# APPROACHES TO WOMEN’S STUDIES I & II

## PROGRAMME

**AUTUMN TERM 2007 / SPRING TERM 2008**

**MONDAY MORNINGS 10.15 – 12.15**

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### SPRING TERM 2008: APPROACHES TO WOMEN’S STUDIES II

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The aim of this pair of modules is to provide a context and foundation for other more specialised work in Women's Studies as well as a space for thinking about general problems of method and theory in this field. They will offer an opportunity to deal with concepts and disciplines different from those with which you are already familiar, to make connections between insights/information from several 'conventional' disciplines, and to discuss ideas and approaches which can help us describe and understand women's experience. We will be using history, fiction and cultural practices as well as sociological studies and philosophical ideas to help us to think through the shape, content and direction of Women's Studies. We also want you to think outside the Western context in which we are working and in which most of the feminist theory we are discussing originated. We therefore include material from two other regions of the world which are also very different from each other: East Asia and the Middle East, as well as considering the legacy of British imperialism.

Approaches to Women's Studies is organized in the form of 5 blocks: Changing the Subject; Gender, Class and Race in Britain and the British Empire in the 19th and 20th Centuries; The Politics of Feminist Theory; Working Women and the State and Approaches to Culture: Subjects, Theories, Texts.

We start the year with Changing the Subject. This explores the meaning of 'woman' from a number of perspectives, starting from the key concepts of 'woman' and 'gender' and then moving on to consider differences among women, particularly 'race', age and class.

Gender, Class and Race in Britain and the British Empire in the 19th and 20th Centuries will consider how the inclusion of gender issues has caused some of the most important areas of study in modern British and British imperial history to be reinterpreted and expanded in recent years. It will introduce students to central topics in gender history, such as ideas about the 'public' and the 'private' spheres; constructions of femininity and masculinity; and class identity, work and respectability.

Working Women and the State compares the economic position of women in the Middle East and Britain in both the wider economy and the family/household, looking out from the Middle East to Britain and problematising Western norms. It also considers the role of material and ideological factors in constraining or empowering women, intervention or inaction and questions of citizenship.

The Politics of Feminist Theory will explore the development of feminist theory from its political roots in feminist activism to its increasing incorporation into the academy. In the process we will discuss the ways in which feminists have engaged with other forms of theory, the shifts which have occurred in modes of feminist theorising and the extent to which theory retains its political relevance.

Approaches to Culture investigates women as consumers, bearers, and producers of contemporary and past cultures. As such it explores the imbrication of the cultural in the social. As well as drawing attention to significant bodies of theory and critique, the sessions will emphasise the interdisciplinary nature of cultural work, the importance of historical moment and cultural specificity alongside a recognition of the effects of globalisation, and the political and intellectual usefulness of examining the 'ordinary'.

This booklet contains detailed reading lists and pre-session exercises, where appropriate. The reading lists are designed to guide your seminar preparation: sometimes the lists have been divided up into manageable units. If you are planning an essay, you should read outside these small units.

IMPORTANT: detailed information regarding student input to each session will be given in the seminar in the preceding week. If you miss those instructions you must ensure you contact the appropriate lecturer so that you can participate fully in the session.

NB: In the entries for the recommended reading the first name is the family name of the author, titles of books and periodicals are in italics, and the volume number and issue number of articles in periodicals are given. You will find books in the Library catalogue under the family name of the author or first editor (often the other editors' names are not catalogued). Articles in periodicals and in edited books are not normally catalogued under the name of their author— to find those you have to look at the book or the periodical volume. The exception to this rule is the case of photocopies of an article from a periodical or book – those are catalogued under the writer's name. Where there is a photocopy of something — either as an additional copy or because the Library does not have the original book or periodical – the entry will include (Also photocopy or photocopy only). Most printed periodicals are also available in the A-Z list of electronic journals but note that in some cases only recent issues of these are online – so don’t forget to scroll down the holdings list in the catalogue entry to find out where the print version is located.
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Weeks 2-7  CHANGING THE SUBJECT

This section will start by destabilising the idea of ‘woman’, before moving on to the central, and much contested, concept of gender. We then go on to consider some of differences and divisions that cut across gender and that alert us to the diversity of women’s lives: race/ethnicity, age and class.

