

# Transnational Feminisms

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The mountain moving day is coming  
I say so yet others doubt it . . .  
All sleeping women now awake and move  
All sleeping women now awake and move.

Excerpt from "Mountain Moving Day" by Yosano Akiko

This chapter focuses on transnational feminism, that movement for the social, political, and economic equality of women across national boundaries. Such an approach underscores the powerful opportunities associated with the development of new forms of international alliances and networks for the emancipation of women worldwide and the empowering consequences that can occur when, as predicted in the poem above, "sleeping women now awake and move." It also, however, addresses the challenges to unity that arise from such forces as economic globalization, neocolonialism, and racism. Still, most agree that the "women's movement" in its myriad forms is a global phenomenon that advocates gender justice. Despite cultural differences and national priorities, women's rights activists not only network across national borders, demonstrating solidarity in their struggles, but exhibit similarities in the ways they frame their grievances and demands, form networks and organizations, and engage with state and intergovernmental institutions (Moghadam, 2005; Naples and Desai, 2002). As discussed in the short reading "Edge of the Earth" by Hafsat Abiola, there is a "cord that links us all" and which connects us "across distances, time zones, [and] worlds." This cord, however, also "connects the different aspects of who we are." It is this quest for unity out of distinct differences that poses one of the greatest challenges for transnational feminism.

Transnational feminist activism has evolved in response to the continuing discrimination and worldwide suffering of women. Despite ongoing efforts throughout the twentieth

century to address this discrimination through, for example, the United Nation's (UN) four World Conferences on Women (see sidebar), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and other campaigns for legal and policy reforms to ensure women's civil, political, and social rights, we still have a long way to go. As Cynthia Wagner writes in the reading, "Women Still Have a Long Way to Go," the latter have yet to achieve full legal, economic and cultural equality with men even

## World Conferences on Women

The International Women's Year was 1975, and the first world conference on women convened in Mexico City to examine the problems of continuing inequality for women and to propose solutions. The next 10 years became the United Nations Decade for Women that focused on women's advancement and global dialogue about gender equality. That conference was followed by three other world conferences. The UN's most recent update in 2005 points to the ongoing need for nations to continue to work to improve women's lives. The four conferences are described below.

### FIRST WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

#### Mexico City, 19 June–2 July 1975

At this meeting, the process was launched and three objectives were identified in relation to equality, peace, and development for the Decade:

- Full gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination
- The integration and full participation of women in development
- An increased contribution by women toward strengthening world peace

The conference urged governments to formulate national strategies, targets, and priorities. It led to the establishment of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), which serve as an institutional framework for research, training, and operational activities in the area of women and development. At this conference, held in Mexico City, women played a highly visible role. Of the 133 delegations from member states, 113 were headed by women. Women also organized the International Women's Year Tribune, which attracted some 4000 participants, and a parallel forum of nongovernmental organizations that signaled the opening up of the United Nations to nongovernmental organizations, enabling women's voices to be heard in the organization's policy-making process.

### SECOND WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

#### Copenhagen, 14–30 July 1980

This conference recognized that there was a disparity between women's guaranteed rights and their capacity to exercise them. Participants identified three spheres in which measures for equality, development, and peace were needed:

- Equal access to education

- Equal access to employment opportunities
- Equal access to adequate health care services

## **THIRD WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN**

### **Nairobi, 15–26 June 1985**

The data presented by the United Nations to the delegations of member states revealed that the improvements observed had benefited only a limited number of women. Thus, the Nairobi Conference was mandated to seek new ways of overcoming obstacles for achieving the objectives of the decade: equality, development, and peace.

Three basic categories were established to measure the progress achieved:

- Constitutional and legal measures
- Equality in social participation
- Equality in political participation and decision making

The Nairobi Conference recognized that gender equality was not an isolated issue, but encompassed all areas of human activity. It was necessary for women to participate in all spheres, not only in those relating to gender.

## **FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN**

### **Beijing, 4–15 September 1995**

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, by the representatives of 189 countries. The platform reflects the new international commitment to achieving the goals of equality, development, and peace for women throughout the world. It also strengthens the commitments made during the United Nations Decade for Women, 1976–1985, which culminated in the Nairobi Conference, as well as related commitments undertaken during the cycle of United Nations world conferences held in the 1990s.

The 12 critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action are as follows:

1. Women and poverty
2. Education and training of women
3. Women and health
4. Violence against women
5. Women and armed conflict
6. Women and the economy
7. Women in power and decision making
8. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
9. Human rights of women
10. Women and the media
11. Women and the environment
12. The girl child

The Platform for Action sets out strategic objectives and explains the measures that should be adopted by governments, the international community, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector.

Source: <http://www.un.org/en/development/devagenda/gender.shtml>

in some of the world's more advanced societies. An explanation for this is discussed in the reading by legal scholar Catharine A. Mackinnon who refers to the 1949 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In noting that most of these human rights are still violated in the case of women some 50 years after the declaration, she asks the question “Are Women Human?” and makes the case for transnational feminist advocacy.

Although by definition transnational feminist action involves feminism across borders, it entails recognition of different contexts and priorities. In other words, while transnational feminist action might exhibit similarities in critiques, goals, strategies, and mobilizing structures, there are identifiable differences among those claiming and using this label. One difference pertains to disagreements over abortion and gay/lesbian rights. In some cases this is a principled position and in other cases a matter of strategic priority-setting within a movement, network, or coalition. Another difference is discursive (about language). As already discussed, where the term “feminism” is either synonymous with interests of the Global North or strategically inadvisable (when, for example, using the label would derail alliances or place activists in jeopardy with the state), advocates instead talk of “women’s rights” or of “law reform.” In some countries in the Middle East or in eastern Europe, for example, women’s rights groups frame their struggle as one for “civil society” or “democracy,” avoiding the feminist label in claiming “national development” that implicitly might include women’s rights. As discussed below, in many parts of the world, Christians who advocate feminism may refrain from using the label. The term “feminist” is also generally not openly used in Jordan and Egypt, for instance, although Iranian women’s rights activists often defiantly call themselves feminists or “secular” feminists even though this puts them at risk vis-à-vis the Islamic authorities. This is also true of the *Association Tunisienne des femmes démocrates* and of several Algerian women’s groups.

In this chapter I address transnational feminist activism through a focus on what I call transnational feminist networks (TFNs): organized and sustained forms of collective



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action for the emancipation of women worldwide (Moghadam, 2005, 2009). The first section discusses the history of global feminisms and addresses political and socioeconomic factors contributing to the development of TFNs, including their relation to international development projects. It also explores strategies employed by TFNs to achieve their goals. This section is followed by an examination of several types of TFNs: (1) networks that target the neoliberal economic policy agenda or those policies that endorse free markets and economic privatization; (2) those that focus on the dangers of fundamentalisms and insist on women's human rights; (3) women's peace groups that target conflict, war, and imperialism; and (4) feminist humanitarian networks that address women's practical needs as well as their strategic interests. Most of these TFNs emerged in the 1980s and all continue to be active in some form today.

Because global feminism has emerged within the context of the world-system and is linked to economic globalization, this chapter describes how these forces unite women across the globe around common grievances and goals. However, because the world-system is unequal and hierarchical, the chapter also emphasizes points of contention among transnational feminist activists that sometimes challenge their alliances with each other. A key aspect here involves opportunities and difficulties associated with the potential alliance between women of color in core or "First World" nations and indigenous women in "Third World" or peripheral countries. For example, the classic reading by Chandra Talpade Mohanty titled "Under Western Eyes" refers to the arrogance of First World feminism in defining the realities and setting the agendas for international feminist struggle.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE

**"Afua Knows Her Goal"** by Trina Filan

Twelve-year-old Nana Korbia Afua Konadu<sup>1</sup> awoke at 4:30 a.m. to start her day. She slid from her mat, slipped into her dress, and stepped from the bedroom she shared with her older sister and her sister's two young children into the family compound. The various sleeping and living rooms surrounding the courtyard of the family's large, rectangular compound were still dark, but there was activity in the interior. Afua's mother and her mother's mother already were at the fire, disdaining the charcoal stove in the enclosed kitchen for the cool air outside, preparing *ampesi* for breakfast.

Afua began her usual morning chores: running to the standpipe—a quick 15-minute walk from the house—to get three buckets of water, sweeping the family compound, and making a fire to heat some hot water for bathing before leaving for school. She helped prepare *ampesi* and bread with marmalade. In the evening, she would help make *abenkwan* and *fufu* for supper. She already was adept at using the wooden pestle to pound the cassava and plantains for *fufu* and also at turning the dough in the mortar as another woman pounded. In Ghana, cooking well was a skill prized by women from the meekest to the most successful.

The roosters crowed at 5:30, and the men and boys stirred in their sleeping quarters. Electric lights clicked on as Afua's father, her *wofa*, and her older brother, Kwame, found their clothes. When Kwame emerged, she ran to him: "Brother, let's fetch water, so we can go to school!" Afua loved school and hurried through her chores every morning to arrive on time.

"All right, sister, all right! Let me wake up first!" Kwame protested, still sleepy.

"No, Kwame! We should hurry!" Afua knew she would not be scolded for being so bold with her brother; he doted on her and gave in quickly. They grabbed two large buckets each and headed out to the standpipe.

Fetching water was a huge daily chore. They had to get enough for washing, drinking, and cooking for the morning, and when they got home from school, they fetched more for the evening. It was not a bad job, though. Afua knew other children who traveled much, much further—sometimes two kilometers each way—with their heavy buckets. And most girls did not have kind brothers to help them; they had to go alone. With this and other chores and because of the expense, very often these girls could not go to school. As the youngest child and with her sister's children too young to lift the buckets and Kwame nearly ready to go away to Kumasi for school, Afua knew the task soon would be hers alone.

After fetching water, Afua cleaned the family bedrooms, then she and Kwame washed, ate their *ampesi*, and dressed in their school uniforms. They ran to Father for chop money and left for school, a three-kilometer walk. The men headed to their shop, where they made and sold beautiful crafts to locals and tourists who traveled outside of Kumasi. After the morning work was done, her mother and grandmother would print batik designs on cloth to sell in the shop and at the market.

Afua's town was about 20 kilometers outside of Kumasi, where her mother's oldest sister had moved many years ago and where Afua's future beckoned. Her auntie was a nurse married to a British doctor. Unable to have children, they had decided to sponsor Kwame's and Afua's education through university, no mean expense and an unbelievable break: no one else in town was so fortunate. As they hurried along the dirt road through town, Afua dreamed about her good fortune and her future.

Some months ago, the school headmaster told the girls a new club would be opening for them alone. This girls' club, run by a development agency, would train them in math and science to encourage them to stay in school and enter a good profession. The idea of their own club thrilled the girls.

The first day, they were introduced to a cartoon character called Sara.<sup>2</sup> Sara, a little older than Afua, was trying to make the right choices in her life, and although many obstacles kept coming into her path, she found a way every time through courage and ingenuity to overcome them. When a "sugar daddy" tried to seduce her to sleep with him, Sara escaped from him. When one of Sara's friends became pregnant, Sara learned from Tamala's mistake and told her friend, Musa, she didn't want to have sex with him.

Sara was remarkable to Afua: she was strong and not afraid, and most importantly, she knew her goal and did not stray from it. Sara inspired Afua to believe that she, too, could have a big goal and reach it, and soon Afua knew her goal: to become a nurse like her auntie.

With this aim in mind, and wisely using her good fortune, Afua studied harder than ever. When the girls' club received a computer from the government, Afua quickly took to it, pecking at the keys, recording her friends singing, and drawing with the mouse. Each day, she grew closer to her goal.

Today was like most others. School went from 8:30 to 2:00 with two short breaks. Afua learned her lessons and answered questions then went to the club and learned to operate something called a "Bunsen burner." It was fascinating.

At 4:00, Afua hurried home; Kwame already was away helping Father with evening work. Afua had many things to do before her day was over. She had to help Mother in her fields, tending crops and gathering food. She had to gather firewood, clean the compound, and cook. She had to do her homework. It would be dark long before she slept. But Afua was a good daughter, and she was a smart and lucky girl who was strong enough to know her goal.

<sup>1</sup> Ghana is home to about 100 ethnic groups characterized by cultural and linguistic differences. Afua is a member of the matrilineal Ashanti, a subset of the country's largest ethnic group, the Akan. Afua speaks Twi.

<sup>2</sup> The Sara Communication Initiative (SCI) originally was developed by the United Nations Children's Fund in conjunction with more than 60 African writers, researchers, and health specialists to improve African adolescent girls' capacity to prevent HIV, pregnancy, and sexual abuse through esteem- and efficacy-building. In 2000, the US Agency for International Development and the government of Ghana partnered to bring Sara—"I Know My Goal" to adolescent girls throughout Ghana.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISMS

Women have worked together across borders for women's rights since at least the era of "first wave" feminism (the nineteenth-century movement for women's rights occurring mostly in the Global North that included suffrage and other social and economic demands). This struggle for political and social rights, as well as peace and antimilitarism, united many women around the world in the early and mid-twentieth century. After World War II ended in 1945, global women's movements began to diverge, grouping themselves within national boundaries or economic zones and aligning with various ideological currents that emphasized different politics and priorities. First, for example, the Cold War (the conflict between the United States and the former Soviet Union and their allies concerning capitalism versus communism or state socialism) cast a shadow on feminist solidarity in the form of the East–West divide from the late 1940s through the 1990s. Second, the "second wave" feminist movement of industrialized Western societies, that arose in the 1960s and 1970s in response to demands for the improvement of women's status in both public and private arenas, brought various feminist perspectives providing different explanations for women's condition and varying strategies for change. These perspectives included liberal, radical, Marxist, and socialist feminist perspectives as well as critiques by lesbians and women of color for inclusivity within these approaches. Third, another division took the form of North–South that often played out as First World versus Third World feminism. These different feminisms had disparate priorities: many activists from the Global North saw legal equality and reproductive rights as key feminist demands and goals while those in the Global South emphasized "development," colonialism, and imperialism as obstacles to women's advancement. Such disagreements came to the fore at the beginning of the UN Decade for Women that sought to address the low status of women worldwide, and especially at its first and second world conferences on women that took place in Mexico City in 1975 and in Copenhagen in 1980, respectively.

