

## REL 4937: The Evolution of the Femme: From Witches to Madam Vice President

**Professors:** Grisel d'Elena MA and Niurca Márquez MFA

### Major Themes:

- Misrepresentation/stigmatization of the feminine
- Social and legal justice for women (through history)
- The body as space and place
- Reproductive rights
- Women in Religion
- Women's Rights
- Women in politics

### Course Synopsis

This course analyzes the root and development of the term “witch” as a means of exploring the historical and systemic oppression of women and stigmatization of the feminine. The proposed course for “Study Domestic” takes a hard look at our own history with these themes in the US. We begin by exploring how the fear of the unknown, severe oppression from the Christian Church and other realities of life during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries cemented a series of ideals, moral and behavioral codes which have made it possible for systemic issues of inequality to continue to exist today. Students will get a chance to prepare for the themes they will be coming face to face with on the travel portion of the course, by engaging in critical analysis of important texts around these and related topics. The course will focus on writings at the intersection of race, gender, oppression, and agency. The themes will be explored in a series of fields like gender studies, religion, history, sociology, ethnography, performance, politics, and the arts. Students will critically examine both theoretical and first-hand accounts of this experience, as well as, performances (staged and mediated) centered on these themes. Additionally, this course examines the implications of these themes in the evolutionary role of women in politics-as voters, citizens, candidates, and leaders from the Seneca Falls Convention to the first woman VP, Kamala Harris. The role of women's organizations and movements in the expansion of political and legal rights are also explored. Students will learn to recognize their own biases that are entrenched in patriarchal / religious values and how to live through a more intersectional lens. Finally, each student will apply to an internship related to the empowerment of women in politics facilitated by FIU DC.

### Travel Component (Summer A)

The course will then continue in New York, where students will get a chance to meet and engage with *artists* currently reclaiming the term witch or *bruja* as a means of agency and alignment with the othering that has for so long been part of the silencing and shaming of women. The works of Luciana Achugar ([#brujas](https://nyuskirball.org/performance-#brujas)' work - <https://nyuskirball.org/performance->

[matters/studies/prepschool-brujx/](#)) and Yara Travieso (film-maker and producer who mixes equal parts Latin American magical-realism, popular culture, and mythology in her work - <https://belatina.com/meet-yara-travieso-artist/>), will be of particular interest in examining how contemporary women artists are using these terms to align with discourses centered on a reclaiming of power and illuminating spaces long relegated to the margins. Students will also visit various museums to review the historical plights of women. This is followed up by visits to the United Nations and UN Women for a tour at the role of women in the global sphere. Finally, the exploration will culminate in Washington DC, where students will have an opportunity to examine how all of this translates into the systems that govern us and policymaking. We have collaborated with FIU DC to provide meet and greets with representatives and potential employers as well as tours and interviews. The trip will conclude with a well-rounded perspective of the history, present, and future of women in politics and how it intersects with the fields of religion and gender studies.

**During this course students will:**

- Research the evolution of the “witch” from at least three disciplinary perspectives and analyze how this term has been used historically to justify oppression against women.
- Learn the practical applications of said terms in distinct religious, socio-cultural, socio-political and artistic discourse and become familiar with other terms that intersect in these discussions including decolonization, identity consciousness and formation, and embodiment.
- Compare and contrast histories of women’s representation in the US in religious, social and political fields.
- Evaluate the reasons for women’s underrepresentation in political institutions in the US and in the international sphere.
- Analyze the effect of gender and stereotypes on politics and policymaking.
- Read both scholarly and creative works of literature that tackle themes of witchcraft and alternative spiritual practices and herblore.
- Analyze at least five case studies focused on different aspects of the “performance” of said identity that reflect what the embodiment of said identity means in a contemporary context.
- Discuss the implications of terms (like witch, bruja) and related concepts, and their nuances in intercultural understanding, identity consciousness and performance, and what this means for its socio-political implications.
- Read/watch and analyze texts/performances by artists and writers self-identifying as “witch,” *bruja*, *bruxa* or “other” and compare the ways in which liminality is discussed, integrated and “performed” in these spaces.

- Examine the evolutionary role of women in politics-as voters, citizens, candidates, and leaders from the Seneca Falls Convention to the first woman VP, Kamala Harris.
- Analyze how religion plays a role in societal constructs, law, and political issues that are up for debate.
- Produce an original piece of written work that analyzes the role of gender in the political sphere in the US.
- Apply to an internship / job in DC.

