

POL379H1 S

Transnational feminisms: Questioning power from the margins

University of Toronto
Political Science

Wed 1-3pm EST
Office hours: Thur 4-5pm SS3052
Or by appointment



INSTRUCTOR: Professor María Méndez, maria.mendez@utoronto.ca

Course Overview

Focusing on the diverse experiences of women living at the margins of nation-states, transnational feminisms have destabilized the notion that women around the world share the same type of oppression. In doing so, they have contributed important analyses of power that acknowledge the intersections between historical formations of capitalism, racism, and patriarchy. This course centers the works of women of color and “Third World” feminists and activists, exploring the conceptions of power and resistance contained in their works. Through engagement with transnational feminist theories and political manifestos, this course will invite everyone, not only female-identifying bodies, to see questions of labor, care provision, war and violence, ecological protection, and solidarity across borders, anew. It will also challenge students to reflect on their own experience and position within global systems of domination.

Course Readings

Required Readings: There will be two required books for this course. You can obtain them online or buy used copies. All other readings will be posted on the course website.

Required texts:

- Françoise Vergès (2021), *A Decolonial Feminism*
- Verónica Gago (2020), *Feminist International: How to Change Everything*

Grading and due dates

- Quizzes: 7%
- Participation: 13%
- Weekly reflections: 10%
- In-class midterm: 35% due February 28
- Final take-home assignment: 35% due April 3

Assessment

Where needed, rubrics, prompts, and further details will be provided at least one week in advance.

Quizzes: 7%

Starting from week 3, there will be four unannounced quizzes spread across the semester to gauge your understanding of course materials. They will be in-person, close-booked, and will last for ten minutes each. You can expect questions related to the content assigned for that week. The quizzes will be administered online via Quercus, at the beginning of class, between 1:15-1:25pm. Readings or notes may not be consulted during the quiz. Each quiz will consist of no more than five questions, which may be multiple-choice or true/false. The focus will be on understanding key arguments and ideas rather than specific details. Note that your lowest score will be dropped and there will be no make-up or late quizzes. This flexibility allows you to skip one quiz without incurring any penalties. In other words, only your top three quiz grades will count towards the total quiz grade.

You should be able to use your computer or phone for these quizzes. However, if you don't have an electronic device or are unable to use your phone, please email Professor Méndez asap. Late quizzes will not be accepted. This means that if you arrive late to class, you will not get extra time to complete the quizzes as they are automatically timed to last 10 minutes.

Participation: Group presentation+ discussion questions (10%) + peer group work review (1%) + peer group presentation review (1%) + class notes (1%) = 13%

This is a discussion-based class, and your participation grade will reflect group presentations, the submission of discussion questions, peer review forms, and class notes. Once during the semester, you will sign up on Quercus to present on an issue related to that week's readings. Presenters are expected to share insights during their presentation but also to actively engage in the ensuing class discussion. Be prepared; I might call on you for additional input.

Dependent on enrollment, there might be two group presentations per week. If this is the case, I will specify which course materials each group will focus on.

Discussion questions: Collectively craft three polished discussion questions and post them on Quercus the day before the session by 11:59pm EST. Since these questions are meant to facilitate sustained conversations and inspire critical reflections, think carefully about what you circulate. Here are some questions you want to avoid: simple yes-no; leading (conveys the expected answer); and slanted (prevents participation from students who might disagree with the implied assumptions).

Grading criteria: 1) Clarity: Are our questions clear, concise, and precisely formulated? 2) Complexity and depth: Do our questions demonstrate a high level of complexity and depth, encouraging critical thinking and in-depth exploration of the topic? 3) Relevance to the topic: Are our questions relevant to the session's theme, connecting with key concepts and encouraging meaningful discussions? 4) Openness: Do our questions allow for diverse perspectives and encourage open dialogue?

Group presentation (7% group presentation grade, including discussion questions + 3% individual contribution grade)

Your group's second assignment requires a unified and dynamic 10-minute presentation at the beginning of class to introduce the assigned readings and share collective reactions.