Disagreements were exacerbated by international development projects that focused on population control while ignoring the basic needs and aspirations of local women. For example, many development projects excluded local communities from development planning and did not take into account women's productive roles and their reproductive responsibilities and needs. In particular, when the global debt crisis emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, structural adjustment policies (SAPs) were introduced by international lending agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. SAPs are economic policies that countries need to follow in order to qualify for international loans. In other words, SAPs are imposed through international monetary organizations as a condition of international lending. They require indebted countries to reduce levels of public expenditure in order to assist the repayment of debt and/or readjust spending patterns in line with perceived needs of a globalizing world economy. As a result, they often require countries to simultaneously cut social services, reduce trade barriers, and encourage foreign investment, halting social development projects in order to repay loans to First World banks. Although many indigenous women and some involved in gender and development research critiqued such capitalist development, other feminists tended to ignore the unequal relations between Global North and South. For example, in the reading "The Messy Relationship Between Feminisms and Globalizations," Manisha Desai argues that although feminism seeks to further women's agency and empowerment worldwide, some

feminist perspectives are too connected with the problems of economic and cultural globalization that have exacerbated women's inequality.

A shift in the nature and orientation of international feminism began to take place in the mid-1980s during preparations for the Third UN World Conference on Women held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985. The shift took the form of bridge-building and consensus-making across both regional and ideological divides, and resulted in the emergence of a new type of women's organization—the transnational feminist network—that brought together women around a common agenda and goals. Three critical economic and political developments within states and regions, and at the level of the world-system, facilitated this development:

- The transition from Keynesian economics (with its emphasis on government intervention for full employment and citizen welfare) to neoliberal economics (with its emphasis on free markets, privatization, and trade and financial liberalization), along with a new international division of labor that relied heavily on (cheap) female labor.
- The decline of the welfare state in much of the Global North and the poverty of many countries, especially in the Global South. Both of these factors placed a heavy burden on women's reproductive and domestic roles.
- The emergence of various forms of fundamentalist and right-wing religious movements that threatened women's autonomy and human rights.

The economic and political realities of these global changes led to a convergence of feminist perspectives: feminists in the richer, “developed” nations found themselves focused on economic issues at the same time that those from “developing” countries were directing their attention to women's legal status, autonomy, and political rights. This encouraged the formation of a number of alliances that brought women together in response to economic pressures and to movements limiting women's rights. Out of these alliances, transnational feminist networks (TFNs) were born. Such networks included Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), MADRE, Women in Development Europe (WIDE), the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), Women Living under Muslim Laws (WLUML), and the Sisterhood is Global Institute (SIGI). The latter is the institute founded by U.S. feminist Robin Morgan and others after the completion of the anthology by the same name discussed in the introduction to *Women Worldwide*. By the 1990s, TFNs were engaged in policy-oriented research, advocacy, and lobbying around issues pertaining to women and development and women's human rights. Many individuals who formed or joined TFNs were scholar-activists who had been, and in some cases, continue to be, involved in the gender and development research community.

Some scholars have distinguished between different kinds of transnational feminist groups such as professionalized women's lobbying groups (nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] or international nongovernmental organizations [INGOs]) and “grassroots” women's groups. The former are sometimes described as “top-down” or potentially elitist groups where those in charge are separate from the broad base of women, while the latter tend to be seen as more local, community-based, and more centered around feminist principles of collaboration and power-sharing. This may be an arbitrary distinction, however, because many of the professionalized TFNs are led and staffed by feminist activists with strong commitments to gender equality, women's empowerment, and social transformation at the local level. It is more useful to see the international women's movement



as diffuse and diverse, with different types of mobilizing structures, discourses, and action repertoires. The overarching frame is that of achieving gender equality and human rights for women and girls. How that is achieved varies across the different forms of groups. Change may occur through direct action, grassroots organizing, research and analysis, lobbying efforts, coalition-building, or humanitarian action. The strategies of TFNs are discussed in more detail below.

What should be noted in the development of all TFNs is the impact of the new information and computer technologies of the 1990s, which helped individuals connect and share information, plan and coordinate activities more rapidly, and mobilize more extensively. As emphasized in the next chapter, these technologies are still invaluable to feminist organizing worldwide. Two feminist networks focusing on communications came to serve as

## LEARNING ACTIVITY **Feminist Networking Across the Globe**

In the past two decades, new technologies have provided feminist activists with unprecedented opportunity to communicate and collaborate globally. Isis International began in 1974 to help women, particularly women in the Global South, connect and communicate in order to be more actively involved in development processes. Visit the NGO's web site at [www.isiswomen.org](http://www.isiswomen.org). Listen to "Isis Journey." Then browse the Web site and answer these questions:

- What is the mission of Isis International?
- What programs does the organization offer? Why do you think these programs are important for transnational feminist activism?
- Look at the most recent issue of *Women in Action*. What is the theme of the issue? How do the articles examine the issue from transnational feminist perspectives?
- What are Isis International's current campaigns? Why are these issues important for women across the globe?
- How do you think Isis International furthers transnational feminist activism?

Now visit the Web site of the International Women's Tribune Center at [www.iwtc.org](http://www.iwtc.org).

- What are its mission and programs?
- Why is its work important for transnational feminist activism?

Check out the Web site of the Global Sisterhood Network at [www.global-sisterhood-network.org](http://www.global-sisterhood-network.org). GSN is "an information resource centre via the monitoring of media and institutional reports which seek emerging developments in agriculture, economics, employment, environment, health, law, militarism, politics, technology, trade and science, and which either directly or indirectly impact on the realities of women's lives. To meet this goal, GSN's electronic list places considerable emphasis on issues that have attracted sparse attention and/or analysis from a feminist perspective."

What do transnational feminist networks that are focused on communications offer women? How are new technologies helping women form networks? How might issues of access be problematic for some women? How might these TFNs help bridge differences and bring women together to work for change?

New technologies have greatly increased opportunities for feminist cyberactivism. Check out the article, "Cyberfeminism: Networking on the Net" by Amy Richards and Marianne Schnall on [feminist.com](http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/genwom/cyberfeminism.html): <http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/genwom/cyberfeminism.html>. Also, visit the Web site of Equality Now at [www.equalitynow.org](http://www.equalitynow.org). How is this organization utilizing the Web to engage people in activism on behalf of women around the world?

conduits and clearinghouses as well as distributors of activist materials: the International Women's Tribune Center, based in New York, and ISIS International Women's Information and Communication Service established in Quezon City, Philippines, and in Santiago, Chile (see sidebar).

As TFNs proliferated in the 1990s, they helped bridge the North–South divide among women activists and they worked to transcend political and ideological differences through adoption of a broader feminist agenda that included a critique of neoliberalism with its free markets and privatization (discussed below), as well as an insistence on women's full citizenship, reproductive rights, bodily integrity, and autonomy. Eventually that common agenda took the form of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that came out of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. In addition to the UN World Conferences on women, however, other UN conferences provided a platform for issues pertaining to gender justice. These included the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992; the Human Rights Conference in Vienna in 1993; the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) that was held in Cairo in 1994; and the World Summit for Social Development (known as the Social Summit) that took place in Copenhagen in 1995. At these conferences participants declared that environmental issues were women's issues, that women's rights were human rights, that governments were expected to guarantee women's reproductive health and rights, and that women's access to productive employment and social protection needed to be expanded. Slowly, new themes emerged that resonated globally and came to be adopted by women's groups throughout the world: women's human rights; gender justice; gender equality; ending the feminization of poverty; and resisting violence against women. These themes are elaborated in the following chapters of *Women Worldwide*.

### ***Strategies of TFNs Worldwide***

What are some strategies employed by TFNs to achieve their goals? First, TFNs mobilize pressure against outside forces and institutions that seek to undermine women's status. Such an institution is the World Trade Organization (WTO): an international organization designed to supervise international trade in accordance with neoliberal economic policies. TFNs mobilizing against outside forces impact global policy via e-petitions, action alerts, and appeals, as well as through direct actions that may include public protest and acts of civil disobedience. Like other transnational social movements, they also create, activate, or join global networks or coalitions in their struggle for gender justice by mobilizing pressure against outside forces. Important coalitions in this regard include Jubilee 2000 (involving labor, religious, environmental, and human rights groups highly critical of corporate capitalism); the Coalition to End the Third World Debt; Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice; the Women and Trade Network; Women's Eyes on the Bank; and United for Peace and Justice. Since "the Battle of Seattle" in November 1999 (a conference in Seattle convened by the WTO that was marred by power brokering on the part of First World countries, disagreements over agendas, and large street protests [see sidebar]), women have become active players in advocating global social justice, taking part in the World Social Forum. The World Social Forum is an annual meeting held by members opposed to corporate forces of globalization where efforts are made to coordinate world campaigns, share and refine organizing strategies, and inform each other about movements worldwide (Dufour and Giraud, 2007).

## The Battle of Seattle



The extent of the protests of the 1999 World Trade Organization conference was unexpected. Protestors delayed the opening of the meeting and forced downtown Seattle businesses to close. Police arrested more than 500 protestors, amidst allegations of police brutality. Go to the WTO History Project at [www.wtohistory.org](http://www.wtohistory.org) for more information from the protestors' point of view. Also, go to [www.cityofseattle.net/wtocommittee](http://www.cityofseattle.net/wtocommittee) for the results of Seattle's WTO Accountability Review Committee.

Second, TFNs act and agitate within their own borders and across nation-states to enhance public awareness and encourage public participation. They work with labor and progressive religious groups, media, and human rights groups on social policy that include humanitarian, development, and militarization issues. They link with local partners, participate in local coalitions, and provoke or take part in public protests. Third, TFNs network with each other in a sustained process of inter-networking and Internet-working. In all these ways, their activism spans local, national, regional, and transnational terrains. The "gift" of the Internet has allowed them to transcend borders, boundaries, and barriers in their collective action against forces that seek to keep women oppressed.

Finally, TFNs participate at the multilateral and intergovernmental level. Here they observe and address UN departments such as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) that facilitates international cooperation on standards-making and problem-solving in economic and social issues (and especially with its Commission on the Status of Women [CSW]) through lobbying of delegates to raise awareness and cultivate supporters. TFNs also consult with UN agencies and regional commissions and attend meetings with

## Tools for a Populist Uprising *by Noah Grant and Layla Aslani*

What can you do to make a difference? The following suggestions can help you collaborate with others to create a movement for social change. Think about a pressing issue for women around the world that you'd like to address. How can these tips help you begin to organize to do something about that issue?

### HOW TO CROSS THE DIVIDE<sup>1</sup>

**Before you talk, listen.** Attend community gatherings. Get to know the people you want to reach and listen to their hopes and fears.

**Discuss things that connect you,** like being a parent or dealing with high gas prices, to build trust before bringing up issues that might spark disagreement.

**Highlight others' points of view.** For example, talk about how an Afghani villager feels about us attacking their country.

**Avoid attacks** on politicians or others who hold different views and the United States.

**Focus on why the issues matter** to you. Speak from your heart and experience.

**Avoid jargon-filled language.** Ask yourself if you come across as friendly or as a know-it-all.

**Avoid emphasizing problems.** Suggest actions people can take, and talk about examples of success.

### HOW TO GET MEDIA ATTENTION

**Find a newsworthy angle** on your event or cause. Human interest, controversy, civil disobedience, superlatives (first, biggest) help.

**Create a short press release.** Make it accessible and factual, with contact information.

**Find journalists** who cover issues related to your own.

**Develop a 30-second pitch** for your story. Don't lie or exaggerate—build a reputation for accuracy.

**Highlight previous coverage** of your issue when pitching your story.

**Identify knowledgeable** and articulate spokespeople. An unexpected spokesperson (a veteran for peace or a doctor for single-payer health care) can be especially interesting to a journalist.

**Don't give up** if journalists aren't interested. Correct them if they get the story wrong, and thank those who cover it well.

### HOW TO BUILD A COALITION

**Identify a goal** that is widely shared, for example, increased support for education. Avoid taking positions on unrelated issues; learn to respectfully "agree to disagree" on topics not essential to your purpose.

**Research potential allies** who share your concerns, including religious, political, civic, and neighborhood groups.

**Explore participants'** interest and concerns about collaborating, and explore ways to address both.

**Structure decision making** so that power is shared among coalition members and timely action is possible.

**Clarify your plan.** Set short-term and long-term goals. Choose among strategy options: large, public campaigns, behind-the-scenes lobbying, popular education, etc.

**Encourage coalition partners** to reach out to their own network of friends and allies to widen support.

## HOW TO BUILD TRUST<sup>2</sup>

**Offer reciprocal liberty.** Each of us relies on society's commitment to freedom to assure our own liberty. I'll respect your liberty if you'll respect mine.

**Remember that diversity** includes diversity you don't like. Treat your opposition with fairness and respect, as potential allies rather than as certain enemies.

**Bust a few stereotypes,** and start thinking about somebody else's problems. You'll make new friends and change others' view of you. Gays against pension cutbacks, women for drug reform, blacks for small business, whatever.

**Use short-term, easier wins** to build momentum for the difficult issues that may take years to get.

**Describe a future worth fighting for.** Optimism is deeply ingrained in American culture. We need to point out what's wrong without simultaneously casting a pall over others' vision of the future.

## HOW TO TAKE DIRECT ACTION<sup>3</sup>

*Direct action can bring people together while raising awareness. Here, for example, is a model developed by City Life/Vida Urbana for protesting foreclosures:*

**Seek advice** from an organization that provides legal advice and support for those facing foreclosure.

**Canvass the neighborhood** to find support. Tell the story of the family involved, and explain how a foreclosure harms the community.