## **Classwork**

In addition to their readings, class and online discussions and case studies, students will have a chance to visit sites where these ideas have a long-standing history, engage with politicians and historians, activists, and artists at the forefront of these discussions, and draw their own conclusion as to the validity of terminologies and their use. They will have a chance to view performance (both as ontology and epistemology) with a critical eye and to develop the capacity to ask questions that lead to critical discussions in gender studies and spirituality.

In class, prior to the travel to each city, students will engage in a series of discussions and examine specific case studies as examples of applied theory. Those students registering for the course under REL will have community liaisons that they will engage with prior to travel through two interview/conversations and a post-trip debriefing consultation where they will discuss their findings on the socio-political implications of these ideas/practices. Writers whose work we will be examining include but are not limited to Audrey Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Shirley Chisolm, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Diana Taylor. Additionally, the course focuses on the approaches, concepts, and methods of women's and gender studies and how they apply to the intersection of religion/spiritual practices and policy. Students are encouraged to consider the ways in which the theoretical lens of gender allows us to rethink traditional analyses of religious systems, governing bodies, social practices, political processes, and theories in all three fields, thereby enhancing their understanding of the application of religious and political studies. Finally, it will place those who choose to acquire an internship, in the playing field.

## **Assessments**

### **Thesaurus of Difference and Likeness (15%)**

**Due:** Ongoing throughout the course (I will collect without previous warning)

**Final Due: April 24 by 11:59pm**

Throughout the course, you will create a “thesaurus of difference and likeness.” Think of this as your archive/anarchive, the place where you “work out” what you believe these terms to mean and where you will continuously create new correlations as we move along in our “unpacking” of terminology. You will gather terms used by authors who theorize, those who live in the liminal

spaces and those who sit between the lived and theorized space. This ongoing assignment is intended to provide a space to dump terms, but also a place to begin to see the connections and patterns in the use of these terms and the flexibility of their use.

### **Which Witch**

**Due: February 13 by 11:59pm**

Students will choose one artist who either self-identifies as “witch” or whose work has been critiqued as engaging in the discussion around alternative artistic or spiritual practices, and, based on an in-depth analysis of why this is so, will write a manifesto of that artist’s stance/positioning in the bigger discussion of the course

### **Who are you adding to your Coven**

**Due: March 20 by 11:59pm**

Survival exercise focused on male flaws and privilege despite their own flaws in comparison to women. Students will have to see the opportunity and potential in others. The process of choosing and selection allows students to identify biases and opportunities. The same thought process used to determine a passenger list can be extended to selecting a major, classes, and resources.

### **Dr. Biden vs. Joseph Epstein (Disputation Paper)**

**Due: April 17 by 11:59pm**

Students will engage with the ongoing debate around the Washington Post OpEd written by Joseph Epstein that clearly reflects the adversities women with higher education degrees face. Students will directly engage in defending Epstein’s stance before engaging in the many discussions around inequality and issues of equity in academia.

### **Final Project (after NY/DC trip)**

Students will be required to create a “work” (writing, sculptural, ritual, performative) that can be classified as contemporizing the stigma of and about women, their bodies and the spaces they inhabit.

### **Apply to an Internship in DC (after NY/DC trip)**

Students will be taught how to gauge the viability of an internship that will provide experience necessary to their goals. Timelines will be created. They will have application materials reviewed and edited prior to submission.

**\*\*Ability and access to internships by the end of the course (75% minimum)**

### **Required Textbook:**

*Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* by Silvia Federici

*Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

**Note that in most cases, excerpts and specific chapters of the texts listed in your course calendar will be available via your canvas shell.**

## **Tentative Course Schedule**

**\*Note that Schedule can change at professor's discretion. This is a partial listing of assignments and discussions. For full details ALWAYS look at CANVAS. All due dates and details of readings (including PDF's and links to library) will be included there.**

### **Module 0- Week 1- Introduction**

- ❖ January 12

Syllabus and Canvas Review

**Video:** Chimamda Ngozi Adichie's [We Should all Be Feminists](#)

### **Module 1 - Weeks 2-5 - Misrepresentation/stigmatization of the feminine**

- ❖ January 19 - Márquez

**Read before class:** In Spite of Plato - "The Case of Penelope" (Intro and pgs. 11-30)

**Discussion in class:** Understanding the link between mythologies and conception of gender.

**After class:** Read for next week and start Thesaurus

- ❖ January 26 – d'Elena and Márquez

The Disappearance or silencing of women in "historical data." **Reading:** Chapters 1 and 12, "The Path to Pokrovka" and "From Celts to Mongols: Women of Business and Kingmakers" in *Warrior Women: An Archeologist's Search of History's Hidden Heroines*.

