

## WOMEN'S/HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE NEW IMPERIAL GLOBALISM

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Prof. Zillah Eisenstein  
Ithaca College  
Ithaca, New York, U.S. A.

NOTE: This address is written in the spirit of opening up and unraveling some beloved feminist constructs—like women's rights—used across the globe today. I write out of the activist struggles of women for the last quarter century for 'us'; for those already engaged in global politics and wondering what is next. So this a particular forum: women already committed to building a network that GENEROUSLY reaches and stretches across differences in order to think/act in newly BRILLIANT ways. If we, the big 'we' can do this, feminisms will become the 'really real' democratic promise of this decade.

I wish to apologize for not being able to write and speak in Korean. I have written this talk trying to take into account the problem of translation—words like gender, patriarchy, misogyny, etc. are often not easily translatable. Words that I use like glocal—for noting the simultaneous presence of global and local sites; and polyversal—my term to connote the differences that exist within any unity (as opposed to universal) may cause particular difficulty.

Thank you so very much for inviting me to participate in this discussion. I hope that our dialogue may assist me in furthering my understanding of Korean women's activism as part of the larger global community.

Sections of this talk are taken from my forthcoming book, Against Empire; feminisms, race and fictions of 'the' West (London: Zed Press, 2004).

## THINKING/SEEING IN IMPERIAL MOMENTS

How does one speak at this particular moment—during the U.S. wars of/on 'terror'—in 2003 in Korea, for women and girls, to encompass a just globe for people of all colors, yellow, black and brown? My head fills with cacophonous noise. I must first

try to clear some space from within which we can hear and see one another, across our power-differences, through our invested visors, in-between the locations of displacement, fear and hope.

I ask us to try and `really' think, with each other. Thinking means being able to grasp the ways moments and their structures of power change while language and naming and seeing often get in the way. I say this as I try to let go...and as I also must hold on. For me understanding the STRUCTURES of transnational capitalist racialized patriarchy are totally necessary for feminist politics and also completely incomplete. Why? Because each of us negotiates this maze through our cultural identities which individualize and specify meaning. We must try to identify and occupy these unstable sites. Mine is a hard site to see from. The imperial visors of the U.S. make it harder to see humanity in its inclusivity.

I want to clarify my use of the phrase of racialized patriarchy. When I first included this phrase in my title my hosts said that because racism does not exist in Korea that I could omit this from my talk. But my response is that racism--the differentiating of colors from white privilege and the hierarchical power-filled meanings given to color is part of the global economy. Racism travels from `the' West to places elsewhere and therefore must be understood as part of the present imperial system of globalism. Even if it is not indigenous to Korea--and I do not know enough here--, no place remains untouched by global capital which has always been racialized by black, brown, and yellow bodies from the start.

I will travel from my female body, to family and nation and globe through the racialized gender meanings and power-locations of women's and girl's lives today. As a woman with white skin of the Ashkinaze Jew, living in the United States, this is not completely possible, and yet I will push as hard as I can to do so.

Instead of a `new world order' I expose the chaos that exists for me. In the hopes of speaking an anti-racist/colonialist feminism I will explore the difficulties posed for women and girls across the globe as we face new/old forms of racialized patriarchy operating at the behest of transnational capital.

The brilliance of feminisms in their plural form--that they must start with the self, the personal, the body, and work outwards, beyond the self to the shared meaning of this starting point--our bodies which function as SIGNS before we have been allowed to give them our own personal/individual meaning. One becomes a feminist as one recognizes the shared meaning of being female in the world; however one constructs the `idea' of being a female in one's individual body it stands counter to a prescribed enforced meaning of womanhood. If one only sees oneself, in

singular fashion, there is no knowing that `we', as female bodies, share a similar location of being women, defined in and through patriarchal regimes and practices that ascribe us meaning other than what we are and think ourselves to be. Seeing similarity means that we can see through the varieties of ascribed and chosen meanings to this shared--but not identical--space.

The similarities are not unified or equivalent to sameness. Women are both similar and different; similarly different and differently similar. Race and economic class differentiate us while they also point to our similarity: girls and women are the poorest of the poor.

Because the globe is NOT a village; because the powerful monoculture of transnational capital makes it so hard to speak, or see, or hear each other, inside the nation, or across and beyond it/them; because the environment is being degraded along with our bodies, I will travel to the cyberenvirons of the filthy rich back to the extreme poverty of women of all colors hauling water, working at computer terminals, living in refugee camps, and leading anti-war movements.<sup>1</sup> And I will ask you to (maybe) rethink and give up ideas and language which will displace feminism to new sites in the process. As the dynamics of the power relations of racialized patriarchy shift so must our viewing and our naming of them--to sites of war, to anti-globalization demonstrations, to women struggling for their new found freedoms.

Let us try and `really' think despite the `real fakes' of the cyber globe. Let us try and move towards a `really' real feminism which initiates a truly democratic globe for 2000.

