

## **Transnational Feminism: A Range of Disciplinary Perspectives**

This roundtable considered new scholarship on transnational feminism from a range of disciplinary perspectives, with the goal of identifying the various subject matters and methodologies with which researchers are approaching this exciting area.

The roundtable was held on Wednesday, May 18, 2005 in Royce Hall, UCLA. Ellen Dubois, UCLA professor of history, was the primary organizer and moderator of the event. The speakers were Nayereh Tohidi, associate professor of Women's Studies at Cal State Northridge, Spike Peterson, professor in Political Science at the University of Arizona, Maylei Blackwell, assistant professor in Chicano Studies at UCLA, and Leila Rupp, professor of and head of Women's Studies at UC Santa Barbara.

The event was sponsored by UCLA's Center for Modern and Contemporary Studies <http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/cmcs/#index.html>, Center for the Study of Women <http://www.women.ucla.edu/csw/indexCSW.htm> and the Research Group on Transnational and Transcolonial Studies <http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/transnation/index.html>. The following transcript was prepared by the UCLA International Institute and edited by the roundtable participants.

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### **Ellen DuBois**

I just can't tell you how happy I am to see you all here. I've been looking forward for a long time to this afternoon. Welcome to this roundtable on different disciplinary perspectives on transnational feminism. Just to point out our disciplines before I point out our people: history, international relations, sociology, and cultural studies. Everyone also works within women's studies.

This roundtable is meant to prepare us, all of us, for subsequent work on a phenomenon which exists both in the real world and in the academy, which is the tremendous growth and development in something that we can call transnational or global or international feminism. What we're going to do at this roundtable is examine this phenomenon and the scholarly, academic attention to it, but do so by trying to understand the different ways we approach and the different things we mean by and the different things we learn about this subject, transnational feminism, on the basis of the different intellectual tools that we use. My sense is that, although there is a great deal of interest, activity, and writings about this, not all of it speaks in the same language.

So, I want to thank, for supporting this afternoon, the Center for Modern and Contemporary Studies, which provided the original funding, then additional funding from the Center for the Study of Women, which is represented here by Chris Littleton, and the multi-campus Research Group on Transnational and Transcolonial Studies, which is represented by Françoise Lionnet, and also support from Geoffrey Garrett of International Institute which will provide us with resources that we are going to transcribe this and make what we've done available afterwards. And I also want to thank my research assistant, Patrick Sharma.

I am going to introduce the people in the order in which we'll meet them, and then tell you what we're going to talk about and how we are going to proceed.

Our first speaker will be **Nayereh Tohidi**, who is an associate professor of Women's Studies at Cal State Northridge and presently directing a new program in Islamic community studies. She earned her MA and PhD degrees from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and also earned a bachelors of science in Sociology and Educational Psychology from Tehran University. She particularly wants us to know that she's been awarded a Balzan-Keddie fellowship, named after our colleague Nikki Keddie who's sitting in the back here, for the academic year 2005-2006, which will place her at UCLA to work on a book project, *Democracy, Feminism, and Women's Movement in Iran: The Global-Local Interplay*, and she'll be teaching in Women's Studies so we'll have her for the whole year, which is great.

Our second speaker will be **Spike Peterson**, possessor of the greatest name in Women's Studies. She's a professor in Political Science at the University of Arizona and also works a great deal with Women's Studies, Comparative Culture and Literature Studies, and the Center for Latin American Studies and International Studies. She is the co-author with Anne Runyan of *Global Gender Issues* and her most recent book is *A Critical Rewriting of Global Political Economy: Reproductive, Productive and Virtual Economies*.

Our third speaker is our own **Maylei Blackwell**, who is an assistant professor in Chicano Studies, which is about to become a department on Tuesday, correct? [applause] She has her PhD in Sociology from Santa Cruz. Actually, Maylei, I've got two different titles of dissertations -- did you do two dissertations?

**Maylei Blackwell:** Well, some people would say that, but my PhD is from History of Consciousness.

Oh, ok. So why don't you say the name of it?

**Blackwell:** I received my PhD in 2000 -- it's "Underlying Geographies of Difference: Mapping Multiple Feminist Insurgencies and Transnational Public Cultures in the Americas."

She's the author of "Contested Histories: La Hijas de Cuautémoc/Chicana Feminisms and Print Culture in the Chicano Movement 1968-1973" in a book called *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader*.

And our fourth speaker is **Leila Rupp** who, after some number of years as a professor of History at Ohio State University and as the founding and longtime editor of the *Journal of Women's History*, has happily come to us in Southern California and is now professor of and head of Women's Studies at UC Santa Barbara. She is the author of several influential books in a wide range of areas: *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America*, her very important history of American feminism in the middle of the 20th century, *Survival in the Doldrums*, and the book which brought her to this subject, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*.

Nayereh, I forgot to say all of your books and here they are: She is the co-editor with Jane Bayes of an important collection called *Globalization, Gender and Religion* and the co-editor with Herbert Bodman of *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity within Unity* and author of many articles on feminism in Iran, including "The International Connections of the Women's Movement

in Iran" in Nikki Keddie and Rudi Matthee's book, *Iran and the Surrounding World* and many other articles.

So, these are our four speakers.

So let me just give you a tiny little bit of other information and then we will proceed. Our plan is for each of the speakers to speak for 10 minutes on a set of subjects that I'll lay out to you, then to have us go around here at the table for about 15 to 20 minutes, and then to have you speak and ask questions to further advance our discussion. Okay? And we're going from 4 to a little before 6 -- Nayereh has to somehow make her way over to the other side of the mountains by 7. But we have a wonderful reception, so stay.

Here are the three areas that we decided that all people would address themselves to, from the perspectives of our separate intellectual traditions.

Number one: In your discipline what do we know about transnational feminism? What do we need to know?

