

Topic: *Critical Race Feminisms*: Reconfiguring feminist theory through the critical lens of colonialism, racism, and slavery

Tuesday and Thursday 14:35-15:55

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The land on which this class takes place is traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The exclusion and dismissal of the voices of racialized subjects from philosophy is, by now, well documented. The assumption has been that “women of colour” can find a better home within the feminist movement. Our marginalization from feminist theorizing and practice has been a contentious topic both within “mainstream” feminism and in racialized and colonized struggles. It often leads either to a silencing of our voices within “mainstream” feminism, or to a rejection of the feminist label in favour of the struggle for racial justice. (Please note that the term “women of colour” has its problems, but I use it in a broad understanding that takes neither “woman” nor “colour” to be fixed or biologically defined.)

This either/or is one that critical race feminists seek to deconstruct—neither giving up our positionality as gendered, nor as racialized. Critical race feminists thus argue that gender cannot be understood as a universal or baseline category, nor can it simply be complicated by adding other layers or intersections of identity. Rather, a different mode of feminist theorizing and practice is made possible when colonized/racialized women’s voices, in their differences and complex experiences, are centred in the analysis.

This will be the approach adopted in this course. It means that you will likely encounter thinkers not included in the canonical philosophical curriculum (though that is changing in contemporary feminist philosophy). We will begin by considering several methodological questions, with the aim of introducing concepts that will be useful to us in the rest of the course: ungendering; intersectionality; white or colonial ignorance; the affective weight of colonial durations.

The rest of the course will be divided into sections with the aim of allowing in-depth and careful readings of the thinkers at stake and with a special focus on (i) Black feminisms. We will also study (ii) indigenous feminisms with particular attention to the Canadian context; and one of the following areas (TBD): (iii) decolonial Latina/x feminisms, or (iv) Muslim feminisms. (Please note that this course does not aim to offer a survey of all critical race feminism, nor can it be exhaustive in its scope. We may have to cut some readings, to allow sufficient time to do justice to the texts we will read.)

Please note that this is a course in formation, so we will be creating the content together. Your active engagement in class is essential. Some of the material will be difficult to read. It evokes affective subaltern experiences, of violence and oppression, that have been suppressed and actively disregarded in the colonial formations that structure our present. Some of the authors we are reading re-imagine, or

as Toni Morrison says *re-member*, these experiences in ways that make reading them affectively complicated. These works deserve attentive, engaged, and critically generous reading.

Prerequisites: *PHIL 242 and one intermediate course in philosophy, or instructor permission.*

TEXTS: There are three books available at *Paragraphe Bookstore*:

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*

All other readings will be posted to *MyCourses*.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES: You are required to write two papers: the first paper is worth 40% and the second paper is a term paper worth 50%. The remaining 10% depends on your attendance and participation in discussion and in the class as a whole.

- (1) The **first paper, worth 40%**, should be **5 pages** in length, double-spaced. This paper should deal with a concept, problem or issue, drawing on texts discussed in the first part of the course (up to the end of the section on Black feminisms). The paper must involve a *critical* discussion of the topic chosen.

There are two possible formats:

- A. An analysis of *one thinker* and critical evaluation of her version of critical race feminist theory. Your analysis should include the positive contributions of the theory, as well its limitations, and should take a considered position with respect to the theory.
- B. A critical comparison of *two thinkers* of your choosing. You should show connections as well as differences. The comparison is not meant to be exhaustive, but should concentrate on specific concepts and/or consequences of their theories (i.e., you are responsible for defining the parameters of the comparison). The comparison should not be merely expository, rather it should lead you to take a position with respect to the two thinkers.

- (2) The **second paper is a term paper, worth 50%**, and should be approximately **7 pages** in length, double-spaced. The topic and format of this paper is to be designed by you, in consultation with the instructor. It will be due in the last week (date to be announced). This paper must be critical and should relate to the themes of the course, but you are allowed in this paper to extend those themes according to your interests. The paper must, however, be mainly based in the readings we have done in the course.

- (3) **Participation and attendance, worth 10%**. Please come to class prepared to discuss the reading. At the beginning of each class, I will ask you to suggest concepts, ideas, and questions that spoke to you from that day's reading in a brief brain-storming session.

Policy on Email Communications: I receive an average of thirty emails a day, so before sending an email, please read: <https://emailcharter.wordpress.com/> Make sure you are not asking a question whose response can be found in this syllabus. If you have a question that requires a long response, please come to office hours. Short and to-the-point emails will be responded to more quickly. Please allow at least 72 hours for a response.

Classroom Etiquette: Please turn your phones to *silent* when in class or conference. Computers should only be used for course-related activities, such as note-taking or viewing readings. Please ensure that they do not affect the vision of those around you.

Policy on Extensions: No extensions will be granted without a medical note. Late work will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per calendar day past the due date. For instance, a paper that is evaluated as a B, if one day late, will be assigned a B-, and if two days late, it will receive a C+.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

- September 3 Syllabus and introduction.
- METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS
- 5 *Ungendering*: Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”
- 10 *Class cancelled*.
Required Listening: Podcast on CBC, Part One “Canada’s Slavery Secret” and Part Two “Slavery’s Long Shadow” [We will discuss when I return.]
<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/canada-s-slavery-secret-the-whitewashing-of-200-years-of-enslavement-1.4726313>
- 12 Charles W. Mills, “White Ignorance.” **Guest Lecture by Celia Edell.**
- 17 *White ignorance and ontological expansiveness*:
Shannon Sullivan, Selected pages from *Revealing Whiteness*.
Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as property.”
- 19 *Intersectional feminism*: Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color.” [Optional: Carasthesis on the concept of intersectionality]
- 24 *Colonial Past*: Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Aphasia”
Alia Al-Saji, TBA. On racialization.
- BLACK FEMINISMS
- 26 bell hooks, “Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination” from *Black Looks* [Optional: “The Oppositional Gaze” from *Black Looks*]
- October 1 Angela Davis, “Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist” from *Women, Race, and Class*.
- 3, 8, 10 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (please read the whole novel)
- 15 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, Introduction.
- 17 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, Chapter one.
- 22 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, Chapter two.
- 24 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, Chapter three.
- 29 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, Chapter four and pp. 183-206.
- 31 Finish Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, pp. 183-206.
Begin Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*.

- November 5 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*. [See *MyCourses* for what to focus on.]
- 7 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*. [See *MyCourses* for what to focus on.]
- 12 Revisiting Hortense Spillers. Reread “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.”
And read the interview with Hortense Spillers, “Watcha Gonna Do?”

First ESSAY due November 7th in class. Please submit a paper copy.

Note that the following reading schedule will be revised, according to time constraints, and in an attempt to reflect the direction that discussion takes in class. Please take this schedule to be flexible.

LATINA/X FEMINISMS

- November 14 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (selection)
- 19 María Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling, and Loving Perception”
- 21 *Decolonial theory*: Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America.” Short selection.
Decolonial feminism: María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System”

INDIGENOUS FEMINISMS

- 26 Bonita Lawrence, “Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview”
- 28 *Decolonizing Feminism? Decolonizing Antiracism?* Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, “Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging connections between settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy”
Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence, “Indigenous peoples and Black people in Canada: Settlers or allies?”
Guest Lecture by Celia Edell. TBA.

MAKE-UP CLASS to be scheduled in the first week of December:

Muslim feminisms:

Al-Saji, *The Racialization of Muslim Veils: A Philosophical Analysis.*”

Selected essays from Saba Mahmood, Lila Abu-Lughod, or Saba Fatima.

Second ESSAY due at the end of term, TBA. Submission by email.

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.