### RETHINKING FEMINISMS IN 2003

Feminisms, depending upon how they are defined, have been around for as long as women have existed. They take different forms and shapes, and can have cacophonous soundings. Much like democracy itself, feminism is often wrongly equated with `the' West, or rather western women. Now in the aftermaths of Sept. 11, 2001 it is more urgent than ever to recognize the polyvocal articulations of feminisms so that they may be threaded back to their earlier histories and pushed forward towards their more immediate understandings of freedom and equality.

At this historical moment I look to find more richly inclusive and expansive understandings of the complexity of feminisms. In the aftermaths of terrorism in the U.S. it is important to clarify the multiple meanings of feminism, some of which are progressive and democratic, some of which are exclusionary and imperial. The varied faces of women and their feminisms are my present site for imagining through and beyond

the anti-democratic U.S. war of/on `terror'. The context of this moment defines the contours of feminist possibility.

The possibility of liberatory feminisms emerging at this time is fraught with difficulty. At first it appeared as though U.S. mainstream feminism had successfully called world attention to the Taliban's horrific treatment of Afghan women. But this attention was quickly captured by first lady Laura Bush along with the rest of president Bush's women helpmates. They took this post-September 11<sup>th</sup> moment and appropriated the language of women's rights for a right-wing and neoliberal imperial agenda.

Yet, at this same time, there are anti-imperialist feminists in the U.S. along with women activists elsewhere--some of whom are self-proclaimed feminists, others not--who seek to democratize the globe for women and the rest of humanity. This is a moment of extreme tension between U.S. imperial feminism and all the other feminisms of the globe which search for liberatory democracy.

I locate my exploration in part at the intersection between women's rights as a complicated discourse, and the burqa--the all encompassing blue body wrap--as a complex symbolic. This is a site from which to understand the complex power struggle embodied in the U.S. war against Afghanistan. But first a note of context is necessary to clear some space for thinking--openly, critically, historically--in terms of a before and after, September 11, 2001.

September 11, 2001 has not changed everything, as so many in the U.S. say. It has just made clear how much context, perspective, and location matter. Suffering and fear have just not been at center view for too many in the U.S. until now. Remember that the people of Chile mourn a different September 11th and came to know a constant trauma and grief living under the U.S. supported terror-filled dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Remember that the U.S. bombed Iraq with tons of `smart' bombs in `91. Think across and beyond to the children of Afghanistan and Iraq who still, this minute, suffer unbearable poverty. Or, look to the majority of Palestinians and Israelis who live with daily crises, surrounded by fear and uncertainty given U.S. support of a minority of fanatics, led by Sharon in Israel. All the while, the language of freedom and democracy are used as justification and cover.

It is also vital to remember that: the U.S. economy was in trouble before September 11, 2001; Boeing was angling for its defense contract before September 11; the airlines were in financial trouble before September 11. Also remember the three thousand people who were murdered on September 11 came from over sixty different countries. Remember, also, the horrible bombings in Nigeria and Sudan; the students in high-school then, like my daughter, who were expected to wear flag pins and would not; the millions of workers who have lost their jobs since September 11; the incredible profits being made by the military-industrial

complex from the wars of `terror'; that Planned Parenthood has faced anthrax threats for years; that college campuses are being targeted as sites of anti-patriotism. Remembering at this moment is subversive and stands against the erasure of political history.

Women in the U.S. will not know the truths of women `elsewhere' if they do not recognize that women in colonized countries have struggled for their rights for centuries. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke have long recognized the feminists in Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Iran, and so on. The notion of a `sisterhood' spread across the globe dates back, at least, to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. One should just not assume that global means oneness, or homogeneity here, but rather that awareness and contact between women, across nations, has a history in the BEFORE. Early flows, between `the' East and West due to the slave-trade and colonialism bespeak an historical dialogue between feminisms.

Global flows are not simply new. Kumari Jayawadana poignantly documents the role of some western women as anti-colonialist. British colonialism in South Asia spoke a "domination by European males of colonized women". And some colonial women did not accede to this process. They instead were sometimes attracted to "concepts of woman's power (shakti) in Hinduism, androgynous duties, female goddesses like Kali and high status of women in ancient Hindu and Buddhist societies."<sup>ii</sup> In this instance, this historical flow is from East to West.

#### HUMAN RIGHTS/WOMEN'S BODIES

This is an important, yet difficult moment to intervene in the discussions surrounding women's rights as human rights. In the past two decades human rights have been specified for women especially in relation to war-rape, and somewhat less successfully in terms of women's reproductive needs and refugee status. At issue is the political saliency of gender--female womanhood--as a category from which rights derive. The unspecified understanding of human rights discourse is that it derives from western notions of universal individual rights, and the individual has been silently constructed in masculinist form. This means that the standard for articulating rights is men and their needs.