- Create a presentation that deepens the group's understanding of the material and sparks thoughtful discussion. The presentation should not be a format for individual section summaries.
- Explore creative avenues, such as elucidating main arguments, connecting theoretical provocations with historical or contemporary political issues, or intertwining the assigned readings with everyday experiences. While multi-media and multi-genre presentations that stimulate engaging discussions are encouraged, they remain optional. Feel free to draw on your weekly reflections for these presentations, infusing them with your unique perspectives.
- Maintain a conversational style throughout the presentation, avoiding a segmented approach where each student summarizes one section. Instead, focus on presenting as a cohesive unit, enhancing the collective understanding of the readings. It's crucial to avoid reading directly from notes or delivering scripted presentations. Approach the task as if you were sharing insights with a friend. This conversational style promotes engagement and ensures a group presentation that integrates the readings seamlessly.
- As part of the preparation process, schedule a meeting at least two days in advance to coordinate the structure and content of the presentation.

Grading criteria: 1) Content: Do we demonstrate a thorough understanding of the topic? Is our content well-researched, relevant, and organized logically? 2) Delivery: Do we engage our audience with a confident and dynamic delivery? Do we use clear language? 3) Time Management: Do we stay within the allotted time, demonstrating effective time management? 4) Overall Impression: Do we leave a lasting and positive impression? Is our presentation memorable and impactful?

Group work peer review form (1%, graded credit/ no credit): Within 48 hours of having delivered your group presentation, you must fill out a group peer review form. This self-grading system will influence the

individual contribution grade (3%). Your participation in this review is crucial for a fair assessment of everyone's performance.

Group presentation peer review form (1%, graded credit/ no credit): Once during the term you will sign up to peer review all the group presentations delivered that day. This peer review will influence, although not determine, the group presentation grade.

Class notes (1%, graded credit/ no credit): You will sign up to post class notes for one week of the term where you are not presenting. These notes can be your raw notes from class; they don't need to follow any specific style and should not require much additional work. However, try to avoid writing them in a verbatim fashion. Instead of writing down everything everyone says as you hear it, capture the key ideas from our discussions. This record of our conversations will be valuable for students who need to miss class. If you take notes by hand, you can upload your hand-written notes as image files to Quercus.

Weekly reflections (10%):

The day before our class and by 11:59pm ET, you will submit a weekly reflection (200-300 words, starting week 2 and ending week 12) that focuses on one of the week's readings. These reflections will help you prepare for our class discussion and assignments. Unless otherwise specified, the reflection will consist of two parts: 1) *A brief description of the main argument or key idea* of the reading (1-2 sentences, this should not exceed 1/4th of the paragraph) and a 2) *A reflection* that connects the main argument to your own thoughts about it, supporting it with observations or personal experiences. Here are some open-ended questions that you can respond to in the reflection part: How does the main argument connect to your everyday life, to world events, or to other readings/films/and ideas covered in the course? What is provocative or lacking in the author's analysis and why is this significant? In what ways does the reading challenge prior conceptions you had or teach you something new? What remains unclear in the reading and why?

The learning paragraphs will not receive written feedback, but we encourage you to discuss them with your instructor. Please do not quote author's exact words in the text but express key ideas in your own words. If you use outside references cite them whenever possible and use any citation format you are familiar with (references are excluded from the word count). There is no need to cite course materials.

Half of your weekly entries can also take any creative format that reflects the amount of work you would devote to writing a 200-300-word reflection: a poem, a song, a work of art, an audio response, a video, an interview. If you submit a non-textual assignment (such as artwork that is not self-explanatory; in other words, an assignment that does not lend itself to a straightforward interpretation or needs further explanation for it to make sense to the observer/reader) please include a short caption describing the work, including any outside references you draw on. You can do so as an attachment or under the assignment comments section.

Midterm exam: 35%

This in-class hand-written test will involve a combination of short questions (e.g., multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank), in addition to some short answer questions, and one short essay. Study

guides will not be provided, and your assessment will be based on your comprehension of the required course materials.

Final take-home assignment: 35%

You will write an auto-ethnographic essay on a topic that relates to course materials. More details will be provided.

Course policies

Personal Accessibility Needs

All students are welcome in the course and should provide reasonable prior notice to facilitate any needed disability accommodation. To arrange accommodations, contact the Accessibility Services staff: Phone: 416-978-8060; E-mail: accessibility.services@utoronto.ca.

