

# Queering International Relations

**GOV 3605**  
**GSWS 3101**  
**Bowdoin College**  
**Fall 2023**

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## **1. Course Description**

“The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” the call for political change implicit in the title of Audre Lorde’s iconic essay put at stake something more profound than the result of change itself: that radical critique is only possible through tools unfamiliar to the “master.” As a Black lesbian woman, Lorde denounced white feminism for being complicit with patriarchy by not acknowledging marginal women’s experiences as a source of strength and creativity. Inspired by the title and impetus of Lorde’s essay, this course seeks to ask what happens when we start seeing the world through unfamiliar, alternative, tools or sensibilities? The main objective of this course is to expose us to alternative sensibilities and ways of thinking offered by voices that experience gender and sexuality beyond Western norms and counter-norms. Topics include: Gender and colonial legacies, global feminisms, imperialism and LGBTQ activism, freedom and agency from a comparative perspective, intersectionality, queer of color critique, and critical research methods.

## **2. Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the course, students will be able to: 1) familiarize themselves with non-Western views on gender and sexuality; 2) analyze and interpret international relations from the perspective of gender; and 3) reflect critically on their own positionality in the world.

## **3. Grade Distribution**

**Six (6) reflections + questions:** 30%  
**Two (2) discussion leadings:** 25%  
**One (1) news sharing:** 5%  
**In-class participation:** 10%  
**Research Project:** 30%

## **4. Assignments**

- a. **Reflection + Question (6x)**: On the weeks you choose to do this assignment, please post a ~300 word or ~3 min audio/video response to that week's material on Padlet, by Monday 10pm EST. This response must demonstrate that you have thought about the material you read/watched, but the exact format is open. Rather than a summary of readings, think of this as a chance to reflect on the following guiding questions: why were you particularly moved by specific points in the readings? How do different materials speak to each other? In what ways did they invite you to think differently? Please add the date and reflection number (#) to the title of your post. **At the end of your reflection, please include a question that you would like us to discuss in class, and then copy/paste it to the discussion questions document (linked on Canvas)**. You are required to submit six (6) reflections over the course of the semester. These are pass/fail.
- b. **Discussion leading (2x)**: Along with one to two other people, you will be expected to offer the class a brief set of provocations (in the form of questions, a short video, images, news link, etc., or a combination of these), pertaining to the material of the week you sign up to lead discussion. Please avoid suggesting questions for which the answer is yes/no, and try to think instead about "how" and "why" questions that generate discussion. Student discussion leading will happen on Thursdays unless otherwise noted. A sign-up sheet will be available on Canvas.
- c. **News sharing (1x)**: On one Tuesday during the semester, you will sign up to share with the class a piece of news relevant to our discussions and materials. You will give a brief summary of it and explain how it connects with the course. A sign-up sheet will be available on Canvas.
- d. **Research Project**: Details TBD.

## **5. Where to find assistance**

- a) **Contact me**: Do not hesitate to contact me if you need help! I am available via email at [tzille@bowdoin.edu](mailto:tzille@bowdoin.edu) and student hours to discuss matters related to the course, or any other matter you think I may be able to assist you with. I will point you to appropriate resources if I am not able to assist you. I will strive to respond to your emails within 24h, but I will generally not be available on evenings and weekends.
- b) **Student hours**: I will hold student hours in person (date and time TBD) in my office at Hubbard 21 (basement). I will also have bookable hours, the link to book an appointment will be posted on Canvas. Please contact me via email to make an appointment if these times don't work for you. **Please note** that you can use this time not only to discuss class-related topics but also any other academic/college concern, or if you simply want to get to know me better.
- c) **Reach out to your peers**: Let me know if you would like me to facilitate connection with others in class.
- d) **Other campus resources**:

**d.1) Counseling and Wellness Services:** These are very stressful times, just know that you are not alone. Counseling is a great resource and you don't have to be in crisis to use it! Here is the link to [CWS](#) and phone number: 207-725-3145.

**d.2) Baldwin Center for Learning and Teaching:** The [BCLT](#) offers many forms of academic assistance, such as peer academic coaching and writing assistance.

**d.3) Accommodations:** Please feel free to discuss your need for accommodations with me. For more info on what the college offers, check out the Student Accessibility Office [here](#).

