

**GENDER, SEXUALITY AND LITERATURE:
GLOBAL INDIGENOUS FEMINISMS**

SEMESTER

PROFESSOR: ERIN CHESLOW

DAY AND TIME

LOCATION

OFFICE HOURS

OFFICE LOCATION

In 2014, Teresia Teaiwa (I-Kiribati), a Banaban scholar working in Aotearoa/New Zealand, wrote, “my experience of theory has mostly been one of valuing ideas, and in particular valuing the ability to identify connections and resonances and distinguish gaps and contradictions between models and proposals” (46). In approaching theory in such a way, she establishes an Indigenous and feminist mode of engagement in which we develop our own voices in relationship to those who came before us and those who work alongside us.

The intellectual genealogies we choose affect how we think and act in the world. The texts in this course carefully cite a long history of feminist and queer thought while refiguring it within radical and land-based frameworks that emphasize not only ideology but also action and activism. Although we will later consider a more canonical British feminist text of the nineteenth century (Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*), we will privilege Indigenous thinkers for the ways in which they base their ideas on webs of relationality that are not limited to individual rights or legal frameworks but instead imagine possibilities for change that are situated in relation to land and people (human and nonhuman).

In short, throughout this course, we will attempt to construct our own intellectual genealogy of feminist and queer thought toward an understanding not only of the history of gender and sexuality discourse but also its contemporary stakes in relation to anticolonial struggle and theory. In a series of units on Foundations, Home and Identity, Institutions and Resistance, Land and Relationality, and Decolonization and Indigenous Futurities, we will read theory alongside poetry, novels, and memoir from the Pacific and North America—works that theorize and enact possible ways of being and knowing. By the end of the class, you should be able to write in conversation with these diverse knowledge systems and engage with literacy as a complex framework for constantly questioning how we think and why.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

TEXTS

Billy-Ray Belcourt, *A History of My Brief Body* (Two-Dollar Radio: 978-1937512934)
Brenna Bhandar and Rafeef Ziadah, *Revolutionary Feminisms* (Verso: 978-1788737760)
Franny Choi et al. *We the Gathered Heat* (Haymarket: 979-8888900871)
Patricia Grace, *Dogside Story* (University of Hawai‘i Press: 978-0824825843)
Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, *Iep Jāltok* (University of Arizona Press: 978-0816534029)
Brianna Jonnie and Nahanni Shingoose Neal Shannacappo, *If I Go Missing* (Lorimer: 978-1459414518)

Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back* (SUNY Press, 978-14384882880)
annie ross, *Pots and Other Living Beings* (Talonbooks: 978-1772012361)
Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (Broadview: 978-1551112862)
Gina Starblanket, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (Fernwood: 978-1773635507)
Tanya Tagaq, *Split Tooth* (Penguin: 978-0143198055)

In addition to these texts, you will also need to purchase a **Composition Notebook** of your choosing. All other texts will be made available on Canvas as PDFs or web links.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Annotation Notebook: For each week of reading assigned, you will be responsible for an entry in an Annotation Notebook, which you will share with me and the class when requested. In each entry, you will respond to a prompt and keep notes based on your reading. You can use the following questions to guide your notetaking:
 - a. Note down your initial reactions. How does the text make you feel? Does it affect the way you think about yourself and the world?
 - b. What are some cultural contexts you recognize? How might the reading help you better understand the period in time with which the text is associated?
 - c. How does the text enact Indigenous and/or feminist methodologies? Where do you see the author writing in ways that are unexpected? What expressions do they use to portray their subject?
 - d. What questions do you have? List at least one.
 - e. Pick one interesting passage to close read and bring it to class for discussion.

Your responses will be used for class discussion and to fuel your writing assignments. They should not take long, but they should be well thought out and relevant to the reading.

2. Artwork Presentation: See sign-up sheet for individual due date. 5-10 minutes, with notes or script and sources demonstrating preparation. Throughout the semester, I will provide artwork, music, or a multimedia website related to the period, country, and culture we are studying. Choose one piece of art to research more thoroughly, providing background on the creator, their relationship to the period, and what the piece represents to you and to society more broadly. At the end of your presentation, provide a connection to our reading for that day that might help us start discussion.
3. Imitations Assignments #1-2: Based on readings for this class, you will write a 2-page response to a prompt. In the response, you will be asked to imitate the style and methods of engagement – what we will call expressions – employed in the reading. In doing so, you will develop strategies for engaging with different communities and begin to explore your own writing process and style through a feminist lens. I will provide prompts for each assignment based on our discussions in class.
4. Imitation Assignment #3: This assignment will ask you to do a more sustained imitation of a text of your choosing from the class, one we have not yet imitated. In 3-4 pages, analyze the

cultural context of a primary text of your choosing using the expressions in the text you are imitating. For instance, if you are imitating Teaiwa's "Yaqona/Yagoqu" and analyzing Jetnil-Kijiner's *Iep Jaltok*, you might begin with a descriptive story of an important moment in our discussion of the text, or a discussion you've had outside of class, then analyze the relationship between nuclear testing and motherhood in Jetnil-Kijiner's poetry through storytelling.

This imitation is, in essence, a close reading, which we will discuss and practice in class. Keep that in mind as you plan and draft your imitation. You might, for instance, consider starting from a specific word or pattern that you notice in your primary text to develop your analysis.

5. Research Question for Final: Using the imitation and close reading skills we have developed in class, I will ask you to choose one of the critical frameworks from the course and pair it with a primary text. You will then develop a research question that you will work to answer for the rest of the semester. What would you like to explore further? How might that reading help you to better understand a larger issue? In other words, what questions have emerged over the course of this class and how might the critical frameworks and primary texts we have read help you to explore that question?
6. Final Research Paper: The final paper will incorporate the methods and skills you have practiced throughout the semester. You will develop a research question that engages with a topic that is of interest to you, then write a 5-6 page paper answering your question. You will be asked to engage with both critical frameworks and a primary text to develop your own argument in conversations with those texts.

Each of you will schedule a one-on-one meeting with me *after* you have formulated your research question for the final research paper. At that time, we will discuss your final project and other work in the class so far. We can also discuss writing in general or anything else on your mind.

LATE WORK: I will accept work within 24 hours of the day and time that each assignment is due, but you will lose 10% of your final grade on that assignment. I will not accept work more than 24 hours late unless you contact me in advance of the due date.

GRADING

This course will not employ a traditional alpha-numeric grading system. Instead, I use a grading contract, outlined below.

Instead of a grade for individual assignments or work in class, you will receive extensive feedback from me and your peers that should help you to think through your own language use and writing and develop skills for working with different texts. I will provide you with methods and examples to help you do this work, and we will continually discuss your expectations for the course and strategies for developing and meeting those expectations.

The idea here is that, unlike in a graded classroom, most of the feedback you will receive in your life will not be graded. If you wanted to learn to crochet, no one would give you an F for making a misshapen sock. Instead, they would show you how to do better and provide their responses to

your process and any mistakes you might have made. It's the same in this class. Instead of providing a stick and carrot to get you to meet what you perceive my standards might be, I will instead continually provide you with my thoughts as a reader of your work and as a fellow reader of the other texts in the class. We will treat your texts just like we do the published texts we read, responding to them as part of a larger conversation about a given subject or contending with a particular issue.

Research in education and psychology over the past 30+ years has shown that the presence of grades in classrooms discourages risk taking and creativity. In this class, you are encouraged to take risks, to make creative choices that might not pan out in the end but will ultimately help you and others in the class think about writing differently. And you *won't* be punished for it. It is my hope that you will be creative and thoughtful in your work and bring your own interests to the table in your choices.

The following grading contract will only affect your final grade in the class. For all other assignments and readings, we will enter into conversation as a class about what the texts we write and read are doing, how we respond to them, and the choices you have made. When done properly, a shift away from grading is not a shift away from rigor. It is, in fact, quite the opposite.

THE GRADING CONTRACT:

You will receive an A for the term if you fulfill all the following expectations:

- meet due dates and criteria for all assignments and learning activities
 - as outlined in the "Late Assignments" section below, you are allowed an extension if you
 - communicate sufficiently with me (at least 48 hours before the deadline) and
 - submit the assignment within the mutually determined time frame
- attend all classes and participate in class discussion regularly, thoughtfully, and substantively
(See "Participation" below.)
- in a focused and specific manner, engage with my and your peers' feedback throughout the term

You will receive a B for the term if you do any of the following:

- turn in an assignment late without communicating proactively with me (at least 48 hours before the deadline)
- turn in an assignment that is insufficiently developed or incomplete
- fail to turn in one or more assignment
- are absent for more than three classes without medical documentation
- participate sporadically in class discussion and activities (including collaborative group discussions)
- show cursory attention to my and your peers' feedback throughout the term

Your final grade will be lowered to a C if you do any of the following:

- turn in multiple assignments late without communicating proactively with me (at least 48 hours before the deadline)
- turn in multiple assignments that are insufficiently developed or incomplete
- engage insufficiently in class discussion and activities (including collaborative group discussions)
- fail to engage with my and your peers' feedback throughout the term

Your grade will be lowered to a D or F if you do any of the following:

- fail to turn in the majority of assignments
- submit assignments that are insufficiently developed, late, or incomplete
- consistently fail to participate in class discussion and activities (including collaborative group discussions)
- submit any work that is not your own
- miss six classes or more without medical documentation

DEADLINES AND LATE WORK

In this course, deadlines are considered motivation and accountability tools. They are designed to help you pace out your responsibilities. Since your work is assessed on the basis of the contract, there will be no deduction in your grade if you submit an assignment late. However, deadlines are not only a tool for you; *they are also an agreement with me and your peers*, a way to be considerate of the time of others. I will accept late work, but you will miss out on vital feedback from me and your peers, and continually missing deadlines shows disrespect for me and your peers. While mistakes and emergencies happen, please view all the work we do in this class in terms of the responsibilities you have to others and the responsibilities they have to you. That said, I am always happy to grant extensions if you ask in advance.

PARTICIPATION

In each class, contribute to class discussion with any thoughts or questions you might have throughout the class. Remember, **there are no wrong answers!** While you may not have something to say every single day, I expect you to contribute to class discussion often. Say what comes to mind and build off of what your peers say. For more information, see the Etiquette and Expectations section of this syllabus.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this class, students should be able to do the following:

- Engage critically and dialogically with primary and secondary texts
- Develop understanding of some the most significant historical, political, and literary developments of gender and sexuality studies
- Think critically about the intersections of indigeneity and feminist thought
- Develop a working vocabulary of literary terms and close reading skills

- Collaborate with texts and peers through careful reading and discussion to produce effective and engaging writing

EXPECTATIONS

- You are required to bring the readings, along with your Annotation Notebook and any other assigned materials, to class each day. It is important that you be able to refer back to the text and pull out key ideas directly in our discussions.
- I do allow laptops and tablets but only for schoolwork. If I feel that you are not paying adequate attention and participating fully in class discussions, I will dock participation points.
- Cellphones must be turned off during class. Use of a cellphone for *any* purpose will result in a lower participation grade.
- You are expected to be *active listeners* in this class. Show your engagement with the course material and in class discussions by looking interested, taking notes, and asking questions.

PLAGIARISM

Through imitation, you can learn the forms, methods, and conventions utilized by writers and their discourse communities. The words and phrases used by the writer, however, are their own. Any copied wording or phrasing or any repeated passages that are not properly quoted and cited will be considered plagiarism, resulting in a 0 on the paper in question. Do not hesitate to speak with me if you have any questions regarding this matter. Please keep in mind:

- Any source consulted must be included on your Works Cited page, even if you have not quoted it directly.
- All paraphrased and summarized information must be distinct from the material paraphrased or summarized and must be cited correctly, including an in-text citation.
- Most of what can be found directly online will not qualify as a reputable sources. We will discuss source viability further in class.

Please consult the university policy on academic dishonesty for more information.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Note: Homework and readings are listed for *the day they are due*. Please plan accordingly.

(C) = Find on Canvas (A) = Artwork for Artwork Presentation

This calendar and syllabus are subject to change according to the progress of the course. Students will be notified in writing of any changes.

UNIT I: FOUNDATIONS

Week 1:

- I. How to read complex texts: Teaiwa, “The Ancestors We Get to Choose” (C)
Sign up for Artwork Presentation
- II. Fernandez, *Imagining Literacy*, Introduction (C)
Davis, “Difficult Dialogues” (C)
TBD: Davis, lecture on prison abolition (C)

Week 2:

- I. Excerpts from Bhandar and Aziadah, *Revolutionary Feminisms*
- II. Excerpts from Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*

UNIT II: HOME AND IDENTITY

Week 3:

- I. Excerpts from Starblanket, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminisms*
- II. Grace, *Dogside Story*

Week 4:

- I. Teaiwa, “Yaqona/Yagoqu: Roots and Routes of a Displaced Native” (C)
- II. Grace, *Dogside Story*

Week 5:

- I. Teaiwa, “For or *Before* an Asia Pacific Studies Agenda: Specifying Pacific Studies
- II. Excerpts from Choi et al, *We the Gathered Heat*

UNIT III: INSTITUTIONS AND RESISTANCE

Week 6:

- I. **HW:** Imitation Assignment #1 due in class
Excerpts from Starblanket, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*
- II. Jonnie and Shannacappo, *If I Go Missing*

Week 7:

- I. Teaiwa, "Microwomen: US Colonialism and Micronesian Women Activists" (C)
Teaiwa, "Articulated Cultures: Militarism and Masculinities in Fiji during the Mid-1990s" (C)
- II. ross, *Pots and Other Living Beings*

Week 8:

- I. **HW:** Imitation Assignment #2 due in class
Excerpts from Ingersoll, *Waves of Knowing* (C)
- II. Jetñil-Kijiner, *Iep Jāltok*
Jetñil-Kijiner, videos of spoken word performances

Week 9:

- I. **No class, Spring/Fall Break**

UNIT IV: LAND AND RELATIONALITY

Week 10:

- I. Excerpts from Starblanket, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminisms*
- II. Leanne Simpson, videos and music (C)

Week 11 :

- I. **HW:** Imitation Assignment #3 due in class
Reed, "Sonic Sovereignty" (C)
- II. Tagaq, *Split Tooth*
Tagaq, *Tongues* (C)

UNIT V: DECOLONIZATION AND INDIGENOUS FUTURITIES

Week 12:

- I. Excerpts from Starblanket, *Making Room for Indigenous Feminisms*
- II. Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*

Week 13:

- I. **HW:** Research Question due in class
McClintock, "Olive Schreiner: The Limits of Colonial Feminism," *Imperial Leather* (C)
- II. Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*

Week 14:

- I. Excerpts from Whitehead, *Indigequeerness* (C)
- II. Belcourt, *A History of My Brief Body*

Week 15:

I. No class, Individual Conferences

Week 16:

- I. Belcourt, *A History of My Brief Body*
- II. Trask poems in Choi et al., *We the Gathered Heat*

Wednesday, Finals Week, by 11:59 pm: Final Research Paper due, hard copy

OTHER READINGS UNDER CONSIDERATION

Joshua Whitehead, "Indigiqueerness: A Conversation about Storytelling"

Joshua Whitehead. *Love After the End: An Anthology of Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer Speculative Fiction*.

Young, Ryan. "[My Gender is Indigenous](#);" "[My Queerness is Traditional](#);" "[We Define Ourselves](#)"

Barker, Joanne. *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies*.

Belcourt, Billy-Ray. "Can the Other of Native Studies Speak."

Byrd, Jodi A. "What's Normative Got to Do with it? Towards Indigenous Queer Relationality." *Social Text* 38 (4), 2020: 105-123. doi: 10.1215/01642472-8680466

Goeman, Mishuana. "Notes Toward a Native Feminism's Spatial Practice." *Wicazo Sa Review* 24 (2): 169-87. <https://www-jstor-org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/40587786>

Justice, Daniel Heath. "Notes Toward a Theory of Anomaly." *GLQ* 16 (1/2), 2010: 217-42. doi:10.1215/10642684-2009-020.

Million, Dian. "Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History." *Wicazo Sa Review*, 24 (2) 2009: 53-76.

Morgan, Jas M. "Trans.NDN Cyborgs at the End of Man's World." PhD diss. McGill University, 2021.

TallBear, Kim. "Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family." In *Making Kin Not Population*, edited by Adele E. Clarke and Donna Haraway, Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018.

TallBear, Kim. "Feminist, Queer, and Indigenous Thinking as an Antidote to Masculinist Objectivity and Binary Thinking in Biological Anthropology." *American Anthropologist* 2019: 1-3.

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology*. Duke University Press, 2006.

Halberstam, Jack. *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire*. Duke University Press, 2020.