Number two: In your discipline, what are the methodology and approach used to examine this subject? And in particular, how does your discipline pay attention to the interconnectedness of race, gender, class, and nation?

Third: From your disciplinary perspective, what is the relationship between an emerging body of scholarship and the current international feminist movement? What kinds of knowledge and political practices does the scholarship in your discipline enable and what kinds of knowledge and political practices does it not reflect or encourage?

So these are the three subjects and with that all said, we'll begin with Nayereh.

### **Nayereh Tohidi**

Hello everybody. Thank you Ellen and thank you all these centers that have sponsored this roundtable. Ellen especially went through a lot of troubles to get us together and find the right time, workable for all of us. It's really a pleasure to see you all and especially meet Leila Rupp for the first time and I'm really proud to be sitting next to my former student whom I hadn't seen for a long time and she just emailed me and said, "Do you know who I am?" and she's now in the same panel with me and I'm very proud of her. She hasn't changed, except that she had long hair then. This was, maybe. 10 years ago,

I begin with the first question, meaning, "In your discipline what do we know about transnational feminism? What do we particularly need to know?" And I will focus on my women's studies as an interdisciplinary field and my training in social sciences, specifically sociology.

In order first to define it, or at least say what I understand about transnational feminism based on what I have been reading and also doing as a transnational feminist myself, I'd like to first explain how we distinguish this transnational feminism from other similar trends or concepts within feminist movements. For example, I distinguish that from international feminism because we, in the feminist movement, have had international feminism from almost the beginning of feminism and the women's movement. We had -- from the early twentieth century after the expansion of the feminist discourse and especially first wave feminism -- organizations like Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the International Alliance of Women,

the International Council of Women, the Young Woman's Christian Association, and so forth -- that were organizational manifestations of first wave feminism and its regional or international expansion during the early 20th century.

And we also had the emergence of international socialist women's movements within the Second International in Europe, and also we had, in the third-world countries, women's movements, especially in Asia, which were closely associated with socialist, or nationalist and anti-colonial national liberation movements. They also had international ties and regional bases.

So therefore, international feminism, or feminist internationalism, is not new. It has been there. But I want to argue that transnational feminism is more recent and is more directly connected to the processes of globalization. And several facts, socioeconomic and socio-demographic changes at both the local national levels and international levels, have contributed to the emergence of transnational feminist networks in the mid-1908s and early-1990s, which have these networks and which grow out of international women's movement, have also produced their theoretical debates. In other words, the academic and theoretical dimension of these networks is what we call transnational feminism and the debate around it has taken place especially within postcolonial feminist studies.

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The most important change at the local and national levels has been the growth in the size and quality of the new middle class and working class women in different countries. Declining fertility rates, thanks to better control women have gained over their bodies and sexualities, has contributed to educational attainment, gainful employment, unionization, civic engagement, consciousness raising and social networking among women. Thanks to the theoretical and research contributions of second wave feminism, exposing the gendered nature and masculinist orientation of nationalism and nation-state projects, disillusionment with male-dominated socialism and socialist movement, and confrontation with religious politics, especially Islamic fundamentalism, have all contributed to this emergence of transnational feminism.

Feminist criticism about the male biases within the projects of nationalism, development, and modernization that compromise women's rights and women's opportunities and also women's movements, coincided with the rapidly penetrating processes of globalization. Global mass culture, the diminishing power of the nation state and national borders, the new liberal economic policies, especially the decline of the welfare state, the emergence and expansion of new communication technology, the Internet in particular, and the United Nations regional, national and world conferences on women all paved the way to the emergence of transnational feminism. These transnational feminist networks have distinguishable characteristics from international feminist networks from the early decades of the 20th century. And if time allows we will discuss those differences.

So, to summarize it, as my colleague and friend Val Moghadam has done in her new book on *Globalizing Women* in both demographic changes and the growth of a so-called critical mass of educated, employed, mobile, and politically conscious women around the world, economic crisis, Reaganism, Thatcherism, and the decline of the welfare state, feminization of poverty, and the growing religious politics, especially Islamic fundamentalism, and finally, as I said, the UN Decade for Women, the theoretical debates within development studies -- WIN/GAD paradigm and so forth -- all have contributed to the concept and also practice of transnational feminism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Valentine Moghadam, Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

Also I want to make a distinction between transnational feminism and the concept of global sisterhood and I would say that transnational feminism is kind of an outgrowth of a global sisterhood concept. As someone who has been myself actively participating in the UN sponsored world conferences, I have noticed how feminists have moved from the notion of global sisterhood to transnational feminism and what conceptual and theoretical and practical differences exist there. Because, as you remember, global sisterhood was a concept coined by American feminist Robin Morgan in 1980s, I believe, after especially her book, she also started an institute called Sisterhood is Global Institute, which was an international network of women working on women's international issues.<sup>2</sup> But the problem with that notion, especially the criticism about its lack of sensitivity or theoretical conceptualization of the issues that divide women -- including race, class, sexuality, nationality -- made the concept rather utopian and romantic. So many people have abandoned that concept and today it's not used much.

People realized the problems with that concept through increasing contacts between women of the north and the south. Thanks to the UN sponsored conferences, especially during their preparatory conferences, regional conferences, women from different countries, different classes, different races, different sexual orientations and nationalities came together and there were lots of debates during these conferences starting with the first women's decade between 1975 and 1995 -- a conference in Copenhagen and in Mexico City and then in Nairobi and then in Beijing and we just recently had the Beijing plus ten conference in New York. All these conferences decreased both the conceptual gap and misunderstandings between women from the global south and the global north and thanks to the contributions of third-world women and women of color within the Western context, the issues, the diversity, the multiplicity of feminism was better understood and also women learned to politicize women's issues beyond their national borders.