- ❖ February 2 - Márquez

Understanding how we got here - Beginnings. **Reading:** Introduction and Chapter 1 "All the World Needs a Jolt" in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*.

- ❖ February 9 – d'Elena

Understanding how we got here - Transitions and Cementing Ideas. **Readings:** Chapter 2 "The Accumulation of Labor and the Degradation of Women: Constructing 'Difference' in the 'Transition to Capitalism'" in *Caliban and the*

*Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation* and “Teaching, Marriage and the Political Idea” in *Unbought and Unbossed* by Shirley Chisholm.

## Module 2 - Weeks 7-8 - The Body as Space and Place

### ❖ February 16 – Márquez

Conceptions of the Body and how these shape behavior and social structures.

**Reading:** Chapter 3 “The Great Caliban: The Struggle Against the Rebel Body” in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*; Excerpt of: Estes’ “The Dirty Goddesses” and sacred sexuality; and “Hips, hip-notism, hip(g)nosis: the mulata performances of Ninón Sevilla” by Melissa Blanco Borelli

### ❖ February 23 – d’Elena

**Readings:** “Sexism: An American Disease in Black Face” and “Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving” by Audre Lorde

**Video:** [Audre Lorde: The Uses of the Erotic](#)

**After Class:** Watch Yara Travieso: The Rebel Body Today

## Module 3 - Weeks 9-12 - Women and/in Religion

### ❖ March 9 – d’Elena (Márquez on zoom)

**Reading:** Chapter 4 “The Great Witch-Hunt in Europe” in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*.

**Schedule one-on-one with professors to determine final topics of interest**

### ❖ March 16 - Márquez

**Reading:** Chapter 5 “Colonization and Christianization: Caliban and Witches in the New World” in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*.

\*excerpts from Anzaldúa on the Coatlicue state vs. the Virgin

Discussion on “what do you want to see in D.C.”

- ❖ March 23 – d'Elena

What is a “Witch Hunt” today?

**Reading:** “Violence against women in world religions” by Christine E. Gudorf and “ Muntu, Kintu and the Bursuit of Bumuntu: Reflection on the Roots of Violence against Women in African Traditional Religions” in *Violence Against Women in Contemporary World Religion*.

- ❖ March 30 - Márquez

**Reading:** “Authority, Resistance, and Transformation: Jewish Feminist Reflections on Good Sex” by Judith Plaskow

**Preliminary research questions and outline due**

#### **Module 4 - Weeks 13-14 - Women and/in Politics**

- ❖ April 6 – d'Elena

**Reading:** “Women and Their Liberation” in *Unbought and Unbossed* by Shirley Chisholm and Pt 2 #1, “Belva Lockwood” and Pt 3, #4 and #6 “The Need for Equal Rights Amendment” and “Advocating the Elimination of Gender-Based Discrimination” in *My Own Words* by Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

**Short Videos:** [How Eleanor Roosevelt Won The Battle For Human Rights](#), [The Women who Shaped the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), and [Beacon of Hope - Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

**Homework:** Documentary on AOC

- ❖ April 13 – d'Elena

Ginsburg and Roe V. Wade

**Reading:** “Facing the Abortion Question” in *Unbought and Unbossed* by Shirley Chisholm.

\* Connect to A Seat at the Table: Congress Women's Perspectives on Why Their Presence Matters lecture notes.

- ❖ April 20 - Márquez

How do we insert ourselves? **Reading:** “Running for Congress” in *Unbought and Unbossed* by Shirley Chisholm and “Feeling from Within” and “In Conversation

with Uses of the Erotic” in *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* by adrienne maree brown.

The Case of Althea Garrison

### **Summer Reading Requirements (Preview)**

Chapter 7 “The Joyous Body: The Wild Flesh,” Chapter 8 “ Self-Preservation: Identifying Leg Traps, Cages and Poison Bait” and Chapter 9 “Homing: Returning to Oneself” in Clarissa Pinkola Estés’ *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*.

*Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

REclaiming the “Witch”