## **6. Course Policies**

- a) **Attendance and deadlines:** Things happen! Please notify me if you must be absent from class more than once. And if you must submit your work late, please contact me in advance so we can work out alternatives together.
- b) **Readings and other materials:** The quality of discussion and your learning will depend heavily on you being able to read/watch the assigned instructional material. I try to assign a realistic amount of readings, and I am willing to reconsider the amount assigned if necessary. In return, I ask that you stay on track with the material to the best of your ability.
- c) **Plagiarism:** Please seek assistance (see options above) if you need help with an assignment. Here is a link to Bowdoin's [Academic Honor Code](#).
- d) **Class etiquette:** Since this is a discussion-based course, be prepared to participate frequently, build your contributions off your peers', and help us maintain a cordial and inclusive discussion environment. I also ask that you check your Bowdoin email and the Canvas page for this course daily for announcements and updates.
- e) **Laptop:** please limit the use of your laptop computer to briefly refer to the readings if necessary, but keep it shut otherwise, especially during discussion. Studies show that the use of laptops can be distracting to both the user and his/her peers. Check out [this](#) study on the advantages of taking notes by hand. **If you prefer digital technology instead of paper, you can try using note taking apps on your ipad and keep it flat on your table.**
- f) **In-class contributions:** Participating in class discussion means both active speaking and active listening. The quality of contributions—that is, contributions that show engagement with the material, even if in the form of questions or confusion—is more important than quantity. A dynamic discussion is one where members of class feel comfortable speaking, give space to others when necessary, and build contributions off their colleagues'. To avoid some voices dominating over others, you will be asked to assign two rotating spokespeople for each group during group activities in class.

## **Schedule**

### **Week 1: Introduction**

Getting to know each other

### **Part I – Speaking from the Margins**

*Part I of the course is intended as an introduction to the conceptual framework that will be a reference for subsequent weeks. We will start with Audrey Lorde's essay to explore the idea of focusing on the "tools" used to construct the "master's house," and the significance of being at the margins of the margin. Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" opens a necessary discussion on what it means to speak, and more importantly, to be heard.*

*Subsequently, the course turns to important contemporary global debates regarding gender and sexuality. First, we will look at how the legacies of imperialism and colonialism have shaped and continue to shape gender relations and identity in the Global South. Secondly, we will move into the topics of freedom and agency (focusing on Western views of gender and Islam) and homophobia, with the aim of opening a discussion on dominant concepts of freedom, agency, and identity, in relationship to how non-Western spaces are commonly seen in the West.*

## **Week 2: Foundations**

Chimamanda **Adichie**, "We Should All Be Feminists"

Audre **Lorde**, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House."

Gayatri Chakravorty **Spivak**, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

## **Week 3: Colonial Legacies**

María **Lugones**, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism"

Haunani-Kay **Trask**, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*.  
(Selection)

Pilar **Villanueva**, "Why Decolonial Feminism?"

## **Week 4: Colonial Legacies II**

Matt **Brim** and Amin **Ghaziani**, "Introduction: Queer Methods"

Chandra Talpade **Mohanty**, "Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses."

Donna **Haraway**, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective"

## **Week 5: Freedom and Agency**

Wendy **Brown**, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance In the Age of Identity and Empire* (Selection)

Saba **Mahmood**, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Selection)

Quỳnh N **Phạm**, "Enduring Bonds: Politics and Life Outside Freedom as Autonomy"

## **Week 6: Empire**

Joseph Andoni **Massad**, *Desiring Arabs* (Selection)

Rahul **Rao**, "The locations of homophobia."

**Week 7: October Break, no new content**

### **Week 8: Empire II**

Jasbir **Puar**, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Selection)

### **Week 9: Interrogating Identity**

Jack **Halberstam**, "Trans\*: What's in a Name?" in *Trans: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*

José Esteban **Muñoz**, *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics* (Selection)

Selected works from **Alok Vaid-Menon**

## **Part II. Visions and Frameworks Otherwise**

*Part II concentrates on alternative visions and frameworks. We will focus on topics such as intersectionality and feminist and queer politics. These weeks address the timeliness and urgency of discussions about the intersection between different forms of marginality, and the necessity of rethinking resistance strategies in a context of ongoing structural inequality locally and globally.*

### **Week 10: Intersectionality**

Kimberlé **Crenshaw**, "The Urgency of Intersectionality"

María José **Méndez**, "The River Told Me": Rethinking Intersectionality from the World of Berta Cáceres"

Flavia **Rios**, "América Ladina: The Conceptual Legacy of Lélia Gonzalez (1935–1994)"

### **Week 11: IR Otherwise**

Laura **Sjoberg**, Toward Trans-gendering International Relations

Cynthia **Weber**, "Queer Intellectual Curiosity as International Relations Method"

### **Week 12: Thinking/Feeling/Doing Otherwise**

Audre **Lorde**, *Sister Outsider* (Selections)

Sarah **Hunt** and Cindy **Holmes**, "Everyday Decolonization: Living a Decolonizing Queer Politics"

Martha **Nandorfy**, “Beyond the Binaries of Critical Thought and Toward Feeling-Thinking Stories”

**Week 13: Thanksgiving Week, no new content**

**Week 14: Thinking/Feeling/Doing Otherwise II**

Leela **Fernandes**, *Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-violence, Social justice and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized feminism* (Selections)

Gloria **Anzaldúa**, *Borderlands/La frontera* (Selections)

**Week 15**

*TBD as a class*