

University of Minnesota – Department of Geography  
Fall 2004  
GEOG 8230 Theoretical Geography: Syllabus

## **FEMINISM AND SOCIAL THEORY IN GEOGRAPHY**

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### **1 GENERAL**

#### ***Objectives***

This course seeks to do two things. Firstly, it will inaugurate a concerted effort at feminist theorization in our department and forge connections with feminist work elsewhere in the University and other geography departments. This is done through the collective reading and discussing of selected texts in feminist geography. Secondly, it aims at bringing feminism into our own research; that is, it should change the way each of us (both students and professors) does her or his particular work, however slightly that may be.

The course can be taken for one, two or three credits.

#### ***Requirements***

Students are required to attend all of the speaker series and the Saturday seminars (see below). One credit students are required to do all the readings and participate in the discussion. For this, every two weeks one student writes and circulates a short report on the assigned readings, and subsequently acts as (co)chair during the seminar (the instructor will also help moderate). Two and three credit students are required to write a research paper of respectively 10 and 20 pages, which reflects on the ways in which the readings, the presentations and the seminar discussions can be integrated into their own research or field of interest.

### **Grading**

1 credit	20% participation 60% reading report 20% chairing
2 credits	15% participation 85% research paper
3 credits	15% participation 85% research paper

## **2 SUMMARY**

This is a unique course, structured like a seminar and requiring much discussion and, depending on the amount of credits chosen, the writing of a research paper at the end of the semester. Top scholars in feminist geography broadly defined are invited from the UK, Canada and the US to present their work and reflections. The seminar has been planned entirely by three graduate students, Karen Dias, Gwen McCrea and Jen Blecha. On Fridays, the speakers give their presentations during our department's traditional Coffee Hour. The students enrolled in the course prepare by reading certain texts chosen by the speakers. A selected student's reading report is circulated by email earlier in the week, so that certain key themes and problems can be identified and reflected upon. Then, during the actual seminars on Saturday morning, students get the opportunity to discuss at length the theoretical, methodological and political issues of the presentation with the speaker her- or himself. Towards the end of the series, the two and three credit students write a research paper which attempts to formulate how the speaker series and the readings helped them refine or reinforce their research.

These are the questions graduate students were particularly interested in, and which were presented to the speakers to reflect on for their Coffee Hour presentations:

1. Has feminist geography been subsumed under the broader project of social theory? Or does feminist thinking impart a distinct critical edge to geographic analysis?
2. In light of emerging economic, political and cultural contexts across the globe, what is the analytic project facing feminist geographers? That is, which objects of analysis do we and should we address as significant?

There is especially an interest in inquiring into the nature of the contraption *feminist geography*. While there is no doubt about the relevance of feminism, there is still no clarity about how to integrate feminist social theory into

geography, while retaining both the specificity of geography and the critical edge of feminism. This seminar will be a much-needed opportunity to engage with senior feminist scholars and address the current challenges of feminist geography and feminism more broadly in the academia and society.

The speakers are:

**Susan Craddock** (Women's Studies/Institute for Global Studies, UMN)

**Larry Knopp** (Geography, UMN)

**Mei-Po Kwan** (Geography, Ohio State)

**Gill Valentine** (Geography, Sheffield)

**Richa Nagar** (Women's Studies, UMN)

**Geraldine Pratt** (Geography, UBC)

**Jennifer Hyndman** (Geography, Simon Fraser University)

**Liz Bondi** (Institute of Geography/Counselling Studies, Edinburgh)

### **3 THE READING REPORT**

Each speaker has been asked to select three to four texts which they think pertinent to their talk and/or to the project of feminist geography. The instructor will list some 'key questions' that are addressed in each text in order to help focus the reading. According to research interests, every one-credit student is assigned a seminar. The students then write a report of **two pages** in which they summarise and compare the readings for the seminar in light of the 'key questions'. The report can be critical and personal. It is there to invite other students to reflect on their own relations to the texts and to the field of feminist geography. The report needs to be circulated by email not later than the **Tuesday** evening before the Coffee Hour presentation. Then, on the Saturday, the student will chair the discussions (together with the instructor).

### **4 THE RESEARCH PAPER**

The research paper of the two- and three-credit students will have to do two things. Firstly, as in other theoretically oriented courses, it should demonstrate an ability to carefully read and make an attempt at understanding what 'is going on' in a particular text and the speakers' work. Secondly, it goes one step further than interpretation, and *puts the reading to use*. That is, this course requires that you 'fold in' the Coffee Hour presentation and Saturday seminar discussions into your own work, whatever stage or area it might be. The research report should consist of a systematic formulation of what you have been *learning* from the course – you individually, from your own research standpoint. Starting out from your own research actually makes the reception of the series and seminar easier,

more focussed. Say you are interested in social relations aboard the Space Shuttle. Did any of the speakers give you fresh ideas about how to conceive the differences between men and women astronauts? about how to conduct your interviews? about the masculinism of space travel?