Week 2  What is a woman?
Ann Kaloski-Naylor

This session is concerned with the ways in which ‘woman’ has been constructed in feminist writing of the 20th century and its implications of this for feminist practice/s. We will consider feminist critiques of ‘woman’ as a self-evident category of identity, and discuss how and why different feminist theorists have challenged and/or re-worked that concept.

You should read at least the key texts indicated below and come prepared to discuss these.

Questions:
• Why is ‘woman’ a contested concept?
• How do feminists construct the conventional or hegemonic notion of ‘woman’?
• How have feminists challenged the concept of ‘woman’?
• What are the implications of those challenges for feminist practice/s?

Reading
Moi, Toril. ‘What is a woman?’, in What is a Woman? And Other Essays. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 3-120. KT

Other reading
Frye, Marilyn. ‘Willful virgin or Do you have to be a lesbian to be a feminist?’ in Willful Virgin. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1992. 124-137. (Photocopy in CWS)

Week 3  Narratives of Gender
Ann Kaloski-Naylor

Gender is one of the terms many of us take for granted in discussing women today: it is part of the equipment we have for questioning the ‘natural’ subordination and inferiority of women. But what do we mean when we use it? Why is it useful? What kinds of distinctions are we invoking when we use it, and are they valid?

The seminar will begin by asking what each of us understands by the term. Does it have a particular resonance or meaning for us depending on our disciplinary background (if any)? Does it mean something different for a historian, a sociologist, an anthropologist, a philosopher, a linguist? If we are familiar with languages other than English, does ‘gender’ have a close equivalent in those languages? Is the term more or less useful depending on cultural or political perspective? How is ‘gender’ different from ‘sex’ or ‘sexuality’ or ‘sexual difference’?

In the second part of the seminar we will look at a particular instance of ‘gender trouble’: Jackie Kay’s Trumpet (1968) KT. Do any of the theories or definitions of gender we have looked at help us to understand Kay’s project in Trumpet? Do they ‘work’? If not, why not?
Tasks for the Seminar

1. Everyone should come to the seminar with a provisional definition of gender, based either on your common-sense understanding of how it is used in feminist parlance, or on your disciplinary training, or on your reading from the introductory list.

2. Everyone should read *Trumpet* and be prepared to make some connections or comparisons between the theories of gender you have looked at and Kay's representation of her hero.

3. We would like all of you to read at least one of the suggested introductory overviews. You should also read, either for this week or next week, the two founding statements.

Founding Statements:


Introductory overviews


Some further reading that addresses issues raise in *Trumpet*


or check out <http:www.dianemiddlebrook.com/bt.html>

Week 4  

**Conceptualising Gender**  

Stevi Jackson

This session will follow on from the previous one, examining some key conceptualisations of gender.

**Discussion will follow from readings of:**


You must read all of the above and come prepared to discuss the similarities and differences between these approaches.

- Why has the distinction between sex and gender come under attack from feminists?
- How does each of these authors challenge the distinction?
- What are the theoretical assumptions underpinning each of these accounts?
- What are the implications of these debates for the definition of 'women' and 'femininity'?
Some challenges/alternatives to the concept of gender:


Further reading:


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**Week 5**

**Age and Generation**

Haleh Afshar

This session is concerned with what it means to be a woman (and associated notions of identity, femininity, sexuality etc) and how this might alter with age and position in the life-cycle. What are the major changes in women’s views of themselves and how others see them? How are these mediated by other factors, for example class and ethnicity? For Britain, research has shown that: social, political and economic inequalities, as they relate to gender, appear to become magnified in association with age; there is now an increasing likelihood of widowhood; that higher proportions of elderly women than of men live alone; and that more older women than men live in or near a state of poverty. Why is this?
Questions:

1. What are the most significant factors affecting older women as a group in Britain today?
2. Which explanations are most useful in explaining older women's particular subordination?
3. Why, despite growing public and academic concern about ageing, are older women still virtually invisible in positions of power in the media?


Afshar, H. ‘Education: Hopes, expectations and achievements of Muslim women in West Yorkshire.’
Gender and Education 1/3 (1989): 261-272. (Also photocopy)


The aim of this session is to explore the meaning of the concept 'woman' within the context of race divisions and racism. Movements which have challenged imperialism and racism have been gender blind, while in both the nineteenth century and the late twentieth century feminist movements have generated forms of theory and practice which black women have criticized as being racist. In this seminar we hope to examine the ways in which the experience of racism alters the oppression to which black women are subjected. We also intend to consider the challenge that Women's Studies is racist and discuss what needs to be done to change this.