So women's movements became more internationalized and also their diversity was better appreciated and the intersectionality of gender with sexuality, with class and race was better understood and appreciated. So that is why the concept of transnational feminism offers the desirability and possibility of a political solidarity of feminists across the globe that transcends class, race, sexuality and national boundaries. This is the definition that my colleague, Breny Mendoza, proposes in her critique of transnational feminism.<sup>3</sup>

But there are still lots of challenges and criticisms about this notion of transnational feminism, which lead me actually to the second and third question that Ellen proposed. Whether, for example, because of the diverse connotations of "transnational feminism" this concept is still left rather unclear. Especially the "transnational" of the transnational feminism. What do we really mean by transnational? For example, is the transnational of transnational feminism what feminists do in global conferences and in cyberspace? Or should we call that global feminism to differentiate it from transnational feminism? Charlotte Bunch, for example, defines global feminism as the spread of feminism around the globe, the feminist global networking that takes place around the UN agenda, and what she perceives as the universality of the feminist struggle around the world in the commonality of our opposition to male domination, discrimination, and violence. So that's a kind of definition of global feminism. But is transnational feminism really that? Or Chandra Mohanty points instead to our shared or common context of struggle due to

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<sup>2</sup> Robin Morgan, ed., Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology (New York: Doubleday, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Breny Mendoza Transnational Feminisms in Question. *Feminist Theory* 3, 3: 295-314.

common exploitation and domination across the north-south divide that allows for a transnational solidarity.<sup>4</sup>

Practically, which is what I am more interested in, is what some feminists such as Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, prefer to call transnational feminism forms of alliance, subversion, and complicity operating in a privileged in-between space where asymmetries and inequalities between women can be acknowledged, sustained, nevertheless to be critically deconstructed.<sup>5</sup>

Transnational feminism is an attempt to construct a virtual imagined, transnational community of diverse social movements in a way that some feminists see as, again, utopian (see Mendoza). In this process the transnational or global appears to gain precedence over the local. The global, especially cyberspace and global media, become the privileged space to inflict political meanings and strategies. Locations and places almost evaporate as an essential context of political struggle and economic surplus production. The struggles and priorities of those women who do not have access to the Internet or transnational networks become neglected or get overshadowed by the mostly English-speaking, better educated and socio-economically more privileged women who can travel, who can go to these conferences, who have access to cyberspace, who can communicate with each other, and so forth. So those are the problems, practical problems of transnational feminism, despite all the strengths and contributions that it has been making.

So in conclusion I will say that, at least based on my own experience with transnational feminism, I still put emphasis on contextualization of feminist theorization and feminist practice and feminist struggle. Rather than grand theories and abstract or utopian notions, as stressed by Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor Simona Sharoni,<sup>6</sup> the significance of coalition building across borders as well as locally and nationally-oriented struggles, beyond ideological differences around specific concrete practical agendas, have been more practical and useful as far as I know for especially third-world women.

And examples of transnational feminist networks that have been made around these specific agendas and concrete issues are plenty. You can, for example, refer to Women Living Under Muslim Laws as a transnational feminist network, who have been specifically working on women's rights in the Muslim context. DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), WIDE (Women in Development Europe, WEDO, (Women's Environment and Development Organization), and SIGI (Sisterhood is Global Institute) which, despite all its shortcomings, is still maybe considered a transnational feminist network, and there are others that I don't have time to talk about.

So I would conclude that feminism and sisterhood is not global, nor is it local. Women's solidarity has to be negotiated with each specific context.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On Mohanty, Chandra, see for example: "Women Workers and Capitalist Scripts: Ideologies of Domination, Common Interests, and the Politics of Solidarity," pp. 3-29 in M.J. Alexander and C.T. Mohanty (Eds) *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Grewal and Kaplan, eds., *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Rupp, Leila J. and Verta Taylor. "Forging Feminist Identity in an International Movement: A Collective Identity Approach to Twentieth Century Feminism." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 24, no. 21, 1999: 363-386.

<sup>7</sup> Sharoni, Simona. "Gender, Conflict, and Peacebuilding: A Critical Overview

Thank you very much.[applause]

Or maybe I should say it is both local and global, the interplay of both. [laughter]

### **Spike Peterson**

I do want to thank especially Ellen and everyone else who is responsible for gathering us together today, and all of you being here on an otherwise pleasanter day outside, perhaps.

I find it intriguing to be asked what my discipline thinks about anything feminist, since my discipline has been characterized as international relations, in which case there really very little going on in the mainstream of international relations that has anything to do with transnational feminism or any number of methodological orientations that I happen to subscribe to. So in terms of international relations, I would say in regards to the questions that Ellen posed, that there is very little going on aside from the obvious particular perspective of international relations to be addressing issues of globalization, which of course the discipline makes some attempt to do primarily from more militaristic, if you will, and conventional questions and issues of inquiry focused on security. These can be very pertinent to feminists and other critical investigations for what is going in regard to social movements and the need for them, but there is very little attention from the mainstream to those specifically feminist issues in international relations.

The other possible disciplinary location is political science, the only thing I will say about that is in so far as there are really exciting intellectually innovative feminist theorists in political science they tend to, I would say, identify their theoretical scale and scope with the more territorially based nation state, and even though clearly we are moving beyond that in a variety of ways, there is still a tendency to think in terms of the societal organizational space of the nation as opposed to what is clearly transgressed by developments in neoliberal capitalism at the global level.

Methodologically, again international relations is like the discipline of economics; there is not very much going on outside of, at best, an 'add women and stir' or 'add critique and stir' way of addressing the issues. So I don't think that the disciplines actually offer very much in the way of transnational feminism. I don't actually think that there are many in the mainstream of international relations or economics who would resonate with any area of inquiry regarded as transnational feminisms. I'm not even sure that transnational is translating very well in international relations or economics!

What do I then think are some of the issues that should be brought to the table in regards to the workshop that Ellen has organized here? Nayereh has saved me from having to frame the progression, or development away from the notion of sisterhood as global (understood as more 'add woman and stir' in the sense that we have an identity politics of women that assumes we know what they are and that they respond to the address of a particular location or identity) to that of transnational or international feminism -- transnational being the more contemporary one. And that most of the critical and important developments in regard to theorizing, conceptualizing the intersection of race, class, ethnicity, culture and national hierarchy come out of postcolonial feminist critiques that have made it very clear the difficulty and problems Nayereh introduced

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of Theory and Practice." Paper presented at Conference on Gender in International Relations at the University of Southern California, February 2-3, 2001.

already in regard to who are we speaking of, what is this movement, who does it represent. So I won't have to go into those.

There are clearly important developments in regard to moving away from that more simplistic essentializing position to one that is a more complex and contested story in regard to the intersection of a variety of hierarchies as well as a transversal politics -- the idea that we are moving across nations and not just assuming these national territorial bases. But what is pointed out in the various articles that I read as well in the early efforts of transnational feminism is that we have proceeded less far or less successfully in regard to what this means for the actual practice or practices of solidarity around "feminist issues." And what does it mean given the deep and painful divides in regard to class, economic issues, imperialism, colonialism, racism, and different ethnic hierarchies to act in any kind of cooperative and effective practical sense with regard to the issues on the table in the face of neoliberal globalization.

So my recent work is primarily out of global political economy and because of that particular location I feel very strongly the importance of the insights from postcolonial feminism in regard to criticizing global capitalism especially in its neoliberal mode,. The latter ostensibly separates the state from markets, gives markets freer reign -- but actually it mobilizes states to support markets in particular ways, especially those that favor corporate capitalism and states remove themselves only from the delivery of public welfare and collective well-being..

Given the trends of neoliberal globalization, there is an absolute need, as far as I'm concerned, for a comprehensive critique of capitalism as a growth-oriented and unregulated juggernaut -- that we just have to go along with this because that's the way it is and that there is no other alternative -- is something critical movements have to effectively counter. And this means engaging the very difficult terrain of criticizing economics. Precisely because there is so little critique coming out of the mainstream of economics, this adds considerably to the assignment and the project for those of us who want to grasp the larger picture of what's going on in regard to transnational, local and national activities.

So, first of all, I think that transnational feminisms -- as I'm sure all of us would agree -- have to be interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, or even meta-disciplinary. You know, to dump some of the baggage of these disciplines and to move beyond them into recognizing the transversal relations and the overlaps among them and their mutual constitution. Also that it must involve a critique of capitalism, which is one of the criticisms] from postcolonial and cultural studies perspective. The easy criticism of cultural studies is that it is too cultural ; in fact, in international relations and economics that's a move that should be welcomed -- to become more cultural -- because we have so completely ignored that which is associated with the cultural. Whether cultural studies and postcolonial studies go too far in the other direction and let a critique of capitalism drop out of their analysis, I think depends on the particulars of the analyst that one is examining or the analysis that is being produced.

Certainly the attention to how ethnicity, cultural, race, gender, sexualities, and national location intersect in complicating particular practices are things that have to be within our lens if we are going to have solidarity around particular transnational feminist objectives, programs, policies, and activities. So I think that from my perspective one productive way to reorient our thinking is away from identity attribution of who we are to notions of agency and practice and solidarity around what are we doing, what can we do, what might we do, what might be appropriate, productive, applicable in particular situations and in the context of the multiple hierarchies that cause oppression and that are related to a lack of privilege throughout the planet.

To me, one of the absences identified in the articles that both Nayereh and I researched (by Breny Mendoza and Val Moghadam ; Peter Waterman also has a review recently that is rather scathing is that transnational feminism, international feminist work has still failed to deliver anything in regard to a basis for solidarity on the ground, that the differences that continue to exist undermine the rather romanticized notion that we have all figured out something here and lets just get on with it. That is one way in which we can conceptualize but we need an analytical perspective that addresses the material, the structural, the concrete, the practical, the economic and the productivist orientations of globalization that generate inequalities and problematize solidarity.

At the same time including and embedding those with the cultural and the more conceptual aspects, is to think about feminization itself as denigration. So we've moved away from women as a category to feminization as a process, to the attribution of characteristics associated with femininity or the feminine, whether that is being too sexual, too naive, too childlike, too irrational, too emotional, unable to take care of oneself -- those characteristics that have been, for a long time, especially in the West, but not exclusively in Western discourse, associated with the feminine -- that allow it to be devalued, devalorized. Particularly economically, so that we have migrant labor, those things associated with women's work -- which is obviously not just women, but those things associated with women's work -- service activities that are devalued, not deemed worthy of requiring good wage, or any wage at all, that are inseparable from the material conditions in which people of minority status, migrant status, and women themselves find themselves located in the political economy. So I'm suggesting that if we take the notion of feminization as denigration we can begin to identify and specify a number of ways in which material practices are inseparable from discursive practices that devalue those identities, those bodies, those work activities, those activities more generally, those cultural phenomena -- that are characterized as feminine. What is devalued in dominant gendered and heteronormative discourse is inseparable from the material conditions that Zillah Eisenstein refers to as "capitalist racialized patriarchy."

That's where I think we can begin, in some way, to try to tackle very complex issue -- it doesn't resolve them; it's just one among a number of starting points to rethink transnational feminism both materially and discursively. [applause]<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Peterson's comments draw from the following readings: Antrobus, Peggy. 2004. *The Global Women's Movement: Origins, Issues and Strategies*. London: Zed Books; Basu, Amrita. 1995. *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press; Brah, Avtar. 1991. Questions of Difference and International Feminism. In *Out of the Margins*, ed. Jane Aaron and Sylvia Walby. London: Falmer Press. Pp. 168-176; Brenner, Johanna. 2003. Transnational Feminist and the Struggle for Global Justice. *New Politics* (New York) 9, 2; Bulbeck, Chilla. 1988. *One World Women's Movement*. London: Pluto; Bulbeck, Chilla. 1998. *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Dean, Jodi, ed. 1997. *Feminism and the New Democracy: Re-siting the Political*. London: Sage. Eisenstein, Zillah R. 2004. *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racisms, and the West*. London: Zed Books. Kaplan, Caren. 1992. The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Practice. In *Scattered Hegemonies*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. Pp. 137-152.; Kaplan, Caren, Norma Alarcon, and Mino Moallem, eds. 1999. *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*. Durham and London: Duke University Press; Mackie, Vera. 2001. The Language of Globalization: Transnationality and Feminism. *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 3, 2 (August): 180-206; Moghadam, Valentine M. 2000. Review Essay: Globalization, Collective Action and Social Theory. *Sociological Forum* 15, 4: 721-725; Moghadam, Valentine M. 2000. Transnational Feminist Networks: Collective Action in an Era of Globalization. *International Sociology* 15, 1: 57-85; Naples, Nancy and Manisha Desai, eds. 2002. *Women's Activism*

## Maylei Blackwell

Ok, I didn't realize I was being set up as a cultural studies scholar ... that's ok, I'm like uh-oh. [laughter]

So to try to situate myself a little bit -- let me just situate what my research is on and then how I am speaking as a person who is active in transnational feminist circles. I'm a social movement scholar more or less; I work on women of color social movements in the U.S. and I also work in Latin America extensively on the questions of race and sexuality in transnational women's organizing. I've written on the Latin American Feminist Encuentros, and the role of race in lesbian organizing. I work with indigenous women's movements in Mexico. And I bridge three interdisciplinary fields, so when we were talking about disciplines I'm like, well, I can't really go back to -- I'm trained as a historian but I haven't really been there in a long time -- they're like my distant cousins or something -- so I want to try to speak to the three interdisciplinary fields as my disciplinary formations, lessons I think we can take from those disciplines and places I'd want to challenge those disciplines to move a little bit further. And that would be in Chicana and Chicano studies, Latin American studies, and women's studies.

And then just to speak to some of my observations that come from being in different activist and political positions -- currently I am a board member of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission so a lot of my thinking around human rights work in the UN revolves around some of that work and also I participate actively in the Continental Network of Indigenous Women.

So, the first question was what do we know about transnational feminisms and what do we need to know? Every question was so big, I was like, 'Oh my gosh' -- so I'm just going to ground it in some things I've been thinking about, some things in my research. I feel like we're getting from a lot of historians and other scholars a deeper knowledge of earlier transnational feminisms, of feminist projects and also a deeper understanding of how this moment of global capital flows of people, cultures, technologies, this stage of global capitalism in general has facilitated new possibilities and challenges of transnational organizing for women.

What I want to do is try to ground my comments in women of color feminism, linking women of color feminism in the U.S. to other kinds of Latin American women's organizing that I work in, as a way to make a bridge that isn't often made. And that's between area studies and ethnic studies, between postcolonial theory and women of color theory; so I'm going to try to walk that bridge and not fall off of it. But I might lose some people, I might lose myself.

Like the conceptualization of borders that the late poet, intellectual Gloria Anzaldúa wrote about, I feel like transnational feminisms are spaces of conflict, of contradiction, of contact in which women, women of color, and other marginalized actors, have transformed discourses and spaces that exclude them, i.e. human rights discourse or the space of the U.N., into spaces of possibility and collaboration. But those transformations haven't excluded the notion that those

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*and Globalization : Linking Local Struggles and Transnational Politics*. New York: Routledge; Ricciutelli, Luciana, Angela Miles and Margaret H. McFadden, eds. 2005. *Feminist Politics, Activism and Vision*. London: Zed Books; Schulman, Barbara. 2004. Effective Organizing in Terrible Times: The Strategic Value of Human Rights for Transnational Anti-Racist Feminisms. *Meridians* 4, 2: 102-107; Walter, Lynn. 2003. Bridges, Chasms, and Common Ground: Multicultural and Transnational Feminism. *Feminist Collections* 25, 1 (Fall).

spaces still exclude them or erase them, that there aren't limitations there. I think some the lessons that we take from Gloria Anzaldúa is that we transform notions like borders, like spaces of translation and feminist contact, but they're still fraught with violence as well as possibility. And we have to hold all those pieces together.

So to give you an example of some the research I've been doing accompanying the indigenous women's movement in Mexico, what I've seen about what we need to know about transnational feminism is that there are incredibly complex navigations going on among social movement actors and scholars of social movements in transnational feminisms. So before when we used to say, "Human rights discourse, that's kind of a westernized discourse. It's based on the individual rational man," what I'm seeing is a real complex cooptation and transformation of forms of international discourse. And I'm also seeing really complex navigations of multiple scales of power, so when indigenous women feel blocked at the local level, they work at the national level. When they are getting blocked at the national level of their organizing they move to the transnational network that they're building. When they get blocked in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, they move back to the transnational. So they weave in and out of those different, multiple scales of power to try to leverage new spaces, new discourses, new identities, new solidarities. So that's what I'm noticing is these really complex navigations created by both constriction of those scales as well as new spaces that keep opening up.

But another thing that I'm noticing that's been a little bit tricky is the navigation of the limitations of what we'll call rights discourse, and this is in Latin America where the state has largely been ignoring indigenous women's organizing or lesbian rights, for that matter. But increasingly under pressure by international financial institutions or investors, they're making symbolic gestures or selectively co-opting movement discourses.

So the national indigenous women's movement in Mexico is discovering that the only strategy that they can work on is a way to center their autonomy, their demands on the practice of rights and the practice of autonomy, rather than waiting for the state to grant them autonomy. And this is an interesting development in the field that I'm working in because the scholarship in both women's movements and indigenous movements in Latin America have been doing this careful work of analyzing the impact of transnational organizing in the context of the twin challenge that we're look at -- which is NGO-ization, increasing institutionalization of social movements, and neoliberalism.

In the context of neoliberalism, I'm not just talking about this global economic structure that's been referred to as a set of economic policies and practices, but actually state cooption, or kind of a neoliberal state strategy of selectively co-opting indigenous demands or women's demands and then codifying them. And so people are having to figure out how, under the World Bank, in order to look good to the IMF or whatever, they have to, there is a gender discourse. So a lot of movement people are trying to make the distinction between real feminist demands and feminist work and being strategic and kind of the work that happens around what are called gender technocrats. We don't just need a gendered agenda. We need to still be able to control what is a feminist agenda.

So I'm seeing a lot of these really complex navigations and negotiations. And then I'm also looking at a more complex analysis by scholars of -- first, there was kind of a more celebratory tone of the possibilities and challenges of so-called global civil society, in which myself and several other scholars who work in social movement organizing saw how these spaces were actually fraught with unequal power relationships and exclusions along some lengths that have been already talked about -- class, sexuality, race, gender. And how when we talk about who

can participate in NGOs, who has access to the international arena, that we have to remember that as much as those are spaces or possibilities of liberation, they're also spaces where power operates. So that what's in a layer of analysis that people had.

But then on the other hand I think that we're tempering more pessimistic views that we saw, maybe about five years ago, that all social movement sectors are just dominated by NGOs and it's completely institutionalized and that's the end of transnational feminism. So we've seen that too and so I think that led to is that I think people were actually looking for authentically local representations of indigenous women or actors themselves instead of realizing that local folks, local are actors always already in global flows. So I think what that meant is that people couldn't walk around trying to look for the authentic other or the authentic local. People had to understand that these were navigations that social movement actors were already making and we could talk about that -- some of you are looking at me like, "What are you talking about?"

So what I've noticed is more complex navigation by social movement actors but also more complex navigation by scholars who try to map out how discourses are flowing, how people have co-opted them and reinscribed them and then put them out in the world. And then also some more critical analysis on actually where spaces of power are operating and how we can keep being critical of them.

Within women's studies and feminist studies, I think we're also seeing the -- well, the way I see transnational feminism taught is that transnational processes and even transnational feminisms are seen as something that occurs outside of the U.S. and so I think what Chicana and Chicano studies can introduce -- if we put those two in collaboration together -- is that transnational processes are transforming Chicana and Chicano communities at an extremely rapid pace. Transnational processes like immigration, feminization of labor, feminization of immigration -- all these processes are truly transforming communities to be transnational communities, to have transnational families. We're looking at highly gendered practices of transnational motherhood and new forms of political organizing. So I think some of the work that I've been doing around women of color, feminist historiography -- what've I've been learning and taking the tools of learning between the contradictions of these two fields, women's studies and Chicana and Chicano studies, is that we have to figure out a way to position ourselves as already globalized actors and part of a transnational flow as well.

So the way I'm doing this in some of the women of color work that I'm doing, I'm trying to historicize the formation of women of color political identities. People look at it as an anti-racist critique of second wave women's liberation movement organizing or an anti-sexist critique of nationalist models of liberation or civil rights movement. But what's dropped out there is this internationalist impulse that was really at the founding base of U.S. women of color or U.S. third-world women organizing. What I'm thinking about there is how we need to look at how transnational discourses like third-world solidarity become localized. So not just how we position ourselves in the U.S. as having transnational flows, not just from north to south, but outside of the U.S. flowing out, but how they flowed in to transform us. So if we look at U.S. third-world women as a political formation that kind of led to women of color as a political identity, we can see that that's a process of transnational identity, transnational solidarity in reverse because that's really the glue that helped us understand ourselves as a gendered formation and a racial formation.

So I think that those are some of the way that these fields can start speaking to each other so that we understand there's alternative, grassroots histories of transnational organizing in the U.S. that helps us link the way that shrinkages in state services or what's impacting

communities of color and women of color here in the U.S. is part of the process of globalization. And so I think what one of our main challenges intellectually and politically is trying to connect that disconnect, where we think what's happening here in the U.S. is totally separate from what's happening as part of neoliberal economic global restructuring in so-called third world places. But if you look at it, global economic restructuring is happening to all communities but differently, so we need to look at bridging models that actually make those connections. So I've been doing that in my teaching and research.

I think as far as methodologies, it's introducing new methodologies that make us have to work on the multiple sides of these flows, so not just how we're flowing out and creating new solidarities, but how third world solidarity in the 1960s and 70s, which had its problems, organizations like the third world women's alliance, or radical women's groups used those discourses to organize themselves as women of color, to try to understand themselves as actors who were situated in a global sense of solidarity together. And so in some ways that's really the glue, trying to understand that we're looking at transnationalism or reverse or the localization of transnational discourses I think has been important to think about methodologically in our fields.

And then I think the transformation of these fields and their proper boundaries are in crisis. So area studies has realized that it's a construct of the Cold War, and it's starting to realize that people in Latin American studies are doing U.S.-Latino studies, Chicano-Latino scholars are realizing they're doing Latin American studies now. So some of the boundaries of what used to be more distinct have started to shift because people are trying to remap what used to be more nationalist frameworks. Especially in Chicana and Chicano studies -- there is some conflict and shifting uncomfortably, but trying to make the paradigm shift from nationalist paradigms to paradigms that really have the agility to understand globalization and their impact on our communities and then the complex forms of organization that are happening. In several of my classes we have the Binational Oaxacan Indigenous Front come to speak -- they're one of the only political organizations that organize along the migrant stream. So thinking about how new political formations are happening under globalization, new communities because of technology -- I don't think we had this sense before that we had transnational communities, transnational families. So I'm noticing that that's challenging our methodology and even the boundaries between our disciplines.

And then last was the question, what are transnational feminist theories presenting to us as possibilities and also obscuring? And I guess one critique that I have of the way that we're understanding transnational feminism and women's studies is that it seems like there's a larger gap between transnational feminist theory and transnational feminist practice. And so I'm seeing a somewhat disturbing development that I associate with the work that women of color did for a really long time, for decades, trying to make lived experience in theory as a set of conversations, as theories in the flesh. That was a political and intellectual project. It's somewhat disturbing how I'm starting to see when you go to look at how transnational feminism is being taught, it's being taught almost totally at the abstract and theoretical level. So I'm wondering why we're having this re-establishment of dichotomies between theory and experience that kind of reaffirmed -- global north as global and women in the third world and women of color as local -- so it's like these same dichotomies -- it's like, "Wait I've seen these before" -- but they were a decade ago, so what's going on that we keep having these same conversations?

So I guess some of the distinctions in my field too that I am worrying about, in women's studies, is the relationship between postcolonial studies and women of color theory because they're very

interrelated but they're starting to be seen as distinct and separate. I guess the other part is just understanding the complexity of transnationalism in our lived realities, because I think when you do a lot of political work internationally, folks say, "If you guys in the U.S. could just get your stuff together we'd be doing a lot better here." And so I think we're really amiss politically and intellectually if we don't understand how we're positioned globally, how we are transnational actors in our daily lived experience, and how transnational processes are -- you know, like every article of clothing on our backs -- were deeply implicated and imbricated in these transnational processes of sweat shop labor and our consumption practices and almost every aspect of our lives are transnational -- but we need to be able to get a grip on that analytically, conceptually and politically.

Those are some of the things that I -- as far as transnationalism and what it is enabling is that it is enabling new possibilities of collaboration. I feel like I'm seeing new forms of collaboration between feminist scholars. It's an exciting time to be thinking and writing and researching about interconnecting these large, macro processes of global political economy to daily lived reality. And we're in a really exciting time politically where social movements are already doing this work if we can keep up with them. [applause]

### **Leila Rupp**

Well, it's really unusual as a historian to go last. Usually you have to talk first and set the stage for things. And I have to say that I was -- and I said this to Ellen and I also am grateful to her for bringing us all together here -- that I realized on the way here, driving here suddenly that we should address this from our disciplines that I was going to address it from the discipline of history, which is what I was trained in and what I have done for a very long time but I'm now in women's studies and I could have, in fact, addressed from the perspective of women's studies. So I'm glad that I didn't because this will add something that we haven't heard anything about much so far.

And I thought I would actually start by saying a little bit about how I got involved in doing research on what I have always called the international women's movement because that's what the women in the organizations involved called it -- and I actually would like to have a discussion about the language between global, international, transnational. I realize that there are lots and lots of debates about the use of these different terms. One of the ways that I dealt with it in my own work was simply as writing narrative it gets boring if you say international all the time so I actually tend to use them interchangeably in ways that would really give social scientists the shivers, I think. But the interesting thing is that these organizations were called international and when they talked -- these organizations I studied were technically open to women all over the world, but they were actually made up of European and American women who were trying to expand the boundaries of their organizations and becoming truly global, that was the term that they used. So just some points about vocabulary.

My own background was in comparative women's history, American and European history, and one of the things I found right away when I was finished graduate school and looking for a job -- I hadn't noticed this before -- the discipline of history is completely structured around the nation state. Even for periods before there was such a thing as the nation state. And so it's one of the reasons that it's very difficult for historians to think about things transnationally.

First of all, it was difficult for me to get a job because I didn't fit into any of the categories, except women's history -- thank God for women's history. But in addition to that there's really very little attention given to transnational relations of any kind. For example, there are no, as far as I

know, there are no recent studies of the League of Nations as a transnational organization. An incredibly important topic, that it's just hard to believe nobody has written about since the 1950s. Even the history of what's called international relations -- or diplomatic history or actually now the more progressive term is international history in the field of history -- traditionally it always really dealt with foreign affairs from the perspective of one country. And the people doing this work have now really realized that actually it's better to look at both sides if you're talking about a relationship -- and they're actually learning languages and going to archives in other countries and that's all really good. But that's very new. Foreign relations was always just what the United States did to the rest of the world, primarily. [laughter]

So I had this funny background and I read an article that was in the first edition of the first European women's history textbook, *Becoming Visible*, by a historian named Edith Hurwitz called "The International Sisterhood," which actually goes back to the whole point about the concept of sisterhood and global sisterhood. And it was the first time I had ever heard about the international women's organizations that she was writing about and it was a pretty superficial piece based on not a lot of research but to me it just opened up the whole world to know that there were actually international women's organizations starting in the late 19th century. So that's really how I got involved in doing this. I decided to do a study of the international organizations themselves and I ended up looking at the three major international organizations that were technically open to women from all around the globe, even though they were primarily Euro-American dominated, at least in the beginning. So they started in the late 19th century and I went up through the Second World War and then a lot of things changed after that.

So the question: what do we know about transnational feminism in the field of history? We know about the history of transatlantic connections among women starting in the mid-19th century, Bonnie Anderson has a book called *Joyous Greetings* on what she calls the first international women's movement.<sup>9</sup> My perspective is a much more social movement perspective so I wouldn't call this a movement but it's about transatlantic connections among a group of women who were reading each other's work, responding, meeting, and so on. And actually quite a radical movement that kind of peaked in the revolutionary year of 1848.

