Syllabus: English/Gender and Women’s Studies 737

Transnational Feminist Theory and Criticism

Time / Place: Wednesday, 9:00-11:30 am.  7109 Helen C. White Hall
Instructor: Susan Friedman
Offices:  7103 Helen C. White Hall;  215 University Club Building
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737 List Serv: english737-1-f10@lists.wisc.edu
Office Hours: For Eng/GWS 737 students: W 11:30-12:30 in 7103 HCW; and by appointment in
215 University Club Building. Sign-up sheet for W 11:30-12:30 is posted for your
convenience on the door of 7103 HCW. For other hours, contact me by email to
set up an appointment.

Course Description

The aim of this course is to examine key concepts in transnational feminist theory as
they relate to literary and cultural studies within a broadly understood feminist framework.
Feminist literary theory of the 1970s-1980s constituted an avant-garde of feminist theory, but
this is no longer the case. In the 21st century, other kinds of feminist social theory and theory in
general have been rich sources for the reading of gender in literature as gender is mediated by
other categories of identity such as race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, caste, national origin,
religion, disability, age, and so forth. The rise of postcolonial and diaspora studies, for example,
produced whole new sets of issues for feminist critics, whether or not this theory dealt
explicitly with literature. Other frameworks—e.g., bioculture studies, environmental studies,
posthuman studies, etc.—have been equally influential in feminist theory and criticism. This
seminar will focus on “transnationalism” as another influential new framework for feminist
literary study. We will examine the meanings of “transnationalism” and its relationship other
terms such as “globalism” and “planetarity” for their impact on feminist literary and cultural
studies.

We will begin with a brief look at the changes in feminist literary theory/criticism from
its emergence in the 1970s through the early 21st century. We will then examine the “spatial
turn” in feminist theory, looking at concepts of plural feminisms, locationality, positionality, and
intersectionality. We then move to the efforts to internationalize feminist theory and the key
debates underlying terms like “transnational feminism,” “global feminism,” and “planetary feminism.” Next, we will explore key concepts of feminist transnational analysis in relationship to gender, including nationalism and the nation-state; colonialism and postcolonialism; borders and borderlands; migration and diaspora; and global religions (with a focus on Muslim feminism). Throughout, the articulation of gender through other systems of stratification and power will be considered.

The seminar will set feminist theory and literature in dialogue, with an aim to breaking down the wall between them. We will explore ways in which “theory” exists with a discourse, with rhetorical, figural, and narrative dimensions; conversely, we will see ways in which literary texts can be read as “theory.” We will also test the extent to which any given theory has explanatory power in illumination a literary text; conversely, we will test the extent to which any given literary text challenges theory and can be read to contribute to theoretical debates in transnational feminist studies.

**Required Books:** An exclusive book order was placed at A Room of One’s Own Bookstore, 307 W. Johnson St. (walk down State Street from campus to capitol; turn right on Johnson and bookstore is right there).


**Recommended Books**
Work Requirements Assignments, directions, and due dates to be given separately and are posted at Learn@UW: Content: Assignments.

- Attendance and active participation in seminar.
- Assigned discussion post on Learn@UW by noon, Tuesdays. 3 for semester; portfolio of posts due on Dec. 15.
- Written work: Seminar Paper Option OR Reflection Paper Option: Directions on Learn@UW: Content: Assignments.
- Oral presentation of paper project: final day of class.

Schedule

Part I: From Beginnings to Transnational Feminisms
September 8 From Then to Now: Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism
Introduction to seminar;
Past and Present in Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism:
Showalter; Walker; Moi; Cvetkovich/Fraiman/Friedman/Yaggi
Recommended: Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own
15 The Spatial Turn in Feminist Theory: Locationality, Positionality,
Intersectionality
Combahee River Collective; Jordan; Rich; McDowell; Friedman,
“Beyond Gender”; Wikipedia
22 “Transnational” Feminisms
Morgan; Mohanty; Beijing; Basu; Tripp; Shohat; Grewal and Kaplan,
Introduction; Grewall and Kaplan, “Global Identities”; Spivak, “Scattered
Speculations”

Part II: Gender and the Nation-State
September 29 The Nation, Nationalism, and Gender
Yuval-Davis; Alarcón/Kaplan/Moallem; McClintock; Smith; Liu
October 6 Women, the State, and War
Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas

Part III: Post/Colonial Feminisms
October 13 Spivak; Balzano; Narayan; Frankenberg and Mani; Nfah-Abbenyi; Mani.
Recommended: Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes”
October 20 Legacies of Colonialism and the Post-Colonial State
Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*

**Part IV: Feminism, Borders, and Borderlands**
October 27  
*Queer Geographies*  
Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*  

**Part V: Feminism, Migration, and Diaspora**
November 3  
Brah; Alexander; Seyhan; Braidotti; Friedman, “Bodies on the Move”  
November 10  
Campion; Film Shown in Class. Jane Campion, *The Piano*. You may watch the movie elsewhere, but it will be shown on a big screen. Discussion of film to be at evening potluck at my house: date/time TBA.  
Recommended: Campion: *The Piano: Screenplay*
November 17  
Edwidge Danticat, *The Dew Breaker*

**Part VI: Feminism and Global Religion**
November 24  
*Muslim Feminisms*  
Mernissi; Moghissi; Mahmood; Moghadam;  
Recommended: Badran, Kahn  
December 1  
Mohja Kahf, *E-Mails from Scheherazade*

**Part VII: Papers and Presentations**
December 8  
No class. Conferences on papers to be scheduled for those who want them during class time and office hours.  
December 15  
Short Oral Presentations of papers in class.

**List of Readings by Week on next page.**
Assigned and Recommended Readings Available at Learn@UW: Listed by Week

Note: All assigned readings (not required books) are available on Learn@UW, under “Content” and listed by week. Recommended readings are sometimes available on Learn@UW, sometimes not.

September 8: From then to Now: Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism
Ann Cvetkovich, Susan Fraiman, and Susan Stanford Friedman, and Miranda M. Yaggi. “‘Women as the Sponsoring Category’: A Forum on Academic Feminism and British Women’s Writing.” Partial Answers 8.2 (June 2010): 235-54.

September 15: The Spatial Turn in Feminist Theory: Locationality, Positionality, Intersectionality
June Jordan, “Report from the Bahamas.”

September 22: “Transnational” Feminisms


September 29 The Nation, Nationalism, and Gender

October 13 Post/Colonial Feminisms
Uma Narayan. Introduction. Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World


October 27  Feminism, Borders, and Borderlands


November 3  Feminism, Migration, and Diaspora


November 10


Recommended: Jane Campion. The Piano: Screenplay.

November 24  Feminism and Global Religion


**Recommended:**