1. What, if anything, are ‘race’ and ethnicity?

Afshar, H. 'Values real and imaginary and their ascription to women: some remarks about growing up with conflicting views of self and society amongst Muslim families in West Yorkshire' in Afshar, H and Maynard, M. (eds), The Dynamics of Race and Gender in Britain. London: Taylor and Francis, 1994. KT


Ramazanoğlu, C. Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression. London: Routledge, 1989. Ch. 6 KT


2. What do we mean by ‘difference’?


3. What are the consequences for feminism and for Women's Studies of taking 'Race' and Racism seriously?


Week 7 Bringing Class Back In

Stevi Jackson

Earlier feminist interventions to debates on class were concerned with remedying the male bias in class analysis, redefining class categories to take account of gender and locating women within the class structure. More recently, however, attention has focused on cultural and subjective aspects of class, with how classed identities intersect with gender, but with some renewed attention to the wider socio-cultural intersections between class, ethnicity and gender. Most of this work is British and hence this session with focus specifically on what class means in a British context, shaped by a particular history. However, interventions on class in other countries are welcome. You should also consider how class intersects not only with gender but with other differences among women (e.g. race and ethnicity; sexuality; age).

Some questions for discussion:

- How does class, in conjunction with gender age, sexuality and ethnicity, shape women’s lives?
- How does class figure in the way women are perceived by others and in their constructions of self?
- Why have feminists adopted Bourdieu’s concepts of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital in addressing these questions? How useful are these concepts?
• Is there still a need for a social structural analysis of class inequality among women as well as cultural analysis of the meanings of class?
• Why might we need an historical analysis to understand the particular configurations of class, gender and ethnicity in contemporary Britain?

Introductory background reading:


For those with little or no prior knowledge of developments in class analysis this provides an excellent accessible overview.

Recent feminist work on class:


Some other relevant discussions:


For examples and discussions of the older tradition of feminist work on gender and the class structure see:


Plus a recent contribution from Japan:
These two sessions will consider how the inclusion of gender issues has caused some of the most important areas of study in modern British and British imperial history to be reinterpreted and expanded in recent years. It will introduce students to central topics in gender history, such as ideas about the 'public' and the 'private' spheres; constructions of femininity and masculinity; and class identity, work and respectability. Furthermore, it will examine the contributions of gender historians to broadening the history of modern Britain to encompass not only ethnic minorities within Britain but also to exploring how the nation's status as an imperial power did much to shape the gender and class identities of Britons both at home and overseas. Although the emphasis in this module is on work done by historians, attention is also given to how gender history has benefited from approaches prevalent in other academic disciplines.

For those of you interested in the background on gender in history and British women's history you may want to look at the following:


For those who are really interested here is some additional reading:

Bock, Gisela (1989) 'Women's History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate,' *Gender and History* 1. (Also photocopy)


*Gender and History* 11/3 (November 1999), special issue: 'Gender and History -- Retrospect and Prospect'.

Hall, Catherine (1992) 'Feminism and Feminist History', in her *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*. London: Routledge. 1-40.


Riley, Denise (1988) 'Does Sex Have a History?', in her *Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History*. Basingstoke: Macmillan. 1-17.


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### Week 8

**Gender and Class Formations in Britain**

Louise Wannell

This seminar focuses on the nineteenth century and considers the formation of working- and middle-class gender identities, conceptions of 'separate spheres', and how ideas of female and male respectability and proper gender roles influenced political movements and franchise reform, the meanings attributed to paid and unpaid work, and domestic ideals and practices in ways that differed according to class. The two primary texts discussed this week examine (amongst other things) representations of women's paid employment and domestic roles as they differed according to social background, contrasting the depiction of Charlotte Brontë's fictional governess Jane Eyre with the diary of the Victorian maidservant Hannah Cullwick.

**Themes for Discussion:**

1) To what degree did the idea of 'separate spheres' accurately describe men's and women's lives in nineteenth-century Britain?

2) Why was women's paid work considered a threat to 'respectability' in nineteenth-century Britain? Discuss with reference to working-class, and middle-class, men and women

**Please read the following:**

Stanley, Liz, ed. (1984) *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick*. London: Virago. **KT** (Please read the introduction and sample some of the writings, there is no need to read all of the diaries.)

