Mishra (2013) *

Nicholson, Linda, ed. **Second-Wave Feminist Reader** (1997)

Films:

Entre Nous (Between Us) dir. Diane Kurys (1983)

Born in Flames by Lizzie Borden (1983)

Ex Machina by Alex Garland (2014)

Grading: You will be graded holistically, with each of the following 4 REQUIRED assignments carrying equal roughly equal weight:

1) Group Work in Small Groups of 3-4 (depending on total number of students in class). This involves leading class discussions on each of the three modules, by members of assigned groups. EACH member of your group must participate, via annotations on the assigned texts (using Perusall, see left tab), and use a google doc (see "Collaborations" tab on the left). Your group work, for which you will be assigned individual grades, will equal =20%

2) Active class participation plus Perusal annotations= 20%

2) 1 midterm and 1 final take-home exam, on dates specified; NO LATE EXAMS will be given or accepted! (20% each; total=40%)

3) A final paper, 7-8 double spaced pages, with citations in-text as in MLA format, due during exam week, making use of your individual "journals" which have been created for you in the Discussions tab. NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED. 20%

NOTE:

- All readings are available in Canvas course site, under section, “Files.”
- This schedule and readings are subject to change—it is up to YOU to keep abreast of any changes that occur.
- Plagiarism is a serious offense; kindly use MLA or Chicago-style documentation for all sources. Failure to acknowledge sources properly will most likely result in a failing grade.
- If you have any disabilities I need to be aware of, please inform me immediately
- Journals, set up as individual Discussion Boards--where you keep track of your thoughts/developments in class via the readings and discussions. This “journaling” should help you generate your final paper for the course. Ungraded (though I will look at these to determine this “pre-work” when I read your final papers).

NOTE:

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- **This schedule and readings are subject to change**—it is up to YOU to keep abreast of any changes that occur.
- Plagiarism is a serious offense; kindly use MLA or Chicago-style documentation for all sources. Failure to acknowledge sources properly will most likely result in a failing grade.

MSU expects its students to adhere to the highest possible standards of scholarship and academic conduct. Students should be aware that engaging in behaviors that violate the standards of academic integrity will be subject to review and may face the imposition of penalties in accordance with the procedures set out in the MSU policy:

<https://www.montclair.edu/policies/all-policies/academic-dishonesty/>

- If you have any disabilities I need to be aware of, please inform me immediately

Schedule:**Week 1**

Aug 25: Meet and greet and discuss course expectations/groups; opening comments

Aug 28: Meet in breakout rooms on Zoom with other members of your group

Module 1: Liberal and Radical Feminisms, Weeks 2-7: (GROUP 1 RESPONSIBLE FOR ORGANIZING/LEADING DISCUSSIONS ON Module 1; week 6 and 7 do not require this)

Week 2

Sep 1: Chap 2 from Mary Wollstonecraft's **Vindication of the Rights of Women** (1792)

Sep 4: "Sultana's Dream" by Rokeya S. Hossain (1905)

Week 3

Sep 8: Chapter "Woman as Other" from **The Second Sex** by Simone de Beauvoir (1949)

Sep 11: Shulamith Firestone, Ch 6 "Love" from **Dialectic of Sex**

(Group : 1 Choose which chapters from Woman Hating you want class to read for next week and inform us!)

Week 4

Sep 15, 18: **Woman Hating** by Andrea Dworkin (1974)

Week 5

Sep 22, 25 “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” by Adrienne Rich (1980)

Week 6

Sep 29, Oct 2: We will watch in class this week, the film Entre Nous (“Between Us”) dir. Diane Kurys (1983)

Week 7

Oct 6: Discussion of Film#1: Entre Nous (“Between Us”) Everyone—Group 1 not responsible for leading discussion

Oct 9: Midterm Exam (*take-home*) **A transnational webinar with former Prof of GSWS at MSU, Anuj Vaidya, and other scholars, Part 1 of 3: “Feminist Frames: Pasts, Presents, Futures.”**

Module 2: Socialist and Women of Color Feminisms, Weeks 8-10: (Group# 2 RESPONSIBLE FOR ORGANIZING/LEADING DISCUSSIONS ON MODULE 2)

Week 8

Oct 13: Discuss: Barbara Ehrenreich’s description/summary of Socialist Feminism at <https://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/ehrenreich-barbara/socialist-feminism.htm>

Oct 16 Watch the film by Lizzie Borden, *Born in Flames* (1983) in class;

Week 9

Oct 20: Discussion of film and begin discussion of Combahee manifesto

Oct 23 Continue Discussion of “Combahee River Collective” (1974) and "On Black Lives Matter" essay

Week 10

Oct 27: Discussion of Cherrie Moraga’s *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness* (2011)

Oct 30: A transnational webinar with former Prof of GSWS at MSU, Anuj Vaidya, and other scholars, Part 2 of 3: “Feminist Frames: Pasts, Presents, Futures.”

Module 3: French Poststructuralist/Postcolonial/Islamic Feminisms; Weeks 11-16 ((Group# 3 RESPONSIBLE FOR ORGANIZING/LEADING DISCUSSIONS ON MODULE 3)

Week 11

Nov 3, 6 excerpts from French Feminism: Luce Irigaray, “This Sex That Isn’t One” and Helene Cixous, “Laugh of the Medusa”(1977-81)

Week 12

Nov 10 and 13: watch *Ex Machina* in class

Week 13

Nov 17: Discuss the film alongside Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1991)

Nov 20: **A transnational webinar with former Prof of GSWS at MSU, Anuj Vaidya, and other scholars, Part 3 of 3: “Feminist Frames: Pasts, Presents, Futures.”**

Week 14

Nov 24: Transfeminist Manifesto

Nov 27: No Class, Thanksgiving

Week 15

Dec 1: Ritu Tyagi, “Understanding Postcolonial Feminism.”

Dec 4: Lila Abu-Loghud, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?” (in American Anthropologist vol. 104, No. 3 pp 783-790)

Week 16

Dec 8: Concluding discussion

Dec 11: In class final exam

A final 8-10 double-spaced page paper will be due on Mon Dec 14, 9 am via Canvas.

Topic: which school of feminist theory/combination has appealed to you the most and why; evaluate its strengths and weaknesses in Part 1; then, in Part 2, describe which other feminist theoretical frameworks could this school of theory be best combined with and how, in order to point toward a better, more inclusive vision of feminist theorizing and practice? in-text citations as in MLA format, NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED.