

FEMINISMS FROM ELSEWHERE; SEEING POLYVERSAL HUMANITY

It is a hard time to write about feminisms. There is too much to know to be able to do this right. So I risk myself because I cannot know enough. I am trying to build a public intellectual and political space in order for feminists to both spark anew, and continue, the struggle for a just democracy for all people. I return to women in Africa both because of the U.S. debt to slaves and because of women's incredible activism there against neo-liberalism. I return to women in Islam because the historical struggles of the moment locate me here. There are also many other feminisms in Korea, Argentina, Thailand, China, Brazil, Chile, India, and on and on. So I do not mean to create silences here, but I do.

If context—historical and of the moment—always matters, then I must locate today's feminisms in ways that respect their many differences and varieties, across time, geographical space, and culture; along with race, class, ethnicity, and sexual preference.¹ But language is not helpful here. I think feminism is always plural and always has been. Yet when I write feminisms and refer to them as one, I risk people thinking that I am writing of a homogeneous politics. Yet if I refer to feminisms and write of them as plural, it appears that I see many different kinds of feminism rather than their co-equal pluralism and singularity. So I will sometimes refer to feminisms as singular—'it'—, and other times as plural—'they', because it/they, is/are both. Multiplicity and cohesion exist simultaneously.

Is feminisms—the belief that women should define the contours of their own creativity—more at home in one place than another? Who gets to answer these questions in the first place? It has never felt more urgent to clarify and answer these questions given the way that women's rights discourse has been appropriated by the Bush administration for making war instead of peace. In the aftermaths of Sept. 11, 2001 neo-liberal democracy has become even less democratic. I wish to unwrap and distinguish the progressive use of women's rights discourse by women in places 'elsewhere' from the imperial feminism of the Bush administration. And I wish to differentiate between the right-wing take-over of feminist discourse and other progressive feminisms which also exist within 'the' West. These dialogues will hopefully recapture and create anew the humanely democratic and thriving complex communities of women and girls across the globe.

Feminisms, as a term, identifies women politically. The name as such puts the patriarchal and misogynist structures of power in view no matter how variously. It breaks the silence of male privilege by denaturalizing and denormalizing it. Because power and oppression are never static, but rather dynamic, feminisms are always changing to address these historical and newly formed systems. Feminisms develop the possibility of theoretically seeing how women's oppression has newly formed sites. Theoretical means seeing the connectedness between women, between them and the multiple systems of power attempting to harness their creativity. Feminisms always requires new dialogue to unfreeze the varied constructions of womanhood. Women's struggle for self-determination is always defined within the cultural

¹See Estelle Freedman, No Turning Back, The History of Feminism and the Future of Women (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), for an important attempt, although not always successful, to pluralize the very idea of feminism to non-western moments. Her discussion of feminism embraces sites that are not always readily seen as feminist, although in the end, Western feminism appears dominant.

contexts and structures of power that women inhabit.

Feminisms recognize the collective life of women defined by child-bearing and rearing and the layers of labor connected with this, and also critiques these burdens, and also demands freely chosen options structured by equality of race and class. Such a rendering must accept diverse understandings of these meanings. But the respect for woman's need to define her own body's integrity is always crucial, whether it be covered, or exposed. I am opening feminist practices to the widest range of possible meanings without undermining their completely revolutionary stance: that feminisms fundamentally reorder the way 'natural' is seen, spoken, and lived. In this reordering women's lives are seen as crucial to life's daily rhythms but not as static or inevitable. The abuse of women's bodies, whether the sex/gendered structuring of the slave trade and racial apartheid; and the sexual terrorism of the trafficking of women and their exploitation in the global factory are no longer silenced. Globalization is then understood as a systematic patriarchal structuring of racialized, sexualized, global exploitation.

Feminisms, especially of 'the' West in the U.S., must be ready to speak against the cultural and economic domination of their home country that creates such impossible sadness and pain to people at home, as well as elsewhere: Afghans, Iraqis, Rwandans, Palestinians, Israelis, and so on. Today, at this moment, given the ascendancy and arrogance of the U.S., U.S. feminism is too easily equated with 'the' West and historically this meant European, democratic, and modern. Yet, these early forms were colonialist and racist. As well, today's brand of ascendant feminism articulates a neo-liberal agenda which advertises an imperial feminist agenda although there are other marginalized feminisms in the U.S. that are silenced in this reading.

Much that is said to be Western and therefore democratic and or/feminist have local sites elsewhere where feminisms also thrive. Feminisms are not simply Western, nor non-Western, but embrace women's activism in places elsewhere whether named as such, or not. A polyversal feminism--multiple and connected-- expresses women's potential shared humanity wherever it exists. When women are subordinated and not allowed the lives they wish to live they respond with resistance. The plural acts of resistance are what women do to survive and thrive in multiple and yet connected ways. I am locating a human response to suffering although it will always be articulated through localized meanings.

West and non-West are both real and made-up as coherent geographical/cultural locations. The flows between empires and their colonies, between colonizer and colonized, between slave and slave-master, between colors of the skin, are misread as separateness and opposition. Feminisms have suffered from this overdrawn divide palpably. They have been wrongly homogenized as a unity, and then defined as of 'the' West. This negates multiple forms of feminisms in 'the' West AND the multiple forms of feminisms outside 'the' West. As such feminisms lose their plurality of meanings which also express the similarities among women.

A similar reductionism has been made between liberal (as western) feminism and feminism per se. The U.S. feminist movement is depicted by both West and non-western discourses alike, as white and middle-class. Although this often accurately describes the mainstream of U.S. feminisms, it silences the difference between mainstream liberal feminism and its neoliberal/imperial self. Other multiple radical sites are also silenced in this equation which simply furthers a right-wing takeover of western feminism.

Today, I revise my thought in The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism, that "all feminism is liberal at its root in that the universal feminist claim that woman is an independent being (from man) is premised on the 18th century liberal conception of the independent and

autonomous self.”² There are other locations for this thinking about woman’s freedom. It is wrong-headed to assume that the notion of feminist individuality and autonomy is always an extension of liberal individualism. There are other notions of autonomy that are not simply liberal individualist at their core. As such, the notion of autonomous woman comes from other locations besides ‘the’ West. There are varieties of autonomy besides liberal individuality that are liberatory. If feminisms from elsewhere have a debt to ‘the’ West, it is also true that ‘the’ West has a debt to women elsewhere.

Woman’s autonomy, though essential to feminist thinking, has differing contextual routes/roots. There are a variety of meanings of woman’s autonomy and independence. When Inji Aflatun, an Egyptian feminist in 1949 says that the enemies of women are the enemies of democracy; and that women’s struggle for themselves will strengthen democracy in Egypt her meaning is not simply Western, or liberal, but rather uniquely human AND creatively dialogic.³ Rich, glocal mixtures emerge: local expressions of the global/universal leave neither as they were separately. This notion of the simultaneity of localized life and global context needs its appropriate translation.

I also previously argued that the creative tension of liberal feminism exists between the individualism of liberalism, and the collectivity of feminism; that “the contradiction between liberalism (as patriarchal and individualist in structure and ideology) and feminism (as sexual egalitarian and collectivist) lays the basis for feminism’s movement beyond liberalism”.⁴ Sadly, much of this creative possibility has been captured by neo-liberal/imperial feminists in the U.S. Yet, much of the creative liberal feminist agenda has also been adopted by human rights activists and feminists in places elsewhere. In these transnational dialogues sexual equality is embraced but with recognition of a complex diversity. Equality is needed for the similarities, rather than the sameness that women share. Hence, the tension in all feminisms between the patriarchal structures of women’s lives and their understanding of their own potential for democratic life. As I wrote in The Color of Gender, women need freedom for our uniqueness and equality for our similarity.⁵

Feminisms, like any politics, should always be in process. I do not want to freeze the meaning of feminisms, nor can I. It is a series of political understandings that develop given the demands and uniqueness of the moment. The flux and change elucidates feminisms, rather than denies their status as a coherent politics. I continue to use the term, problematic though it is, because it is the only term I know that translates across time and culture to put women in view politically—as more than isolated individuals living in disparate political moments. Feminisms continue to name patriarchy and misogyny as a global problem for the times we live in. English

²Zillah Eisenstein, The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1981), p. 4.

³Inji Aflatun, “We Egyptian Women”, in Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing, ed. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 350.

⁴Eisenstein, The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism, p. 3

⁵Zillah Eisenstein, The Color of Gender, Reimagining Democracy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 173.

privileges women in 'the' West, so I gladly translate feminism into its home language whatever this is. And we shall all speak and write of *feministe*, *feminismo*, and so on.

Feminists in Islam allow feminists in the U.S. to see secular and believing Muslims in their political struggle for democracy against their own home-grown patriarchal regimes, and against U.S. hegemony. This positioning, along with African feminisms, necessitate a self-critique of U.S. feminisms' privileged status within globalized discourses. Feminists in Islam who are re-reading the Qur'an also query in a variety of ways their understandings of women's equality which is not hostile to ideas of sex difference as well as obligation. African womanists demand that Africa be seen as a resource for enriching feminism's notion of liberation. Given the extraordinary hegemony of U.S. neo-liberalism, and my own place consciousness in the U.S. I attempt as best I can to create dialogue, rather than misappropriation. My hope is that progressive feminists in the U.S. will assist in building an anti-globalization movement which will successfully challenge the Bush wars on/of 'terror'

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

I find it nearly impossible to name the past three decades of women's activism. U.S. feminists in the early 1970's of all stripes spoke of women's rights or liberation; reform or/and revolution. Although civil rights and anti-Vietnam war activists initiated much of what was called feminism at the time, the mainstreamed women's movement was predominantly white and middle class. At this same time, there were many other women activists—in Algeria, Iran, Egypt, Chile, Argentina, South Africa, and so on—struggling for democratic lives but they were treated as invisible by 'the' West. It easily followed, through this silencing, that feminism was depicted as of 'the' West. And much of women's activism elsewhere, was subsumed under the rubric of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, even by women themselves.

U.S. Black and Latina feminists, by the late seventies, played a crucial role in critically pluralizing feminism beyond the liberal individualism of the mainstream white women's movement. Anti-racist feminists embraced differences in order to build a larger collectivity and inclusivity of 'women'. Black feminists like Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, and bell hooks were crucial to this process. Despite the conservative Reagan-Bush decade of the '80's anti-racist feminists articulated a more honest viewing of women as a sexual class, divided by economic class, race, and sexual preference. At this time feminisms were pluralized to different socialist, anarchist, cultural, liberal, lesbian, environmental, radical, Black and Latina agendas. Such naming was necessary, and yet these borders dividing one feminism from another were only partially accurate. A Black feminist also has other identities, like socialist, or lesbian or...or... At this time, horizons, though, were not often global. There was little mention of Muslim feminisms, and little recognition of the feminisms abroad elsewhere.

During this period I identified as a socialist feminist to distinguish myself from the mainstreamed/white liberal movement in the U.S. Then came the revolutions of '89 and Eastern European women's indictment of the misuses of feminism by statist socialism. Socialist feminist no longer felt like an effective identity. I began to just say I was a feminist. But the more this term was being appropriated by neo-liberals for global capital I felt uncomfortable with this as well. I began to think I needed to reclaim socialism again; and as a white woman of the globe, I needed to name my anti-racism.

My process of seeing and naming a more inclusive feminism has been a process of recognizing the growing power differentials between the U.S. and the rest of the world and also

looking to see more kinds of women across the globe. My viewing from the U.S. may be less encompassing than women's standpoint from their sites elsewhere because colonialism and imperial capitalism have demanded that they know more and see more in order to survive. Because hegemony of and by 'the' West appropriates and narrows vision to its own visor I must work at deconstructing the universalized gaze and not see through its distortions as I look elsewhere. There are glocal polyversal feminisms to unveil and learn about. These local sites of women's activism are the locations from which to recognize and give voice to a cacophony of feminisms.

Despite globalization's attempts to homogenize cultures it also puts other cultural practices in view. Global markets create a broader lens from which the world is seen even if it distorts this unique multiplicity while doing so. The U. N. sponsored Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995, mobilized and publicized various women's movements around the world to the world. It was the first time for many across the globe to know of Muslim feminists who had been reading the Qur'an in non-patriarchal ways for a long time before; or to know of women's organizing in Nigeria and Ghana on behalf of sustainable development.

Feminism emerges as women can see their own identity as at one with other women in like and different situations. The naming as such is part of the process of coming to consciousness of one's shared identity and this identity forms more readily the more one's life activity crisscrosses contradictory locations: slave-women committed to their own humanity; Arab women working in the fields and market and relegated to the home; middle-class professional women in Iran and India and the U.S. circumscribed by their dutiful roles as wives and mothers.

Women activists need to radically pluralize, rather than liberally pluralize, the concept of feminisms. This means that differences will not be silenced in some hierarchically privileged order against a singular standard, or set up oppositionally against each other. This means that differences of power must be recognized and challenged. The structures of power have to be dismantled so that differences simply express variety and can be earnestly embraced as such.⁶ There will be a variety of ways that women's equality, freedom, and justice are expressed and defended; as long as self-determination—which encompasses individual choices and access (equality) to them exists as part of this process.

So, feminisms belong to anyone who is committed to women's ability to choose their destiny; to be the agent of their own life choices as long as they do not colonize another. As such, no one simply owns feminisms particular meaning. Naming acknowledges the thing named so that it can be seen. Naming ends silence. Naming also expresses the power of those who get to name. It is part of the very process of self-determination that is so central to feminism itself. Toni Morrison in Beloved writes: "Definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined".⁷ Feminism locates the sites of women's oppression as visible. There are differing notions of what oppression means, yet 'feminism' gives coherence to the variety. Women, especially in 'the' West, need to multiply the versions/visions of women's oppression and liberation; and find multiple ways to understand the varieties of feminisms.

⁶Zillah Eisenstein, The Color of Gender, Reimagining Democracy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 175. Also see my The Female Body and the Law (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), especially chapters 2, 3, and 6.

⁷Toni Morrison, Beloved (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1987), p. 190.

The contested domain of feminisms is not understood best as a clear West/non-West divide. I instead look to see plurally in `other-than-western' varieties.⁸ Yet, to the extent `a' West is spoken in this phrasing it is still privileged in this site. I recognize that there has been much of `the' West written into feminist theory, but also believe that `the' West has simply claimed much of feminism as its own that is not. My queries and condemnations are not meant to deny the enormously rich history that feminisms of `the' West have provided women across the globe. Maria Stewart demanded women's rights for slave women in the 1820's. Working class feminisms with communal notions of rights go back to at least the 17th century in Europe. Yet, feminism is not simply of `the' West. Many women from elsewhere already know this so my inquiry is hopelessly slanted by my own start.

Miriam Cooke, a Muslim feminist living in the U.S. says that feminists are "women who think and do something about changing expectations for women's social roles and responsibilities". She calls attention to the journal Zanan and the women who are reading the Qur'an from a women's viewpoint and "demanding equal access to scriptural truth at a time when Islamic discourse is on the rise." For many of these women, Islam does not presume gender inequity; and feminism the opposite. Rather, Islam itself, at its most democratic reading, requires women's equality. These women seek to subvert and adapt Islamic practices to recognize justice and citizenship for Muslim women. She sees Islamic feminism, not as singular but as a politic with no one "fixed identity" and a series of subject positions. And she also recognizes that some Muslim feminists, like Haideh Moghissi are radically opposed to the idea that there is any room in Islam for women's rights.⁹

To the extent that English has been predominantly a white/Western woman's language it also is attached to white women's identities. This does not mean that most white women readily claim the term, nor does it mean that women of color do not utilize it frequently. But nuanced differences exist within these choices. U.S. Black women have been uncomfortable with the term given its racist history, its exclusionary focus privileging white women, Black women's own multiple oppressions which made feminism's singularity feel too narrow, and the hostility towards feminism by Black men as a white woman's thing. Jill Nelson, who often identifies as feminist also says that although naming is important, so "is anonymity and adroit warfare". She says Black women know "the efficacy of stealth", of "communicating indirectly", of the "amazing art of passing on information via metaphor" as spirituals do.¹⁰

Women activists in Egypt in the early 20th century like Huda Shaarawi wrote and spoke from their own experiences; no one term directly translated into `feminist'. The problem of translation is so often why Arab feminisms have been invisible to the world outside Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, and Syria. Shaarawi was an upper class Egyptian woman who was brought up in the segregated world of the harem, and resisted this life because it constructed her femaleness as a barrier to her freedom. She criticized social custom, rather than the Qur'an, for holding women

⁸I am indebted to Carol Quillen, "Feminist Theory, Justice and the Lure of the Human", Signs, vol. 27, no. 1 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 87-122, for the phrasing, "other-than" in pluralizing feminisms beyond liberalism..

⁹Miriam Cooke, Women Claim Islam (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. ix, xv, 60, 61.

¹⁰Jill Nelson, "Call Me Woman", Ms. Magazine, vol. XI, no. 2 (Feb./March, 2001), p. 48.

back.¹¹ The autobiography of Fay Afaf Kanafani chronicles her sexual abuse as a child at the hands of her father; and her difficult refusal of sex with her husband for years. As a Muslim/Arab woman her identity is formed by this, and the tensions between Palestine and Lebanon from the close of WWI.¹² Her activism was polyvocal, and feminist. Their stories are quasi-universal; wealthy educated women who wish to do as their brothers and husbands do.

Deep inside the very notion of feminism resides this conundrum: the translation of plural meanings and multiple locations into one term that cannot be home grown in each location. The term feminism—its racist and colonialist past—inhibits an embrace of all women’s lives across the globe. And yet it calls attention to women like no other term, in no other language. If feminisms means the willingness to both recognize and subordinate differences while recognizing the inequalities of power that divide women, the language of feminisms should not inevitably reproduce imperial meaning itself.¹³ And yet again, the term feminism silently authorizes the English language as power-filled.

We, the big ‘we’—feminists across the globe—need an identity chosen from women’s present activism that opens feminisms to their most democratic promise. This will be more-than-a-westernized anti-racist feminism. De-westernized does not mean less focus on the gendered oppressions of women’s lives, but gender is complexly connected to multiple systems of power. It also requires the denuding of the globalized West’s cultural dominance and economic appropriation. It means commitment to the gender rights of women while condemning global imperialism. This is a necessary and powerful combination: women challenging global capital with its racialized patriarchal structures of domination and exploitation while also embracing a democratized gender agenda which will destabilize local/cultural misogynys.

¹¹Huda Shaarawi, Harem Years, The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist, trans. And introduction by Margot Badran (New York: The Feminist Press, 1986), p. 40.

¹²Fay Afaf Kanafani, Nadia, Captive of Hope, Memoir of an Arab Woman (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), p. xiii.

¹³Zillah Eisenstein, Hatreds, Racialized and Sexualized Conflicts in the 21st Century (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 109.

So where does 'feminisms' stand at present? Given feminism's troubled history and incomplete understanding of the complexities always also defining sex and gender oppression, activists must employ the term skeptically and give it new and insurgent meanings all the time. It is impossible to control and limit the radical dimensions of feminisms as they are practiced by women cross-culturally so language must specify the practices in relentless detail.¹⁴ It is an enormous challenge to remain open and not assume that you know the limits and meanings of a particular practice before hand. So women from multiple sites and cultures must remain open to new meanings of feminisms, as each person looks for their particular and plural meanings of selfhood. Feminisms are always changing with new possibilities for democratizing human liberation so we—the big 'we'-- must allow them to do so.

MODERNITY AND FEMINISMS

The language of politics—democracy, socialism, modernity, civilization—is deciphered by Marxists, neo-liberals, Islamists, in relation to the economic system, which by definition makes the racialized gender system invisible. Bourgeois liberalism articulates the relations of capitalism; socialism writes its critique. Conservatism embraces preservation of the economy. Terms like western and modernity bespeak the bourgeois layering of economic development. In all this, women's lives are de-politicized as private and not public, and stand outside the contours of political language. Despite this, women remain the symbolic of nationhood.

Women's bodies are clothed to represent the status of the nation: chadors, burqas, saris, mini-skirts, spiked heels, eye make-up, face-lifts, etc. Non-modern dress, read as non-Western, is a sign of backwardness or underdevelopment. Modernity exposes the woman's body; the more the body is revealed, the more modern the nation. The more that sexuality is spoken, the more modern the culture. Yet, both rich and poor nations, so-called modern and not, suffer domestic violence, rape, and unwanted pregnancies.

Feminisms put women's and girl's lives in full view as part of the matrix of oppression, and intervene in the simplistic modernity debate. As such, societies where rape and domestic violence are practiced are backward, as well as uncivilized, whether or not these countries are western or not. Rape camps during the Bosnian War should have put Serbs on the same par with the Taliban because rape is no more 'modern' than enforced seclusion behind a burqa is simply backward. The enforced prostitution of women in South-East Asia and the Pacific by the Japanese military during WW II bespeaks woman as the horrific 'other'. She is not a part of the society, but merely serves it as sex slave. From this vantage point of sexual slavery there are no nations that are not in some sense 'backward'.

Women who were forcibly rounded up as 'comfort women' for the Japanese military during the Asia Pacific War during 1931-45, were imprisoned in brothels to provide sex to military men. As one officer of the Army Corps justifies the practice: "This desire [for sex] is the same as hunger or the need to urinate, and soldiers merely thought of comfort stations as practically the same as latrines".¹⁵ These young women from Indonesia, the Philippines,

¹⁴I am indebted to my friend and African historian Sandra Greene for helping me clarify this point.

¹⁵As quoted in Yoshimi Yoshiaki, Comfort Women, Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II, (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 199.

