Week Eight:
Third Wave Feminist Engagement with Inclusivity

Monday, October 15: Transnational Feminism

Wednesday, October 17: Third Wave Feminist Analyses of the Body

Friday, October 19: Discussion Groups
http://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1570&context=jiws

Readings for this Week
Available on WyoCourse as:


http://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1570&context=jiws


You may consult related sources online in open access format by consulting the “Additional Resources” section of this document.

Context and Relevance

This week we built on last week’s discussion of intersectionality in third wave feminism by reading four distinct texts that also engage with questions surrounding privilege and inclusivity. Our assigned readings recognize the diversity of women’s experiences while also critically examining the structures of domination that shape and otherwise inform those experiences. As we learned last week, class, gender, race, and other identity categories intersect to produce the social structures and forms of social interactions that individuals encounter in a given context. Yet individuals maintain agency even as these intersectional harms constrain their abilities to act in the world. This exercise of agency within constraint was a major concern among third wave feminists, and this week we read four texts that explored the tension between agency and constraint.
Kumari Jayawardena’s book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* is one of the most influential books to explore social movements for gender equality in formerly colonized countries in what used to be known as “The Third World.” Most countries throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America achieved independence from colonial empires during the historical time period ranging from just after the end of World War II through the 1970s. Independence prompted intense discussions about the legacy of colonialism in a host of social, political, and economic institutions. These discussions raised profound questions for newly independent nations regarding their futures and identities, and gender had a central role within them. Jayawardena notes that feminism evokes heated debates throughout what she terms “Western society” and that in what she terms “the Third World” these debates are intensified by accusations that gender equality is a foreign cultural import irrelevant or even contrary to local culture. Jayawardena notes that across formerly colonized nations

It has variously been alleged by traditionalists, political conservatives and even certain leftists, that feminism is a product of ‘decadent’ Western capitalism; that it is based on a foreign culture of no relevance to women in the Third World; that it is the ideology of women of the local bourgeoisie; and that it alienates or diverts women, from their culture, religion and family responsibilities on the one hand, and from the revolutionary struggles for national liberation and socialism on the other. In the West, too, there is a Eurocentric view that the movement for women’s liberation is not indigenous to Asia or Africa, but has been a purely West European and North American phenomenon.

Jayawardena’s book tackled the double bind facing “Third World” feminists because of the accusations that they promote ideals that undermine local culture and even national sovereignty. Unlike their peers in North America and Western Europe, feminists in newly independent nations faced critics who argued that they were unpatriotic, Westernized, or idealizing pre-colonial cultural traditions in ways that did not reflect reality.

Gloria Anzaldúa’s poem, “To live in the Borderlands means you”, vividly uses both English and Spanish portrays how some Chicanas, women of Mexican ancestry born in the United States, experience intersectionality. The borderlands/la frontera that Anzaldua refers to in the poem are both physical, in the form of the border between Mexico and the United States, cultural, in terms of languages and identities, and socio-institutional, as manifested in experiences with discrimination by peers and la migra alike. “To survive the Borderlands” she concludes, “you must live sin fronteras/be at a crossroads.” Although this poem specifically refers to the US/Mexico border, it encapsulates numerous other borderlands as well, including history, gender, race, ethnicity, and cultural identity. These types of borderlands are familiar spaces for almost all of the authors whose work we have read this semester.

Philosopher Judith Butler is a leading theorist of gender and this week read a short excerpt from the introduction to one of her most famous books, *Bodies That Matter*. The book’s title has a double meaning that refers to privilege assigned on the basis of biological sex — much in the same sense that Simone de Beauvoir referred to women in her book *The Second Sex* — and to the body’s physical self (its materiality, in Butler’s words). In this book, Butler engages with a long feminist tradition of critiquing gender as a social construction, rather than as a biological or otherwise “natural” fact. Butler argues in this excerpt, and throughout the rest of the book, that
gender becomes real through its performance, specifically the use of language. Butler argues that a deeply rooted “exclusionary matrix”, which she articulates in five points, requires some identities to be abject in order for other identities to be active subjects. Ideas expressed in this introduction are highly influential in the third wave but also in the fourth wave, which we will discuss next week, which has much more actively engaged with the fluidity of gender as a social construction than previous waves.

Karen Dias’ article provides a nice transition to the discussion of the fourth wave we will have in Weeks Ten and Eleven because it focuses closely on third wave concerns about the body and body image while also engaging with online communities, which is a major characteristic of fourth wave feminism. Dias notes that online communities are highly controversial because they may promote anorexia nervosa, a mental health condition that can lead to death, yet some of the images and attitudes presented on them closely resemble the idealized images of women’s bodies found in advertising and mass media. Dias also observes that women struggling with this illness often do so in secret, making online fora potential place for them to find community and seek help from others who understand their issues and will not pathologize or judge them. She concludes by arguing that third wave understandings of such online communities should follow broader trends in third wave feminism by acknowledging “a multiplicity of voices and agencies”, rather than simply dismissing them as good or bad.

Taken together, these four texts unite major threads within third wave feminism with respect to questions of inclusivity and marginalization. Texts by Jayawardena and Anzaldúa grapple with the spaces in between borders both literal and ideological as they engage with issues related to nationalism, migration, and cultural identities. Butler and Dias also engage with borders as they consider questions related to the physical body and the socio-cultural expectations and forces that inform and constitute the value assigned to particular bodies and not others. As we will see when we begin our discussion of fourth wave feminism in Week Ten, these ideas—as well as those we have read earlier in the semester—paved the way for the important work that fourth wave feminists are doing today.

**Reading Questions**

1. Jayawardena describes the considerable challenges facing feminist movements in newly independent nations across the world, particularly the accusations that movements for gender equality are irrelevant, foreign, and even dangerous. What are some of the similar challenges we have engaged with in assigned readings this semester? How are these different from the challenges Jayawardena describes?

2. Part of the reason that Jayawardena’s book is still so highly regarded today is that it took such an ambitious approach to documenting how feminism and nationalism variously manifested in so many formerly colonized countries. In what ways is the geographically and culturally wide-ranging evidence she offers in support of her argument most convincing to you? In what ways does it leave something to be desired or sometimes come across as anecdotal because of its wide-ranging scope?
3. What are some of the artistic strategies that Anzaldúa uses to convey a sense of the borderlands/la frontera? In what ways do many individuals occupy the borderlands/la frontera that she describes as characterizing many Chicanas’ lives?

4. Consider the five numbered points Butler raises on pages three and four of the assigned texts. As noted above, Butler argues that these, taken together, produce an “exclusionary matrix” that requires some identities to be abject in order for other identities to be active subjects. If we were to physically map out the relationships between the five elements of this matrix on the board or in a drawing, what would it look like? How does it differ from the way that we variously represented intersectionality last week?

5. Websites and other online communities for and by women suffering from anorexia nervosa remain highly controversial because they can provide a mutually supportive forum for women struggling with anorexia nervosa but also potentially encourage unhealthy obsessions with weight loss. Given ongoing debates about net neutrality and free speech, what are some of the major ethical concerns with these websites? Should they be allowed to exist and, if so, why?

**Additional Resources**

1. Visit a collection of Gloria Evangelina Anzalúa’s papers online at: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utlac/00189/lac-00189.html


4. Visit Judith Butler’s professional website at: https://vcresearch.berkeley.edu/faculty/judith-butler
Third wave feminist engagement with inclusivity

Week Eight

- This week builds on our discussion of intersectionality
- Four distinct texts engaged with questions related to privilege and inclusivity
- Recognize the diversity of women’s experiences
- While also critically examining the structures of domination that shape and inform those experiences
Agency vs. constraint

- Class, gender, race, & other identities intersect
- Producing social interactions that reflect structures
- Yet individuals exercise agency
- Even as intersectional harms constrain their abilities to act
- Exercise of agency vs. constraints on it was a major concern among third wave feminists
- All four texts this week explore tensions between agency and constraint

Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*

- One of the most influential third wave books
  - Explores social movements for gender equality
- Uses now-outdated Cold War term “The Third World”
  - First world: North America & Western Europe
  - Second world: Soviet Union
  - Third world: Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Pacific Islands
Post-colonial nationalism

- WWII-1970s independence movements
- Prompted intense debates about colonialism’s legacy
- Profound changes to socio-political and economic institutions
- Deep questions for newly independent nations
  - Futures and identities
  - Changes to gender roles
  - Feminism as a “Western cultural import”

“...It has variously been alleged by traditionalists, political conservatives and even certain leftists, that feminism is a product of ‘decadent’ Western capitalism; that it is based on a foreign culture of no relevance to women in the Third World; that it is the ideology of women of the local bourgeoisie; and that it alienates or diverts women, from their culture, religion and family responsibilities on the one hand, and from the revolutionary struggles for national liberation and socialism on the other. In the West, too, there is a Eurocentric view that the movement for women’s liberation is not indigenous to Asia or Africa, but has been a purely West European and North American phenomenon”

