



GNDR_ST 397 • Mary Dietz

Feminist Theory: Patriarchal Dominations

The selection of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* for this year's "One Book One Northwestern" gives us an occasion to think again about "patriarchy." A term of feminist political discourse and analysis, "patriarchy" operated at the core of second wave feminist theories about the domination and oppression of women. But the concept (and the word) found themselves eclipsed if not entirely dismantled in the 1980s, as "Third Wave" feminist critiques of gender, sexuality, and race, and new approaches to relations of power, identities, and subjectivities, emerged. These interventions included work that not only complicated, problematized, and intersected the feminist subject but also introduced analytics that troubled the coherence of the category "women" and deconstructed totalizing notions like "patriarchy" and "oppression." But political upheavals, irruptive events, and new articulations of relations of power have a way of changing (and reviving) terms of political discourse, bringing the moribund back to life. Our aim in this course, in a time of authoritarian rule, state-sponsored gendered and reproductive violence, renascent white supremacy, the militarization of society, and virulent rhetorics of sexual humiliation, brutality, and misogyny, is to take stock of the meaning, significance, and revitalization of discourses of patriarchy through the interpretation of (mostly) contemporary feminist theorists and texts. Rather than seeking a definition of patriarchy or attempting a conceptual history (much less assuming its stability as an explanatory concept), we'll simply investigate how it appears in selected writings and gets theorized, encoded, wielded, and weaponized by feminist writers in disparate ways, whether as "male power" "masculine domination," "the law of the father," "the androcentric principle," "the sexual contract," "phallogentrism," "heterosexuality," "heteropatriarchy," "colonial masculinity," or just (following Marilyn Frye on B Friedan), "the problem that has no name."

Tu/Th 2:00-3:20 PM • University Hall 312