**Secondary Readings:**


Rendall, Jane (1999) 'Women and the Public Sphere', *Gender and History* 11/3 (November): 475-88. (Also photocopy)


**Week 9**

**British Femininity, Masculinity, and the Empire**

Louise Wannell

Many scholars studying the British empire have made significant contributions to gender history in recent years. Alongside the vast number of works focusing on colonized women and men have appeared studies of how the empire was central to domestic British culture and influenced the gender identities of Britons both at home and in the colonies. Moreover, British conceptions of femininity and masculinity - both their own and those of the peoples they governed in the empire - informed colonial policy-making and ideologies of rule. This week's readings thus examine the effects of empire on Britons both at home and overseas, emphasizing how British gender ideologies influenced the colonized as well as informed
how Britons defined themselves in 'racial' and national terms. The ways in which imperialism was long part of everyday life and common cultural understandings within Britain is suggested in Jane Eyre, which will be re-examined this week with specific reference to the novel's colonial underpinnings. Brontë's novel will be read alongside Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea, which gives voice to Mrs Rochester and further explores the colonial dynamics of Jane Eyre.

Primary Reading:

Charlotte Brontë. Jane Eyre (1847) Variously rpt. KT

Themes for Discussion:

1) How did gender and racial stereotypes of colonized societies interact to influence British colonial policymaking?

2) Evaluate 'white' British women's roles in influencing colonial ideologies and policymaking in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

3) In what ways was the British empire evident in British culture at home in the nineteenth century, and to what degree were these imperial manifestations gender-specific?

Further Readings:

Grewal, Inderpal Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel (1996).
Hall, Catherine (1992) 'Missionary Stories: Gender and Ethnicity in England in the 1830s and 1840s', and 'Competing Masculinities: Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill and the Case of Governor Eyre', in her White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History. London: Routledge.
Nair, Janaki (1990) 'Uncovering the Zenana: Visions of Indian Womanhood in Englishwomen's Writings', Journal of Women's History 2/1 (Spring): 8-34.
Paxton, Nancy L. (1992) 'Mobilizing Chivalry: Rape in British Novels about the Indian Uprising of 1857', Victorian Studies 36/1 (Fall): 5-30. (Also photocopy)
Sharpe, Jenny (1993) Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press.
Tosh, John (1995) 'Imperial Masculinity and the Flight from Domesticity in Britain, 1880-1914', in Timothy
Week 10 Race and Ethnicity in Britain, Louise Wannell

This seminar situates the immigration of Asians, Africans, and Afro-Caribbeans into Britain since the Second World War within a broader historical context to consider not only the earlier presence of non-Europeans (largely from the empire), but also other groups in Britain defined as ethnic or 'racial' minorities, such as the Irish and many continental Europeans. These readings illuminate how 'racial' categories and their meanings shift over time, and highlight the centrality of gender to the construction of 'racial' identities and 'Britishness'. Alongside examining the specific history and experiences of minority women in Britain (using Beryl Gilroy’s autobiography Black Teacher in conjunction with academic scholarship) and expanding upon last week's discussion of 'whiteness', many of this week's texts consider 'mixed-race' sexual relationships and individuals and how they have been represented culturally.

Themes for Discussion:

1) To what extent did ethnic minority women in modern Britain share experiences in common, and to what extent did they diverge?

2) Discuss some of the ways that 'mixed-race' relationships have been publicly discussed in modern British society.

3) What can the analysis of personal testimonies contribute to the historiography on gender and ethnicity in modern Britain?

Primary Sources:

Gilroy, Beryl Black Teacher (1976) KT

Secondary Readings:

Alexander, Ziggi 'Let it Lie Upon the Table: The Status of Black Women's Biography in the UK', Gender and History 2/1 (Spring 1990): 22-33. (Also photocopy)
Afshar, Haleh and Mary Maynard, eds. The Dynamics of 'Race' and Gender: Some Feminist Interventions. London: Taylor and Francis, 1994. See esp. introduction; ch. 1, Mary Maynard, "Race", Gender and the Concept of "Difference" in Feminist Thought; ch. 7, Haleh Afshar, 'Muslim Women in West Yorkshire'.