**Warn the bank** that a protest is planned. Send out press releases.

**Gather neighbors,** family, friends, faith groups, and organization members at the house for the scheduled foreclosure. Hold signs and use a megaphone to tell the story of the homeowner.

**If successful** in thwarting the foreclosure, use the extra time to negotiate with the lender.

## HOW TO ORGANIZE ONLINE

### E-Mail Lists

To keep members of your group informed, set up a Listserv (find them at [riseup.net](http://riseup.net) or Google). Listservs allow people to subscribe, unsubscribe, and share files easily.

### Write Effective E-Mails

- Get the reader's attention with an interesting hook.
- Make the text straightforward, not wordy, and break it up with bullet points and short paragraphs.
- Include everything the reader needs to take action and ask recipients to forward the e-mail.
- Limit e-mails to once every couple of weeks, except during a campaign climax.

## How to Blog

Post short, confident pieces on a single subject. Update frequently, and reference your e-mails, along with information on how to subscribe to your e-mail list. Free blogging sites include: [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com), [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com), and [www.sixapart.com/typepad](http://www.sixapart.com/typepad).

## Other Uses of New Media

Share photos on Flickr or videos on YouTube. You can link to these shared images from your website, blog, or e-mails.

<sup>1</sup> Source: article by Doug Orbaker

<sup>2</sup> Source: Sam Smith at [prorev.com](http://prorev.com)

<sup>3</sup> Source: City Life/Vida Urbana

International intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). By preparing background papers, briefing papers, and reports, and by submitting these documents to IGOs, TFNs increase their expertise and influence on a whole range of issues. Their purpose is to raise new issues (such as gender and trade, women's human rights, and violence against women in war zones) with a view toward influencing policy.

## TYPES OF TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST NETWORKS

In this section I identify four types of TFNs: (1) feminism against neoliberalism; (2) feminism against fundamentalism; (3) feminism against imperialism and war; and (4) feminist humanitarianism. These networks combine a variety of the strategies discussed above.

### *Feminism Against Neoliberalism*

In the latter part of the 1990s, alarmed by the global reach of neoliberalism, feminist scholar-activists began addressing issues of globalization and the new global trade agenda. You will recall that neoliberal economic policies emphasize free markets, privatization, and trade and financial liberalization, an international division of labor and cheap, feminized, labor forces. Numerous workshops were organized and publications produced to increase knowledge about the technical details of trade liberalization and its gender dynamics. Of particular concern was that neoliberal policies with their flexible labor markets, privatization of public goods, commercialization of all manner of services, and "free trade" threatened the economic security of workers, small producers, and local industries. Policies such as SAPs placed a heavy burden on women and children, increasing their poverty and vulnerability. As already mentioned, SAPs, with their prescribed measures of privatization, denationalization, and trade liberalization, paved the way for the global spread of neoliberalism, especially after the collapse of communism in the early 1990s (Moghadam, 2009).

TFNs such as DAWN, WIDE, WEDO, and others participated in the critique of neoliberalism, arguing that new rules of global free trade undermined existing national laws protecting workers and the environment. They also argued that WTO intellectual property provisions allowed large corporations to appropriate (through patents) the knowledge and products of “developing” countries and their local communities. Additionally, transnational feminists argued that employment losses and dislocations brought about by new international trade agreements would be disproportionately borne by women and children (WIDE, 1998; Wichterich, 1999).

TFNs have been active in preparing documents and analyzing the policies and activities of multinational corporations, national governments, and global financial organizations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the WTO. They emphasize the corporate bias of these financial institutions that initiates and supports policies undermining the well-being of workers and the poor, citing evidence that such institutions conduct deliberations in secret and are not subject to rules guaranteeing transparency and accountability. These and other transnational feminist groups have joined broad coalitions such as Jubilee 2000, mentioned above, and participate in what is known as the “global justice movement” dedicated to principles of global justice for all; respect for the earth; the knowledge that “abundance and freedom are possible”; creativity at work, or respect for all types of human labor; and economic democracy (GRACE principles) (<http://www.globaljusticemovement.org/index.htm>). It is important to note, however, that the global feminist agenda on neoliberalism preceded that of the global justice movement by about a decade.

Another example of transnational mobilizing around issues of neoliberalism is the World March of Women, initiated in 1998 by the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec* in Montreal, Canada. It culminated in 2000 in a series of coordinated marches and other actions held around the world to protest poverty and violence against women. Nearly 6,000 organizations from 159 countries and territories were represented in these rallies and marches. The initiative’s “Advocacy Guide to Women’s World Demands” emphasized the ways the world-system is governed by forces associated with neoliberal capitalism and patriarchy that cause poverty and violence against women. It proposed concrete measures that included an end to SAPs and their associated cutbacks in social budgets and public services. The “Advocacy Guide” also endorsed implementation of new taxes on international finance and such changes to global governance as a democratization of the UN (including the Security Council) and establishment of a World Council for Economic and Financial Security. These demands were presented to the president of the World Bank in 2000 (Moghadam, 2005).

Continuing its activities to this day, the World March of Women remains an important actor within international movements for social justice. In 2005, the World March of Women launched another global mobilization centered on the Women’s Global Charter for Humanity. This action highlighted differences in feminist perspectives should unity, inclusion, and effective action be preserved. As a result, while the run-up to the 2005 mobilization entailed such compromises on the network’s agenda as language pertaining to abortion and homosexuality, it had the effect of being more inclusive and avoided alienating groups such as those from Africa and India. While painful to some members, the compromise decision was important to the goal of building a global social movement with a collective identity (Dufour and Giraud, 2007).

<b>TFNs Against Neoliberalism</b>		
<b>Transnational Feminist Network</b>	<b>Web Site</b>	<b>Location</b>
Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)	<a href="http://www.dawn.org.fj/">http://www.dawn.org.fj/</a>	Fiji
Network Women in Development Europe (WIDE)	<a href="http://www.eurosur.org/wide/home.htm">http://www.eurosur.org/wide/home.htm</a>	Brussels, etc.
Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)	<a href="http://www.wedo.org/">http://www.wedo.org/</a>	New York
Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ)	<a href="http://www.wicej.addr.com/">http://www.wicej.addr.com/</a>	U.S.
International Women's Tribune Center (IWTC)	<a href="http://www.iwtc.org/">http://www.iwtc.org/</a>	U.S.

### ***Feminism Against Fundamentalisms***

The 1980s saw not just the spread of neoliberalism and diminishment of Keynesian economics with its focus on government intervention and welfare policies, but also a rise and expansion of religious fundamentalist movements of various types, including Christian and Islamist movements. Fundamentalist religious movements, as Karen McCarthy Brown (1994) argues, construct their identities in opposition to an “external other” whose identity is perceived as different from, opposite to, and, importantly, less valuable than, their identity or identities. Fundamentalism requires an external other to create a sense of unity and maintain subcultural boundaries. This is because fundamentalists understand themselves in opposition to others who are not like them and who may pose a (perceived) threat to them. McCarthy Brown adds that fundamentalist men also pay great attention to controlling the “other” among them—women and children. Since controlling the external other is not actually possible, fundamentalist men may transfer their focus to the close and familiar “others” in their lives who can be controlled.

Christian fundamentalism utilizes a literal reading of the Bible to reinforce gender roles and hierarchies as God-ordained. It claims that male headship over women is part of the divine order of creation and that women's primary tasks include being wives and mothers. It also opposes women's leadership in the church, as well as the movements for gay and abortion rights and women's rights generally.

It was in the 1980s and 1990s that Christian fundamentalism in the United States increased dramatically. During these years of President Ronald Reagan's administration, Republican politics and the Christian Right became considerably more intertwined, with far-reaching implications for women's rights globally. For example, at the 1984 global population and development conference in Mexico City, Reagan announced a global “gag rule” for non-U.S. family planning NGOs. Under the gag order, NGOs receiving family planning funding from United States Agency for International Development (USAID) could not use



even their own funds to provide or refer clients to abortion services, or offer counseling or medical advice on other issues if abortion was offered in the range of options available at the clinic or center. These policies were followed by other U.S. presidents, notably George W. Bush, who was influenced by Christian fundamentalism.

Also in the 1980s, fundamentalist Southern Baptists took over the Southern Baptist Convention, adopting increasingly restrictive statements about women's roles in family, church, and society. Southern Baptists are the largest Protestant denomination in the United States with nearly 16 million members and more than 5000 missionaries worldwide.

Another significant development among fundamentalist Christians within the past decade is the "quiverfull movement." Proponents of quiverfull theology suggest that married couples should not use birth control but should have as many children as God gives them. Some even suggest childlessness is a sinful act. Of course, requiring women to have as many children as possible controls them and limits their opportunities for education and employment. Finally, in early 2009, a small group of fundamentalist Christians in Singapore attempted to take over AWARE (Association of Women for Action and Research), a 25-year-old women's rights organization. They enlisted a large group of new members who joined at the last moment before showing up to vote in a new fundamentalist leadership that was also antigay. At the next general meeting, however, over 3000 people showed up and overwhelmingly passed a vote of "no confidence" in the new leadership and elected a new executive committee that was more diverse and representative of a wide range of races, faiths, and backgrounds.

While fundamentalist Christian movements have been predominant among evangelicals (the Protestant Christian movement with a high regard for Biblical authority and which believes in the need for personal conversion or being "born again"), the Catholic Church has been criticized for limiting women's rights, especially in its opposition to contraception and abortion rights—although it has played a very positive role in the expansion of girls' education. Feminists have challenged the church's position on contraception and on women's religious leadership. For example, Women Priests, an online organization for women in Catholic ministry, is a nonprofit organization based in the U.K. that advocates for the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. Catholics for Choice is a nonprofit organization formed in 1973 as a voice for Catholics who support women's rights to follow their conscience in matters of sexuality and health. The mission of Catholics for Choice is to shape and advance sexual and reproductive ethics based on justice, reflecting a commitment to women's well-being and respect, and affirming the capacity of women and men to make moral decisions about their lives.

Many Christian feminists organize their opposition to fundamentalism through women's organizations in their own denominations, such as Baptist Women in Ministry, or they join with international ecumenical women's organizations, such as Church Women United. While these organizations may not explicitly call themselves feminist, they can become a primary place for Christian feminists to organize and work with others toward equality and justice. Baptist Women in Ministry ([www.bwim.info](http://www.bwim.info)) was formed in 1983 in response to fundamentalist opposition to women in ministry within the Southern Baptist Convention. The group works to advocate for the ordination of women and to support women in ministry. Church Women United ([www.churchwomen.org](http://www.churchwomen.org)) engages women from 26 Christian denominations in social action and community building. Again, while the organization does not explicitly label itself feminist, many feminists find great affinity with the group and its work on behalf of women.

Responses to Christian fundamentalism through specifically transnational networks include the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus that supports Christian feminists through educational and networking opportunities. The organization originated as a caucus of Evangelicals for Social Action in 1974, holding its first national conference in 1975. While located in the United States, the group is international and invites membership across all forms of difference, including sexual identity, and promotes itself as an inclusive organization. The group affirms gender justice or equality between women and men and advocates women's ordination in religious organizations. In addition, organizations like Women Advancing Freedom and Equality (WAFE) seek to eliminate religious fundamentalism in all faiths, believing religious extremism in all its forms serves as a key source of gender discrimination. They emphasize that the denial of women's rights in the name of God is a serious blasphemy, and they oppose the ways many political leaders call on God or placate their country's priests to justify women's subjugation.

The second form of fundamentalism addressed in this section is Islamic fundamentalism, which demands introduction and strict application, or reinforcement and strengthening, of existing Islamic norms and laws. Islamist movements—which began to spread first in the Middle East and then across the Muslim world in the 1980s—are religio-political in that they both adhere to a fundamentalist interpretation of the faith and insist that all national laws and policies be derived from Islamic law, or *Sharia*. In addition to the prohibition of alcohol and usury (the charging of unreasonable or relatively high rates of interest on loans), Islamic law in its orthodox application compels women to veil in public. Muslim family law—which regulates marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, and other aspects of family relations—puts women in a subordinate position. Dating from the Middle Ages and reflecting the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence that were classified in the modern period of state-building, Muslim family law place females under the authority of male kin, and wives under the control of husbands. Men have more rights and privileges than women, and Muslim citizens more than non-Muslim citizens.

Beginning in the 1980s, responses to these developments came from expatriate Iranian women in Europe and the United States and by South Asian feminists in the U.K. The Sisterhood Is Global Institute, for example, continued through the 1990s under the leadership of expatriate Iranian feminist Mahnaz Afkhami and emerged as a highly visible TFN dedicated to Muslim women's human rights. This institute has sponsored training workshops, conferences, policy dialogues, manuals, and publications to further their goals. In 2000, Afkhami formed the Women's Learning Partnership for Development, Peace, and Rights (WLP).

Another key example of feminism against fundamentalism is the international solidarity network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) formed in July 1984 by nine women from eight different countries. Key figures such as Marieme Hélie-Lucas of Algeria and France, Salma Sobhan of Bangladesh, Ayesha Imam of Nigeria, and Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed of Pakistan were concerned about changes in family laws in their countries, the rise of fundamentalism and aggressive Islamist movements, and threats to the legal status and social positions of women in Muslim-majority societies. Tasks for the network included creation of international links between women in Muslim countries in order to exchange information on their situations, struggles, and strategies. The network also hoped to strengthen and reinforce women's initiatives and struggles through publications, exchanges, and an Alert for Action system (Hélie-Lucas, 1993).

## ACTIVIST PROFILE

**Nawal El Saadawi**

Nawal El Saadawi was born in a small village near Cairo in 1931 to parents who were a mix of both traditional and progressive. Like many young rural girls, El Saadawi was forced to undergo female genital cutting, an issue about which she would write passionately years later. Her parents also insisted on their children's education, and so El Saadawi eventually attended the University of Cairo and went on to practice psychiatry. She became Egypt's Director of Public Health Education and married another doctor, Sherif Hetata, who shared her left-leaning views. By the early 1970s she had begun to write both fiction and nonfiction. *Women and Sex* was considered so controversial among conservative political and religious leaders that in 1972 they forced the Ministry of Health to remove her from her post. She also lost her job as chief editor of the journal *Health*. In 1977 she published *The Hidden Face of Eve*, a feminist examination of women's status in Arab societies. In this work, she explored such issues as female genital mutilation, violence against women, virginity, sexual relationships, and marriage and divorce, situating her discussions in the social, political, and religious contexts of the Arab world. In 1981, she was arrested for "crimes against the state" after criticizing the rule of Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and spent two months in Qanatir Women's Prison. In 1982 she founded the Arab Women's Solidarity Association ([www.awsa.net](http://www.awsa.net)) to promote women's participation in political, social, religious, and cultural life. The Egyptian government closed the association's Cairo office in 1991 when the organization criticized the Gulf War. In 1983 she published her *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*. After her release from prison, her name appeared on fundamentalists' death lists, and eventually she moved to the United States for a few years to teach as a visiting professor. She returned to Egypt in 1996. In 2001, religious fundamentalists tried to force El Saadawi's divorce from Sherif Hetata on the grounds that her radical views put her outside the bounds of Islam, but the courts dismissed the case after international outcry. In 2004, she announced she would run for Egypt's presidency, but current president Hosni Mubarak manipulated



the electoral process to ensure he would win reelection, and El Sadaawi withdrew from the race early in 2005. El Saadawi has continued to write and advocate for women, and she continues to be a target for religious fundamentalists. In 2008, fundamentalists attempted to have her stripped of her Egyptian citizenship and to have all of her books banned from Egypt, but the court dismissed the case against her, arguing that the law does not allow removal of citizenship for holding controversial opinions. To find out more about Nawal El Saadawi, read her *Walking Through Fire: A Life of Nawal El Saadawi*. Her novels include *Woman at Point Zero* and *The Fall of the Imam*. She has won numerous literary awards and has received honorary doctorates from four institutions, including the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Read an interview with Nawal El Saadawi on *Women's E-News*: <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/1726>.

Read another interview with *Newsline* at: <http://www.newsline.com.pk/NewsJul2006/interviewjul.htm>.

Fiercely antifundamentalist since its inception, WLUML began to issue warnings as early as 1990 (at a conference on comparative fundamentalisms and women that I organized in Helsinki, Finland) about an “Islamist international” with the organizational, human, financial, and military means to threaten secularists, feminists, and democrats. In the 1990s, WLUML called for solidarity with women of Afghanistan under Mujahidin, and later Taliban, rule, and for the support of Algerian women during the wave of Islamist terror that same decade. In both cases, WLUML took a strong position against those responsible for violations of women’s human rights, whether these were Afghan warlords or jihadists associated with Algeria’s militant Islamist parties. WLUML has been especially critical of Western governments for their support of Islamists in the 1980s or for the granting of political asylum by European governments.

WLUML’s central activity is its solidarity and support work. The network receives and responds to appeals as well as initiative campaigns pertaining to violations of women’s human rights (Shaheed, 1994). In line with its focus on monitoring the human rights of women in Muslim countries, extending solidarity, and raising international awareness, WLUML has issued numerous Action Alerts and publicized the situation of Muslim women and their relationship to legal codes in various countries. WLUML also reports on the activities of women’s organizations and has initiated petition drives in support of women under harsh regimes. Exemplifying the fluid and flexible nature of contemporary transnational social movements, such work is maintained through the activities of “networkers” who communicate largely via the Internet but who meet occasionally to agree on plans. The January 2006 meeting in Dakar that produced the most recent Plan of Action was attended by 50 networkers from 22 countries, but input was also received by affiliates via e-mail. This double strategy of real and virtual communication enabled the network to agree on four priority issues: (1) peace-building and resisting the impact of militarization; (2) preserving multiple identities and exposing fundamentalisms; (3) widening debate about women’s bodily autonomy; and (4) promoting and protecting women’s equality under laws.

### ***Feminism Against War and Imperialism***

Feminists and women’s groups have long been involved in peace work in their focus on causes and consequences of conflict, methods of conflict resolution and peace building, and conditions necessary for human security (see, for example, Enloe, 2007; Moghadam,

## Facts About Nations

To find out more about the demographics and status of women's human rights in individual countries, visit the Web sites listed below. There you can discover facts about each nation's sex ratio, birth rate, infant mortality rate, life expectancy, fertility rate, HIV/AIDS prevalence rates, ethnic groups, religions, languages, literacy, and suffrage. You can also learn about each country's laws on domestic violence, rape, trafficking, marriage, and inheritance. For each activist profile in the textbook, go to these sites to learn more about the countries where these activists work.

<http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/>

<http://www.infoplease.com/countries.html>

<http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/places/countries/index.html>

### TFNs Against Fundamentalism

Transnational Feminist Network	Web Site	Location
Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus	<a href="http://www.eewc.com">http://www.eewc.com</a>	U.S.
Women Advancing Freedom and Equality (WAFE) (formerly Women Against Fundamentalism and for Equality)	<a href="http://wafe-women.org">http://wafe-women.org</a>	U.K.
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)	<a href="http://www.awid.org/">http://www.awid.org/</a>	Canada
Equality Now	<a href="http://www.equalitynow.org/">http://www.equalitynow.org/</a>	U.S. & Kenya
Women's Human Rights Network (WHRNet)	<a href="http://www.whrnet.org/">http://www.whrnet.org/</a>	N/A
Women's Caucus for Gender Justice	<a href="http://www.iccwomen.org/">http://www.iccwomen.org/</a>	U.S.
Sisterhood Is Global Institute (SIGI)	<a href="http://www.sigi.org/">http://www.sigi.org/</a>	Canada
Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA)	<a href="http://www.awsa.net/">http://www.awsa.net/</a>	U.S.
Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML)	<a href="http://www.wluml.org/">http://www.wluml.org/</a>	Nigeria, Pakistan, U.K.
Women's Learning Partnership (WLP)	<a href="http://www.learningpartnership.org">http://www.learningpartnership.org</a>	U.S.
Women for Women International	<a href="http://www.womenforwomen.org">http://www.womenforwomen.org</a>	U.S.

2007). One of the world's oldest peace organizations, and, indeed, one of the oldest TFNs, is the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), founded in 1915 by 1300 women activists from Europe and North America opposed to what became known as World War I (see sidebar). The activities of antimilitarist and human rights groups such as WILPF, Women Strike for Peace (U.S.), the Women of Greenham Common (U.K.), and the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Argentina) are well known, and their legacy lies in ongoing efforts to "feminize" or "engender" peace, nuclear disarmament, and human rights.

As discussed in later chapters, cultural and economic globalization has been accompanied by a new wave of conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Central Africa, and the Middle East that violated women's human rights. Women's groups have responded by underscoring the specific vulnerability of women and girls during wartime, the pervasive nature of sexual abuse, and the need to include women's voices in peace negotiations. They also formed a number of new women-led peace, human rights, and humanitarian organizations as well as more professionalized networks. These include Women in Black, Medica Mondiale, Women Waging Peace, and Women for Women International. Advocacy networks and scholar-activists produced research to show that women's groups had been effective in peace-building in Northern Ireland as well as in Bosnia and Central Africa.

In response to these efforts, the UN Security Council issued a resolution embraced by women's groups, if not governments themselves. In 2000 the UN Security Council in its Proclamation on International Women's Day (March 8) recognized gender equality as an integral component of peace. Later that year it convened a special session to consider the situation of women in armed conflict, and in October 2000, passed Resolution 1325 calling on governments (as well as the UN Security Council itself) to include women in negotiations and settlements with respect to conflict-resolution and peace-building. See below for key points of the resolution.

While Security Council Resolution 1325 was widely hailed as a historic achievement in a domain usually considered the preserve of men, its importance was diminished not long afterwards when new conflicts erupted postponing the resolution in the name of the "global war on terror." The aftermath of September 11, 2001, and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 galvanized women across the globe to support existing peace organizations or build new ones. Women participated in huge numbers in antiwar activities in India, Pakistan, Turkey, Tunisia, and South Africa. As discussed in chapter 12 on war and peace, in 2002 an important group to emerge from this context was the U.S.-based Code Pink: Women for Peace. The group's name is a play on the national security color codes established by President George W. Bush in the aftermath of September 11: "While Bush's color-coded alerts are based on fear, the Code Pink alert is based on compassion and is a feisty call for women and men to 'wage peace'" (<http://www.codepink4peace.org>). The organization identifies as "a women-initiated grassroots peace and social justice movement" working to end war and to redirect resources into healthcare, education and other "life-affirming" activities. Toward this end, Code Pink works with other feminist and social justice networks, including the National Organization for Women (NOW), United for Peace and Justice, the humanitarian women's human rights organization MADRE (discussed in more detail in the next section), Women in Black, and Women for Women International. Code Pink is also active in CARA, the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics. Together these coalitions engage in operational activities, information exchange, and solidarity work, as well as direct action to protest government policies or inaction. Indeed, cofounders Medea Benjamin, Jodie Evans,

## LEARNING ACTIVITY

**Women's International League for Peace and Freedom**

In 1915, a group of women met in The Hague, Netherlands, to protest World War I. These women, also active in the suffrage movement, saw the connections between women's rights and peace. Out of the global gathering of women came the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, one of the oldest peace organizations in the world.

Visit the WILPF's web site at [www.wilpf.org](http://www.wilpf.org).

The League's first president was Jane Addams. To learn more about her work, follow the link to Hull-House. Addams was the first U.S. woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. To learn more about the prize, follow the link to the Nobel Foundation's site.

The vision and mission statements of the organization are as follows:

**VISION STATEMENT**

WILPF envisions a transformed world at peace, where there is racial, social, and economic justice for all people everywhere—a world in which:

- The needs of all people are met in a fair and equitable manner
- All people equally participate in making the decisions that affect them
- The interconnected web of life is acknowledged and celebrated in diverse ways and communities
- Human societies are designed and organized for sustainable existence

**MISSION STATEMENT**

WILPF members create the peaceful transformation they wish to see in the world by making connections that:

- Provide continuity with the past so that knowledge of historical events and patterns informs current activities for change
- Create analysis and action that reflect and reinforce each other
- Link and challenge root causes of oppression, especially racism, sexism, heterosexism, militarism, economic disparity, and political disempowerment
- Build and strengthen relationships and movements for justice, peace, and radical democracy

What are the organization's current issue priorities? What are the connections between these priorities and women's rights?

Check out the WILPF toolkit. What can you do to get involved?

and Gael Murphy already had considerable prior experience in activism and lobbying prior to initiating Code Pink. Benjamin helped establish Global Exchange in 1988; Evans had worked for former California Governor Jerry Brown; and Murphy was a long-time public health advisor in Africa and the Caribbean.

Innovation and creativity are key features of Code Pink activism. Protesters have been known to hand out "pink slips," for example, to politicians as forms of protest, parodying

### Security Council Resolution 1325

- Increasing the representation of women at all decision-making levels
- Integrating a gender perspective into peacekeeping missions
- Appointing more women as special representatives and envoys of the Secretary-General
- Supporting women’s grassroots organizations in their peace initiatives
- Involving women as participants in peace negotiations and agreements
- Ensuring protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls
- Protecting women and girls from gender-based violence
- Integrating a gender perspective into disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants

the notices given to employees when their jobs are being terminated. In 2003 Code Pink activists staged a four-month vigil at the White House and a rally with over 10,000 women marching to honor International Women’s Day. The next year they organized protests against George W. Bush’s second presidential inauguration. Wearing pink costumes and engaging in daring acts of public protest, Code Pink activists have become known for infiltrating congressional meetings, unfurling antiwar banners, and shouting antiwar slogans and badgering members of Congress on their stand on the war, military spending, healthcare for veterans, and support for Iraqi civilians. In one bold act in 2007 that received much national and international coverage, a Code Pink activist, her hands painted red, approached then-secretary of state Condoleeza Rice on Capitol Hill when she was testifying before the House Foreign Relations Committee. The activist accused her of having the blood of the Iraqi people on her hands.

In addition to Code Pink, networks such as the Women’s Initiatives for Gender Justice, Women in Conflict Zones Network, PeaceWomen, and Women Waging Peace engage in research, lobbying, and advocacy to ensure that war criminals are brought to justice and that local women’s peace groups are recognized. They also advocate for the International Criminal Court (established in 1999 as the first international war crimes court) and for Security Council Resolution 1325 discussed above. In 2007, six women who were Nobel Peace Prize winners formed the Nobel Women’s Initiative and organized its first international conference in Galway, Ireland, attended by about 75 women from across the globe. The conference focused on women, conflict, peace, and security in the Middle East ([www.nobelwomensinitiative.org](http://www.nobelwomensinitiative.org)).

### *Feminist Humanitarianism*

The final type of TFN described here is feminist humanitarianism and international solidarity. While almost all TFNs may be regarded as internationalist and solidaristic inasmuch as they are concerned about the plight of “sisters” across borders and boundaries



<b>TFNs Against War and Imperialism</b>		
<b>Transnational Feminist Network</b>	<b>Web Site</b>	<b>Location</b>
Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region (AWMR)	<a href="http://digilander.libero.it/awmr/int/">http://digilander.libero.it/awmr/int/</a>	U.S. & Cyprus
Women for Women International (WWI)	<a href="http://www.womenforwomen.org/">http://www.womenforwomen.org/</a>	U.S.
Women in Black	<a href="http://balkansnet.org/wib/">http://balkansnet.org/wib/</a> <a href="http://www.womeninblack.net/">http://www.womeninblack.net/</a>	Various countries
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)	<a href="http://www.wilpf.org/">http://www.wilpf.org/</a>	Switzerland & U.S.
Code Pink	<a href="http://www.codepink4peace.org/">http://www.codepink4peace.org/</a>	U.S.
Grandmothers for Peace International	<a href="http://www.grandmothersfor-peace.org">http://www.grandmothersfor-peace.org</a>	U.S.
MADRE	<a href="http://www.madre.org">http://www.madre.org</a>	U.S.
Medica Mondiale	<a href="http://www.medicamondiale.org/_en/projekte/jugoslawien/">http://www.medicamondiale.org/_en/projekte/jugoslawien/</a>	Germany

of nationality, religion, and class, not all engage in feminist humanitarianism as operational work. Feminist humanitarianism consists of moral support and material assistance for those in conflict zones or repressive states. Such actions to alleviate the suffering of women and children and efforts to meet their basic needs are informed by strategic goals for achieving women's human rights and gender equality. Such goals tend to be framed by a broad critique of international relations, including militarism and war. Note that this notion of "humanitarian" differs from the so-called humanitarian interventions conceptualized by nations to justify bombing Serbia or invading Iraq. Organizations that engage in feminist humanitarianism include MADRE, Medica Mondiale Kosovo, Women for Women International, and Code Pink. In addition to its strategy of direct action discussed in the previous section, Code Pink's action repertoire includes feminist humanitarianism and international solidarity, as evidenced by support for the Iraqi people and coordination of the historic "Families for Peace Delegation" with members of the antiwar group United for Peace and Justice and relatives of both U.S. military personnel killed in action and 9/11 victims. According to one report: "In an inspiring act of humanity and generosity, they brought with them US\$650,000 in medical supplies and other aid for the Fallujah refugees who were forced from their homes when the Americans destroyed their city. Although the American press failed to cover this unprecedented visit, the mission garnered enormous attention from Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiyya, and Dubai and Iranian television, who witnessed first hand the depths of American compassion" (Brim, 2003, pp. 10–12; Milazzo, 2005, p. 103).

The feminist humanitarian organization MADRE began its work in the early 1980s during the war in Nicaragua when the United States sponsored right-wing Contra rebels.

## 10 Policies for a Better America

In our increasingly globalized world, what happens in the United States has tremendous impact on the rest of the world, and vice versa. When we work for justice within the United States, we also work for justice in our relationships with the rest of the world. Often in our studies of other countries and cultures, we have a tendency to critique their problems without examining our own. But what would make the United States a better country? The following chart is the result of a poll by *Yes!* magazine about what Americans want in order to create a better nation.

### ECONOMY

- Repair and rebuild neglected bridges, rail-roads, schools, and other infrastructure, designing for climate change and a post-petroleum world.
- Extend unemployment insurance benefits.
- Provide tax relief to middle- and low-income families, and reinstate fair taxes on high-wealth individuals and corporate profits.
- Adopt the Employee Free Choice Act to increase opportunities to unionize.

*67% Favor public works projects to create jobs.*

*55% Favor expanding unemployment benefits.*

*73% Say corporations don't pay a fair share of taxes.*

*76% Support tax cuts for lower- and middle-income people.*

*71% Say unions help their members; 53% say unions help the economy in general.*

### FAMILIES

- Make the minimum wage a "living wage" adequate to keep working families out of poverty.
- Provide everyone vacation and family leave.
- Provide gay and lesbian couples with the legal protections afforded to straight couples.
- Make bankruptcy and foreclosure laws protect families first, not predatory lenders.

*64% Are not confident that life for our children's generation will be better than it has been for us.*

*80% Support increasing the federal minimum wage.*

*59% Favor guaranteeing two weeks or more of paid vacation.*

*65% Believe same-sex couples should be allowed to marry or form civil unions.*

*75% Want to limit rate increases on adjustable-rate mortgages.*

### CONSTITUTION

- Fully restore habeas corpus for all people in U.S. custody.
- Protect our right to privacy and freedom from warrantless search and seizure.
- Keep the Internet free of corporate and government censorship and obstruction. Protect "net neutrality."
- Restore the balance of power between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government.

*70% Support restoring habeas corpus rights for detainees at Guantanamo.*

*59% Would like the next president to do more to protect civil liberties.*

*58% Believe a court warrant should be required to listen to the telephone calls of people in the U.S.*

*68% Believe the president should not act alone to fight terrorism without the checks and balances of the courts or Congress.*

## ENERGY AND CLIMATE

- Take a leadership role in reducing our own greenhouse gas emissions.
- Maximize the conservation and efficient use of existing energy supplies.
- Launch and fund ambitious research and development programs, offer tax credits, invest in public works projects, and focus government procurement to jump-start renewable energy deployment.
- Invest in public transit and intercity rail.
- Tax carbon; use revenues for renewables and to help ratepayers.

*79% Favor mandatory controls on greenhouse gas emissions.*

*76% Believe that oil is running out and a major effort is needed to replace it.*

*90% Favor higher auto fuel efficiency standards.*

*75% Favor clean electricity, even with higher rates.*

*72% Support more funding for mass transit.*

## HEALTH CARE

- Offer all Americans the option of joining a single-payer national health insurance program, paid for with tax dollars.
- Break the drug companies' monopoly and lower drug prices by allowing Americans to buy prescription drugs abroad.

*73% Believe our health care system is in crisis or has "major problems."*

*64% Believe the government should provide national health insurance coverage for all Americans, even if it would raise taxes.*

*55% Favor one health insurance program covering all Americans, administered by the government, and paid for by taxpayers.*

*69% Believe the government should make it easier to buy prescription drugs from other countries.*

## FOREIGN RELATIONS

- Lead global effort to abolish nuclear weapons.
- Rule out unilateral attacks, deploying weapons in space, and torture.
- Phase out U.S. role as global police, and instead work through the U.N. and other international agencies to develop and enforce international law.
- Work with other countries to improve global health and environment.

*73% Favor abolishing nuclear weapons, with verification. 80% favor banning weapons in space.*

*81% Oppose torture and support following the Geneva Conventions.*

*76% Say the U.S. should not play the role of global police.*

*85% Say that the U.S. should not initiate military action without support from allies.*

*79% Say the U.N. should be strengthened.*

## IRAQ AND IRAN

- Develop a timetable for a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.
- Build no long-term military bases in Iraq. Leave control of Iraq's oil in the hands of Iraqis.
- Fund an international effort to help restore the economy and infrastructure of Iraq.

- Abolish future uses of private mercenaries.
- Enter into negotiations with Iran about unclear issues and regional stability. End threats of attack and attempts to destabilize the Iranian government.

*63% Want U.S. forces home from Iraq within a year.*

*57% Say going to war in Iraq was the wrong decision.*

*47% Favor using diplomacy with Iran. 7% favor military action.*

*69% Believe we should use diplomatic and economic means to fight terrorism, rather than the military.*

## ELECTIONS

- Provide public financing for elections campaigns.
- Bring back the Fairness Doctrine and get broadcasters to open the people's airwaves to free campaign information.
- Require voter-verified paper ballots that are audited and can be recounted.
- End partisan districting and voter-roll purges.
- Fully implement the Voting Rights Act and enforce existing laws against vote suppression.
- Restore voting rights to ex-felons who have served their sentences.

*86% Say big companies have too much power.*

*74% Favor voluntary public financing of campaigns.*

*66% Believe intentional acts are likely to cause significant voting machines errors.*

*80% Say ex-felons should have their voting rights restored.*

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

- Drop punitive sentences for drug possession and other nonviolent offenses in favor of substance-abuse treatment, fines, community service, and restitution.
- Offer training and counseling to prepare inmates for a crime-free life after release.
- Channel youth into schools and jobs, not jail.

*65% Believe attacking social problems is a better cure for crime than more law enforcement.*

*87% Support rehabilitation rather than a "punishment-only" system.*

*81% Say job training is "very important" for reintegrating people leaving prison. 79% say drug treatment is very important.*

## IMMIGRATION

- Implement trade policies that strengthen, not undermine, rural economies south of the border, reducing the poverty and displacement that spur migration. Start by ditching NAFTA.
- Increase minimum wage and worker protection for all, documented and undocumented.
- Provide a pathway to legal status and citizenship for immigrants already here.

*56% Believe NAFTA should be renegotiated.*

*80% Favor allowing undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. to stay and apply for citizenship if they have a job and pay back taxes.*

*64% Believe that on the whole, immigration is good for the country.*

As a progressive women's organization, MADRE invariably champions feminist causes and pursues feminist humanitarianism, often in opposition to U.S. foreign policy. Partnering with sister organizations in Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Palestine, Sudan, and Haiti, among other countries, MADRE has consistently provided aid for women and children. For example, MADRE has worked in partnership to provide emergency aid to displaced women and families in Darfur, sending about a half-million U.S. dollars worth of clothing and bedding to small refugee camps in 2005 (<http://madre.org/programs/index.html>).

### Key Features of Feminist Humanitarian Networks

Network	Core Goals and Activities	Country Projects	\$ Disbursed
MADRE (1983) United States	Gender, economic and environmental justice; programs in peace building; women's health and freedom from violence; mobilizes resources for partner organizations to meet immediate needs of women and their families and develop long-term solutions to the crises they face. <a href="http://www.madre.org/">www.madre.org/</a>	Sudan, Iraq, Nicaragua, Cuba, Haiti, Guatemala, Kenya, Peru, Colombia, Panama, Palestine	\$22 million since 1983
Women for Women International (1993) United States	Addressing the needs of women in conflict and post-conflict environments; helping to effect transition from victims to active citizens; provides microcredits and business services. <a href="http://www.womenforwomen.org/">http://www.womenforwomen.org/</a>	Afghanistan, Bosnia, Colombia, Iraq, Kosovo, Sudan, Nigeria, Rwanda, DR Congo.	\$33 million as of 2006
Medica Mondiale (1999) Germany	Women's human rights and security; "We support traumatised women and girls in war and crisis zones"; medical assistance and counselling; safe houses <a href="http://www.medicamondiale.org/_en/projekte/jugoslawien/">http://www.medicamondiale.org/_en/projekte/jugoslawien/</a>	Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia, Cambodia, DR Congo, Aceh, Iraq, Kosovo, Liberia, Sudan, Uganda	Unknown
Code Pink (2003) United States	Against war, militarism; U.S. out of Iraq; solidarity with Iraqi people; support U.S. troops by bringing them home; provided medical supplies for Iraqis. <a href="http://www.codepink4peace.org/">www.codepink4peace.org/</a>	Iraq	Unknown

MADRE's work in Iraq dates back to the 1991 Gulf War when it began collecting an assortment of needed supplies such as milk and medicines for Iraqi families. It continued this work throughout the 1990s, critiquing the detrimental effects of the sanctions regime on women and children. After the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq, MADRE partnered with UNICEF/Iraq and provided 25,000 citizens with supplies and emergency aid, including essential drugs and medical supplies to those in need (<http://madre.org/programs/Iraq.htm>). Working with local feminist partner the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), MADRE has helped to address the problem of "honor killings" (where, as discussed in other chapters, women are killed to avenge a notion of "family honor") that have spiked since the invasion began. MADRE has also worked to support the creation of women's shelters for victims of domestic and community violence in cities like Baghdad, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Nasariyeh. The campaign has given rise to a web of shelters and an escape route for Iraqi women (the Underground Railroad for Iraqi Women) run largely by OWFI volunteers (<http://www.madre.org/articles/int/honorcrimes.html>; personal interview with Yanar Mohammad, May, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

Transnational feminism engages with issues of concern to women across national boundaries with the goal of increasing women's status worldwide. In particular, TFNs engage in research, advocacy, lobbying, public protests, and humanitarian assistance to advance women's strategic gender interests as well as to help meet women's practical or basic needs. A common feature of transnational feminism is international solidarity: the extension of support to "sisters" across borders. I close this essay with an ongoing example of transnational feminist activism: the One Million Signatures Campaign. It is a global campaign to support Iranian women's rights activists. (See if you can determine which kind of TFN is involved in this campaign.)

Feminism in Iran has a long and complicated history, but the postrevolutionary period of quietism came to an end at the start of the new millennium, when small networks began meeting and strategizing for change in the country's legal and policy frameworks, notably the family law that places women in a subordinate position within the family. The first public protests took place at the end of the liberal Khatemi presidency and just before the new and very conservative president Ahmadinejad took office in June 2005. Subsequent protests and rallies were broken up by police, and a number of activists arrested. The result of the state's repression was a decision to change the strategy from public protests to a petition drive, and the One Million Signatures Campaign was launched in September 2006. (It was adopted from the highly successful campaign of Moroccan feminists, initiated in the early 1990s: an example of how feminist ideas "travel," in this case from regions within the Global South.)

The Campaign is a grassroots, door-to-door initiative to obtain signatures for a change in family laws and other legal instruments unfavorable to women. The Campaign's activities include collecting signatures by approaching women in their homes. Activists also talk with women on the metro and in parks, shops, and classrooms. They run workshops and write articles in support of women's rights for the Campaign's Web site, Change for Equality (<http://www.change4equality.com/english/>). Despite its peaceful nature, however, the Campaign has been subject not only to harassment, but to prosecution. Campaign activists have

been charged with security crimes, including acting against the state and spreading propaganda against the state. To date, more than 50 Campaign activists—the majority of whom are in their twenties, both men and women, living in Tehran and in the provinces—have been threatened, called into court, arrested, or forbidden to travel abroad. At this writing, two activists remain in prison. What is more, in January 2009, the authorities closed down a long-standing women's magazine, *Zanan*, which was an early exponent of “Islamic feminism.”

Women's rights activists in Iran requested international solidarity (1) to support the campaign for law reform toward gender equality, and (2) to bring pressure to bear on the government for the release of feminist protestors. Expatriate Iranian feminists played an important role in helping to mobilize support from groups such as DAWN, WLUM, WLP, and Equality Now, as well as Amnesty International. Such transnational feminist organizing is an example of “cyberactivism” that includes the global circulation via Internet of action alerts and petitions, and the launching of a multilingual Web site, formed in Tehran, that provides extensive information on the campaign.

In these ways, transnational feminism is characterized by a critique of social and gender inequalities and a set of strategies to enhance women's rights within the family and society. These strategies involve networks engaged in research, lobbying, and advocacy for women's human rights and gender equality. They also include bold acts of direct action and acts of cross-border humanitarianism and solidarity. Many TFNs target discriminatory or oppressive laws, policies, and norms; and many take part in global campaigns to alleviate suffering and/or show solidarity with nationally based feminist action. Although many TFNs, along with other global social movements and networks, are based largely in the Global North (or are resourced, staffed, and funded largely from the North), it is important to note the ways such distribution of resources reflect the inequalities associated with the contemporary capitalist world system. While such discrepancies are unavoidable at present, they should not diminish the achievements of transnational feminist solidarity to reverse the logic of the present world-system and improve the lives of women worldwide.

Utilizing such strategies, TFNs are one of the principal organizational forms of a feminism aimed at uniting women worldwide. Central in this work is that of women learning to be allies with and for each other: coming together with conscious understandings of privilege and making commitments toward a politics of engagement that recognizes the difficulties of the struggle. These difficulties are illustrated in the short story reading “Comrades” by South African writer Nadine Gordimer. They are also underscored in Hafsat Abiola's reading, “Edge of the Earth.” She makes the case for unity among women through an understanding and respect for our differences. She hopes we might “[bring] together what we have seen, who we have been, as we weave new patterns, streaking the land with our magic.”

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## Women Still Have a Long Way to Go

Cynthia G. Wagner (2008)

Despite the enactment of more laws and programs to eliminate discrimination, women have yet to achieve full legal, economic, and cultural equality with men even in some of the world's more advanced societies.

This is the conclusion of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, a body of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Its most recent round of ongoing international reports examined the progress—or lack of it—of eight countries in their efforts toward meeting the obligations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The countries studied were Bolivia, Burundi, Saudi Arabia, France, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Morocco, and Sweden.

The enactment of equality-promoting laws and programs, such as the Family and Domestic Violence Act, is an indicator of progress in Bolivia, but there remains a gap between increased legal protections for women and their ability to access those protections, according to the Committee. Women's access to justice is impeded by their high rates of illiteracy and their lack of information on rights and available legal assistance, particularly in rural areas.

In Burundi and Saudi Arabia, patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of the sexes are reflected in family laws that

continue to perpetuate women's subordination and disadvantage them economically.

The Committee describes as "distinctive" Saudi Arabia's understanding of the principle of equality, "which implied similar rights of women and men as well as complementarities and harmony between women and men, rather than equal rights of women and men." The Committee notes that "there was no contradiction in substance between the Convention and Islamic Sharia" and thus calls on Saudi Arabia "to confirm that international treaties had precedence over domestic laws."

But traditionally male-dominated societies are not the only ones where stereotypes impede women's progress toward equality. In France, for instance, persistent stereotypes are blamed for directing girls and women toward academic specialties that translate into a narrow range of employment options.

The Committee challenges the governments of Sweden, France, and Luxembourg to initiate campaigns encouraging women to bring up complaints of discriminatory treatment. And the mass media could do more to promote more diverse portrayals of women's roles, such as women as breadwinners and not just mothers, caregivers, or—notably in Sweden's case—sexual objects.

Eliminating stereotypes may not eliminate violence or discrimination, but proactive measures by governments to provide equal opportunities for women in the economy and a greater role in decision making would remove the principal obstacles "to women's enjoyment of their fundamental rights," the Committee concludes.

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Source: United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. Web site [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org).

## Are Women Human?

Catharine A. MacKinnon (2006)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines what a human being is.<sup>1</sup> In 1948, it told the world what a person, as a person, is entitled to. It has been fifty years. Are women human yet?

If women were human, would we be a cash crop shipped from Thailand in containers into New York's brothels?<sup>2</sup> Would we be sexual and reproductive slaves? Would we be bred, worked without pay our whole lives, burned when our dowry money wasn't enough or when men tired of us, starved as widows when our husbands died (if we survived his funeral pyre), sold for sex because we are not valued for anything else? Would we be sold into marriage to priests to atone for our family's sins or to improve our family's earthly prospects? Would we, when allowed to work for pay, be made to work at the most menial jobs and exploited at barely starvation level? Would our genitals be sliced out to "cleanse" us (our body parts are dirt?), to control us, to mark us and define our cultures? Would we be trafficked as things for sexual use and entertainment worldwide in whatever form current technology makes possible?<sup>3</sup> Would we be kept from learning to read and write?<sup>4</sup>

If women were human, would we have so little voice in public deliberations and in government in the countries where we live?<sup>5</sup> Would we be hidden behind veils and imprisoned in houses and stoned and shot for refusing? Would we be beaten nearly to death, and to death, by men with whom we are close? Would we be sexually molested in our families? Would we be raped in genocide to terrorize and eject and destroy our ethnic communities, and raped again in that undeclared war that goes on every day in every country in the world in what is called peacetime?<sup>6</sup> If women were human, would our violation be *enjoyed* by our violators? And, if we were human, when these things happened, would virtually nothing be done about it?

It takes a lot of imagination—and a determinedly blinkered focus on exceptions at the privileged margins—to see a real woman in the Universal Declaration's majestic guarantees of what "everyone is entitled to." After over half a century, just what part of "everyone" doesn't mean us?

The ringing language in Article 1 encourages us to "act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Must we be men before its spirit includes us? Lest this be seen as too literal, if we were all enjoined to "act towards one another in a spirit of sisterhood," would men know it meant them, too? Article 23 encouragingly provides for just pay to "[e]veryone who works." It goes on to say that this ensures a life of human dignity for "himself and his family." Are women nowhere paid for the work we do in our own families because we are not "everyone," or because what we do there is not "work," or just because we are not "him"? Don't women have families, or is what women have not a family without a "himself"? If the someone who is not paid at all, far less the "just and favorable remuneration" guaranteed, is also the same someone who in real life is often responsible for her family's sustenance, when she is deprived of providing for her family "an existence worthy of human dignity," is she not human? And now that "everyone" has had a right "to take part in the government of his country" since the Universal Declaration was promulgated, why are most governments still run mostly by men? Are women silent in the halls of state because we do not have a human voice?

A document that could provide specifically for the formation of trade unions and "periodic holiday with pay" might have mustered the specificity to mention women sometime, other than through "motherhood," which is more bowed to than provided for. If women were human in this document, would domestic violence, sexual violation

from birth to death, including in prostitution and pornography, and systematic sexual objectification and denigration of women and girls simply be left out of the explicit language?

Granted, sex discrimination is prohibited. But how can it have been prohibited for all this time, even aspirationally, and the end of all these conditions still not be concretely imagined as part of what a human being, as human, is entitled to? Why is women's entitlement to an end of these conditions still openly debated based on cultural rights, speech rights, religious rights, sexual freedom, free markets—as if women are social signifiers, pimps' speech, sacred or sexual fetishes, natural resources, chattel, everything but human beings?

The omissions in the Universal Declaration are not merely semantic. Being a woman is “not yet a name for a way of being human,”<sup>7</sup> not even in this most visionary of human rights documents. If we measure the reality of women's situation in all its variety against the guarantees of the Universal Declaration, not only do women not have the rights it guarantees—most of the world's men don't either—but it is hard to see, in its vision of humanity, a woman's face.

Women need full human status in social reality. For this, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must see the ways women distinctively are deprived of human rights as a deprivation of humanity. For the glorious dream of the Universal Declaration to come true, for human rights to be universal, both the reality it challenges and the standard it sets need to change.

When will women be human? When?

## NOTES

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G. A. Res. 217, U.N. GAOR, 3d Sess., at 72–76, U.N. Doc. A/810 (1948). All quotations from the Universal Declaration in this essay can be found here.
2. For data supporting all statements on violence against women in this analysis, see Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Report Submitted by the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences*, Commission on Human Rights, 50th Sess., Agenda Item 11(a), U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/1995/42 (1995); Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences*, U.N. ESCOR Hum. Rts. Comm'n, 52d Sess., Prov. Agenda Item 9(a), U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/1996/53 (1996); Radhika Coomaraswamy, Report, U.N. ESCOR Hum. Rts. Comm'n, 53d Sess., Prov. Agenda Item 9(a), U.N. Doc. E/CN.4/1997/47 (1997).
3. See Traffic in Women and Girls, Sub-Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2002/51 E/CN.4/RES/2002/51 (Apr. 23, 2002). The U.S. Department of State estimates that around 800,000 people are trafficked internationally annually, most of whom are women and children. *Trafficking in Persons Report 7* (June 2003).
4. The majority of the world's illiterate people are women. See UNESCO, *Statistical Yearbook 1997* 2–6 tbl. 2–2 (estimating 28.8 percent of the world's women and 16.3 percent of the world's men are illiterate).
5. See Interparliamentary Union, *Women in Parliaments, 1945–1995: A World Statistical Study* (1995).
6. See “Women's September 11th: Rethinking the International Law of Conflict,” below at No. 25 below for discussion of this concept.
7. Richard Rorty, “Feminism and Pragmatism,” 30 *Michigan Quarterly Review* 231, 234 (Spring 1991) (“MacKinnon's central point, as I read her, is that ‘a woman’ is not yet the name for a way of being human”).

## The Messy Relationship Between Feminisms and Globalizations

Manisha Desai (2007)

For the past decade, I have been engaged both with transnational feminisms and with writing about gender and globalizations.<sup>1</sup> In the course of my engagement in these two fields, I have been intrigued by the interrelationship(s) between them. Yet, with some exceptions (e.g., Eisenstein 2005), feminist scholars have written about gender and globalizations or about transnational feminisms but have rarely examined the connections between the two. In this essay, I reflect on this relationship to highlight how they have shaped each other. I suggest that feminisms are important forces shaping globalizations. At the same time, the interrelationships are fraught and in some instances have furthered inequalities among women. But this does not preclude other possibilities, as is evident in the work of feminists around the world.

To begin with the issue of how the two have shaped each other, I draw on Hester Eisenstein's (2005) important, but not widely discussed, article: "A Dangerous Liaison? Feminism and Corporate Globalization." In it she argues that in the United States, global capitalism has used feminists' arguments for women's autonomy and need for economic independence to undermine welfare and the family wage and to send poor women into the workforce. Concurrently in the Third World, similar feminist ideologies have been used to feminize the workforce in the export processing zones and to discipline poor women, through micro credit, into becoming responsible economic agents.<sup>2</sup> Thus, like missionaries in the nineteenth century, feminisms in the twentieth act as "cultural solvent[s], as globalization erodes the traditions of patriarchy" (Eisenstein 2005, 487). Such a "legitimization of feminism masks the radical restructuring of the world economy, and the glitter of economic liberation disguises the intensification of poverty

for the vast majority of women" (Eisenstein 2005, 489–90). Eisenstein argues, then, that feminism has served unwittingly as the hand-maiden of corporate globalization.

While I agree with Eisenstein that actors of corporate globalization have used feminist ideologies for their own profit, this is only a partial account. The other story is how feminists have used globalizations to further women's agency and their political, economic, and cultural empowerment. To see these other stories, one needs to define globalizations in the plural and to understand feminists as both constitutive of, and important actors in, globalizations (Desai 2009b).

Here I will give a few examples of the ways in which feminists have shaped the spaces of global politics: by (1) providing theoretical frameworks, organizational structures, and strategies; (2) engaging economic globalizations to exploit both the opportunities provided by it and articulating alternatives to corporate globalization; and (3) creating new cultures of globalization.

The International Women's Decade, 1975–1985, brought together women's organizations from around the world. The feminist principles women from these organizations had developed across their respective local contexts facilitated the formation of a new transnational perspective for political action, new organizational structures, and new strategies. Primary among these was the commitment to an intersectional analysis and transversal politics. The contentious experiences of dealing with differences among women for those in women's movements in the North and South enabled the transnational women's gatherings to form solidarities across differences.

In addition to this transnational political perspective, transnational feminists were among the first to

develop networks on the basis of nonhierarchical, informal structures and participatory processes, to share experiences and strategize for political actions at multiple levels. These networks were formed before information and communication technologies made such connections the norm in corporate and civil society. Finally, transnational feminists also pioneered strategies for articulating autonomous spaces—such as tribunals, caucuses, grassroots women’s networks, partnerships with other movements and local authorities—exemplified in projects like the Feminist Dialogues. These strategies mobilize both a critique and an alternative to global politics today, especially those practiced in conjunction with the World Social Forum. Hence, contemporary global politics have to be recognized as feminist politics.

Even in the realm of economic globalization, feminists have made important contributions. From highlighting the ways global corporations have used gendered and racialized assumptions to feminize the labor force, to demonstrating how processes of economic globalizations are gendered, feminists have been at the forefront of challenging corporate globalizations. For example, feminists have demanded an end to what Acker (2006) calls corporate irresponsibility; they have proposed a “Maria tax” to acknowledge the reproductive labor of women; they have called for nongendered caring and provisioning as the basis of production and reproduction instead of profits (e.g., Beneria 2003); and they have crafted egalitarian institutions, organizations, families, and communities.

In addition to the feminist focus on waged work in corporate globalizations, in my own research I have shown how women cross-border traders<sup>3</sup> creatively use the openings provided by global trade to make better lives for themselves (Desai 2009b). Most women cross-border traders are able to build new houses, provide education for their children as public education becomes scarce, and expand their business. Cross-border trade has also enabled women to become independent and to develop local and regional networks and economies based on creative responses to the uncertainties created by the structural adjustment programs in the region.

Cross-border trading is not restricted to poor women. In many West African countries, middle- and upper-class women also engage in cross-border trade and bring in foreign consumer items for men and women in local markets. In southern Africa, cross-border trade was made possible by the new immigration policies of the postapartheid regime, which enabled other Africans to travel freely to South Africa, as well as by the structural adjustment programs that created the need for women to become traders. Women have engaged in this trade out of necessity as well as innovation. In the process, they have developed social networks and new collective identities that have empowered them as individuals and as members of communities.

In the cultural globalization realm, I have suggested that we move away from the homogenizing, hybridity, and clash of civilizations debates (e.g., Nederveen Pieterse 2004). Instead, I argue that we should focus on the nonconsumptive, interactive culture of globalization in which women weave their own traditions and practices along with other cultural and political traditions. In this sphere, women are using new technologies to create cultures of globalization that are both place and cyber based and that enable them to communicate with local, national, and transnational communities working for gender justice. These new cultures of globalization are invented and imagined based on traditions as well as modernities, combine new organizational structures with new forms of communication, circulate transnationally, and illuminate alternative cultural possibilities that blur the distinctions between the aesthetic and everyday sense of culture.

For example, in Guatemala, the Centro de Comunicadoras is a Mayan site where Web surfers can sign up with women’s cooperatives to learn how to make videos or access handicrafts produced by women’s cooperatives in the rural areas. The sales are handled by women directly, thus, facilitating social economies outside the capitalist system. In Mexico, *Laneta* (slang for truth), which began promoting the use of the Internet for the women’s movement in 1993, links women’s organizations and networks in rural and urban Mexico for sharing information and strategizing for collective action. In Bolivia, Chasquineta has provided indigenous women access to

computer training by opening telecenters, or cyber cafés. Women have used this training for opening Internet-based businesses as well as to address issues of violence against women in their communities. These new cultures of globalization embody hybridities of virtual and geographic communities, and of activists across movements and classes. In using technology for social change, activists develop a common culture based on social justice.

Despite these examples of the ways in which feminists and feminisms have shaped globalizations, these are uneven relationships. Although feminisms, in some organized fashion, are alive and well in more parts of the world today than at any other time, the lives of most women around the world are mired in poverty, ill-health, and injustice. Feminists have offered many explanations for this contradictory state, such as the new inequalities resulting from neoliberal globalization, the war on terror, religious fundamentalisms, the difficulties of transforming structures and institutions, and the lack of political will to redistribute resources. I would add to that list some of the strategies of transnational feminisms (Desai 2007; Pearson 2003; Simon-Kumar 2004).

For example, transnational feminisms have for the most part drawn on the expertise of educated, privileged women from the global North and the South who are well versed in a Euro- and U.S.-centric professional culture. To function as an activist in the global women's rights movement, one needs expertise—such as a familiarity with the UN system and its treaties and platforms, and the ability to raise funds for travel—that is, for the most part, available only among educated women from the North and the South. This is not to say that feminists have not made efforts to be more inclusive. But given the structural inequalities that exist, their efforts have been limited by the ability of women lacking formal education—and facility in English, in particular—to navigate global gatherings. This has led to inequalities among feminists who work in the global versus local arenas. Moreover, some of the spaces in which transnational feminists have operated, such as the UN, and even global meetings such as the World Social Forum, have ended up taking feminist insights and demands and transforming them into managerial solutions, such as gender mainstreaming, that

have not really addressed structural inequalities. This has led some feminists to advocate a move away from global spaces, where the victories are primarily symbolic and discursive, to local arenas where addressing issues of immediate relevance on a local scale is more likely to yield concrete improvement in people's lives.

The move to local and more concrete issues does not have to entail moving away from transnational perspectives, networks, or solidarities. Such networks and solidarities provide both support and resources. Rather, strategic uses of transnational connections for local actions are more useful as many women's groups have found.

But while transnational feminist strategies have played a part in the contradictory situation of women's continuing poverty and ill-health in the face of the rise of feminist power around the globe, the major reasons continue to be the greater power of other actors—new and old, global and local—in marginalizing and harming women around the world. And to deal with such entrenched power inequalities, we need to enact a dual politics of possibilities—a pragmatic politics of what is possible within the current conjuncture and a visionary politics of what can be possible—even as we recognize the power and complicity of some of us.

Feminists around the world have already been engaged in such a dual politics of possibilities. For example, in India, where religious differences are often so volatile, activists have used gender equality, to which the Indian state is committed, to gain rights for women while sidestepping religious debates (Desai 2009a). In fact, to some extent feminists have been doing this from the start. Since its inception, one of the strengths of feminisms has been their openness to self-critique and change. The plural, feminisms, in common usage now, is itself recognition of this regenerative process.

In conclusion, what the messy relationship between feminisms and globalizations suggests is the need to be aware of, and to critique, the complicity, unwitting though it may be, of some feminists and feminist ideologies with global capital. It also highlights the necessity of reinvigorating our alternative values of creating and living in societies where caring and provisioning are not gendered and racialized

but rather are the framework that guides all of our actions. To achieve this, we need to remind ourselves of the dual politics of possibilities in our individual and collective lives.

## NOTES

1. I define both as plural processes, the former reflecting the diversity of gendered realities around the world and the latter in terms of economic, political, and cultural processes. While both the multiple feminisms and globalizations are mutually constitutive, they are also distinct.
2. In addition to serving global capital through economic means, Eisenstein (2005) argues that the U.S. administration has used feminism for its imperial policies via the war on terror.
3. Cross-border traders are those who buy food and other consumer items in one country and sell it another. In some regions, women take goods from their home country to another and return with goods from the foreign country to their own. Such cross-border trade by women has been facilitated by the economic globalization that has opened borders between countries that previously did not allow such easy flow of people and goods across borders.

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# R E A D I N G 4

## Under Western Eyes

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984)

What I wish to analyze is specifically the production of the “third world woman” as a singular monolithic subject in some recent (Western) feminist texts.

If one of the tasks of formulating and understanding the locus of “third world feminisms” is delineating the way in which it resists and *works against* what I am referring to as “Western feminist discourse,” an analysis of the discursive construction of “third world women” in Western feminism is an important first step.

Clearly Western feminist discourse and political practice are neither singular nor homogeneous in their goals, interests or analyses. However, it is possible to trace a coherence of *effects* resulting from the implicit assumption of “the West” (in all its complexities and contradictions) as the primary referent in theory and praxis. My reference to “Western feminism” is by no means intended to imply that it is a monolith. Rather, I am attempting to draw attention to the similar effects of various textual

strategies used by writers which codify Others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western. It is in this sense that I use that term *Western feminist*.

My critique is directed at three basic analytic principles which are present in (Western) feminist discourse on women in the third world.

The first analytic presupposition I focus on is involved in the strategic location of the category “women” *vis-à-vis* the context of analysis. The assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally. (The context of analysis can be anything from kinship structures and the organization of labour or media representations.) The second analytical presupposition is evident on the methodological level, in the uncritical way “proof” of universality and cross-cultural validity are provided. The third is a more specifically political presupposition underlying the methodologies and the analytic strategies, i.e., the model of power and struggle they imply and suggest. I argue that as a result of the two modes—or, rather, frames—of analysis described above, a homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group is assumed, which, in turn, produces the image of an “average third world woman.” This woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being “third world” (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.

### **“WOMEN” AS CATEGORY OF ANALYSIS, OR: WE ARE ALL SISTERS IN STRUGGLE**

By women as a category of analysis, I am referring to the crucial assumption that all of us of the

same gender, across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogeneous group identified prior to the process of analysis. This is an assumption which characterizes much feminist discourse. The homogeneity of women as a group is produced not on the basis of biological essentials but rather on the basis of secondary sociological and anthropological universals. Thus, for instance, in any given piece of feminist analysis, women are characterized as a singular group on the basis of a shared oppression. What binds women together is a sociological notion of the “sameness” of their oppression. It is at this point that an elision takes place between “women” as a discursively constructed group and “women” as material subjects of their own history.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the discursively consensual homogeneity of “women” as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women. This results in an assumption of women as an always already constituted group, one which has been labeled “powerless,” “exploited,” “sexually harassed,” etc., by feminist scientific, economic, legal and sociological discourses. (Notice that this is quite similar to sexist discourse labeling women weak, emotional, having math anxiety, etc.) This focus is not on uncovering the material and ideological specificities that constitute a particular group of women as “powerless” in a particular context. It is, rather, on finding a variety of cases of “powerless” groups of women to prove the general point that women as a group are powerless.

This mode of defining women primarily in terms of their *object status* (the way in which they are affected or not affected by certain institutions and systems) is what characterizes this particular form of the use of “women” as a category of analysis. In the context of Western women writing/studying women in the third world, such objectification (however benevolently motivated) needs to be both named and challenged. As Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar argue quite eloquently, “Feminist theories which examine our cultural practices as ‘feudal residues’ or label us ‘traditional,’ also portray us as politically immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of Western feminism. They need to be continually challenged . . .” (1984, 7).



## WOMEN AND THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The best examples of universalization on the basis of economic reductionism can be found in the liberal “Women in Development” literature. Proponents of this school seek to examine the effect of development on third world women, sometimes from self-designated feminist perspectives. At the very least, there is an evident interest in and commitment to improving the lives of women in “developing” countries.

For instance, Perdita Huston (1979) states that the purpose of her study is to describe the effect of the development process on the “family unit and its individual members” in Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, Tunisia, Sri Lanka and Mexico. She states that the “problems” and “needs” expressed by rural and urban women in these countries all center around education and training, work and wages, access to health and other services, political participation and legal rights. Huston relates all these “needs” to the lack of sensitive development policies which exclude women as a group or category. For her, the solution is simple: implement improved development policies which emphasize training for women fieldworkers, use women trainees, and women rural development officers, encourage women’s cooperatives, etc. Here again, women are assumed to be a coherent group or category prior to their entry into “the development process.” Huston assumes that all third world women have similar problems and needs. Thus, they must have similar interests and goals. However, the interests of urban, middle-class, educated Egyptian housewives, to take only one instance, could surely not be seen as being the same as those of their uneducated, poor maids? Development policies do not affect both groups of women in the same way. Practices which characterize women’s status and roles vary according to class. Women are constituted as women through the complex interaction between class, culture, religion and other ideological institutions and frameworks. They are not “women”—a coherent group—solely on the basis of a particular economic system or policy. Such reductive cross-cultural comparisons result in the colonization of the specifics of daily existence and the complexities of political interests which women of different social classes and cultures represent and mobilize.

Thus, it is revealing that for Perdita Huston, women in the Third World countries she writes about have “needs” and “problems,” but few if any have “choices” or the freedom to act. This is an interesting representation of women in the third world, one which is significant in suggesting a latent self-presentation of Western women which bears looking at. She writes: “What surprised and moved me most as I listened to women in such very different cultural settings was the striking commonality—whether they were educated or illiterate, urban or rural—of their most basic values: the importance they assign to family, dignity and service to others” (1979: 115). Would Huston consider such values unusual for women in the West?

What is problematical about this kind of use of “women” as a group, as a stable category of analysis, is that it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination. Instead of analytically *demonstrating* the production of women as socio-economic political groups within particular local contexts, this analytical move limits the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities. What characterizes women as a group is their gender (sociologically, not necessarily biologically, defined) over and above everything else, indicating a monolithic notion of sexual difference. Because women are thus constituted as a coherent group, sexual difference becomes coterminous with female subordination, and power is automatically defined in binary terms: people who have it (read: men), and people who do not (read: women). Men exploit, women are exploited. Such simplistic formulations are historically reductive; they are also ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions. All they do is reinforce binary divisions between men and women.

What would an analysis which did not do this look like? Maria Mies’s work illustrates the strength of Western feminist work on women in the third world which does not fall into the traps discussed above, Mies’s study of the lace makers of Narsapur, India (1982), attempts to analyze carefully a substantial household industry in which “housewives” produce lace doilies for consumption in the world market. Through a detailed analysis of the structure

of the lace industry, production and reproduction relations, the sexual division of labor, profits and exploitation, and the overall consequences of defining women as “non-working housewives” and their work as “leisure-time activity,” Mies demonstrates the levels of exploitation in this industry and the impact of this production system on the work and living conditions of the women involved. In addition, she is able to analyze the “ideology of the housewife,” the notion of a woman sitting in the house, as providing the necessary subjective and sociocultural element for the creation and maintenance of a production system that contributes to the increasing pauperization of women, and keeps them totally atomized and disorganized as workers. Mies’s analysis shows the effect of a certain historically and culturally specific mode of patriarchal organization, an organization constructed on the basis of the definition of the lace makers as “non-working housewives” at familial, local, regional, statewide and international levels. The intricacies and the effects of particular power networks are not only emphasized but form the basis of Mies’s analysis of how this particular group of women is situated at the center of a hegemonic, exploitative world market.

This is a good example of what careful, politically focused, local analyses can accomplish. It illustrates how the category of women is constructed in a variety of political contexts that often exist simultaneously and are overlaid on top of one another. There is no easy generalization in the direction of “women” in India, or “women in the third world”; nor is there a reduction of the political construction of the exploitation of the lace makers to cultural explanations about the passivity or obedience that might characterize these women and their situation. Finally, this mode of local, political analysis which generates theoretical categories from within the situation and context being analyzed, also suggests corresponding effective strategies for organizing against the exploitation faced by the lace makers. Narsapur women are not mere victims of the production process, because they resist, challenge and subvert the process at various junctures. Here is one instance of how Mies delineates the connections between the housewife ideology, the self-consciousness of the lace makers, and their inter-relationships as

contributing to the latent resistances she perceives among the women.

The persistence of the housewife ideology, the self-perception of the lace makers as petty commodity producers rather than as workers, is not only upheld by the structure of the industry as such but also by the deliberate propagation and reinforcement of reactionary patriarchal norms and institutions. Thus, most of the lace makers voiced the same opinion about the rules of *purdah* and seclusion in their communities which were also propagated by the lace exporters. In particular, the *Kapu* women said that they had never gone out of their houses, that women of their community could not do any work other than housework and lace work etc. but in spite of the fact that most of them still subscribed fully to the patriarchal norms of the *gosha* women, there were also contradictory elements in their consciousness. Thus, although they looked down with contempt upon women who were able to work outside the house—like untouchable *Mala* and *Madiga* women or women of other lower castes—they could not ignore the fact that these women were earning more money precisely because they were *not* respectable housewives but workers. At one discussion, they even admitted that it would be better if they could also go out and do coolie work. And when they were asked whether they would be ready to come out of their houses and work in one place in some sort of a factory, they said they would do that. This shows that the *purdah* and housewife ideology, although still fully internalized, already had some cracks, because it has been confronted with several contradictory realities. (p. 157)

It is only by understanding the *contradictions* inherent in women’s location within various structures that effective political action and challenges can be devised. Mies’s study goes a long way toward offering such analysis. While there are now an increasing number of Western feminist writings in this tradition,<sup>3</sup> there is also, unfortunately, a large block of writing which succumbs to the cultural reductionism discussed earlier.

As discussed earlier, a comparison between Western feminist self-presentation and Western feminist re-presentation of women in the third world yields significant results. Universal images of “the third

world Woman” (the veiled woman, chaste virgin, etc.), images constructed from adding the “third world difference” to “sexual difference,” are predicated upon (and hence obviously bring into sharper focus) assumptions about Western women as secular, liberated and having control over their own lives. This is not to suggest that Western women *are* secular, liberated and in control of their own lives. I am referring to a *discursive* self-presentation, not necessarily to material reality. If this were a material reality, there would be no need for political movements in the West. Similarly, only from the vantage point of the West is it possible to define the “third world” as underdeveloped and economically dependent. Without the overdetermined discourse that creates the *third* world, there would be no (singular and privileged) First World. Without the “third world woman,” the particular self-presentation of Western women mentioned above would be problematical. I am suggesting, then, that the one enables and sustains the other.

## NOTES

Terms such as *third* and *first world* are problematical both in suggesting over-simplified similarities between and among countries thus labeled, and in reinforcing implicitly existing economic, cultural and ideological hierarchies which are conjured up using such terminology. I use the term “*third world*” with full awareness of its problems, only because this is the terminology available to us at the moment.

1. Elsewhere I have discussed this particular point in detail in a critique of Robin Morgan’s construction of “women’s herstory” in her introduction to *Sisterhood Is Global: The International Women’s Movement Anthology* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984). See my “Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience,” *Copyright* 1, “Fin de Siecle 2000,” 30–44, especially 35–7.

2. These views can also be found in differing degrees in collections such as Wellesley Editorial Committee (ed.), *Women and National Development: The Complexities of Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), and *Signs*, Special Issue, “Development and the Sexual Division of Labor,” 7, no. 2 (Winter 1981). For an excellent introduction of WID issues, see ISIS, *Women in Development: A Resource Guide for Organization and Action* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1984). For a politically focused discussion of feminism and development and the stakes for poor Third World women, see Gita Sen and Caren Grown, *Development Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women’s Perspectives* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987).
3. See essays by Vanessa Maher, Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson, and Maila Stevens in Kate Young, Carole Walkowitz, and Roslyn McCullagh (eds), *Of Marriage and the Market: Women’s Subordination in International Perspective* (London: CSE Books, 1981); and essays by Vivian Mota and Michelle Mattelart in June Nash and Helen I. Safa (eds), *Sex and Class in Latin America: Women’s Perspectives on Politics, Economics and the Family in the Third World* (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1980). For examples of excellent, self-conscious work by feminists writing about women in their own historical and geographical locations, see Marnia Lazreg (1988) on Algerian women, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman’s Text from the Third World,” in her *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 241–68, and Lata Mani’s essay “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on SATI in Colonial India,” *Cultural Critique* 7 (Fall 1987), 119–56.

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## Comrades

Nadine Gordimer (South Africa, 1991)

As Mrs Hattie Telford pressed the electronic gadget that deactivates the alarm device in her car a group of youngsters came up behind her. Black. But no need to be afraid; this was not a city street. This was a non-racial enclave of learning, a place where tended flowerbeds and trees bearing botanical identification plates civilized the wild reminder of campus guards and dogs. The youngsters, like her, were part of the crowd loosening into dispersion after a university conference on People's Education. They were the people to be educated; she was one of the committee of white and black activists (convenient generic for revolutionaries, leftists secular and Christian, fellow-travelers and liberals) up on the platform.

—Comrade . . . —She was settling in the driver's seat when one so slight and slim he seemed a figure in profile came up to her window. He drew courage from the friendly lift of the woman's eyebrows above blue eyes, the tilt of her freckled white face:—Comrade, are you going to town?—

No, she was going in the opposite direction, home . . . but quickly, in the spirit of the hall where these young people had been somewhere, somehow present with her (ah no, she with them) stamping and singing Freedom songs, she would take them to the bus station their spokesman named.—Climb aboard!—

The others got in the back, the spokesman beside her. She saw the nervous white of his eyes as he glanced at and away from her. She searched for talk to set them at ease. Questions, of course. Older people always start with questioning young ones. Did they come from Soweto?

They came from Harrismith, Phoneng Location.

She made the calculation: about two hundred kilometers distant. How did they get here? Who told them about the conference?

—We are Youth Congress in Phoneng—

A delegation. They had come by bus; one of the groups and stragglers who kept arriving long after

the conference had started. They had missed, then, the free lunch?

At the back, no one seemed even to be breathing. The spokesman must have had some silent communication with them, some obligation to speak for them created by the journey or by other shared experience in the mysterious bonds of the young—these young.—We are hungry.—And from the back seats was drawn an assent like the suction of air in a compressing silence.

She was silent in response, for the beat of a breath or two. These large gatherings both excited and left her over-exposed, open and vulnerable to the rub and twitch of the mass shuffling across rows of seats and loping up the aisles, babies' fudge-brown soft legs waving as their napkins are changed on mothers' laps, little girls with plaited loops on their heads listening like old crones, heavy women swaying to chants, men with fierce, unreadably black faces breaking into harmony tender and deep as they sing to God for his protection of Umkhonto weSizwe, as people on both sides have always, everywhere, claimed divine protection for their soldiers, their wars. At the end of a day like this she wanted a drink, she wanted the depraved luxury of solitude and quiet in which she would be restored (enriched, oh yes! by the day) to the familiar limits of her own being.

Hungry. Not for iced whisky and feet up. It seemed she had scarcely hesitated:—Look, I live nearby, come back to my house and have something to eat. Then I'll run you into town.—

—That will be very nice. We can be glad for that.—And at the back the tight vacuum relaxed.

They followed her in through the gate, shrinking away from the dog—she assured them he was harmless but he was large, with a fancy collar by which she held him. She trooped them in through the kitchen because that was the way she always

entered her house, something she would not have done if they had been adult, her black friends whose sophistication might lead them to believe the choice of entrance was an unthinking historical slight. As she was going to feed them, she took them not into her living-room with its sofas and flowers but into her dining-room, so that they could sit at table right away. It was a room in confident taste that could afford to be spare: bare floorboards, matching golden wooden ceiling, antique brass chandelier, reed blinds instead of stuffy curtains. An African wooden sculpture represented a lion marvelously released from its matrix in the grain of a Mukwa tree-trunk. She pulled up the chairs and left the four young men while she went back to the kitchen to make coffee and see what there was in the refrigerator for sandwiches. They had greeted the maid, in the language she and they shared, on their way through the kitchen, but when the maid and the lady of the house had finished preparing cold meat and bread, and the coffee was ready, she suddenly did not want them to see that the maid waited on her. She herself carried the heavy tray into the dining-room.

They are sitting round the table, silent, and there is no impression that they stopped an undertone exchange when they heard her approaching. She doles out plates, cups. They stare at the food but their eyes seem focused on something she can't see; something that overwhelms. She urges them—Just cold meat, I'm afraid, but there's chutney if you like it . . . Milk everybody? . . . Is the coffee too strong? I have a heavy hand, I know. Would anyone like to add some hot water?—

They eat. When she tries to talk to one of the others, he says *Ekskuus*? And she realizes he doesn't understand English, of the white man's languages knows perhaps only a little of that of the Afrikaners in the rural town he comes from. Another gives his name, as if in some delicate acknowledgement of the food.—I'm Shadrack Nsutsha.—She repeats the surname to get it right. But he does not speak again. There is an urgent exchange of eye-language, and the spokesman holds out the emptied sugar-bowl to her.—Please.—She hurries to the kitchen and brings it back refilled. They need carbohydrate, they are hungry, they are young, they need it, they burn it up. She is distressed at the inadequacy of the

meal and then notices the fruit bowl, her big copper fruit bowl, filled with apples and bananas and perhaps there is a peach or two under the grape leaves with which she likes to complete an edible still life.—Have some fruit. Help yourselves.—

They are stacking their plates and cups, not knowing what they are expected to do with them in this room which is a room where apparently people only eat, do not cook, do not sleep. While they finish the bananas and apples (Shadrack Nsutsha had seen the single peach and quickly got there first) she talks to the spokesman, whose name she has asked for: Dumile.—Are you still at school, Dumile?—Of course he is not at school—*they* are not at school; youngsters their age have not been at school for several years, they are the children growing into young men and women for whom school is a battleground, a place of boycotts and demonstrations, the literacy of political rhetoric, the education of revolt against having to live the life their parents live. They have pompous titles of responsibility beyond childhood: he is chairman of his branch of the Youth Congress, he was expelled two years ago—for leading a boycott? Throwing stones at the police? Maybe burning the school down? He calls it all—quietly, abstractly, doesn't know many ordinary, concrete words but knows these euphemisms—“political activity.” No school for two years? No.—So what have you been able to do with yourself, all that time?—

She isn't giving him a chance to eat his apple. He swallows a large bite, shaking his head on its thin, little-boy neck.—I was inside. Detained from this June for six months.—

She looks round the others.—And you?—

Shadrack seems to nod slightly. The other two look at her. She should know, she should have known, it's a common enough answer from youths like them, their color. They're not going to be saying they've been selected for the First Eleven at cricket or that they're off on a student tour to Europe in the school holidays.

The spokesman, Dumile, tells her he wants to study by correspondence, “get his matric” that he was preparing for two years ago; two years ago when he was still a child, when he didn't have the hair that is now appearing on his face, making him a man, taking away the childhood. In the hesitations, the

silences of the table, where there is nervously spilt coffee among plates of banana skins, there grows the certainty that he will never get the papers filled in for the correspondence college, he will never get the two years back. She looks at them all and cannot believe what she knows: that they, suddenly here in her house, will carry the AK-47s they only sing about, now, miming death as they sing. They will have a career of wiring explosives to the undersides of vehicles, they will go away and come back through the bush to dig holes not to plant trees to shade home, but to plant land-mines. She can see they have been terribly harmed but cannot believe they could harm. They are wiping their fruit-sticky hands furtively palm against palm.

She breaks the silence; says something, anything.  
—How d’you like my lion? Isn’t he beautiful? He’s made by a Zimbabwean artist, I think the name’s Dube.—

But the foolish interruption becomes revelation. Dumile, in his gaze—distant, lingering, speechless this time—reveals what has overwhelmed them. In this room, the space, the expensive antique chandelier, the consciously simple choice of reed blinds, the carved lion: all are on the same level of impact, phenomena undifferentiated, undecipherable. Only the food that fed their hunger was real.

## R E A D I N G 6

### Edge of the Earth

Hafsat Abiola (2006)

Some of us with the luck of the draw—born in the most auspicious place at the most auspicious time, and then fueled for any number of reasons—make that journey to the edge and poke our heads out into space. We look into territory previously uncharted by any in our sisterhood, gather courage as a cloak around our shoulders, trembling with fear or anticipation, and breathe deeply before taking the plunge.

Behind are others whose lives are still steeped in traditions and old ways of doing things. Others who adjust and adjust to changes that come and who yet believe that change is something that happens to them and not something that they can cause. For them, the immutability of things is its own good news.

And between those of us at the edge and those of us at the center is a cord that binds. A cord that we feel in both places. At the center, it is as an amorphous wondering: Might something else not be possible, or is this always all there is? And at the edge, it is a bittersweet realization: Life could have

been easier than this. If only we could have closed our eyes more, demanded less, accepted less, been less. Some say you can only be who you are, but in our hearts we recall, if vaguely, the choices that brought us onto roads less traveled, which for want of traffic become narrow paths, then trails, until all that remains is wilderness.

Far off in the distance, we hear a sound. It is only the wind. Or it might be a message from those who have ventured this far before. The wind might bear their wisdom to us. Except that we don’t understand; there is no one among us who can interpret. Or if there are interpreters, we might not know of them.

At the edge there is little talking. Soon we realize that the edge is also harsh. It is a world with too many questions without answers; it entails living with the void that remains when all beliefs are taken away. Silence becomes an armor here. And our eyes focus on some distant place, or it may just be that we look there to avoid looking here, where the mess of uncertainty gathers at our feet.

At the center, our eyes are quiet and clear. They look warm and sweet. Here sisters hold hands, and during long walks to waters that move farther away, we sing. The sick find the small hollows of our hands, brimming with water, against their lips. Soon, their sickly forms full with our giving and our stories. With transitions, our keening connects the skies and the mother earth. Yet the center makes never-ending demands for our labor, so that from dawn to dusk we work, tending to everyone but ourselves.

At the edge, we begin to see that we ought to have brought our roots with us. But when we set off, baggage seemed tiresome and was left behind. So here we stand, perilously at the border, with the wind about our ears and our feet shaky on the ground.

What joy is the cord that links us all. The cord that connects our sisterhood across distances, time zones, worlds also connects the different aspects of who we are. So that even as each of us is an embodiment of contradictions, the center holds all the pieces together. We don't fall apart. Or if we do, it is possible to pick all the pieces up again. It is even possible to arrange them in a new design. This cord now brings us back to the lands we've known. From the edge, ours are the eyes filled with mystery. And from the center, ours are the feet rooted into the soil of time and place.

And now we come together.

Bringing together what we have seen, who we have been, as we weave new patterns, streaking the land with our magic.