Thus, there are four central avenues to consider in assessing the importance of the speaker series, the readings and the discussions for your research:

- *feminist methodology*: how do the gender(s) of researcher and research subject affect the possibilities and the results of the research?
- *feminist epistemology*: how has knowledge (especially science, including geography) been dominated by men, and how can this male-dominated and gender-blind history be corrected?
- *feminist politics*: ‘the personal is the political’ – how can feminism make research more attentive to the ways local, everyday tensions reproduce wider structures of power?
- *feminist metaphysics*: how does feminism alter our definitions of what it means to be human, in particular, what has feminism to say about the mind/body split and ‘spirituality’?

Remember, this seminar not only invites excellent speakers; it is also very much about you and your (future) research. While working on the paper, there is the opportunity every two weeks to further discuss issues you’re still struggling with during the seminar itself – a circuit of writing, reading, thinking, talking, and learning. The paper is graded in the light of how successful you are at appropriating the seminar and readings for your own purposes.

Formal requirements:      hard copies  
    10 (two credits) resp. 20 (three credits) pages,  
    excluding bibliography  
    1.5 line spacing  
    think of an own title.

The deadline for the research report is 5 p.m. on **Monday, December 13**.

## **5 PLANNING AND ABSTRACTS**

The speaker series takes place Fridays at 3:15 p.m. in 445 Blegen Hall. The seminar sessions are in the same place, from 10 to 12 a.m. on Saturdays, starting on September 11, 2004. Some changes have had to be made to the programme advertised earlier.

**September 11**

**Introductory class**

‘Feminism and social theory in geography’

**September 17**

**Susan Craddock**

Associate Professor, Department of Women’s Studies and Institute for Global Studies, University of Minnesota

‘AIDS and the politics of genocide’

With the advent of effective antiretrovirals in the 1990s, the capacity exists to keep most individuals living with AIDS alive and relatively healthy. But with new regulations and patents, pharmaceutical companies and western governments have ensured that the vast majority of those who need drugs do not get access to them. The result is the genocide of upwards of 3 million individuals last year alone who died preventable deaths from AIDS. The question of why this abrogation of human rights is acceptable and ongoing lies at the nexus of feminist theories of globalization, postcolonial frameworks, citizenship, and representation.

**October 1**

**Liz Bondi**

Professor, Institute of Geography and Counselling Studies, School of Health and Social Sciences, University of Edinburgh, UK

‘On incorporating feminism: reflections on an analysis of counselling and psychotherapy’

This paper reflects on what it means to do feminist research in and around human geography, with particular reference to my own current work about counselling and psychotherapy. At the same time as engaging in debates in human geography, this research seeks to contribute to the development of counselling and psychotherapy studies. I explore tensions and contradictions that arise in relation to this dual strategy. The relationship between feminism and the field of counselling and psychotherapy is at least as complex and ambivalent as the relationship between feminism and human geography. In this context I discuss multiple interpretations of the "incorporation" of feminism into research and practice.

**October 15**                      **Mei-Po Kwan**  
 Professor, Department of Geography, Ohio State University

‘Feminist geography and geospatial technologies: a new beginning?’

Recent critiques by critical geographers have left the relationship between feminist geography and geospatial technologies relatively unexplored to date. The late 1990s have witnessed some important developments at this intersection. In feminist urban geography and political ecology, GIS and remote sensing are involved in qualitative research that explores the multiple realities (and stories) of livelihood and land-cover change in various cultural contexts. There is also research by feminist geographers that seeks to renegotiate the meanings of geospatial technologies at the intersection of science, art and subjectivities. Outside geography, feminist scholars in cultural and media studies have explored the role of GIS as a new representational medium. Geospatial technologies seem to be a fruitful area for feminist research. In my presentation I will reflect upon these recent developments and their implications for feminist geography. I will examine the possibility of these developments for impacting upon geospatial practices in geography at large.

**October 29**                      **Gill Valentine**  
 Professor, Department of Geography, University of Sheffield, UK

‘Sister Fate: the end of feminist geography as we know it?’

This paper will draw on my autobiographical experiences of discovering feminist geography and moving away from this label; my contemporary research about the nature of prejudice; and my experience of putting ‘feminist’ research methods into practice to question the contemporary relevance of feminism in geographic theory and practice. As the title of this paper suggests this will involve consideration of whether the lack of recognition of feminism within contemporary critical geography is a marker of its success or a result of inherent flaws in the logic of identity politics. In doing so this paper will address the broader theorisation of ‘identities’; and methodological debates about what constitutes feminist praxis.