Rose, Sonya O. 'Girls and GIs: Race, sex, and diplomacy in Second World War Britain', International History Review 19/1 (February 1997): 146-60. Photocopy only; and 'Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in World War II Britain', American Historical Review 103/4 (October 1998): 1147-76. (Also photocopy)


SPRING TERM 2008

Weeks 2-4 WORKING WOMEN AND THE STATE

This block concentrates on: the work that women undertake in the wider economy and polity as well as in the family/household; the role of material and ideological factors in constraining or empowering women; and the effects on women of state intervention or inaction. The intention is for us to compare the situation for women in the Middle East and in Britain. However, we want to do this looking out from the Middle East to Britain, rather than the other way round, as is usually the case. In other words we wish to take Middle Eastern women's experiences as the norm to which those of British women will be compared and rendered problematic. In addition to offering students an understanding of the nature of women's work and the role the state plays in their lives, this module also provides the opportunity to reflect on the dangers of 'otherising' inherent in comparative work, to consider the methodological difficulties of interpretation which this involves and the implications of both for Women's Studies.

In preparation for the module please read one of the following:


Week 2 Women's Labour in the Household

Haleh Afshar

This session looks at what constitutes a family/household in the Middle East and in Britain. What work do women undertake in the household, what is the nature of the sexual division of labour, and what are the implications of both of these for how women are perceived more generally? Activities such as childcare, domestic, reproductive and emotional work will be considered.

1. What constitutes household work for women in the two societies?
2. What is the nature of the sexual division of labour and what are the similarities/differences between the two societies? How might these be explained?
3. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of kinship ties and obligations.

Week 3 Women and Paid Employment

Haleh Afshar

This session looks at the trends in women's paid employment in the Middle East and Britain. In addition to considering the form that this has taken in the recent past, attention will be paid to contemporary factors encouraging or facilitating this eg. religious fundamentalism, global and local economic and political factors, demographic profiles etc.

1. To what extent is women's position in employment influenced by their domestic situation or by the structure of the economy?

2. How far do British women's working lives differ when compared to those of the Middle East?

3. Is the conventional definition of 'labour' adequate?


Catalyst ‘The bottom line, connecting corporate performance and gender diversity’.

Sanghera, B. 'Microbusiness, household and class dynamics: the embedding of minority ethnic petty commerce', Sociological Review 50/2 (2002).

**Week 4 Citizenship and the State Haleh Afshar**

Still focusing on the Middle East and Britain, this seminar considers the definition of citizenship and the role of the state in facilitating women's active participation as equal citizens in society and the extent to which the state's activities and assumptions prevent this.
1. What problems might exist for women in terms of the operation of the state? How might these be overcome?

2. Is there a tension in women seeking rights and protection from the state, when it might be argued that it constitutes a legitimating source of anti-woman ideas?

3. What are the implications of stated and unstated ideologies in shaping women's political lives?


Weeks 5-7  THE POLITICS OF FEMINIST THEORY

These three sessions will explore the development of feminist theory from its political roots in feminist activism to its increasing incorporation into the academy. In the process we will discuss the ways in which feminists have engaged with other forms of theory, the shifts which have occurred in modes of feminist theorising and the extent to which theory retains its political relevance. The first session looks back at explanations of women’s oppression generated by feminists in the 1970s and early 1980s, at some of the criticisms that were levelled at this work, particularly claims that it offered universalistic theories which failed to take account of differences among women. We then move on to discuss the so-called ‘cultural turn’ in feminism, the move away from social structural explanations towards an emphasis on language, the symbolic and subjectivity and the rise of poststructuralist and postmodernist theorizing. In so doing we will explore the differing stories that have been told about these theoretical developments and the political interests at stake in competing representations of feminism’s theoretical history. In the final session we will move on to consider feminist engagements with theorists of late/reflexive modernity and consequent attempts to theorise the gendered consequences of global social change.

Week 5  Confronting women’s subordination: debates on patriarchy and capitalism
Stevi Jackson

This session will consider how feminist theory developed, in the 1970s and early 1980s, from the concerns of feminist politics and through engagement with Marxism and the political Left. Looking back on this early work we will consider critiques of it and begin to raise questions about the directions feminist theory has since taken.