Communication policy

Official communication for this course will take place through Quercus. Please note that emails will not receive replies. Given the high volume of daily messages, we encourage you to ask questions during class or seek clarification before or after our classroom sessions for a faster reply. Regularly check Quercus for important course updates.

For course-related inquiries, follow these steps:

- First, check the syllabus or Quercus for answers, as many assignment details are outlined under specific instructions.
- Second, contact your course buddy (we will set up a buddy system so you can contact each other about coursework!)
- Thirds, message Prof. Méndez via Quercus (skip step 4 if the question pertains to the lecture or quizzes)

Messages received within 24 hours of an assignment deadline may not be answered in time. Questions that are answered in the course syllabus or on Quercus and queries about missed class content will not receive responses.

When messaging about the course, include the course number and a brief description of your query in the subject line. We aim to respond within 4 business days, Monday-Friday (8:00 am-5:00 pm). Plan accordingly for urgent matters and maintain professional communication, using appropriate salutations. In general, address individuals with the title "Professor" followed by their last name. You can address me as Professor Méndez. My pronouns are she/her/hers

Assignments

Submission: All assignments must be submitted on Quercus unless stated otherwise. It is your responsibility to keep a backup hard copy in case of loss. Students must ensure that their assignments are correctly uploaded. Assignments not appearing or unable to be opened will receive a grade of zero.

Late penalty: Assignments will receive a late penalty of 2%/day, including weekends, and will only be accepted within 7 days of when they were due. Moreover, feedback on late assignments is not guaranteed.

Grade appeals: If you believe that the TA has given you an unfair grade, you may email the TA who graded the assignment and request a re-evaluation. Students must 1) submit the original work and attach 2) a written explanation identifying in detail why they believe there is a substantive error in grading. Grading appeals must be submitted after 48 hours and within 72 hours of receiving the graded assignment (It is your responsibility to regularly check Quercus to find out when your grade has been posted). If the student is not satisfied with this re-evaluation, the student may then appeal to the course instructor (i.e., me) by submitting (1) the written reasons as to why they believe the work was unfairly/incorrectly marked, and (2) communications from the original marker as to why no change in mark was made. This must be done within 48 hours of receiving the TA's re-evaluation. Please note that a re-evaluation doesn't guarantee a change in your grade; it can result in the same or lower grade. Continuing with the remark or the appeal means the student accepts this condition. Appeals that do not follow the procedure outlined above will not be considered.

Final grades: Final grades for the course are considered final and will not be subject to negotiation or alteration after they have been submitted. Please refrain from contacting the instructor to request additional points or grade adjustments. The grading process is conducted thoroughly and fairly, adhering to the criteria outlined in the course syllabus.

Missed Academic Obligations

Extensions, make-ups, and incompletes: These will not be granted unless you meet one of the University's identified exceptions. If you are absent for legitimate reasons report your absence through the online absence declaration form available on ACORN and contact your tutorial section TA to arrange an accommodation. In your message, please include the reason for your request and a proposal for a new deadline. Extensions requests (for all assignments except quizzes and in-class midterm) made 48 hours prior to the deadline will be granted automatically. Any other requests will be considered at the discretion of the TA.

Legitimate reasons for temporary absences include illness, injury, and other unplanned circumstances beyond a student's control (such as court subpoena, funeral, car accident). Reasons such as holidays, pre-purchased plane tickets, family plans, lack of test/assignment preparation, conflicting deadlines, late course registration, technology failure, and traffic- or weather-related incidents are not considered to be beyond a student's control. Please note that accommodations due to late registration into the course will not be approved.

Missed Tests: Students who do not attend a scheduled term test will be assigned a grade of zero unless they are granted special consideration. In cases where the absence is due to university-excused reasons, all students will have the opportunity to take the makeup test on the same day, ideally scheduled seven days after the originally scheduled in-person midterm. Students who miss a test must present one of the following documents to the instructor for consideration of special accommodation: Absence declaration via ACORN; U of T Verification of Illness or Injury Form; College Registrar's letter; or Letter of Academic Accommodation from Accessibility Services. These documents must be provided to the instructor within 72 hours of missing the test.

Absence due to illness: If you become ill and it affects your ability to do your academic work, consult a TA right away. Normally, they will ask you for documentation in support of your specific medical circumstances. This documentation can be an Absence Declaration (via ACORN) or the University's Verification of Student Illness or Injury (VOI) form. The VOI indicates the impact and severity of the illness, while protecting your privacy about the details of the nature of the illness. If you cannot submit a VOI due to limits on terms of use, you can submit a different form (like a letter from a doctor), as long as it is an original document, and it contains the same information as the VOI (including dates, academic impact, practitioner's signature, phone and registration number). For more information on the VOI, please see <http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca>. For information on Absence Declaration Tool for A&S students, please see <https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/absence>. If you get a concussion, break your hand, or suffer some other acute injury, you should register with Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Fostering a Positive Learning Environment

Effective learning can only occur in a positive classroom environment; therefore, we have a shared responsibility in ensuring that everyone in the class feels welcome to contribute. As your course instructor, I am committed to fostering a learning community that recognizes your inherent worth and dignity. This means that I will not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or hate speech.

Office Hours

This class will require you to digest and synthesize a broad range of materials, therefore I encourage you to attend TA and course instructor office hours early and often or contact us to set up an appointment. Here are some reasons why you might attend office hours:

- You need clarification on a concept, aspect of class discussion, or reading.
- You want to discuss course materials or topics further.
- You want to chat about a topic related to course materials.
- You have a question, concern, or comment about the course.
- You need to ask a question about an assignment that is specific to you.

Please note that to ensure fairness and consistency in the treatment of students in this course, detailed feedback on outlines or drafts will not be provided before submission.

Academic integrity

Plagiarism is a very serious academic offense punishable by the university. Examples of plagiarism include copying another's work without attribution, falsifying records, cheating on tests, and submitting your own previous work. For advice on how to avoid plagiarism see <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>). If you wish to opt out of the university's plagiarism detection tool, email your tutorial section TA no later than January 17, 2023.

Use of generative AI: The knowing use of generative artificial intelligence tools, including ChatGPT and other AI writing and coding assistants, for the completion of, or to support the completion of,

an examination, term test, assignment, or any other form of academic assessment, is prohibited and will be considered a form of cheating. Representing as one's own an idea, or expression of an idea, that was AI-generated may be considered an academic offense in this course.

Course support

If you are struggling in the course in personal or academic ways and/or need special accommodations, here are some helpful resources available to you:

- For mental health: <https://mentalhealth.utoronto.ca/>
- For writing: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres>
- For research: <https://onereach.library.utoronto.ca/research-help>
- For religious accommodations: <http://uoft.me/religiousaccommodation>
- For other support contact the Registrar's Office: <https://future.utoronto.ca/current-students/registrars/>

Course schedule

All course materials will be made available through Quercus under course modules. I recommend engaging with materials in the order in which they are listed. Always check Quercus since this schedule may be subject to substantial modification.

Week 1

January 10— Introduction: What is this course about? No readings

Week 2

January 17— Theorizing from the margins

Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*. Introduction.
bell hooks, *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Preface, and Chapters 1-3

Week 3

January 24—Intersectional praxis

Françoise Vergès, *A Decolonial Feminism*. Introduction and Chapters 1-2

Week 4

January 31— Capitalism and gender

Silvia Federici, *Patriarchy of the Wage: Notes on Marx, Gender, and Feminism*; Introduction and Chapters 1-3

Week 5

February 7— Coloniality and gender

María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System.”
Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*.
Chapter 4.

Week 6

February 14— Representation and difference

Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”
Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?”

Week 7

February 21— Reading week, no class

Week 8

February 28— In-class MIDTERM, no readings.

Week 9

March 6— Privilege and complicity

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “Ch’ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization”
Shaista Aziz Patel & Dia Da Costa. “‘We cannot write about complicity together’: Limits of Cross-Caste Collaborations in Western Academy”

Week 10

March 13— Care and caring

María Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception”
María José Méndez, “Acuerpar: The decolonial feminist call for embodied solidarity”

Week 11

March 20—Feminist power

Verónica Gago, *Feminist International: How to Change Everything*. Introduction, Chapters 1-4. (Focus on Introduction and 1 and 2)

Week 12

March 27— Feminist power

Verónica Gago, *Feminist International: How to Change Everything*. Chapters 5-8 (Focus on 5 and 6)

April 3—NO CLASS. Instructor at conference.