**November 5**                      **Richa Nagar**  
 Associate Professor, Department of Women’s Studies, University of Minnesota

‘Playing with fire: NGOization, grassroots feminisms, and collaborative bordercrossings’

The expansion of a full-scale globalized capitalism since 1989 has been accompanied by a complex politics of state and international civil society where

international platforms such as the United Nations have come to be dominated by a "global feminist" agenda. In this political scenario, the interventions made by powerful non-government organizations often end up serving the interests of global capital, despite being feminist in their professed interest in gender. How are activists interpreting, theorizing, and resisting these processes? What kinds of critiques of feminist- and development NGOs are emerging at the grassroots? How can these critiques help us extend and refine transnational feminist praxes in the Northern academy? This presentation considers how these questions can be approached productively through collaborative border crossings that consciously destabilize the boundaries between academic/non-academic, theory/praxis, vernacular/English, as well as between theoretical, creative and activist writing.

**November 19**

**Geraldine Pratt**

Professor, Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, Canada

‘Nannies, whores and the missing Canadian state: theorising bare life’

Examining the cases of murdered sex workers and Filipina domestic workers in Vancouver, I enlist Giorgio Agamben’s concepts of *homo sacer*, bare life and spaces of exception to describe the seeming reluctance of the Canadian state to administer the rights of sex workers and migrant domestic workers. But although Agamben builds his analysis from a recognition of the instability of the distinction between public and private – and thus shares a theoretical point of departure with feminists – his analysis is gender blind. I want to explore what feminists might bring to Agamben’s theory and his speculations about a renewed politics beyond the proliferation of spaces of exception.

**December 3**

**Jennifer Hyndman**

Associate Professor, Department of Geography, Simon Fraser University, Canada

‘Feminist (geo)politics revisited: space to act?’

The intersections and conversations between feminist geography and political geography have been surprisingly few. Feminist geographers’ forays into geopolitics and international relations within political geography have been relatively rare compared to their presence and influence in social, cultural, and economic geography. Likewise, only a few political geographers concerned with IR and geopolitics have engaged with scholarship in feminist geography. In an attempt to traverse this gap, the notion of a feminist geopolitics is elaborated; it aims to bridge scholarship in feminist and political geography by creating a theoretical and political space in which geopolitics becomes a more gendered and racialized project, one that is epistemologically situated and embodied in its conception of security.

**December 10                      Larry Knopp**

Professor, Department of Geography, University of Minnesota-Duluth, and  
Adjunct Professor, Department of Geography, University of Minnesota-Twin  
Cities

‘On the relationship between queer and feminist geographies’

This presentation explores the generally allied, but sometimes uneasy, relationship between queer and feminist geographies. I focus particularly on certain underdeveloped themes, including ontologies of movement/motion, issues relating to men and masculinities, homophobias and heterosexisms, generational cultures, and cultural politics.

**December 13                      Deadline for the research report****6 TO READ**

The reading material that the speakers have assigned is available in the Secretaries’ office. In addition, the following material is for background reading, and integrating some of it in the Saturday discussions and research reports is highly recommended.

Bordo, Susan, Binnie Klein and Marilyn K. Silverman (1998) ‘Missing kitchens’, in Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile, eds. *Places Through the Body*. London, Routledge.

Shows, through autobiography, how space and gender identity are intimately connected.

Butler, Judith (1993) ‘Introduction’, in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*. New York, Routledge.

Not straightforwardly connected to geographical concerns, but a highly influential argument across the humanities and social sciences.

Frankenberg, Ruth (1993) ‘Growing up white: the social geography of race’, in *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

An example of qualitative research into the joint construction of gender identity and place, here intertwined with race.

Gatens, Moira (1991) 'Corporeal representation in/and the body politic', in R. Diprose and R. Ferrell, eds. *Cartographies: Poststructuralism and the Mapping of Bodies and Spaces*. Sydney, Allen & Unwin.

Criticises the masculinist assumptions of political philosophy. Relevant from a geographical perspective as it questions the public/private split and the 'right to the city'.

Grosz, Elizabeth (1995) 'Sexual difference and the problem of essentialism', in *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. New York, Routledge.

Addresses a long-standing debate within feminism. Understanding this debate is as good as understanding feminism and much of contemporary cultural politics.

hooks, bell (1992) 'Selling hot pussy: representations of black female sexuality in the cultural marketplace', in *Yearning: Race and Representation*. Boston, South End Press.

An example of black feminism in cultural studies.

Irigaray, Luce (1999) 'Approaching the other as other', in *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, transl. Stephen Pluháček. New York, Columbia University Press.

Most influential of contemporary 'French feminism'. Follows a woman-centered, spiritual path to argue for a radical ethics against patriarchy.

Longhurst, Robyn (2001) 'Geography and gender: looking back, looking forward', *Progress in Human Geography* 25(4):641-648.

Handy overview.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade (2003) 'Privatized citizenship, corporate academies, and feminist projects', in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham, NC, Duke University Press.

Reflects how feminism has brought a politics of reflexivity within the institution of the university. An example of third world feminism.

Rose, Gillian (1993) 'A politics of paradoxical space', in *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Arguably one the seminal texts in the current, poststructuralist phase of feminist geography.