Please reflect on the following:

- What do you understand by the term ‘theory’ and what is its relevance to feminist politics?
- In what ways were Western feminist theories of the 1970s and 1980s a product of their specific historical/cultural location?
- What were they intended to explain and how successful were they?
- Do the concepts of patriarchy and capitalism retain any relevance today?

Introductory overviews:


Some key texts from the 1970s and 80s:


Later contributions, commentaries and reflections:

Week 6

Contesting the meaning of the ‘cultural turn’
Stevi Jackson

This session will focus on debates around feminism, poststructuralism and postmodernism. It will take as its starting point the idea of the ‘cultural turn’ in feminist theory. We will consider how the story of the cultural turn has been told by Barrett and others, as well as competing claims about what has been gained lost by the turn to culture and the rise of poststructuralism and postmodernism. We will explore the tension between the material and cultural in feminist theorizing and how this relates to basic questions of social justice and (in)equality. Initial discussion will focus on the articles by Barrett, Flax, Hemmings and Jackson (essential reading).

Introductory reading (for orientation only):


Essential reading:

Please read as many of the these as you can and at least two of them

Jackson, S. 'Why a materialist feminism is still possible – and necessary', Women’s Studies International Forum 24/2-3 (2001).

Questions for discussion:

- How has the story of the cultural turn and the rise of postmodern theorizing been told by feminists writing from different perspectives?
- How has the tension between the material and the cultural been represented in these accounts?
- What political claims are at stake in these competing versions of theoretical shifts?
- Is postmodern theorizing a mystificatory, elite practice, or is it essential if we are to avoid universalising theory that excludes many women?
- Is postmodernism the best way of theorising the complexity of differences among women or are there alternatives?
- How, after postmodernism, can we deal with questions of social (in)justice
Further Reading:

Fraser, N. ‘Rethinking recognition’, New Left Review 228 (2000).
Hekman, S. J. Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism (1992)

Week 7 Theorising late modern social change: East and West
Stevi Jackson

The late 20th and early 21st centuries have been characterised as both post-modern and late modern, as a new era of reflexive modernity. These characterisations have in common an emphasis on increased individualisation and personal uncertainty consequent on rapid social and cultural change, the dislocation of traditional social relations and increased social fluidity. Living in such times of flux is said to have engendered new forms of reflexive self-hood and new forms of gendered, sexual and familial relationships. Feminists have begun to engage critically with theorists of late/reflexive modernity such as Beck and Giddens. In this session we will consider the gendered implications of these accounts and whether they have any relevance beyond the Western contexts in which they were produced. Here we will focus on East Asia.

Questions for discussion:

- Do such concepts as individualization, detraditionalisation and the reflexive project of the self have gendered significance?
- How valid are such concepts in the West and the East?
- Is there a peculiarly late modern form of reflexive selfhood? If so, is it specifically Western?
- Are we witnessing a global ‘end of patriarchalism’?
- What new forms of gendered practices and relations might be associated with late modernity?
- How do they vary in different cultures?
- How far is there a late modern transformation in sexual and family relationships?
- Does modernisation in the East inevitably mean Westernisation or are there ‘other modernities’?
Introductory reading


Some influential texts in the ‘modernity’ debates:


Critical and Feminist Interventions


Some East Asian Sources:


* note, re Hayami et al. – the authors’ names are the Japanese way round – family name first – the library has mis-catalogued this by personal names.

NB. Those of you from East Asia may well be able to find Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese and Korean sources engaging with Western theories of modernity. Please feel free to bring ideas from these to the session.
Weeks 8-10  APPROACHES TO CULTURE

Culture may be described as a set of signifying practices through which, inter alia, masculinity and femininity are articulated. In the following three sessions we shall engage with the ways in which women as consumers of culture, as bearers of cultural norms, and as producers of cultural objects are constructed and construct themselves in contemporary culture. As well as drawing attention to significant bodies of feminist theory and critique, these sessions will emphasize the interdisciplinary valences of the cultural, the importance of historical moment and cultural location, and the imbrication of the cultural in the social.

Week 8  Women in/as Culture: Consuming Cultures
Gabriele Griffin

In this first session we shall explore the ways in which feminism and Women’s Studies have engaged with the issue of gendered cultures and the genderization of culture. We shall explore the construction of women in contemporary popular culture, and discuss how this construction has been theorized. For that purpose we shall look at contemporary women’s magazines. Therefore please bring a copy of a current women’s magazine of your choice to the session and be prepared to discuss its content.

