

ROUTLEDGE



FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY UNDER CAPITALISM

Witches, Fairies, and Nomads



KATHLEEN SKOTT-MYHRE

CONCEPTS FOR CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY | DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES RE-THOUGHT

‘A wonder-ful exposition that draws on a truly breathtaking range of scholarship and original analysis to posit as the beyond of gendered, classed and colonial oppression a domain of collective nonrational knowing. An inspirational and major contribution to new, ‘minor’ forms of psychology that seek neither to re-centre marginality, nor to close down the proliferation of resistant practice, but rather makes a call to reclaim women’s rituals and traditions to provoke new transnational political alliances and engagements.’

Erica Burman, Professor of Education,
University of Manchester

‘This is a book to be read by all those who want to be challenged to think differently about contemporary capitalism. Not only will readers rethink dominant ways of knowledge but they will also be introduced to brujas, faeries, sorcerers, and other minoritarian knowledges and, simultaneously, learn new living relations. A feminist political project that readers will never forget.’

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Professor,
Western University, Canada

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FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY UNDER CAPITALISM

Industrial modernity's worship of rationality had a profound effect on women's ways of knowing, marginalizing them along with other alternate forms of knowledge such as the imagination and the unconscious. *Feminist Spirituality under Capitalism* discusses the importance of women's spiritual knowledge throughout history and under the current socio-economic consensus. Within a critical analysis of the subjugation of certain knowledges, it investigates, in particular, the role that psychology and psychiatry have played in the repression of women. Aimed at students and researchers in the social sciences, the book will also appeal to anyone interested in critical psychology, politics, activism, and social change.

Kathleen Skott-Myhre is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of West Georgia. She teaches courses and supervises undergraduate and graduate students in feminist, clinical, post-modern, and critical psychology. Her research specializes in the psychology of feminist spirituality.

Concepts for critical psychology: Disciplinary boundaries re-thought

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PREFACE

Psychology today enchants many people; it operates as a form of knowledge that connects with something inside us that appears to express what is most authentic about the self. Psychology is intimately connected with sorcery and provides one way of grasping something magical about ourselves that then, at the same moment, escapes us. This enchantment happens in a world that turns our creativity into a series of commodities that circulate around the world completely outside our control. The paradox which haunts this book is that there are forms of spiritual knowledge about that self that descriptions of our psychology try to tap into, but which psychology as a discipline repeatedly betrays.

Once upon a time, before psychology, our mental lives were populated with hosts of magical beings that lived among us, tempting and taunting us on some occasions, shielding and supporting us on others. They were there outside us, reference points that we could collectively experience and share in, to explain how and why things went wrong with our lives and offering resources we could draw upon to put things right. Kathleen Skott-Myhre reclaims that history and shows how different it is to what we call “psychology” today, and she provides a compelling argument for why we must connect once again with this spiritual realm. But, more than that, she mobilizes critical theoretical resources that speak of our individual and collective agency as human subjects, agency as something that always already refuses attempts to fix us in place, to define what we are, and that subjects us to totalizing vertical regimes of scientific truth and

societal control. These theoretical resources that revolve around the motif of the “nomad” are infused with a feminist sensibility which questions and transforms what witches and fairies tell us about what is “feminine” about ourselves. What has been shut out of capitalism and its help meet psychology over the centuries is thus returned to, and this radical collective spiritual knowledge of who we are comes to speak through this book.

When Marx pointed out that religion under capitalism was the “opium of the people”, it was to make a much deeper claim about our experience than simply to accuse those who go to church of being crack-addicts. What is often forgotten are the other aspects of Marx’s argument in which religion is characterized as the “soul of a spiritless condition”, as the “heart of a heartless world”. This is not a negative scornful critique, but one which values attempts of people to find meaning in a world which has been turned into a system of brutalizing economic calculation and competition between self-sufficient separate individuals, alienated from each other. In similar spirit, we can read the claim in *Feminist Spirituality under Capitalism: Witches, Fairies, and Nomads* as being that psychology today operates as opium of the people, but that sorcery is the force that enables us to speak of what psychology promises but then shuts out. With psychology, to the side and against it, inside psychology but working at the edges, redefining it not as a disciplinary apparatus but simultaneously as ancient knowledge and as new “minor psychology”, outwith the regimes of knowledge that speak of women but have so often silenced them.

Ian Parker
University of Leicester

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I express my heartfelt gratitude to Ian Parker for affording me the opportunity to write the book that I have been carrying in my head for over 15 years.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the strange and wondrous Psychology Department at the University of West Georgia. It may be the last psychology department left in North America where a project such as this would be not only supported but also encouraged. In that regard, I thank Dr Chris Aanstoos who insisted that I teach *Sorcery and Transformation* as one of the first courses I offered as a new faculty member. I will be forever enamored with the sweet magic to be found in the community of Carrollton, Georgia.

This book would never have been written without the unwavering support and encouragement of my partner/husband, Hans Skott-Myhre. Your love and encouragement during the stormiest of seas kept me from drowning. There is not enough time nor are there enough words to say what you mean to me. If I could write my love to you until the end of time, it would not be enough.

This book is dedicated to my sisters, Linda, Lorna, and Debbie, all of whom live out our Gallagher magic every day.

And to my mother, whose love is written on my bones.

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INTRODUCTION

Of fairies, feminism, and 21st-century capitalism

WHERE dips the rocky highland
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
There lies a leafy island
Where flapping herons wake
The drowsy water-rats;
There we've hid our faery vats,
Full of berries
And of reddest stolen cherries.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you
can understand.

Where the wave of moonlight glosses
The dim grey sands with light,
Far off by furthest Rosses
We foot it all the night,
Weaving olden dances,
Mingling hands and mingling glances
Till the moon has taken flight;
To and fro we leap
And chase the frothy bubbles,
While the world is full of troubles
And is anxious in its sleep.
Come away, O human child!