I have long argued that the notion of individual rights is problematically universalized in a homogenized form that does not recognize the specificities of female bodies.<sup>iii</sup> I argue that it is important to name and articulate the particular needs of women--embracing the specifics of sexuality and racialized gender--and articulate the cross-cutting needs of all humans from this female site. No hu/man is excluded by a standard that includes

diversity at its start; whereas all women are excluded by a standard that homogenizes the male body if the woman is pregnant, or suffered war-rape, or in need of assist given their responsibilities as mothers. The specification of differences through female bodies is more inclusive of the multiplicity of humanity, than the abstracted universalism which allows masculinism to silently parade as all encompassing.

It is hard to find a language that is helpful here. Human is thought to be a more embracing concept than woman because it supposedly encompasses men AND women. But does it? Clearly it did not do so when the right to property, or the right to vote was first initiated. I keep trying to find a language that does not position women as a more selfish or narrow interest than humanity in general. After all, when Kofi Anan seeks to address the AIDS crisis in Africa he says that the U.N. must invest in Africa's women and they will then save their communities. The World Bank as well writes that investments in a country's women is what makes the difference for development. What is it about women that if their lives are bettered the lives of all are bettered along with them. It is their contextual location that connects them to communities larger than themselves.

I want to bring center stage the incredible juxtaposition that girls and women suffer the greatest consequences of this newly unfolding imperial globalism as a majority of the global working class, homeless, refugees, rape victims, AIDS patients AND yet despite these realities women are seen as the mortar that sustains humanity.

So I wonder if I should not write about "human rights for the female body", or "write humanity into women's rights", or "imagine female bodies for human rights". I want to use language here to break the troublesome differentiation between women's rights and human rights. A notion of what I term polyversal humanity begins to allow this dismantling: to see that diverse beings are part of a notion of cross cultural humanity. And this notion is not simply western or determined by 'the' West, but is rather located in the very multiple expressions of how female bodies make them uniquely human.

#### WHOSE RIGHTS? AND FOR WHICH WOMEN?

Given the flux and tensions that reside within the sexual and gendered relations of global capitalism, women are a key part of the messy political imagery of the times. During the Afghan war, on any given day women appeared in the news in an astonishing array of roles: passive burqa-covered creatures, fighter pilots (although I think there was only one), bereaved widows of the September 11 carnage, pregnant wives of men who died in the Towers, Pakistanis holding signs against the war, and

Condoleezza Rice, national security adviser to Bush. Rice, a Black woman, sometimes called the 'Warrior Princess', made her name while on the board of Chevron oil company and as Provost of Stanford University where the tenure rate for white women and African American faculty declined during her tenure.<sup>iv</sup>

Other key women players of the Bush administration's Afghan war included Victoria Clarke as the hardline Pentagon spokeswoman, worldwide advertising agent Charlotte Beers, chosen to overhaul the government's image abroad, and main Bush aide Karen Hughes as the coordinator of wartime public relations. Hughes resigned her post claiming that her family duties must come first. She would tele-commute instead. This instigated much talk-show noise of whether (western) women can 'really' have it all. These women, along with the well-known conservative Mary Matalin, who is chief political adviser to vice president Dick Cheney, were in charge of shaping the words and images of the Afghan war in the U.S.<sup>v</sup>

They were showcased as the movers and shakers of the moment alongside the grieving mothers and wives of September 11th and contrasted to the supposedly non-modern women in Afghanistan. This U.S. showcase masqueraded as a modernized masculinity in drag. The war-room of Rice, Clarke, and Beers distorts the symbolic of power. They shore up white patriarchy for global capital by making it look gender and race-neutral. Of course they represent change, but for themselves, not the rest of women either inside or outside the U.S. Coreene Swealty Palm, bomber pilot of an F-14, spoke about her love of flying even while dropping bombs, which were simply a misfortune of war. Again, the United States looks egalitarian in terms of its women. In reality, the military simply resexes its masculinist privilege for a few.

This distortion became even more corrupt as these women of the Bush administration supposedly spoke on behalf of women in Afghanistan and their "deplorable conditions" under Taliban rule. Mary Matalin ignored the facts that in 1979 Jimmy Carter played an important role in the destabilization of the very government that brought significant gains to Afghan women: literacy, medical services, prohibition of the bride price, and so forth. This secular government, the Progressive Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) is credited with promoting the welfare and liberation of women. And it is this socialist government that the CIA targeted and overthrew through its earlier support of bin Laden.<sup>vi</sup> Women become easy barter here. First their successes are smashed by U.S. policy, and then they are used in their smashed existence to justify yet another war on their behalf.

Laura Bush who had never spoken on behalf of women's rights before found her voice in order to mobilize women for the Afghan war. She delivered the president's weekly radio address—a first

for a first lady—in order to speak in defense of women's rights in Afghanistan. She said that the Taliban's treatment of women "is not a matter of legitimate religious practice," that the plight of women and children is a matter of "deliberate human cruelty." She further stated that the "brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists" and is a clear picture of "the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us."<sup>vii</sup> But I wonder about the impetus of the administration's targeted focus on women and its real commitments, when women's rights have never been a priority of U.S. foreign policy.