The aims of the session are to investigate a) how issues of culture have been taken up by/within feminism in different ways at different times; b) to explore the meanings of the construction of women in contemporary culture through the example of contemporary women’s magazines; c) to understand the articulation of femininity in culture.

Compulsory Reading
Griffin, Gabriele (2006) ‘Gendered Cultures’, in K. Davis et al., Handbook of Gender and Women’s Studies. London: Sage. 73-91. (Available as a photocopy in the common room boxes.) This will provide you with a quick overview of how western feminism has engaged with culture over the last forty years or so.

A current women’s magazine of your choice.

Questions to think about:
To facilitate the discussion please makes notes and bring them to the session on the following:
 a) What are the key issues/topics/areas covered by the magazine?
 b) What notions of femininity emerge in the magazine?
 c) What issues that you consider important are not covered in the magazine?
 d) What assumptions does the magazine make about its readership?
 e) Does the magazine assume any particular cultural competences and are these/how are these culturally specific?
 f) If you are from a different country, how does this magazine differ from those in your own country?

Secondary Reading
There are also many articles on the impact of women's magazines on women's self-perception, behaviours, views of their bodies etc. available in journals such as *Sex Roles*. Additionally, you need to bear in mind that cultural forms such as women's magazines are not produced in isolation but circulate just like other popular genres, answering to similar gender logics.

**Week 9 Cultural Transmissions and Genealogies: Women as Bearers of Culture – Niki Carro’s *Whale Rider* (2002; film)**

Gabriele Griffin

In this session we shall consider how women are constructed as bearers of cultural inheritances through the example of the film *Whale Rider*, and how the transmission of culture and genealogies of transmission are articulated in a contemporary film by a woman film maker. (You may wish to look at other cultural products, of which there are a great many, that engage with the same issues, from films such as Gurinder Chadha’s *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) to novels such as Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Chitra Divakaruni’s *Mistress of Spices* (1997), or Jeanette Winterson’s *Lighthousekeeping* (2005). *Whale Rider* is available from the library (as a dvd) and we shall view it together. We shall agree the time when we do this in advance.

In the session we shall discuss how questions of cultural transmission and genealogy intersect with the status of particular social groups and what the implications of this are for feminist thinking about women as bearers of culture.

The aims of the session are to understand how genealogies and cultural transmission have been theorized by feminists, how they have been culturally constructed, and what the implications of this are for women.

**Compulsory Preparation**

You will need to view the film *Whale Rider* (we’ll do this together at an agreed time). You should also do some secondary reading on women and culture.

**Questions to think about:**

a) How are gender and cultural structures imbricated in the film?

b) How are intergenerational relations portrayed?

c) How do intergenerational relations and transmission of culture intersect in the film?

d) How is women’s and men’s relation to culture/s and its/their preservation constructed?

e) How do you see your role in the transmission of your own culture/s?

**Secondary Reading**


Barker, Francis et al., eds. (1994) *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*. Manchester: Manchester UP.


Week 10

Articulations of Identity in Culture: Women as Cultural Producers and The Case of Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti’s Behzti (Dishonour)

Gabriele Griffin

The issue of women’s articulation in culture has been at the heart of feminist engagement with culture and cultural practices, and questions first raised many centuries ago of how women can ‘speak’ (i.e. articulate themselves), in what forms and on what issues remain key to understanding women’s cultural positioning. In this session we shall look at the case of a short play, Behzti, by a British Asian woman playwright, and consider the ways in which that text produces women’s positioning within culture. We shall also address how the public and publicized reaction to this play (there were riots and it was closed down immediately on opening at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre) speaks to women’s positioning in culture and contemporary issues of censorship, inter-cultural and intra-cultural differences, and claims of cultural authority.

Compulsory Reading and Preparation:


Please search the internet, in particular newspapers site such as The Guardian, The Times, and The Telegraph but also BBC news for reports of the incidents surrounding Behzti.

Questions to help structure the class discussion:

a) What do you consider to be the controversial aspects of Behzti and why?
b) What do you think are the racial and the sexual politics of the play? How do they intersect? What do you make of them?
c) What are your views on censorship – should certain representations/views/images be censored in their circulation and why?
d) How does Behzti and the controversy around it relate to contemporary gender and race politics?

Secondary Reading: