

Professor Kathleen Moore

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Time: Wednesdays, 12-2:30 p.m.

RS 292 Special Topics Seminar
Feminist Sexual Politics and Religion
Spring 2012

Course Description:

The purpose of this seminar is to achieve some understanding of the origin of bias. Students should expect to come away with a clearer sense of what a feminist perspective in religious studies means. The approach is comparative. The course examines the following:

- The formulation, critique and impact of public policy on issues of gendered justice with specific emphasis on understanding the role of subjectivity in feminist sexual politics in the United States.
- The means used by feminist scholars to modify and challenge “western” religious traditions and expressions of sexuality that may objectify and subordinate.
- The rise of feminist theologies as a political movement of tremendous significance, and the question of whether traditional western religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) are “redeemable.”

Requirements:

1. Students must attend all class meetings and lead a seminar discussion on the assigned readings for the week (students will choose the week they wish to lead). Prior to the seminar discussion, the student leader will circulate (via email) questions and points for discussion based on the readings. Seminars to be led by students will be on April 11 – May 23. (20%)
2. Students will write a short (250-500 words) weekly response to the readings. (20%)

3. Students will write a term paper of 25 pages in length that will discuss a feminist analysis of religion influenced by gender studies. The subject will be selected by the student in consultation with Professor Moore. Short research presentations will be made in class May 30th, June 6th and, if needed, June 13th. Papers are due on June 15. Instructions about citations and how to upload papers on Gauchospace will be provided during the quarter. (60%)

Term papers must include material from at least four of the following types of sources:

1. scholarly journals (see suggestions below in schedule, April 4th)
2. scholarly book-length treatments (secondary source) of feminism and/or religion
3. textual primary sources or original materials, e.g., scriptural texts, sayings or traditions attributed to a spiritual leader, official documents, letters, diaries, memoirs, transcripts, court records, art, artifacts, manuscripts or anything else *archival* that provides a first-hand account about a person, event, belief, etc. This is meant to include anything material that provides a first-hand account or direct experience.
4. data obtained through your own fieldwork, e.g., an ethnography or public opinion data
5. documentary films and photographic images
6. myth and legend

Required Texts (on reserve in Davidson Library):

Ahmed, Leila, (2011), *A Quiet Revolution: The veil's resurgence from the Middle East to America*. New Haven: Yale University Press. ISBN: 9780300170955

Ali, Kacia, (2006), *Sexual Ethics and Islam: reflections on Qur'an, hadith, and jurisprudence*. Oneworld.

Brooten, Bernadette, (2010), *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming its Religious and Sexual Legacies*. Palgrave Macmillan ISBN: 978-0-230-10017-6

Feldman, Jan, (2011), *Citizenship, Faith and Feminism: Jewish and Muslim Women Reclaim Their Rights*. Brandeis University Press.

Kruks, Sonia, (2001), *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*. Cornell University Press. University Press ISBN 0-8014-8417-0

Scott, Joan Wallach (2011), *The Fantasy of Feminist History*. Duke University Press, ISBN 978-0-8223-5125-2

Plus selected articles indicated in schedule below and accessible at Gauchospace.

Schedule:

April 4th Introduction – “New” Feminist Activists

Objectives: to introduce the state of the field in women’s studies and theology with respect to feminisms and religion, and to provide an overview of theoretical approaches.

Assigned reading:

Syllabus

Recommended Journals:

- *Journal of the Feminist Study of Religion*
- *Hypatia: a Journal of Feminist Philosophy*
- *Gender, Place, and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*
- *Religion and Gender: the First Online Journal for the Systematic Study of Gender and Religion in an Interdisciplinary Perspective.*

Recommended Books:

Linda Martin Alcoff, *Feminism, Sexuality, and the Return of Religion*. Indiana University Press, 2011.

Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (2000)

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of History*. Routledge, 1999.

Sandra Grey and Marian Sawyer, eds., *Women’s Movements: Flourishing or in Abeyance?* Routledge, 2008.

Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe*. Columbia University Press, 2009.

April 11th Feminist History

Objectives: To familiarize ourselves with western feminism’s history and to begin examining the relationship between secularism and gender equality, with its associated tensions with so-called “religious” texts, traditions, etc. We will begin to understand feminist critiques of traditional theism. What are feminist questions about religious texts, traditions, and practices?

Assigned reading:

Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*

Nancy Frankenberry, "Feminist Philosophy of Religion," in Winter 2011 edition of Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessible on Gauchospace.

April 18th The Gendering of Religions

Objectives: Examination of a variety of feminists studying religions and theology who brought tools of analysis to the study of religions in order to think about how these systems of belief were used to legitimate and shape the social body. We will question the interrelation of patriarchal imperatives with women's contributions to religious practices, reflecting aspects of what is called a feminist standpoint epistemology. We will get an overview of methods used by feminist scholars to reform or challenge Western "founded" religious traditions and expressions of sexuality that objectify or subordinate.

Assigned readings:

Christine Delphy (1996), "Rethinking Sex and Gender." In Diana Leonard and Lisa Atkins, eds., *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism*. London, Taylor & Francis: 30-41.

Kristin Ghodsee (2011), "Research, Collaboration, and Intelligence: When Governments Take an Interest in Feminist Ethnography." *Feminist Formations* vol. 23 no. 2: 164-189.

Helen Hardacre (1994), "Japanese New Religions: Profiles in Gender." In John Stratton Hawley, ed., *Fundamentalism and Gender*. New York: Oxford University Press: 111-133.

Mary Jo Neitz (2011), "Feminist Methodologies." In Michael Strausberg and Steven Engler, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*. Routledge: 54-67.

Rosemary Radford Ruether (1998), "Feminism, Future Hope, and the Crisis of Modernity." In *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, vol. 18: 69-73.

Ursula King (2004), "General Introduction: Gender – Critical Turns in the Study of Religion." In U. King and T. Beattie, eds., *Gender, Religion, and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. London: Continuum Publishing: 1-10.

Recommended readings:

Jose Cabazon, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*. SUNY Press, 1992.

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Transforming Vision: Explorations in Feminist The*logy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Publishers, 2011.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: a Theological History*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.

April 25th Postmodernism and Women's Experience

Objectives: To look at the concept of feminine embodiment and the "discursive" turn taken in western philosophy. This relates to the formulation, critique and impact of regulation/policy on gendered justice and the role of subjectivity in the evolution of feminist sexual politics.

Assigned Reading:

Sonia Kruks, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*

Deborah Whitehead, "Feminism, Religion and the Politics of History," Editorial in *Journal of the Feminist Study of Religion*, vol. 27 no. 2 (2011): 3-9, accessible at Gauchospace.

Jill Peterfeso, "From Testimony to Seximony, From Script to Scripture: Revealing Mormon Women's Sexuality through the Mormon Vagina Monologues. In *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 27, no. 2 (2012): 31-49.

May 2nd Religion, Slavery, and Sexuality

Objectives: To examine the past complicity of religions with the institution of legal slavery, and to familiarize ourselves with the scholarship on enslaved girls and women in the United States. Questions about productive and reproductive labor, sexual vulnerabilities, and religious beliefs and practices in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam will be raised.

Assigned reading:

Bernadette Brooten, ed. (2010), *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming its Religious and Sexual Legacies*.

May 9th Islam and Feminism: a Textual Approach

Objectives: To look at the changing patterns of women's claims and participation in textual interpretation. The term "feminist" has become pejorative in the Muslim world and the question here is why? The purpose of Islamic feminist scholarship has been to combine subjective and

objective insights about the relative position of women in society. Here we try to understand the breadth of Islamic feminist scholarship in the humanities, developing an epistemology of faith and feminism.

Assigned Reading:

Kecia Ali (2006), *Sexual Ethics and Islam: reflections on Qur'an, hadith, and jurisprudence*. Oneworld.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Toward Gender Equality: Muslim Family Laws and the Shari'ah." Accessible at Gauchospace.

Recommended:

Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. OneWorld, 2009.

Ingrid Mattson, *The Story of the Quran: its History and Place in Muslim Life*. Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

Judith Tucker, *Women, Family and Gender in Islamic Law*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

May 16th Islam, Feminism, and Diasporic Formulations

Objectives: To examine the return of religion and how patterns of religious/cultural/familial change and continuity have been shaped in the diaspora. The selection here is on Islam and diaspora but the lessons can be applied to other communities. Studies of transnational or diaspora communities at the turn of the millennium commonly found that migrants tend to be more religious after migration than they were before, perhaps because religion provides an island of continuity in the midst of a sea of change. How has this shaped the expression of women's religiosity?

Assigned readings:

Leila Ahmed (2011), *A Quiet Revolution: The veil's resurgence from the Middle East to America*.

Juliane Hammer. "Performing Gender Justice: the 2005 woman-led prayer in New York." *Contemporary Islam* (2010): 91-116

Jazmine Zine, "Creating a Critical Faith-Centered Space for Antiracist Feminism: Reflections of a Muslim Scholar-Activist." *Journal of Feminist Studies of Religion*, vol. 20 no. 2 (2004): 167-187. Accessible at Gauchospace.

Recommended reading:

Peggy Levitt, *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape*. New Press, 2007.

May 23rd Feminist Interventions: Reclaiming the Faith

Objectives: Questions regarding authority are central to late 20th century and 21st century approaches to hermeneutics – in this global age, who has the authority to translate and interpret religious texts? We will examine theoretical reflections upon principles of interpretation and the means of establishing credibility for individuals to assert their authority to understand religious texts for themselves (e.g., by evidence of competence, ability to formulate new ideas, etc.). Are Western “founded” religious traditions redeemable?

Assigned reading:

Jan Feldman (2011), *Citizenship, Faith and Feminism: Jewish and Muslim Women Reclaim Their Rights*.

Recommended reading:

Asma Barlas, “*Believing Women*” in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.

Helene Meyers, *Identity Papers: Contemporary Narratives of American Jewishness*. SUNY Press, 2011.

Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women’s Reform in Islam*. OneWorld, 2006.

May 30th Discussion of Student Research

June 6th Discussion of Student Research