It made no sense for Laura Bush to have thousands of school uniforms sent to Afghanistan as soon as the Taliban were deposed while most children were starving and too hungry to concentrate on school work. More recently, as disorder and pillage have returned to Afghanistan despite the so-called end of the war, many schools have been closed again. But we have heard nothing further from Ms. Bush on behalf of women and children. She has remained silent as have the other women of the war room in spite of the return of draconian measures enforced on women by the Northern Alliance.

The U.S. "war on terrorism" exacerbated misery, starvation and homelessness for most Afghan women despite breaking the Taliban's hold on the country. The U.S. public is told that the Taliban is gone, but religious zealots are still in charge. Afghanistan is ruled by thuggery; Osama bin Laden remains alive in hiding; the Northern Alliance has not improved the economy; U.S. troops remain but they are not remembered much of the time.

It is unforgivable to have used women's rights as a pawn in the Afghan war while increasing human suffering, and then forget to remember women's rights once again.

It is worth noting that although U.S. foreign policy has never made the conditions of women's betterment a key concern, our first ladies often speak on behalf of women in other countries. Hillary Clinton was well known for traveling abroad to speak for women's rights in Africa and India. Yet here at home, she never chose to speak as a feminist or develop a women's rights agenda.

Bush administration women do the same. Many speak negatively of feminism, and none have spoken on behalf of a domestic women's rights agenda. Neither do they seek to deal with issues like women prisoners, welfare mothers, accessible day care, or reproductive health. None has shown outrage at the religious fundamentalists who bomb and kill women in U.S. abortion clinics. None has spoken out against the terror of domestic violence. I am uneasy with an imperial women's rights agenda spoken for others while it is not used as a critique for our own lives here at

home.

I am also critical of a women's rights campaign which chooses to ignore the numerous worldwide women's organizations speaking on behalf of women in these countries as well as the post-Beijing global network working toward women's equality. The Bush administration women should have brought attention to these initiatives that are local and homegrown instead of appropriating these struggles for 'the' West and its exclusionary version of democracy. Nowhere did the Bush agenda address the health of Afghan women, most of whom still are at great risk for radiation poisoning due to the depleted uranium in the bombs the U.S. dropped.<sup>viii</sup> Instead, these very bombs were justified by women's rights rhetoric.

The insider women of the Bush administration should caution feminists across the globe of the limits and risks involved in insider status. Much has been made of the importance and difference that women can make from the inside, because they remain in part always outsiders given their gender. But I am not so sure. Although the main critique of the FBI's deficiencies in responding to information leading up to Sept. 11 was leveled by a woman, Coleen Rowley, her criticism was not of the agency per se, but individuals within it. I am not sure that Anita Hill is right when she says that Rowley had "insider status and outsider values".<sup>ix</sup> Rowley rose within a male dominated institution despite being female and used these very same skills which allowed her to advance to criticize what she saw as inefficient bureaucratic bumbling. In her bombshell memo she asks that the FBI update and restructure itself for the changing times.<sup>x</sup>

Globalization and more porous national borders requires a more modern FBI. I might say that Rowley just did a better job than her bosses at modernizing a nation-state apparatus for a global militarist stance. She saw the need for 'modernizing' an anachronistic system; and is the insider par excellence in this instance. Maybe women are better at change and seeing the need for it. Clearly, most of the women in these high status leagues use their talents as women-adaptability and multi-tasking-to sustain institutions that are structurally misogynist. These women are not embracing democracy but rather seek to reform institutions which wreak havoc on much of the world. What this portends for women on the outside, and for Afghan women as they enter Afghan politics is fraught with tension.<sup>xi</sup> Similar tensions exist for women in so-called post-war Iraq as they lose more and more of their freedoms.

We must look elsewhere to find an honest embrace of democratic imaginings for women, like the "Proposal for UN Women's Strategies for Civil Conflict Resolution" drawn up by the Ugandan women's delegation. The declaration asks for an end to all terrorism and a worldwide culture of tolerance, for better

conflict resolution and de-escalation of conflict, for an elimination of rich and poor, that each life be accorded the same human rights as all others, for the creation of a World Security Council of Women, and for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. The delegation asks the world to embrace the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which presumes global pluralism and diversity. A twelve-point statement committed to peace was e-mailed to individual women and women's organizations all around the globe. Over a thousand people and organizations responded and endorsed the twelve points for peace.<sup>xii</sup> Earlier, on October 30, 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325, which states that "all actors negotiating peace agreements need to adopt a gender perspective which recognizes the special needs of women and girls."<sup>xiii</sup> It is significant that the Bush administration women do not speak on behalf of these international women's groups but rather as women of 'the' West.

Women in the aftermath of September 11 are captured as both actors and passive receptors of historical moments. And there is little clarity of what a democratic and freely chosen femaleness and womanhood should mean. U.S. policy spoke against the Taliban's mistreatment of women at this historical juncture, but condoned it earlier. The United States also supports Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan, which all regularly violate women's rights.<sup>18</sup> So what exactly is U.S. foreign policy toward women's rights, the very rights that the United States parlays as central to so-called Western democracy? At least one senior administration official early on in "the war on terrorism" said that the United States could not make women's rights a part of the post-Taliban package because we have to be careful not to look like we are imposing our values on them.<sup>19</sup>

The official went on to say that the championing of women's rights goes well with a domestic audience, but that we must be careful how it sounds abroad. But who exactly is this official thinking of here? Hundreds of thousands of women as well as men, abroad, applaud the rights of women. Afghan women were active contributors and participants in everyday life before the Taliban. The Afghan 1964 Constitution guaranteed equal rights and the vote for women; and four women were elected to parliament during this Soviet run period. As well, 70 percent of school teachers and 50 percent of civilian government workers were women. And by some readings of the Qur'an, it too gave women rights of inheritance and divorce before Western women had such status.<sup>20</sup>

The anti-Taliban Northern Alliance even had a female lobbyist in Washington and a position paper on women's rights, despite criticism by some Afghan women's groups that the Alliance has not been a friend to women in the past.<sup>21</sup> The divide between

"us and them" is no simple divide and should not be used to occlude the similar patriarchal roots/routes of global capitalism. Also, if U.S. policy makers aggressively think they have a right to orchestrate aspects of a new Afghan regime, why exclude women's rights for fear of seeming too pushy? Obviously, these western officials do not see women's human needs as essential to the transition toward and construction of democracy.

There is no one position on women's rights to analyze because the government's stance has shifted and changed. The State Department released a report, "The Taliban's War against Women," which stated that "Islam is a religion that respects women and humanity," while the "Taliban respects neither." The report then advocated a role for women in a post-Taliban Afghan government.<sup>22</sup> And although several women became a part of this new government the government itself has not been able to establish any semblance of order. President Karzai can travel nowhere without U.S. body-guards.

In interesting contrast, at home in the U.S., post-September 11 became a very manly moment. The new heroism celebrated the American male worker, be he firefighter or policeman or welder. As stated in The New York Times: "The operative word is men: brawny, heroic, manly men. The male hero expresses the new selflessness of masculinism. Physical prowess is back in vogue along with patriotism."<sup>23</sup> New York City police, the same police who have been repeatedly charged with racist violence towards people of color and the violation of their human rights, embodied the new heroism.

In the early after-math of Sept. 11 there was little if any talk of women firefighters, or heroic women in general, for that matter.<sup>24</sup> Women, who were busy trying to rebuild the lives of their shattered families while they scrambled to get to their jobs as well, were shunted to the side—seen only through the veil of motherhood and wifely duty. There may be a few women in the Bush White House, but it is men who make the system work. They are the heroes and patriots. Ironically, amid all this, it is the Taliban that were viewed as "living in a world without women," not us.<sup>25</sup>

Sept. 11 ignited a renewal of masculinist patriotism. Jashur Piar and Amit Rai write of this disciplining of the docile citizen as a "heteronormative patriotism". Bin Laden the terrorist is made into the "monstrous fag"; and anyone who does not support the war is a fag as well. The "terrorist fag", as the "queered other" is "both a product of the anxieties of heteronormative civilization and a marker of the non-civilized".<sup>26</sup> The nation is once again renewed through an exclusionary, anti-democratic 'othering' which smashes the very freedom that it supposedly honors.

## POWER-FILLED GLOBALIZATION

As the globe moves through the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century geographical boundaries shift beneath and around us. Supposedly information travels anywhere and the globe has shrunk. Time and space take on new meanings. Present discourse tells us that capitalism, and with it democracy, have finally triumphed. There are new levels of poverty and new levels of environmental degradation and the World Trade Organization continues to legalize and authorize this process. But I think that this is not democracy. It rather is massive amounts of freedom for the privatization of the earth's resources and its people, with especially difficult expression for women and girls.

Capitalist racialized patriarchy, not capitalism, is the universalized system and the naming is significant so it can be SEEN as such. I need theory in this instance; and theory is not simply intellectual for me because it is intimately connected to daily life. Seeing theoretically means seeing the connections between differences; and through the relationships of our structural and individual lives. Theorizing racialized patriarchy allows a viewing of powerful structural relations of masculinist privilege. Theory allows for a historical memory tied to a present that is power-filled.

The obscene levels of profits for the rich and upper classes across the globe should not be allowed to obscure the particular ways that race and gender are exploited by multicultural corporatism, 'western feminism for export', and imperial feminism. These are new forms of corruption that both destabilize and recode women's and girls lives. And one should not mistake 'the' feminism for export or imperial feminisms as one and the same as anti-globalization feminisms in 'the' West. We all need to see women's activism, sometimes called feminisms, which are more multiple and complex given the many identities of women in locations other than 'the' West.

At this moment of the U.S. war of/on terror we need to see the complexities of Islamic feminists and their struggles within religious extremist regimes. Islamic feminists, often seen simply as western, are misunderstood in their specific struggles both inside and outside the nations in which they live. 'The' women in Islam--often defined as an export for global consumption--have become a new fault-line of struggle between nationalisms that are inherently patriarchal AND global capital's smashing of statist patriarchal controls. Women in Islam, in spite of and because of their variety, have initiated some of the cross-fire and are also caught within it.

As well, post-communist feminists throughout Eastern Europe now suffer the consequences of their various revolutions of '89. Their commitment to non-patriarchal democratic regimes has been

smashed with the harsh realities of their new market economies. Women in Russia, Bulgaria, the Czech republic, etc. have lost their jobs AND the state supports of old. The economies work mainly for transnational capital and the thugs it creates. Women beggars are common, alongside porn and prostitution. Given all this it is almost impossible to reclaim the democratic imaginary for feminism. And many women in Eastern Europe are not sure that the language of feminism is sufficient for their needs anyway.

Women's struggles in Algeria, South Africa, Nigeria, Korea, and China pose enormous variety. Women struggle against the violence of their political regimes as well as private lives, the degradation of the poverty created by the policies of the IMF and World Bank, and famine, and...build communities of women out of this which also express self-determination for themselves and their countries. Meanwhile the United Nations says it is determined to improve the lives of women. But, very often U.N. initiatives are simply forms of imperialist feminism. Other times, not. The U.N.'s women's agenda--IN PART a politics articulated by women themselves--is not simply of 'the' West because feminisms have always also had homes 'elsewhere'. Women's human rights are located with their bodies and not just with one geographical home. Feminisms' home is female bodies and they travel across and through multiple geographical and cultural locations.

Racialized patriarchy is transnational so the language of east/west; north/south; third world/first world; global/national; must be thought through THROUGH this reality. The divides, though real and painful are also not simply divides. They connect transnational structures defining women/girls lives while distinguishing them in terms of economic class, cultural meaning and the privileges of wealth. Racialized patriarchy has 'glocalized' meanings--local and global simultaneously--and women across the globe must try and see these realities which are never represented for these purposes.

Consumer culture is a culture of images and visual screenings that are never wholly false, nor simply true. Fantasy reigns today and it is never in our interests to not seek to find how our our imaginings are constructed and distorted in this manner. Bare breasts, veils, lipstick, chadors, blue-jeans, porn, sati, khaki uniforms, henna, nose-rings, high heels create fantasized women because there is no one meaning of any of these.

Each practice is local and travels. Deep red lipstick CAN be an act of defiance in Iran, and simple consumer culture in New York City....and neither.

So "information" is not even that. "Information" has become the consumer form of knowledge. High-tech cyber is more about military corporatist interests than about any of 'us' knowing anything about each other. Cybersociety is commercialized: .com

sites have grown fifty fold in the past ten years.

I do not see a global village here. Instead there is one explosion after another: the genocidal wars in Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, Chechnya, etc. More newly there have been the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Liberia. As I write North Korea boasts its nuclear capabilities and the U.S. threatens pre-emptive action. There are more prisoners in the U.S. today than in any other country which I guess is why this model of democracy is busier building prisons for its people of color than schools while the high schools are terrorized by white boys with guns.

Why do some academics--across the globe--speak of post-colonialism while cyberculture attempts to colonize the world? Why do critics of transnational capital speak of the U.S. as dominating the world when more and more communities inside the U.S. are also dominated? Why do Islamic extremists target women rather than 'the' West? And then why does global media target these extremists while covering over patriarchal abuses elsewhere?

Clearly, seeing and naming change WITHIN the systems of power is subversive to the discourses which neutralize regimes of power. The trouble here is BOTH those who are interested in protecting systems of power and those who are interested in changing/dismantling these systems are invested in and sometimes need language which is no longer REALLY helpful in revealing new complexities.

#### SEEING/VIEWING RACIALIZED PATRIARCHY

Today, the virtual real, the fantasy real, gets in the way and complicates our ways of knowing and seeing, and therefore naming. This is true for simply seeing nation, or globe, race and gender. Each are always in the process of construction. Identities are written on bodies/nations/and globe through the political process of naming color as though it were one and the same with racial meaning; and sex as though it were one and the same with gendered meaning. Color and sexuality are more plural than their naming. Race and gender parade as homogenized formulations of this: black/yellow/white; man/woman; women of color/white women.

There are sexual colors as in the "lightening of color" in slavery through the rape of slave women.<sup>27</sup> Black/white, rather than the hues of mahogany, ebony, chocolate, chestnut, vanilla, and on...silence the memory. And yellow is closer to black than white. Racialized gender is always in the process of construction, always changing along with the contexts of the moment, yet language is less fluid, and gets stuck, and we are unable to see, name, an act on it.

Reality has become more real AND unreal, fantasy, and virtual. There are few clear markers of the 'fantasy real' and yet I need to find them. In looking for them I will move as carefully as I can with my own invested blinders to try and name the 'glocal phallusies' which inhibit really real anti-racist, anti-colonialist feminist action.

For me, nationalism is a fantasized imaginary which maps political geography on women's bodies in color, while also erasing the process. Globalism, also fantasized, is part of this re-newed erasure today. Meanwhile forty percent of the globe has no electricity and seventy percent of the earth's people have never made a phone call. As of 2000 in India 3/4 of the country's billion people were still struggling for basic necessities. Fewer than 1/2 of 1 percent of Indian households had internet access.<sup>28</sup> Instead of a village new hierarchies are formed through the renegotiation of family to nation to globe in the attempt to merge and rescope the relations between economic nations and transnational racialized/gender politics.

National governments are no longer able to curtail global capital while commitments to public life are downsized and smothered. The International Monetary Fund orchestrates the privatization of every possible space while racialized patriarchy runs rampant across women's bodies. So transnational corporations restructure nation-states and racialized patriarchy is reconstituted along with the nation-state.

My meaning of racialized patriarchy focuses the system of male privilege to its negotiations by and through racialized meanings. Gender is already racialized--masculinity is color-coded, while race is engendered--women of color are colored while whiteness is neutralized.

The process is not one of unity or simply differentiation. Patriarchy is the differentiating of women from men while privileging men AND the transformation of females to women and males to men in this process. Yet, gender is differentiated in racism and racism is differentiated by race AND gender. Racialized patriarchy roots male privilege in racism AND racism is differentiated by race AND gender. It is why girls and women in third-world countries supply the new proletariat.

The state is no longer envisioned as simply harmonizing nation-based interclass conflict but rather assisting the mobility of global capital and its gendered borders. The imaginary globe replaces the imagined economic nation while the political nation gets privatized. Citizens are simply a new kind of consumer. And the nation-state becomes a major player in the process of globalizing capital while giving new license to its racial/sexual formation.

As such, statist patriarchy is re-formed to a transnational gendered division of labor of the 'information-age'. Women's

exploitation is rewired at computer terminals throughout countries of the south and north. Global patriarchy is less directly sustained through the privatized nation-state and maintained more through the numbing inequalities of the market.

Patriarchal privilege relocates itself in new formulations of the public/private nation/family divide. It means that masculinist privilege operates through a series of signs that are actually disconnected from their earlier/historical forms and points of origin. The new forms of racialized patriarchal privilege written into transnational globalism are tied both to traditional `signs' of femaleness and to newer media-mediated fantasies of privatized governments.

#### LOCATING BODIES AND THEIR POWER

The cyber real of racialized gender presents the labor of women and girls in the prosthetic language of Microsoft and media corporations. We need to refind the bodies and their labor to dismantle the mystifying fantasy of the supposed global culture.

Cyberlanguage says there is no center, no power, no race or gender, no one owning in the `old' way. The only thing that is said to matter is knowledge and one's embrace of one's new classless, raceless, genderless freedom. The cyberscreen is the free-market.

In actual fact, cyberspace is a construction of digital apartheid, a newly actualized form of racial exclusion. Most countries in Africa fall off the global map if electricity and phone lines are necessary. Given that only one in five people across the globe have a phone line the internet becomes an exclusive suburban community. Korea becomes hyper-exploited.

Tragically, just as telecommunications COULD hook up the world, no commitment exists to create the equality of access which could make this happen. Instead, new technologies rewrite and expand new inequalities on top of those which already exist.

As we speak of information highways we need to remember that one out of three women worldwide is illiterate and spends a significant portion of her day performing essentials like collecting firewood and drawing water. Cyberspace will simply remain a new kind of country-club if unchallenged.

The illusion of reality cannot be allowed to substitute for reality. Power and oppression are not simply signs with no origin. Cyberlanguage, then, expresses a politics of body and mind, labor and technology. It is imperative, then to see, that global capital and its cyberdiscourse obfuscates the real: the racialized patriarchal division of labor which disproportionately locates women and girls in low-wage assembly and information jobs and in sexual ghettos elsewhere in the global market.

Women are half of humanity and remain the poorest of the

poor. We do approximately 2/3 of the world's work and earn about 1/10th of the world's income. We own less than 1/100th of its property. We make up a majority of the world's refugees. We attempt to make life possible while living in degraded environments. We are the best hope to stand against the obscene agenda of transnational capitalist/racialized patriarchy because it is destroying our bodies: in nationalist wars, in the workplace, in religious fundamentalist assaults, in crass-corporatist commercialism, and contaminated breast milk and breast tissue.

### FEMINISMS FROM ELSEWHERE

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.

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.<sup>29</sup> 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 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 18<sup>th</sup> century liberal conception of the independent and autonomous self."<sup>30</sup> 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. This reciprocal debt should inform human rights discourse as well.