In post-colonial states, Jayawardena argues...
Double bind facing feminists in post-colonial states

- Accusations that feminism undermines culture
- National sovereignty rejects “Western” cultural imports
- Critics dismissed as unpatriotic, Westernized, or idealizing pre-colonial cultural traditions
- Amplified versions of challenges facing North American and Western European feminists

Gloria Anzaldúa, *To live in the borderlands means you*

- Pay attention to creative choices in language and style
  - Preparation for Week 12 application of feminist analysis to literature
- Vividly unites English and Spanish
- Portrays how some Chicanas experience intersectional identities
- Women of Mexican ancestry born in the United States
Borderlands/la frontera

- Physical
  - US/Mexico border
  - Gendered bodies
- Cultural
  - Languages
  - Identities
  - Gender roles
- Socio-institutional
  - Discrimination by peers
  - Xenophobia

Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*

- Philosopher and leading gender theorist
- Part of a long tradition of critiquing gender as a social construction
  - Rather than a biological or "natural" fact
- Title has a double meaning
  - Privilege assigned on the basis of biological sex (like de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* )
  - The body’s physical self (materiality)
Gender as a performance

- Gender becomes real through performance of it
- Most evident in language
- Deeply rooted “exclusionary matrix”
  - requires some bodies to be abject
  - in order for other bodies to be subjects
- Paved the way for fourth wave feminism’s active engagement with gender as a fluid social construction

Karen Dias, *The Ana Sanctuary*

- Nice transition to Weeks 9-11 discussions of the fourth wave
- Focus on third wave concerns about the body and body image
- Engages with online communities, a major characteristic of fourth wave feminism
- Argues that online communities for women struggling with anorexia nervosa are highly controversial
  - May promote a mental health condition that can lead to death
  - Yet images/attitudes closely resemble those of women’s bodies in advertising and mass media
Online fora

- Potential places for women to find community
- Seek help from others who share their struggles
- Avoid pathologizing and judgment
- Analysis should acknowledge “A multiplicity of voices and agencies”

Authors in dialogue

- Four texts unite major threads in third wave feminism
- Questions of inclusivity and marginalization
- Spaces in between borders both literal and ideological
- Questions related to physical body and socio-cultural expectations
- Forces that inform and constitute values assigned to particular bodies and not others
- Paved the way for the important work fourth wave feminists are doing today
Jayawardena describes the considerable challenges facing feminist movements in newly independent nations across the world, particularly the accusations that movements for gender equality are irrelevant, foreign, and even dangerous. What are some of the similar challenges we have engaged with in assigned readings this semester? How are these different from the challenges Jayawardena describes?

Part of the reason that Jayawardena’s book is still so highly regarded today is that it took such an ambitious approach to documenting how feminism and nationalism variously manifested in so many formerly colonized countries. In what ways is the geographically and culturally wide-ranging evidence she offers in support of her argument most convincing to you? In what ways does it leave something to be desired or sometimes come across as anecdotal because of its wide-ranging scope?

What are some of the artistic strategies that Anzaldúa uses to convey a sense of the borderlands/la frontera? In what ways do many individuals occupy the borderlands/la frontera that she describes as characterizing many Chicanas’ lives?

Consider the five numbered points Butler raises on pages three and four of the assigned texts. As noted above, Butler argues that these, taken together, produce an “exclusionary matrix” that requires some identities to be abject in order for other identities to be active subjects. If we were to physically map out the relationships between the five elements of this matrix on the board or in a drawing, what would it look like? How does it differ from the way that we variously represented intersectionality last week?

Websites and other online communities for and by women suffering from anorexia nervosa remain highly controversial because they can provide a mutually supportive forum for women struggling with anorexia nervosa but also potentially encourage unhealthy obsessions with weight loss. Given ongoing debates about net neutrality and free speech, what are some of the major ethical concerns with these websites? Should they be allowed to exist and, if so, why?
- Visit a collection of Gloria Evangelina Anzalúa’s papers online at: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utlac/00189/lac-00189.html
- Read a review of *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* online at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/09/feminism-and-nationalism-in-the-third-world-by-kumari-jayawardena-review
- Visit Judith Butler's professional website at: https://vcresearch.berkeley.edu/faculty/judith-butler