Singapore, China, Korea, and Burma, were forced to service military men's needs. Their continued rape, confinement and physical abuse, was a grave violation of their human rights which combined sexual violence against women, racism, and discrimination against the poor.¹⁶

These sorts of rape camps bespeak inhumanity and 'backwardness'. Rape is uncivilized, and yet stands outside the usual markers depicting modernity and 'civilization', as it did in the 18th century and the slave trade. This is simply one example of the unsettling of the modernity/backward, civilized/uncivilized divide once one looks at the silenced political arena of sexual violence. And this violence should not be oversimplified or misrepresented as one of simple gender oppression. In Rwanda, 1994, the slaughter and rape of hundreds of thousands of women was done by ordinary people wielding machetes. And many in these civilian mobs doing the killing were women.¹⁷

Given the silencing of women's lives and struggles in political discourses like modernity, it becomes even more troublesome to connect feminisms with terms like 'western', or 'modern'. Such identifications often simply reproduce silences which negate the possibility for seeing women's activities and contributions as part of the stuff of political life itself. Instead, women are captured by modernity—and its global capitalist markets—as for sale as in “feminism for export”.¹⁸ Glitzy advertisements of beautiful women fantasize the freedom of 'the' West. Well-dressed and fashionable women image the promise of democracy. Women of 'the' West are exported to the rest of the global 'community' as CEO's or porn stars. Mass marketing turns feminism into a consumerist self-help market and feminisms' possibilities are de-radicalized as a marketing device of first-world markets. In these instances the radical possibilities of feminisms are truncated and the struggle for humane democracies vaporized. Meanwhile a majority of the women across the globe—inside and outside 'the' West-- are living and working harder than ever.

However, the same exploitative system of global capital that renews the oppression of women and girls in sweat-shop labor, prostitution, and cyber-systems of power, also provokes and makes visible women's activism across the globe. As former divisions between home and work, and public and private life are challenged, patriarchal controls are exposed and undermined in new fashion because the consumerist culture of capitalism also undermines traditional masculinist privilege. So although global capital, as such, is no friend to women and girls, it unsettles existing gender relations in ways that it cannot simply control. In this sense global capital is tremendously contradictory: it promises freedom and riches to the very people it exploits and degrades while also putting this contradictoriness in view.

Global capitalism exposes women to new levels of exploitation and also instigates new yearnings for democracy that cannot be easily dismissed as simply bourgeois. Instead, these desires tap the human quest for self-determination. These yearnings rather endorse their own local feminist desires, some of which are resistant to globalization, and some of which embrace the promissory of globalization: freedom for all. These global feminist formulations bespeak reciprocal flows even though the promise of freedom is too distant for women and girls suffering the gravest inequalities of the global market. Again, none of this is best understood as simply

¹⁶Ibid., As stated by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1996, p. 23.

¹⁷Mahmood Mamdani, When Victims Become Killers (Princeton: Princeton University, 2001), chapter 7.

¹⁸Eisenstein, Hatreds, chapter 5.

`modern', or `backward'.

For Leila Ahmed the history of colonialism has tainted feminism as `modern' for most women across the globe. Colonialism's episodic and exclusionary notion of modernity defines a complex set of attitudes here. For some Islamists, it stigmatizes sexual independence and freedoms as western, but accepts women's education and work outside the home. Wearing the hijab is then not seen as traditional but rather as a modern form of rejecting foreign ways.¹⁹ For Margot Badran there is no culturally pure location that could be termed simply modern. Instead "entanglement" creates problems for "modernity" as a concept.²⁰ In Egypt, indigenous, local elements mix with external ones. Outside elements are absorbed into its own culture with a variety of secular and Islamist feminisms emerging. Leila Abu-Lughod says that progressives in Egypt choose a "moral modernity" which is not western, i.e., sexually immoral and individualist.²¹ Omnia Shakry believes that the woman's question in Egypt shows "how a local nationalist discourse articulated in very complex ways with colonial discourse, seeks to situate itself as both modern and Islamic", as both with and against `the' West.²² Or, as Zohreh Sullivan says, Egyptian women neither want to return to a past, nor do they wish to mimic western feminism. She argues that modernism should not be thought to be reduceable to a western formulation.²³ Haleh Afshar says that women activists in Iran cannot be easily classified as liberals or westerners. She rather argues that the variations within Islam are "reconcilable" with a host of feminisms that exist in the world today".²⁴ There are a variety of feminisms to explore here: secular, Islamist, in-between, communist, liberal, and...

Western feminism, when equated with liberal feminism, as it was articulated in the 19th century stood as a critique of the exclusion of white women from the bourgeois revolution overtaking England and France. These women wanted the new freedoms being promised white propertied men. In order to claim these rights these women first had to see that they were excluded as a sexual caste, as a homogenized collective with no individuality. They then used this ascribed status to challenge the engendered exclusivity of bourgeois right. These feminists did not speak of slave women or slaves in general. They did not speak of non-propertied

¹⁹Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiations as a Dynamic of Post-Colonial Cultural Politics", in Lila Abu-Lughod, ed. Remaking Women, Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 243, 263.

²⁰Margot Badran, Feminists, Islam and Nation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 31, 32.

²¹Lila Abu-Lughod, "Introduction", in Abu-Lughod, ed., Remaking Women, p. 15.

²²Omnia Shakry, "Schooled Mothers and Structured Play: Child Rearing in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt", in Abu-Lughod, ed., Remaking Women, p. 158.

²³Zohreh Sullivan, "Eluding the Feminist, Overthrowing the Modern? Transformations in 20th Century Iran", in Abu-Lughod, ed., Remaking Women, pp. 216, 236.

²⁴Haleh Afshar, Islam and Feminisms, An Iranian Case-Study (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 217.

women, or colonized women. They were exclusionary by the silences they allowed. They instead utilized the abstract/inclusive promissory of individual rights and demanded democracy for themselves. These were the canonized and commodified voices of feminism which silenced other feminisms in 'the' West: Black, working class, Quaker/believing Christians, and... Their radical—though incomplete—moment has long since passed.

Western hegemony equates individuality with bourgeois individualism. In this reading the very idea of an individual with rights assumes a competitive and oppositional standpoint between the self and others. However, there are other notions of individuality that are not simply at one with a bourgeois individualism that presupposes that the self flourishes best in autonomous, rather than communal fashion.. This “other-than-western” notion of individuality premises the self as also interconnected with others, and is not by definition antagonistic to sexual difference, but rather sexual hierarchy. The self is enhanced by others and the social obligations and responsibilities they entail. Instead of equating the liberal notion of equality with sameness of treatment, an individual woman’s particularity can be encompassed without negating fair treatment.

Feminisms of all sorts recognize the complex need to re-write democratic theory while recognizing both women’s similarities and differences, among themselves, and to men as well. The criteria for equal treatment should be about justice for humanity, which is both male and female. This standard for justice is specified through the divides of rich and poor, and all colors, religions, and cultures. Many Islamic and Africana feminisms imagine a social notion of the individual that is connected to family. It is terribly important to distinguish the progressive and life enhancing dimensions of collectivity—whether under a veil or a tribal commune or family-life—from the stifling and hierarchical, lonely and arduous dimensions of individualism AND from the stifling and arduous dimensions of patriarchal and extended families.

Submission to scriptural canon and/or a degrading collectivism negates the individuality of women. Submission to a rugged individualism negates the connectivity of these same women. The recognition of the communal, familial and interconnected concepts of the self is spoken by feminists and women activists in Mexico, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Familial relations have always been foundational for U.S. Black feminists.

Individuality can imply autonomy and connection; one can choose to act individually while also recognizing obligations and responsibilities. This requires recognition of the self-determining woman and her choices while recognizing that these choices are not utterly free and unrestricted. This sense of self is interconnected with others, although the self is also independent. This reading of the self is other-than-bourgeois individualist which is masculinist and racialized at its root. This feminist self has its roots/routes from 'elsewheres' where slavery and colonialism have demanded more of the individual than selfish desire, but also more than selflessness. A slave woman runs away and risks death over rape for herself and her children. A woman wears the veil while fighting for the revolution she believes will free all women. A woman risks her individual job as she makes charges of sexual harassment.

Connectedness and autonomy are not oppositional stances as they so often have been articulated in both bourgeois individualism and socialist collectivism. This significance of the webbed relations between self and others may be more present in women’s than men’s lives because most women undertake the burdens and responsibilities of family more directly than most men. Women’s lives—their duties and responsibilities—blend and bleed across the usual political divides of bourgeois and socialist, individualist and collectivist, West and non-West. Feminisms which have developed through the challenges of imperialism and globalization

explore new meanings of self-hood in response to these complex power regimes defining their lives.

I cling to the self as 'free' even though I wish to disengage the idea of selfhood from its commodified selfish form. I remain committed to individuality because it can nurture a diverse humanity. Because freedom can allow us our differences it always has the possibility of creating uniqueness. Freedom, then, of the self, allows for the possibility of dissidence and resistance in that it nurtures individuality, rather than deference. But of course this presupposes an individual who already is committed to more than just selfishness. Otherwise, submission rather than unique creativity dominates.

Neoliberal and imperial feminism mass market a selfish individualism and silence concerns with racial and economic equality. Such feminism destroys its promise of democracy because without equality freedoms cannot be actualized by most women. Freedom to choose must be accompanied by the possibility of having access to one's choices. So feminists, especially within 'the' West must work to equalize the access to freedoms so that they matter more, and for all people. Democratic feminisms embrace equality as a way to recognize women's similarities as female, and freedom because it celebrates women's multiplicity. And they must also recognize that within the sharedness of being female there are enormous power differentials that must be remedied by creating differential access. Given power differentials, demands for equality must be specified as they are woven through the differentials of race, class, sexuality, and culture. And, it is not enough to have economic or legal equality without equality of sexual choices. New feminisms will emerge as women engage in the pressing challenges of this day.

For new feminisms to thrive as they should, it is important to clarify the various present days feminisms of 'the' West: a neoliberal/imperial feminist discourse of the U.S. government and transnational capital; a mainstream liberal feminist equal rights agenda articulated inside the U.S. and elsewhere as well; a vocal human rights discourse publicized through the U.N.; and a mix of progressive liberatory discourses from Black, Latina, Socialist, women's groups in the U.S. and Europe.

Women in 'the' West and in 'the' East and women in 'the' North, and in 'the' South; women of 'the' non-West living in 'the' West; and women of 'the' West living in 'the' non-West must move and shake these dialogues beyond these falsely defined divides. These various feminist voices reflect the vital power struggles of the 21st Century. And it is out of these contested voices that new radically pluralist feminist dialogues can develop.

Although the dominant discourse of global capital reproduces and reifies the notion of 'the' western woman daily, this image silences too many women living in 'the' West, while also rightly speaking her enormous privilege. So, we--women in the U.S.-- have an added responsibility to recognize and critique the obscene power of our own country in relation to discourses of 'the' West--in the hopes that this will allow new trust among women from elsewhere. We, the big 'we'--feminists and women activists across the globe--must carefully listen to each other and learn new ways of seeing and hearing silences and whisperings. This demands a generosity of spirit from the many women from elsewhere living in the U.S., and the women living elsewhere, suffering the consequences of the U.S. wars of/on 'terror'. Hopefully such generosity will allow all feminists to trust, together, that a better world is possible.

UNIVERSALIZING POLYVERSALISM

Given the new possibilities for thinking cross-culturally it is critically urgent to rethink the contours of the meaning of 'universal', and pluralize it to other-than-its western formulation. Universality has been exclusionary of the very thing it is to embrace—totality. Universality operates as an abstracted viewing of humanity when it is articulated by the powerful, for themselves. It implies unity rather than a notion of 'all', or 'everyone'. It is why 18th century theorists could write of the humanity, the freedom, and equality of 'all', and really mean white propertied men. To them, no one was excluded. The abstract metaphor—the individual-- makes it possible to misname and mis-see the totality, as one and the same with oneself. Yet, this notion of 'the' abstract individual'—which presumes 'any' and 'all' individuals--remains a gift of promise for those who have been silenced.

Universal rights are human rights; humanely given to any one who is human. As such they are said to be natural rights. They are available to any one who chooses to claim them. These visions were written by men like I. Kant, and J. J. Rousseau who either never spoke against the slave trade or spoke in metaphor; and never endorsed women's freedom or equality. Rousseau wrote his Social Contract because men were born free and yet everywhere lived in chains. But his men who were born free were white, not Black slaves. And the men chained were not Black, but white. No woman was a part of his civil contract.

Given the exclusionary history of universal rights they must be democratized by a previously silenced specificity. The universal must be reinvented by particularizing. If universal rights had been written at the start from the site of slavery there would have been no slaves because freedom would have been envisioned more inclusively. Today, if the universal is written from women's bodies in their polyversal diversity—with their actual needs for food, shelter, love, education, and creative lives—humanity is enlarged. Extend universal rights in actual form to the girl working in the Philippine sweatshop. The universal is specifically multiple; or as the Bengali theorists argue, there is "unity in diversity".

Specificity—especially of differences—critiques and informs an overly abstracted humanism which can be read from the site of power as oneness. Human as a term is already encoded with the colonialist's exclusiveness. Nevertheless, 'human' rights is thought to be a more inclusive construct than 'women's' rights by many. Feminist U.N. discourse states that "women's rights are human rights". I continue to query why humanism is thought to be more inclusive than feminism. Instead, why not shift the inclusive standard toward women; that human rights are encompassed by women's rights? Women's rights address the shared human likeness with men AND the distinct uniqueness of differing needs, in a way human rights, at present do not.

A health system which provides women with pre-natal and pregnancy care provides an inclusive program for both women and men, even though men will not need this specific care. Men are not disabled in this framework, as pregnant women are, within the abstracted masculinist standard of universality. As such, pregnancy becomes a (legal) disability; while women are treated similar to men. Given the specific needs pregnant women's bodies may have they simply become a more total vision for encompassing humanity. As such, women's bodies become a more inclusive standard. Inclusivity derives from a plural diversity written from women's bodies. And this specificity puts sites of powerlessness in view, for those who see themselves as the universal. When women's specified needs to health are met the silences encoded in abstracted and hierarchically privileged conceptions of humanity are uncovered.

It is therefore troubling that when Martha Nussbaum argues for a cross-cultural notion of humanness, she adopts the liberal notion of universalism. She calls for a universal accounting of

human capabilities as shared even though she recognizes the need of a universalism that is sensitive to plural and cultural differences. Pluralism and respect for difference are themselves universal values, yet they also remain liberal, or of 'the' West for her. The point I have been making throughout is that these values are not in-and-of-themselves liberal, or simply Western. She says we need a universalist feminism, an abstracted promissory of oneness which is understood as liberal.²⁵ But what can diversity of implementation mean if unity is premised at the start.

Carol Quillen interrogates Nussbaum's project. She sees much of Nussbaum's proposals as Eurocentric; that she does not recognize the tension between "European humanism and European imperialism". Whereas Nussbaum is bound by the liberal humanist tradition, Quillen asks for an "other-than-liberal humanist" project. Western humanism is one and the same with European domination and racist and colonialist practices.²⁶ Without recognizing these power differentials it is too risky that one will simply think that others should be "free like me". Emancipation is thought to lead to 'the' West—away from Islam, or anywhere elsewheres. Nussbaum needs to interrogate the promissory of liberal humanism to try and find a non-colonialist humanity in polyversal form that can retrieve humanism for liberatory feminisms not limited to abstracted universals.

Nussbaum thinks that "any universalism" which has a chance of succeeding in the "modern" world must be a "form of political liberalism". She herself acknowledges that cultures are not homogenous; that "plurality, contestation and individual variety" exist within all cultures, along with overlap and borrowing.²⁷ So how does she decipher what she terms 'political liberalism'; as well as disconnect it from the mix of other influences of which it is a part? Nussbaum either does not see other-than-liberal notions of humanism as promissory, or her Anglocentrism simply allows her to claim that liberal humanism is the universal. Once again, for me, the uni is also poly; and the global flows have always been dialectical, even if unevenly so.

Nussbaum wrongly privileges the notion of 'humanity' when she writes of women's rights. She starts Sex and Social Justice with the qualifier that it is "not really about women at all but about human beings and about women seen as fully human". She simply ignores the exclusionary practices done in the name of humanity. She authorizes her discussion of feminism by saying her feminism is humanism, i.e., that it is more inclusive than just about women.²⁸ Why this deference to huMAN? Why not reject the framework of an abstracted universal humanism and replace it with a specified viewing of humanity through the lives of its women?

Nussbaum herself repeatedly makes the case, as many others at the U.N. and World Bank do, that if you improve the lives of women, you improve the lives of everyone. Country's

²⁵Martha Nussbaum, Women and Human Development (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 74, 8, 32, 242.

²⁶Carol Quillen, "Feminist Theory, Justice and the Lure of the Human", pp. 88, 89, 100, 120.

²⁷Martha Nussbaum, Sex and Social Justice (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 9, 256.

²⁸Ibid., p.9.

develop in direct proportion to the levels of education and participation of their women. She does not consider why this is the case; just that it is so. However, a plausible reason for this scenario is that women are usually expected to take care of more than themselves. That women's lives often embrace duties and responsibilities that extend beyond, and sometimes are in conflict with, liberal humanism.

Amartya Sen has influenced Nussbaum's thinking. "The voice of women is critically important for the world's future—not just for women's future".²⁹ According to Sen, women's empowerment through education, property rights, and employment reduces fertility rates and promotes female literacy. And, when women's lives are bettered, their nations also benefit. Improve women and one simultaneously improves the lives of others. Such statements and findings are not said of men, nor is much made of this as a difference: that it is women, and not men, who readily embrace the work of humanity.

A World Bank study states that "countries which promote women's rights and increase their access to resources and schooling enjoy lower poverty rates, faster economic growth and less corruption than countries who do not." The report continues: "Gender inequality hurts all members of society, not just girls and women".³⁰ Although it is often noted that women are a main resource for community development it is less often recognized that women's sense of self is more than singular. This notion of development begs one to see more-than-a-liberal view of humanism; one which expresses the interconnectedness of female autonomy.

Nussbaum says she will redefine universalism in radically plural ways but instead universalizes liberal pluralism in its western form. I find this perplexing given that she argues that feminism should become less insular, more international, and more attentive to issues like inequality, hunger, and health care across the globe. In order to achieve such an agenda she needs to dislodge the dominant discourse she adopts. If she does so she would be more able to see other-than-liberal feminisms, and less readily homogenize women from non-western countries.³¹

Liberal humanism cannot envision more-than-western visions of humanity rich in interconnectedness and diversity because abstract individualism demands a homogeneity that makes multiplicity look chaotic and troublesome. 'The' West does not allow for the "unity in diversity"; rather global capital uses a corporatist multi-culturalism to domesticate difference into a marketable homogeneity.

Liberalism is readily privileged in 'the' West by many in the academy, like Susan Moller Okin. She also believes that cultures must become liberal to be respected. Okin wants to prioritize women's rights and fears that multi-culturalism is bad for women. She positions multi-culturalism—as group rights—against women's rights—as individual rights.³² She sees gender equality as in tension with the "claims of minority cultures" because she assumes that cultural

²⁹Amartya Sen, "Population and Gender Equity", The Nation, vol. 274, no. 4 (July 24/31, 2000), p. 18.

³⁰"Women Key to Effective Development", available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/gender/>

³¹Ratna Kapur, "Imperial Parody", Feminist Theory, vol. 2, no.1 (2001), pp. 79-88.

³²Susan Moller Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women?", in Susan Moller Okin, ed., Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women? (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 9.

diversity will clash with feminist goals. She says that group rights should not trump the individual rights of its members, and she sees group rights usually as anti-feminist. She works from within the tradition of liberalism which posits the tension between the individual and the group at its core. Individualism is bourgeois and autonomous for her. Therefore, a tension always exists between the individual and the group, whether women's rights are part of the equation or not.

Okin makes a mistake here by assuming that feminism is not also about group rights—of women as women—however individually these rights are practiced. She also does not deal with the intersectionality and multiplicity of women of color's lives when she assumes that their culture will always oppose their fair treatment. Clearly, to position multi-culturalism against women, the women become homogenized in non-cultural/racial identity. So she also does not wonder about new ways of thinking about women's rights in multi-cultural fashion..

Okin needs to re-read the dilemma and see how a different rendering of cultural rights can be used to embrace feminisms. Okin sees women's servitude as written into Islam.³³ Wearing a head scarf or veiling oneself is not a priori anti-feminist, unless Okin is only allowing her liberal feminist notion of sameness of treatment to be her defining criteria of feminism. Okin needs to indict patriarchal practices rather than multi-culturalism as the problem. And she needs to rethink how her privileging of the cultural traditions of liberalism create hostility to the multiplicity of other feminisms within other-than-liberal meanings.

Universalism covers over the normalized forms of patriarchal colonialism in the name of democracy. Multi-culturalism calls attention to diverse cultural practices, some of which are patriarchal and some of which are not. It is up to feminisms to struggle with its many formulations to decipher the widest interpretive meaning of women's liberation. Multi-culturalism comes clothed in many forms and should not be collapsed into a singularized westernized rendering. In this sense a liberal feminist critique, no matter what its local home is, is too narrowed in its viewing. There are too many other feminisms which are a compilation of their own and other cultural articulations. The globalized language of women's rights is both liberatory and colonizing; maybe more so now than ever given the insidious global webs of power that exploit women and girls everywhere while supposedly championing their newly won freedoms—from the Soviet empire, the Taliban, and so on.

Amidst this flux some Africana womanists and feminists do not see equality as meaning sameness (of treatment with men) but rather meaning respect for who each woman is. And they view liberation as an individual, communal, and national affair.

AFRICANA WOMANISMS AND THEIR BLACK FEMINIST MEANINGS

Global capitalism and its cyber airwaves make more of the world visible to more people than ever, even while large portions of the globe exist without phone lines and cyber access. Africa remains invisible to 'the' West unless it is put in view as home to the AIDS plague. Given its lack of electricity and wiring and the present anti-terrorist preoccupation with the Middle East and South-East Asia Africa's exclusion is remodeled. Blacks inside the U.S. and

³³Azizah Y. Al-Hibri, "Is Western Patriarchal Feminism Good for Third World/Minority Women?" in Okin, ed., Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women?, pp. 41-46.

Africa stand alongside the new alien color, Brown Muslim. Women in Africa continue to struggle to create sustainable lives, fight against and live with AIDS, and are also challenged by misogynist fundamentalists in Algeria, Nigeria, and Morocco.

Black feminisms in the U.S. are almost two centuries old. Black feminist critique of the racist practices of white liberal and radical feminism rejected their singularity of focus and the narrowness of their world view. Black feminists see the intersections between their race, sex, gender, and class oppression. They do not have the privilege to disregard or silence their racialized existence and its webbed connection to their gender. Black women did not know the suffocating 'institution of motherhood' that turned white middle-class women into housewives and mothers. They instead were expected to earn wages and care for white middle class women's homes. So there are different histories and trajectories to explore. Many U.S. Black feminists readily identify with Africana "womanisms", while others do not.

Women's activism has been a crucial part of life in most African societies. Women were central to the liberation of Algeria in its war for independence, were essential to the struggles against apartheid in South Africa, and have led most of the environmental movements throughout the continent for sustainable development. These African roots/routes of feminisms wind back to the days of the slave-trade when Black women suffered an enforced equality with Black men--in bearing the whip and its cruelty. These women built their lives out of degradation and resistance.³⁴ They seeded African culture in North America and the Caribbean

These women's struggles have yet to be named as part of feminist history, by Black and white women alike, and especially by neo-liberal/imperial feminists in 'the' West. White women in England and the U.S. first named their struggles as feminist even while other-than-liberal feminisms had already existed elsewhere in many indigenous forms. The powerful positioning of English as the dominant language--rather than the actual diverse practices of women's struggle--has facilitated these exclusions.

Clenora Hudson-Weems, writing in the U.S. argues that it is the "ultimate in racist arrogance and domination to suggest that authentic activity of women resides with white women." Africana women in the U.S. like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and Ida B. Wells were feminists even if they did not singularly and exclusively focus on women's issues. For Weems the struggles of African women are an originary site for understanding women's movements. White feminists have benefitted and learned from abolitionists, civil rights workers, and African women activists. Therefore, "when Africana women come along and embrace feminism, appending it to their identity as Black feminists or African feminists, they are in reality duplicating the duplicate."³⁵

There is a history to be remembered here of an "androgynous world born, weirdly enough, not of freedom, but of bondage".³⁶ Black women have practiced an alternative

³⁴Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves", Black Scholar, vol. 3, no. 4 (December, 1971), pp. 3-15; and her Women, Race, and Class (New York: Random House, 1981).

³⁵Clenora Hudson-Weems, Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves (Troy, Michigan: Bedford Publishers, 1993), p. 153.

³⁶Willie Lee Rose, Slavery and Freedom, William Freehling, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 29.

womanhood, in slavery and in freedom which nurtures alternative feminisms as well.³⁷ When Black women ask if they are not women as in Sojourner Truth's famous speech—"Ar'n't I A Woman?"—the directional needs redesigning, away from the query ar'n't I like a white woman. So although there are similarities between white and Black women, differences within the similarity also exist. Aida Hurtado writes that while white women are seduced, women of color are rejected.³⁸ Yet, the common denominator of phallographic violence, phallographic fascism, and the destruction of the human being remains.³⁹

Women's embeddedness in other relations—their color/race, their economic class, their cultural identity—demands feminisms which recognize these complexities at the start. Most feminists/womanists in Africa demand this polydimensional understanding and reject the singularity of a feminism focused on gender alone, which silently privileges white women and diminishes the presence of women of color. Alice Walker, speaking as a Black feminist in the U.S. uses the term "womanist" to refer to feminists of color who are committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female. "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender."⁴⁰ She chooses "womanist" over "feminist" because Black women need to name women's struggles from inside 'the' West for themselves. Dialogues and flows across continents are a part of this naming, and pluralizing.⁴¹

Awa Thiam wonders: "'Women are the Blacks of the human race'. Can they tell us then what or who are Black Women? The Blacks of the Blacks of the human race?"⁴² She calls for this specificity, while speaking a commitment to African liberation in the tradition of self-reliance and autonomy. However, race and class are key issues for people/women of color and must come first, before gender for some Africana womanists like Hudson-Weems. Liberation is a collective struggle for the entire family. African women, in this instance, are not fighting against the strictures of family because they have not suffered from the protective pedestal of familial womanhood.⁴³ They want no part of white middle-class women's feminism in this arena.

Hudson-Weems also argues that Africana womanists must name themselves. Her

³⁷Deborah Gray White, Ar'n't I a Woman? (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), p. 190.

³⁸Aida Hurtado, The Color of Privilege, Three Blasphemies on Race and Feminism (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. vii.

³⁹Awa Thiam, Speak Out, Black Sisters: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa (London: Pluto Press, 1986), pp. 124, 125.

⁴⁰Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p. xi.

⁴¹I was hesitant to accept this naming thinking that it denied an important historical feminist continuity, however problematic. I have come to understand that much of this continuity is one that I envisioned as a white, and not a Black woman. Today I readily embrace a pluralizing of naming and the seeing that goes with it. See: Eisenstein, The Color of Gender, p. 212.

⁴²Awa Thiam, Speak Out, Black Sisters, p. 3.

⁴³Hudson-Weems, Africana Womanism, pp. 39, 41, 44, 48.

criticism lumps all western feminism together as imperialist, and therefore Black women's own "self-naming, self-defining and self-identifying" is crucial. Feminism, for her, has been defined by white women, for white women. Africana womanism is unique from white and even Black (westernized) feminism. Her particular "womanist" stance is homogenized and set in opposition to a homogeneous, singular, mainstreamed western feminism.

For Hudson-Weems, African women's struggle against poverty in its colonial and neo-colonial forms shapes the contours of their political activism. Women in Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa connect with men in this "struggle toward a common destiny". Men are not women's enemy but rather are comrades in the struggle against colonialism. Because men in Africa have not had the "same institutionalized power to oppress as white men" Hudson-Weems embraces a "family pride".⁴⁴ She rightly focuses on the commonality of purpose between men and women resisting colonial and imperial power, but wrongly equates western/radical feminism with gender separatism, and loses keen insights by doing so. Unlike Hudson-Weems, there are other local feminisms developing in many African countries which critique gender privilege in its specific forms, rather than dismiss it as simply of 'the' West.

When Africa is the contextual site from which feminisms are written economic class oppression is put in the bold. But if this is done by equating feminisms in 'the' West with white feminists of the middle class, class rather than the racialized and gendered meanings of class, becomes the oppositioned problem. U.S. Black feminists come in many stripes. Some speak as neo-liberals and silence problems of economic class and poverty. Others speak as humanists and anti-colonialists; others as lesbian anti-racist socialists. The possibilities are varied, as they are in any African country. Instead of parodying either side, if there are sides as such, let us earnestly blend the collective strategies and intersectional identities of women in Africa with a carefully honed critique of gender privilege. This careful critique always complicates gender to its racial and class hierarchies but it does not deny the place of gender in the power-filled lives of women on any continent. As such, there are no abstracted enemies, but specified relations of power to be dismantled and rebuilt. Women's oppression is then polyversal and glocal and as complex as their struggles of resistance.

African womanism invites a recognition of the important relatedness of people's being. Hudson-Weems writes about "liberating an entire people"; of the importance of an holistic harmony and communalism rather than a simplistic and isolated notion of individuality. African womanism is a collective struggle which recognizes the relatedness of women to their families and communities. It "is a family-centered rather than a female-centered perspective." She says it is by "necessity" that the first concern must be with "ridding society of racism, a problem which invariably affects our entire family, or total existence". Racism necessitates a frontal and collective struggle against it and Western feminist individualism alike.⁴⁵ Given the colonizing history of Western feminism the bifurcation of communalism and individualism is understandable. But too much is lost here.⁴⁶ Hudson-Weems could harvest rich notions of

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 2, 5, 7.

⁴⁵Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Africana Womanism", in Obioma Nnaemeka ed., Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power, From Africa to the Diaspora (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1998), p. 149.

⁴⁶Ibid., Clenora Hudson Weems, "Self-Naming and Self-Definition: An Agenda for Survival", pp. 450, 451.

female autonomy in local form: a recognition of the woman as able to choose and define her dreams for herself, her community, and her family if she has one, rather than collapsing woman's selfhood with family.

Individuality and collectivity should not be embraced as opposites; or collapsed into themselves. The tensions between these realms need exploration in new directions. One needs to imagine the Nigerian woman who simultaneously struggles on behalf of her reproductive rights without being seen as anti-family, and who also remains critical of global capital's restructuring policies of her country without being seen as anti-modern. Her polyvocal feminism embraces the initial recognition of the self without denying responsibilities to other communities. And, her multiply oppressive identities necessitates a more complex wholeness of the individual. This rendering of feminism or 'womanism' is neither simply western or African. Rather it is a feminist articulation of individuality which recognizes the autonomy of the woman without imagining her as solely alone, nor negating her identity as one and the same with her family or community. There are more and more feminists in Nigeria and South Africa who speak and write for unmarried women, women surviving with AIDS, as lesbians, and women living alone. These are womanist voices with new promises for women's liberation.

African womanism according to Nigerian Zulu Sofola expresses holistic harmony and communalism rather than individual isolation. The African experience of exploitation demands a recognition of the relatedness of humans in order to build their own resilient communities.⁴⁷ South African Julia Wells stresses the importance of maternal politics in political struggle. Women, fighting as mothers against apartheid is a dramatically important part of "black South African women's resistance history." South African "motherist movements" were significant challenges to the extreme effects of apartheid rule "which invaded too deeply into their private worlds".⁴⁸ Women's resistance is located from within the site of family life, against the state, and as such the family becomes a location of liberation struggle. Similar stories could be written for women in Mexico, Argentina, and Palestine.

For Ifeyinwa Iweriebor African feminism is "integrationist rather than separatist". Its tactics use negotiation, confrontation, consensus, and compromise. It is often reformist.⁴⁹ Obioma Nnaemeka reiterates this sense positioned against a western feminism which is exclusionary. She looks to an inclusionary feminism which she terms "negofeminism—the feminism of negotiation, accommodation and compromise; no ego feminism".⁵⁰ Once again, the positioning is against a westernized separatist feminism that is used to describe Nigerian feminists labeled by Nigerian men as 'westernized'. But Nnaemeka needs to also look for the not-so-easy-in-view feminisms within 'the' West.

⁴⁷Zulu Sofola, "Feminism and African Womanhood", in Nnaemeka, ed., Sisterhood, Feminisms, and Power, p. 54.

⁴⁸Julia Wells, "Maternal Politics in Organizing Black South African Women: The Historical Lessons", in Nnaemeka, ed., Sisterhood, Feminisms, and Power, pp. 259, 260.

⁴⁹Ifeyinwa Iweriebor, "Carrying the Baton: Personal Perspectives on the Modern Women's Movement in Nigeria", *Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁵⁰Obioma Nnaemeka, "This Women's Studies Business: Beyond Politics and History (Thoughts on the First WAAD Conference)", *Ibid.*, p. 371.

Glo Chukukere writes that “Nigerian feminism is womanism” meaning a nonviolent and non-confrontational self-determined “ability of women to produce maximum results through cooperative endeavors”. If feminism means a “female-oriented consciousness then there is no doubt” that Nigeria has a feminist history. However, Nigerian women’s history did not start with colonialism; and BEFORE ‘the’ western experience some say that Nigerian women were “competent warriors, rulers, and co-administrators with their menfolk.”⁵¹ The very concept ‘Africa’ is a colonial artifact. Besides this, Glo Chukukere writes that not all differences between males and females should be assumed to be hierarchical in parallel ways with ‘the’ West. She argues that hierarchy can also be diffused and multiple especially when domestic and public life overlap with one another.

Some African feminists argue that pre-colonial Africa was defined by gender complementarity, rather than subordination and that West Africa still has much fluidity between public and private domains that allows for this.⁵² Women in many African countries, depending on the specific region, lost land rights with European colonization. Missionaries brought gender inequality with them as they educated boys, and not girls. As such, some African women scoff that gender inequality was one of the many “benefits” of contact with western civilization. In this rendering today’s gender oppression of African women was initiated and exacerbated by western colonialist policies.

Many women in Africa see themselves as feminist/womanist although they also deeply believe in partnership between the sexes. This partnership focuses their activism on issues of elementary literacy, and freedom from hunger, poverty and disease for everyone.⁵³ Their feminism is committed to “each and every person” and as such stretches to encompass a polyversal standard for all. There are complex flows to and from Africa today that push feminisms towards a more inclusive notion of humanity even though global capital makes a more humane world much less likely. However, Taiwo Ajai ironically notes that when African women speak on behalf of their own equality they are dismissed as being too ‘western’.

The complexity of the cultural flows that travel back and forth between continents is painfully and publically visited in 1992 at the first international conference on “Women in Africa and the African Diaspora” (WAAD). Right at the start of the conference conflict erupted over who should be allowed to participate. The conference organizers who were all African, and mostly Black had invited a few white women to attend. The African-American conference contingent demanded that white women not be allowed to participate in the proceedings. The Nigerians, as hosts, rejected this position as an act of “feminist exclusion and imperial arrogance”. They believed that the conference should embrace a full understanding of inclusion, accommodation and negotiation instead of only seeing “color, differences, and separation”.⁵⁴ The

⁵¹Glo Chukukere, “An Appraisal of Feminism in the Socio-Political Development of Nigeria”, *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 145.

⁵²Niara Sudarkasa, “The Status of Women in Indigenous African Societies”, in Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley, Andrea Benton Rushing, eds., Women in Africa and the African Diaspora (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1987), pp. 28-36.

⁵³Taiwo Ajai, “The Voluptuous Ideal”, in Daphne Williams Ntiri, ed., One is Not A Woman, One Becomes...(Troy, Michigan: Bedford Pub., 1982), pp. 78, 79, 81.

⁵⁴Obioma Nnaemeka, “This Women’s Studies Business”, in Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power,

South-Africans attending argued that everyone, regardless of race should be allowed to participate fully in the conference. They were extremely upset that two of their participants, a Black and white South African who had co-authored a presentation had been reduced to tears and sadness.⁵⁵

Many of the African women criticized the U.S. Black women who thought they spoke in African voices, as western and imperialist in their actions. Their divisiveness felt like European competitiveness, not African cooperativeness.⁵⁶ Many of the African attendees saw these U.S. women as shunting the malignancy of their own angst onto the conference. They disrupted the conference because they had come to “‘find themselves’ and return to the motherland; we were caught up in their frustration and rage at being unable to do either”.

The African-Americans came to the conference filled with pent up anger; while the South African delegation, after years of living under apartheid spoke a different notion of possibility. This may seem unexpected, and yet very telling. De Bryant speaks of her grief about the agony felt by the white women attending and celebrates the fact that she cannot enjoy their pain. If I did, it “‘would mean I have a hole in my soul through which all that is humane and just and good is leaking out”.⁵⁷ Fidelia Fouche argues that apartheid can never cure apartheid.⁵⁸ It is important to recognize these differences of culture, notions of inclusion and exclusion, and effects of racism.

Without overstating and homogenizing this divide, African feminists/womanists are in conflict with African American feminists over the meaning of inclusivity. African-American women were criticized for their western readiness to exclude and punish. Rather than looking to build bridges through reconciliation the women from ‘the’ West, though Black, chose to retaliate and isolate. Then again, I know Black feminists in the U.S. who would have not taken the position of the U.S. delegation, and work with white women all the time. So there are Africans, so-to-speak, in the U.S. and westerners in Africa. Feminists and womanists must be careful to hear and learn from each other in these contested times, so that we make the most of our possibilities for building another world. The Global Women’s History Project (GWHP) 2000 was a more recent and successful set of meetings between African American and South African women organizing against modern forms of slavery, especially in the global factories.⁵⁹

About 3000 Itsekiri, Ijaw and Ilaje women in Nigeria seized the Warri headquarters of Shell and Chevron, August, 2002. They stormed the gates, seized the offices, and demanded a

pp. 364, 366.

⁵⁵“Statement from the South African Delegation Regarding the Request by Some Participants that Whites Be Excluded from Presenting Papers at the WAAD Conference”, in *Ibid.*, p. 480.

⁵⁶Martha Banks, “Bridges Across Activism and the Academy: One Psychologist’s Perspective”, in *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁵⁷De Bryant, “Reflections on Nsukka ‘92”, in *Ibid.*, pp. 406-408.

⁵⁸Fidelia Fouche, “The Nigeria Conference”, in *Ibid.*, p. 419.

⁵⁹Elise Young and Zengie Mangaliso, “South African and African American Women”, *Meridians*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2002), pp. 191-200.

living wage and decent life. They were protesting against environmental degradation and substandard employment and demanding accountability for themselves and their families. There is no one expression of feminism in Nigeria at present. Instead there are multiple activisms developing: civil society feminism, legal feminism, radical feminism, secular feminism, religious feminism.⁶⁰ Since the horrific Rwandan 1994 genocide women's lives have been changed forever. As a result of the genocide and hundreds of thousands of men's deaths, women are now mayors, and members of parliament for the first time. Meanwhile, and alongside this, huge numbers of Tutsi women are living with AIDS due to massive war rape. These same women are raising children, going to school, and working.⁶¹ Their activism which has developed out of sheer necessity is an important site for feminists to know. At the same time Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is the first woman to stand trial for genocide, charged as then Minister of Women's Affairs, with inciting the rape of thousands of Tutsi women.⁶²

The other-than-western African feminisms are potentially more inclusive than many feminisms of 'the' West because they view women as human beings responsible to others, while imbricated within multiple systems of oppressive power. Embracing the connective tissue of women's lives while also demanding women their due, allows African women their home-grown feminism, with its inclusive and humanistic character.⁶³ Women working hard for gender parity in the African Union have won it for themselves, as of 2002. Africa is now the only continent in the world to make an explicit commitment to gender equality within its continent-wide governing body. Although this is little more than a symbolic start, it is more than any Western country has done for gender equality. Potentials for gender democracy located elsewhere and in locations other-than-'the' West need to be put in view.

In other-than-western glocal feminisms there must be dialogue between and across and through: women of color feminisms, Africana womanism, feminisms in 'the' West, feminisms in Africa, feminisms in Islam, and so on. These dialogues must shake loose the overlap between the very categories I have just named. And these discussions must also challenge the established political language of modernity, universalism, nationalism, globalization, religiosity, and secularism so that women can better see and hear one another. This dialogue still must name gender and put it in clear view, but in non-exclusionary form. It must be honest about class exploitation and privilege. It must be brave enough to speak the silences about sexual freedom; a feminisms/womanism that includes lesbians and gays in Africa and Islam.⁶⁴ And it must speak against imperial feminism while doing so.

⁶⁰Hussaina J. Abdullah, "Religious Revivalism, Human Rights Activism and the Struggle for Women Rights in Nigeria", Beyond Rights Talk and Culture Talk, ed., Mahmood Mamdani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 96-120.

⁶¹Kimberle Acquaro and Peter Landesman, "Out of Madness, A Matriarchy", Mother Jones, vol. 28, no. 1 (January/February, 2003), pp. 59-63.

⁶²Peter Landesman, "The Minister of Rape" New York Times, September 15, 2002, pp. 81-132.

⁶³Filomina Chioma Steady, "African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective", in Terborg-Penn, Harley, and Benton, eds., Women in Africa, p. 21.

⁶⁴Robert Worth, "Duality of Gay Muslims is Tougher After Sept. 11", New York Times, January 13, 2002, p. 31.

FEMINISMS IN ISLAM(S)

When “women’s rights” were initially used to mobilize the Afghan war against the Taliban, Islam and democracy were purposefully and inadvertently positioned as opposites. But I want to entertain a feminist and democratic reading of Islam as it is articulated by some feminists in Islam and Muslim women that dislodges this simplistic and distorting opposition.

The Qur’an which is the text for Islamic practice has multiple interpretations and interpreters. Much of the interpretation is done within and through a misogynist rendering of patriarchal privileges. Women are then read as less than, different from, in need of protection, to be veiled and hidden away. This patriarchal reading matches similar readings in fundamentalist Judaism and Christianity. All religions can be read for the sinfulness of women, the contamination of their blood and their lust, and the need for their seclusion.

Fundamentalist does not necessarily mean authentic. Salman Rushdie says of many Muslims that they “are not Koranic analysts”. They rather believe in their customs and habits which are not very theological in the first place.⁶⁵ So-called Islamic practices create enormous suffering for women across the globe. In Karachi, Pakistan a young woman is raped as a punishment for a crime supposedly committed by her brother. But this enactment of Jirga law, which derives from tribal customs and traditions, should not be equated with the Islamic religion, even though women are punished all the time as though it were. As Been Sarwar writes of one of these rapes: tradition does not equal religion and religion does not equal patriarchal practice.⁶⁶ In Nigeria Amin Lawal, a single mother is sentenced to death, by stoning, for adultery in the name of shari’a-Islamic law.⁶⁷ And yet Islamic feminists argue that no such ruling is written in the Qur’an. Antagonistic struggles continue between mainstream Islamic scholars, Islamic misogynist extremists, and feminists in Islam.

There are some ‘believing women’ and feminists in Islam who read and interpret the Qur’an as a potentially egalitarian text.⁶⁸ There are also ‘believing women’ and Muslim feminists who think that feminism cannot and should not be framed in Islamic terms. Nayereh Tahidi believes that Islam and feminism are incompatible; that reformists within an Islamic republic are not best described as Islamic feminists. There is little agreement and much contestation among Islamic and Muslim women about the relationship between religiosity and secularism for feminism. The plural feminisms within Islamic countries are as multiple as within ‘the’ West.

Valentine Moghadam reveals the tensions she sees between the differing feminisms in

⁶⁵Salman Rushdie, “Yes, This is About Islam”, New York Times, November 21, 2001, p. A25.

⁶⁶Beena Sarwar, “Brutality Cloaked as Tradition”, New York Times, August 6, 2002, p. A15.

⁶⁷Norimitsu Onishi, “Mother’s Sentence Unsettles a Nigerian Village”, New York Times, Sept. 7, 2002, p. A23.

⁶⁸I am indebted to collegial discussions with Asma Barlas as well as her book, Believing Women, Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002) for much of my understanding here.

Islam. She sees Haideh Moghissi as viewing cultural pluralism and the right to individual choice as incompatible with Islamic states. Therefore, reforms of the Islamic state wrongly push to democratize Islam, when secularism is what is needed. Moghissi believes that it will be the Left, and secularists who free women; that feminism cannot be fit into the Qur'an. Yet, Afsaneh Najmabadi describes Islamic feminism as "a reform movement that opens up a dialogue between religious and secular feminists". In this case religiosity and secularism are not incompatible but can dialogue with each other. Nayereh Tohidi in part agrees: "Many proponents of Islam are playing an important role in the reformation of women's rights in an Islamic context."⁶⁹

Moghissi sees a remarkable feminist tradition within the Middle East that has been largely silenced by Islamic law. She thinks that traditional Islamic culture is overly romanticized in ways that wrongly allow progressive readings of its practices. She does not see the hijab in Iran or Egypt as a positive statement of anti-westernism. She sees the anti-Western gesture as anti-democratic in spirit while embracing western consumer capitalism. Western clothes are worn underneath the hijab. As such, Moghissi sees the "re-Islamization" of women pretending to be the authentic Islam.⁷⁰

Out of these struggles new developments in feminist theory are articulated. Mai Yamani describes the present feminist choices as: new feminist traditionalists, pragmatic feminists, secular feminists, and neo-Islamist feminists.⁷¹ They each seek to empower women within a rethought Islam. Saudi women seek their own power "through the basic precepts of Islam", even to the point of "manipulating the Qur'an to their advantage" by using fundamental Islamic concepts. Significantly they use the Qur'an, rather than the rhetoric of western feminism.⁷²

There are attempts to articulate an Islamic politics which recognizes the multiple and plural meanings of Islamic practice. In Tunisia, according to Saba Mahmood and Talal Asad, the Islamic leader Ghannushi, who was banned from Tunis, discussed the need to politically institutionalize the multiple interpretations of the founding texts. Recognizing the distinction between the Qur'an and its interpreters and interpretations, Ghannushi has suggested that the electorate be allowed to vote for or against policies that flow from any given reading. This utilizes the doctrine of *nasiha*—the obligation, more than the right—to criticize and debate. This formulation of the Islamic tradition accommodates a plurality of scriptural interpretations; difference is understood as a blessing according to the *shari'a*. Asad reiterates that *ijtihad* authorizes the "construction of coherent differences", not the "imposition of homogeneity". In this instance pluralism is not foreign to Islam; tolerance is not the same as indifference; and intolerance should not be equated with violence. The richness of Islam lies in its openness rather

⁶⁹As quoted in: Valentine Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward A Resolution of the Debate", *Signs*, vol. 27, no. 4 (Summer, 2002), pp. 1135, 1142, 1143, 1147, 1148, 1149.

⁷⁰Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism* (New York: Zed Books, 1999), pp. 10, 73.

⁷¹Mai Yamani, "Introduction", in *Feminism and Islam*, ed., Mai Yamani ((New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 1.

⁷²Mai Yamani, "Some Observations on Women In Saudi Arabia", in *Feminism and Islam*, Mai Yamani, ed., p. 263.

than oneness with God.⁷³

This is not the Islam that is put in view for 'the' West. The Islam of 'the' West remains static, traditional and non-modern. But Talal Asad asks us to see that tradition need not be fixed and unchanging. Authenticity need not be repetitive and uncreative. He gives as an example the tradition of liberalism; which continues to change and adapt. Traditional practices allow for the possibility of argument and reformulation. Then, traditions can be central to modernity itself.⁷⁴ He wonders why "western culture is thought to be pregnant with positive futures in a way no other cultural condition is". And why liberalism has acquired such a hegemonic status that all other cultures are judged and seen in terms of a teleological westernized path to the future.⁷⁵

Although sectors of Islam fight against westernization and its domination, Ali Mirsepassi is one of many who argues that this is different from being anti-modern. In the case of Iran, he writes of the rejection of a western-centric modernity in favor of a historically and culturally specific one. Iran has tried to "reimagine modernity" in accordance with an Iranian-Islamic tradition that "articulates a viable modernity". Iran is looking to create its own "authentic Iranian modernity". Much that is happening is both authentic and modern and "grounded in the local".⁷⁶ The Iranian revolution which deposed Shah Pahlavi was a rejection of despotic secularism, not secularism itself; and westernization, not modernism. As well, a rejection of secularism is not necessarily one and the same with a rejection of modernity. The men of Al Qaeda used cell phones and computers, and knew how to fly planes. The hard-liners in Iran want investment, modern technology, family planning, and so on.

Abdolkarim Soroush argues that Islamic liberalism is no less authentic than anti-western fundamentalism. And religion need not be an imposition, but can be democratically embraced. Religious knowledge changes and develops with human knowledge. Creative religion is unfolding and not static.⁷⁷ Islamic radicalism was innovative and imaginative in mobilizing the masses and took hold as a result. Today the struggle is renewed to define a modern Iran which does not suffer "Westoxication". Jalal Al-I Ahmad says that Iran suffered from "occidentosis"—the political and economic subordination of Iran to Europe and America.⁷⁸ Now feminists need

⁷³Talal Asad interview with Saba Mahmood, Stanford Humanities Review, vol. 5., no. 1-?

⁷⁴Talal Asad interview with Saba Mahmood, Stanford Humanities Review, vol. 5, no. 1-?

⁷⁵Ibid.,

⁷⁶Ali Mirsepassi, Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization, Negotiating Modernity in Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 96, 127.

⁷⁷Abdolkarim Soroush, Reason, Freedom and Democracy in Islam, Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush, trans. And ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. xv, 135. Also see: Richard Antoun, Understanding Fundamentalism, Christian, Islamic and Jewish Movements (New York: Alta Mira Press, 2001). For a traditional western viewing of Islam see: Bernard Lewis, What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Easter Response (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁷⁸The term 'westoxication' was coined by Al-I Ahmad (1923-69) who was committed to developing a local notion of Iranian modernity. See: Jalal Al-I Ahmad, Occidentosis: A Plague From the West (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1947, trans. 1984); and Ali Mirsepassi, Intellectual

to pressure Islam to become an anti-globalization site which explicitly embraces democracy for women. This is a moment when progressive feminists across the globe should inform themselves about Muslim women's local struggles.

Saba Mahmood also interrogates the way 'the' West thinks in terms of oppositions like religiosity and secularism; and equates traditionalism with patriarchy and modernity with women's freedom. She asks that religious practices in Islam not be viewed as a priori subordinating of women. Instead women's agency within these practices must first be explored. Mahmood studies women in the Mosque movement in Egypt as "reconfiguring" gendered practices within Islamic pedagogy. These women defy the practice of male teaching and instruct women and girls on the meaning of the Qur'an. They have their own rendering of self-realization and autonomous will which cannot simply be read from 'the' West. The women's Mosque movement wants to restore virtue and humility; and embraces "individual and collective practices of pious living". These women "subvert the hegemonic meanings of cultural practices".⁷⁹

Women's agency for Mahmood is "not simply resistance to domination" but is also an "action that is created and enabled by relations of subordination". If I understand this point correctly it means that the rigid oppositioning of oppression and freedom is ill-placed and that agency develops from within resistances that are incomplete or less than total. Mahmood re-reads the meaning of docility and humility as the effort to achieve a malleability to be instructed in the ways of Islam, but with women as teachers of this process. Al-haya, meaning to be diffident and modest is seen as a process of learning shyness, not oppression.⁸⁰ Mahmood's description embodies the veil with piety and rebellion. She sees agency instead of passivity.

Mahmood asks secular women to revisit their dismissal of religion as oppressive. Cultural and religious practices can be habitually repressive AND re-readings are still possible. She does not see secular reasoning and morality as exhaustive of "valuable human flourishings". She asks that non-liberal traditions be explored for their possibilities for liberation and not be subsumed into a "universalized seeing of subordination".⁸¹ When women teach and study Islamic scriptures this modernizes religiosity and does not limit it to a traditionalist misogyny. Islam is not simply custom and tradition; nor is the West simply modern. Religious women of all sorts--Christian, Jewish, Hindu--have been engaged in similar re-castings of religious texts for years.

For Mahmood choosing religion can be an act of liberation as can veiling, if the woman sees it as part of the process of teaching herself humility. The veil means "both being and becoming a certain kind of person"⁸² and contributes to the making of the self. These women

Discourse and the Politics of Modernization, pp. 97-113 for an important explication of Ahmad's writings.

⁷⁹Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival", Cultural Anthropology, vol. 16, no. 2 (2001), pp. 210, 204, 205.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 210, 211.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 225.

⁸²Ibid., p. 215.

develop their individual selves, although not in a western autonomous fashion. I remain unsure why humility, embodied in the veil, is such a privileged construct particular to women. But if humility nurtures a humbleness of who we are in relation to others I am open to learning more of this. Veiling also has a history of misogynist extremism and western colonialism; meaning different things at different times. Context matters before women's agency can be known.⁸³ Self-realization is not simply a western construct. More-than-liberal notions of self-fulfillment are germinating in these instances.

Progressive interpretations of the Qur'an reveal an egalitarian spirit although there is often no clear position on what equality is meant to mean. Shaheen Ali believes that a human rights discourse exists in the Qur'an for women so that 'the' West and feminisms of 'the' West are not needed here.⁸⁴ Haleh Afshar also thinks that these new interpretations of Islam are more liberating for women than feminism has been liberating for women in 'the' West.⁸⁵

I still wonder about Mahmood's discussion of the veil. Why veil women? Why not have men veil to learn humility? Maybe I am thinking too much about equality as sameness here. Yet, the veil encodes gender difference and 'difference' remains contested. When I think I would not choose to veil I wonder whether there is something more than my Western acculturation at play here. I do not see the veil as intrinsically more problematic than other Western codings of femininity and gender difference. I dress as a female with signs given on my face: make-up, hair in view; jewelry. And even though I think I give these signs my own personal meaning, I am not fully free to do so. The veil has its parallels here. I am thinking/wondering whether oppressive practices—those that encode gender—can ever be wholly recuperable or self-realizing.

What are the hybrid blendings of and between liberal individualist autonomy, selfhood with humility, and woman's connectedness? The concept of self cuts through each but with differing understandings of fulfillment for the self. In order to see the polyvalent status of individuality within these discourses one needs to de-naturalize the concept of the singular, competitive, autonomous self while holding onto the notion of the social, communal self which has obligations to others but rights as well. This is neither an anti- or pro-western/liberal stance. Rather it is a dialogic positioning of an individuality defined in other-than-liberal individualist frames recognizing women's connectedness to children and family alongside men sharing a colonized location with them, although with gendered privilege. But the woman is self-determining in these connected spaces. The self-determining woman is free but not alone; obligated yet independent; equal and also unique.

A word on sex, which has been too silent here. Homosexuality is often a crime, sometimes punishable by death in Islamic countries. However, the founder of the U.S. based gay Muslim group Al-Fatiha argues that homosexuality is a matter of interpretation, and not simply forbidden in the Qur'an. Some scholars say that the sin is promiscuity rather than homosexuality. Homosexuality is not an easily accepted identity, almost everywhere, not simply in Islam. In the U.S. Muslim gays are reviled by mainstream Muslims for their sexual

⁸³Camelia Entekhabi-Fard, "Behind the Veil", Ms. Magazine, (July/August, 2001), p. 72.

⁸⁴Shaheen Sardar Ali, Gender and Human Rights in Islam and International Law (Boston: Kluwer Law International, 2000), p. 163.

⁸⁵Haleh Afshar, Islams and Feminisms, p. 6.

orientation, and viewed as potential terrorists by some Americans.⁸⁶ Today GLAS, an Arab gay and lesbian international organization networks gays and lesbians of Arab descent, or those living in Arab countries, worldwide.

Sex, though always present, is almost always silenced in public, and as such creates complex and silenced political fault-lines. So it should not be a surprise that the Taliban tried to erase pedophilia from male dominated Pashtun culture, and now that the Afghan Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice is gone, supposedly the practice has burgeoned again.⁸⁷ This cannot help but also remind one of the scandal ridden Catholic church and the sexual predators it too often has for priests. The silences about sex and desire need their global theorization.

MS. WORLD AND 'THE' WEST IN NIGERIA

Kaduna, Nigeria hosted the Ms. World contest, 2002. Contestants representing Costa Rica, Switzerland, South Africa, Panama, and Denmark refused to participate in the pageant because of the choice of the host country. They thought it was unacceptable for the pageant to condone, inadvertently or not, the practice of Shari'a/Islamic law which notoriously prescribed death by stoning for Amina Lawal for adultery. These contestants spoke out against what they saw as the cruelty of Islamic law and its unfair treatment of women. At this same time, Isoma Daniel, a Christian Nigerian journalist wrote disrespectfully in her newspaper that perhaps the prophet Muhammad would have liked one of these contestants as a bride. Extremist/Islamic led violent riots broke out almost immediately in Kaduna. Hundreds of people died, and thousands were seriously injured. The Pageant quickly relocated to London.

Let me try and unpack the messy mix of issues here. Before doing so I should say that I have chosen to look carefully at this specific moment because it reveals the insufficiency of established political discourses to represent, without distortion, the tangled webs which map cross-cultural patriarchal and masculinist continuities. The simplistic oppositional frames, which always falsely homogenize complexity, make it almost impossible to see new feminisms and their fault lines as they emerge. The pageant itself is of 'the' West and yet is watched by several billion viewers around the world. It is a globalized site which offers up women's bodies from around the world in western garb, according to western standards. But one should not assume as I think Katha Pollitt does that this "cattle call" represents secular modernity, while the Islamic extremists who rail against it are simply religious 'backward' fanatics.⁸⁸ Neither, by the way, are these extremists standing up for women's rights. Afterall, remember Lawal and her death sentence which remains on appeal as I write.

So there are partial truths and partial realities here. The contest itself treats women more like pieces of meat than human beings. It reduces women's worth to their bodies. A particular kind of beauty is what counts: high cheek bones, narrow noses, thin necks, slight muscle, long

⁸⁶Robert Worth, "Duality of Gay Muslims Is Tougher After Sept. 11", New York Times, January 13, 2002, p. 31.

⁸⁷Craig Smith, "Shh, Its an Open Secret: Warlords and Pedophilia", New York Times, February 21, 2002, p. A4.

⁸⁸Katha Pollitt, "As Miss World Turns", The Nation, vol. 275, no. 22 (December 23, 2002), p. 9.

legs, lean bodies. These women are to look like the fashion models of the global cosmetic and fashion industries and beauty models of all nationalities try to mold themselves accordingly to this singular standard. This mold is 'a' Western hegemonized notion of beauty that tyrannizes women everywhere with its power-filled exclusions. Awura-Abena Ansah of Ghana says that women need to carve out a more all encompassing notion of beauty respecting their home cultures. Long necks with fleshy folds are seen as beautiful by Ghanaians.

But what happens to this critique of hegemonic westernized patriarchy when the pageant is presented as an expression of women's freedom and positioned against religious extremism? Instead of seeing the pageant as exploitative and 'backward' in and of itself, Islamic fundamentalists are characterized and singled out as such. It is not that I do not think that Islamic extremist masculinism is not 'backward', but that the pageant, in its own way, is 'backward' too. Although women in 'the' West as well as women 'elsewhere' speak out against fundamentalist misogyny some Muslim women take offense and defend the 'true and progressive' Islam against what they see as arrogant western feminism. On Amy Goodman's "Democracy Now" Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Azizah al-Hibri criticize western feminists for "obsessing" over Islamic violence.⁸⁹ Salman Rushdie weighs in and asks why a majority of Muslims in 'the' West, if they believe in this progressive side of Islam, do not speak out against the rioting in Nigeria.⁹⁰

Katha Pollitt who usually gets it right, has it partially wrong in this instance. She reduces the pageant and the ensuing riots to a religious/secular struggle even though she readily admits that "religious texts mean what people want them to mean, and always have". Women's rights will never be a perfect fit for her in either the Qur'an or the bible. Yet she also says: "Say what you will about beauty pageants, if it's bikinis versus burkas, you've got to be for bathing suits".⁹¹ But exactly who benefits from this oppositioning? The issue is not about burqas and bathing suits as pieces of clothing so it is crucially important to flesh out what the problems really are in this instance. Pollitt needs to look inside these choices for the silences and the whisperings inside each.

One last pluralizing of 'seeing' the pageant from Zohra Yusuf Daoud, who was crowned the first Miss Afghanistan in 1972. She writes that despite the trivializing of pageants in the U.S. their role in Afghanistan is different. They mean "we were catching up to the world, working to fit in, joining the global community". Her role as Miss Afghanistan involved promoting literacy, and visiting women's prisons that were filled with women who had run away from forced marriages, killed husbands who had beaten them, escaped from domestic violence. She says that maybe pageants are "silly" but being Ms. Afghanistan changed her life. She notes: "I'm no politician, I'm no activist. I am a mother, a wife, a woman, and a refugee from a country whose glory has long since passed. Like so many other Americans, I am an immigrant with only stories of what my life used to be like in a land far away."⁹²

⁸⁹"Democracy Now", Pacifica Radio Archives, "Ms. World Riots in Nigeria", November 27, 2002

⁹⁰Salman Rushdie, "No More Fanaticism as Usual", New York Times, November 27, 2002, p. A3.

⁹¹Katha Pollitt, "As Miss World Turns", p. 9.

⁹²Zohra Yusuf Daoud, "Miss Afghanistan, A Story of a Nation", in Women for Afghan Women,

Women's bodies remain a major site of political contestation because so much power is located in women's activism and energy for sustaining life. Even a commercialized and domesticated event like Ms. World reveals this contestation. Women themselves must struggle to develop ways of seeing beyond the imperial and masculinist divides that prevent new dialogues for revolutionary action.

RELOCATING POLYVERSAL FEMINISMS

Feminisms are humanist theories of inclusivity that attempt to name women in their cacophonous varieties. This variety expresses the standard of polyversality—a connectedness rooted in multiplicity--a sharedness expressed through uniqueness. Self-determination of women's bodies and minds is expressed through local cultural meanings but with a cross-cultural recognition of women's duties and rights. No woman shall be excluded or silenced because of imperial blinders or cultural domination.

Feminisms have a unity which is also simultaneously diverse. It is multiple and continues to multiply. As such, feminisms is the most inclusive theory of social justice I know but I am not sure that this is the same thing as saying, as feminist and friend bell hooks does, that Feminism is for Everybody.⁹³ Because feminisms are about displacing and rearranging masculinist privilege—with its racist and colonialist roots/routes--there are men and women alike who will not embrace it. The inclusivity is too revolutionary, the power rearrangements too unsettling.

This poly/dimensional origin of feminisms means that liberal, Islamic, and Africana womanists dialogue with each other while challenging the limits of each others understanding and viewings. The tensions between beliefs about family, religion, secularism, sex, veils, and nudity are not easily resolved. Nor is it clear that they need be in order to recognize women's and girl's shared exploitation and oppression. Women's bodies and the life women live because of them creates the bridges that are necessary to humanely embrace each other in spite of conflicts. We, the big 'we' must disentangle ourselves from the imagined West/non-West, modern/backward, developed/lacking divide in order to creatively see the panoply of women's activism more fully. This means challenging U.S. imperial feminism wherever it exists.

We, the big 'we', must also acknowledge that most women want freedom and most women want equality as well. These desires make us similarly human. Women may define these desires differently, and this also makes us uniquely human. Women's polyversality allows us to see one another but not simply as in a mirror. At this moment women across the globe must find ways to celebrate and blend these different traditions of women's struggle. The process of naming, and seeing, and working together dislodges former barriers. New ways of thinking will allow for more inclusive ways of knowing and seeing so that no one is left behind.

As an anti-racist feminist in the U.S. it is urgent for me and others like me to actively work towards ending women's and girl's exploitation and oppression at home and all places elsewhere. Alice Walker says somewhat the same thing when she says that "we must see where

ed. Sunita Mehta (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 104, 105, 111.

⁹³bell hooks, Feminism is for Everybody (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press), 2000.

our tax dollars flow and try, in awareness, to follow them.”⁹⁴ This anti-globalization position must also be clarified to demand a fair wage for all. The U.S. government must be pressured to make good on its obligations to Afghanistan and establish peace in Iraq; end the wars of/on `terror; rebuild a just welfare state in the U.S.; change its policies toward Palestinians. We, the big `we` need peace, not war; justice not greed; support not competition; health care not insurance companies. For any of this to happen the right-wing take-over of the U.S., and with it the globe, must be stopped.

The reach of neo-liberalism extends well beyond any one nation. It is the major obstacle that women face in their struggles for just and humane democracies almost everywhere. What makes this all even more difficult is that like the wars of/on `terror`, women’s rights is now embedded in neoliberalism, as a way of containing it. The U.N. Development Program’s “Arab Human Development Report” says that the lack of women’s empowerment and education is a key reason for the poverty of the region. The report advises to enhance the freedom of Arab women. Interestingly, there is no mention of women’s equality, given the report’s neoliberal framing. Choices should be increased rather than access. And the state should empower the poor, but not by assuming “the role of direct provider of economic goods and services. This approach has failed”.⁹⁵ So much for humane democracy because the private sector is preferred.

Nevertheless, hugely viable women’s movements throughout the world speak an incredible diversity and heterogeneity that pushes out the borders that each of us inhabit. New bridges are being built as women discover each other in transborder actions across diverse currents. Latin American and Caribbean feminisms have been newly naming their struggles in their Encuentros (encounters) since the early 1980’s. Feminists in Arab states lead the struggle for democracy in Iran, Afghanistan, Algeria. Peasant women in Mexico kept an airport from being built in the name of land rights for peasants. Women Reebok workers in India fought for better wages and working conditions and won.⁹⁶ It is at each of these locations that the meaning of feminisms and democracies will unfold for this next century.

Ask me a few years from now if my understanding and agenda for feminisms is the same and I hope I can say no. Hopefully, we, the big `we` will have moved on, beyond neoliberalism and imperial feminism, to humane democracy for us all.

⁹⁴Alice Walker, sent by earth, a message from the Grandmother Spirit (New York: Seven Stories Press, Open Media Pamphlet Series, 2001). P. 49.

⁹⁵Arab Human Development Report, pp. 72, 107. Available from: 1 U.N. Plaza, N.Y., N.Y., 10017; or Email Publicaiton@U.N..org

⁹⁶James Russell, “Land and Identity in Mexico: Peasants Stop an Airport”, pp. 14-25; and Bernard D’Mello, “Reebok and the Global Footwear Sweatshop”, pp. 26-40, in Monthly Review vol. 54, no. 9 (February, 2003).