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 Aflatum, 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.<sup>31</sup> 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".<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

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

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 alongside the globalization of capital. 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 Korea 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 and human rights. 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.<sup>34</sup> 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".<sup>35</sup>

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.

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.<sup>36</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup>

Women activists in Egypt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 back.<sup>39</sup>

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.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> And yet again, the term feminism silently authorizes the English language as power-filled.

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

rights agenda which will destabilize local/cultural misogyny.

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.<sup>42</sup> 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.

#### RADICALLY PLURALIZING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

My discussion of feminisms as "other-than western" has important implications for women's rights and human rights discourse at this moment. Similar skepticism about 'rights' talk is needed because feminism is often written through the language of 'human rights' today. And 'rights' talk, though promissory has always been exclusionary. In the present neo-liberal context exclusivity becomes an even greater problem. Whereas 'the' West has been identified with human rights discourse in the past, the war of/on 'terror' has displaced this commitment. And, THE U.S. WAR OF/ON 'TERROR' IS NOW INSTEAD USED TO SILENCE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND DISSIDENTS BY REPRESSIVE REGIMES. THIS HAS GRAVE CONSEQUENCES FOR WOMEN ACTIVISTS AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS.

Western feminism, when equated with liberal feminism, as it was articulated in the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 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. Such thinking needs to also directly interrogate women's rights discourse.

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 African 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. Human rights discourse needs to be rewritten from this context.

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 with new notions of human rights will emerge as women engage in the pressing challenges of this day. For these

new feminisms to thrive as they should, they must be carefully distinguished from 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 21<sup>st</sup> Century. And it is out of these contested voices that new radically pluralist feminist dialogues about human rights 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 elsewheres. 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 elsewheres living in the U.S., and the women living elsewheres, 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> 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 also do, that if you improve the lives of women, you improve the lives of everyone. Country's 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".<sup>47</sup> 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".<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup>

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.<sup>50</sup> She sees gender equality as in tension with the "claims of minority cultures" because she assumes that cultural 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.<sup>51</sup> 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.

#### FEMINISMS AND THE FEMALE BODY

Cyberdiscourse gives us prosthetics rather than bodies. But bodies are too REAL. Anyone who is hungry knows the REALNESS of the body. Anyone who has lived through a war knows this. We are stuck with our bodies, no matter. Feminism, the only politics that theorizes and speaks from the body, must return from the cyberglobe to this problematic site.

I do not mean to say that women are only their bodies, or even mainly their bodies, or that our bodies give us a special essential meaning that men cannot have. Rather, I mean simply to say that female bodies absorb and effect their environs in unique ways that need to be theorized and politicized. Feminism's contribution here is that once gender and race (and sex and color) are denaturalized as not simply genetic/biological constructions, then women's bodies are viewed as open environments absorbing contaminated air and cultural predispositions. Such a viewing is a quite different scenario than that of a bio-genetically determined notion of femaleness...or the body-less fantasy of cybercapitalism.

I am neither a biological determinist nor environmental one. I respect and fear each. But as long as profit, rather than health define corporate priorities, we shall see more illness and war across the globe. As bodies are assaulted by the effects of war damage to the air and water; as chemical pollutants compromise people's immune systems; as dietary habits shift as part of global transformations in agriculture, women will face new challenges for their families and communities.

Let us use female bodies to destabilize the excess greed of global racialized patriarchy. So, my global personal politics for 2000 says that feminisms across this earth must say no to the transnational corporate agenda which pollutes our bodies, steals labor, ruins the air and soil and streams, smashes the varieties of rich cultural pleasure, and seduces too many while doing so. In reclaiming our bodies--which have become MORE subversive in this cybereconomy--we can construct an intimate and honest politics for the millennium. This REALLY democratic imagining does not ask for inclusion for women and girls. I rather argue

that girls and women's bodies become the site from which democracy is written.

I know that my chaotic journey from the nation to the globe; from the body through to the environment; from the factory to a critique of global capital; from sex to gender AND color to race; from western to transnational corporate interests of the 21<sup>st</sup> century asks you to travel uncomfortably. I have asked you to cross over and weave spaces that are often thought of as apart and separate. But I trust this journey.

The REAL is too painful for too many to not embrace the possibility of new democratic imaginaries written from women's bodies as an inclusive site of humanity. And, I have not resorted to some essentialist meaning of femaleness or womanhood here because bodies are never simply flesh. Instead I write from my body which is no longer simply female, but open to new political meaning still to be imagined in this new century.

### 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.<sup>52</sup> 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.

Women's polydimensional 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 and its misuses of women's rights talk 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 utilizing rights discourse.

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 our tax dollars flow and try, in awareness, to follow them."<sup>53</sup> 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. The inclusive '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".<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> Women

workers in Korea are doing the same. It is at each of these locations that the meaning of feminisms, human rights and democracies will unfold for this next century.

Ask me a few years from now if my understanding and agenda for feminisms and women's rights 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.

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