And then there's also a book by Margaret McFadden called *Golden Cables of Sympathy* which deals with all sorts of transatlantic connections among women -- not just feminists, but women travelers and all sorts of people.<sup>10</sup> Then there are studies of international organizing. My book in that category as well as a number of other studies of particular organizations: Mineke Bosch on the International Women's Suffrage Association; Ian Tyrell, Australian scholar on the World Women's Christian Temperance Union and some other works of that kind.<sup>11</sup> Also, there is some work on regional organizations, such as the Pan Pacific Women's Association, the Inter-American Commission of Women. And also studies of national participation in international organizing. For example, Margot Badran's book on Egyptian feminism deals really, in a very

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<sup>9</sup> Bonnie Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Margaret McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999)

<sup>11</sup> Mineke Bosch with Annemarie Kloosterman, *Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1902-1942* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990). Mineke Bosch with Annemarie Kloosterman, *Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1902-1942* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990).

important way, with the issues of Egyptian feminists' involvement in the international organizations.<sup>12</sup>

Or national participation from a kind of international or transnational perspective. Antoinette Burton has written about the British women's suffrage movement in connection with the Indian women's suffrage movement, and then gone on to write about other kinds of connections between Indian and British women.<sup>13</sup>

There are also some biographies of women involved in the international women's movement. There's a book about Ransom-Kuti in Nigeria, Mineke Bosch has a new biography only in Dutch at this point of Aletta Jacobs, a very important Dutch feminist involved in the international movement. Then there are comparative histories and actually Ellen's work on suffrage, I would put both in that category and she's looking at the international organizations but really trying to look at suffrage as a transnational phenomenon. And I think that's really important work.<sup>14</sup>

There are also studies of feminist thought in cross-national interaction, so comparative or regional or even broader histories of feminist ideologies. And then there are comparative histories of such things as maternalism, protective legislation -- some work, although this is another direction I think we need to have more on, the trafficking [of] women, for example, that look at things cross-nationally.

So that's kind of what we do know and I've kind of made it sound like a lot but there isn't really that much. It's still a very limited amount of literature that we have, so I think that there's quite a lot that we need to know. We need to know a lot more outside the transatlantic world, and of course one of the problems that we encounter are the problems of languages, of sources, of getting to sources. And so that makes it somewhat difficult. I have a student who wrote her dissertation on interactions between Western and Middle Eastern women in the international women's movement and she learned French and Arabic to do the study, and obviously it took a pretty long time. But that's the kind of work that we really need, where we're really moving outside that Euro-American world.<sup>15</sup>

We also need to know a lot about other kinds of organizations. And I have to say that my focus does tend to be on the organizing rather than sort of transnational feminist thought. But for example, there's a very interesting organization called the Women's International Democratic Federation, which was founded out of the leftist French resistance movement after the Second World War and became a really a Soviet-dominated organization, technically, although I think the women involved in it had their own agendas. It became -- it still is actually, I think -- the largest international women's organization in the world and I one time thought I was going to write a book about this, called *The Women's Cold War*, because what happened is it really competed with the traditional women's organizations around organizing in the third world, and

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<sup>12</sup> Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and nation: Gender and the making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997). Ellen Carol DuBois, "Woman Suffrage around the World: Three Phases of Suffragist Internationalism," in *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, edited by Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, 252-74 (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Charlotte Weber, "Making Common Cause? Western and Middle Eastern Feminists in the International Women's Movement, 1911-1948," Ohio State University diss., 2003.

so a lot of the third world countries belonged to and participated in the Women's International Democratic Federation. We know almost nothing about it. And again there are some language issues involved in that but the archives, as far as I know, they were in East Germany -- they're in Berlin -- and it's an absolutely wonderful topic.

There's also an organization that was founded in the early 20th century called the International Council of Women of the Darker Races, which was founded by African American women and attempted to bring together all women of color throughout the globe. It didn't really take off but there were some conferences in the Caribbean that did have some kinds of interactions and again we know very, very little about it.

And then about socialist women's organizations, we don't know very much about those at all. We also need a history of women's activism in the United Nations. We know very little about how what was going on before the Second World War fed into what was going on after. And where all of this came from. There's a whole history there, I think, that we need to know and I think we really need to know contemporary transnational feminism, which everyone has been talking about in very interesting ways, what kind of connections there are to earlier forms of activism.

And one of the things that Ellen has written about, and I've commented on as well, is how when we look at the women's movement or women's movements transnationally, when we look at suffrage transnationally, you have to rethink the whole question of waves. Not so much that there are waves, but that the waves are not all happening at the same time in the same place. So what struck me in the organizations that I looked at is that in the period that we think of as the decline of feminism in Europe and the United States, after 1920, that's when feminism and the women's movement is taking off all over the world. So, we really have to think about those kinds of issues.

The second question about methodology and approach -- I always think about one of my very stodgy colleagues at Ohio State who always told graduate students when they were asked about their methodology to write, "I used the standard historical methodology." [laughter] Because in fact we never talk about it in history, we just go to archives, we read documents and we don't really think about what it is that we're doing.

But the one thing I want to say about that is that it seems to me that there are two very different approaches to looking at transnational feminism historically. One is to do original archival research, which I think is very important and we need a lot more of but that obviously and immediately limits the scope of what you can do. You cannot go to every archive in every country in the world to study everything that ever happened. So even, for example, my own work where I was looking at these organizations I used the organization documents but they still tended to be pretty dominated by certain kinds of countries and then to get more stuff I went to places like Paris, Berlin and Amsterdam where I could read the languages that were going to be in the archives. So I tried to get a perspective on things but we're still missing what was going on from countries that were not either as integrally involved in those organizations or countries where people were corresponding with people in other countries not in one of the official languages, which were always English, French and German.

So that's one kind of strategy. And the other is to do syntheses of existing secondary works, which also requires language competence because if we only read things in one language then we won't necessarily get everything. But that's another approach that I think is possible because there's a lot of good work out there in national organizations and we could kind of bring those all

together. And what all this makes me think of is how much more we should be thinking about collaborative projects -- organizing people in all different countries to be focusing on a particular topic, a particular organization and I'd love to see something like the feminist response to the trafficking of women that starts in the League of Nations in 1920s from really multiple national perspectives. So that's one question.

The question of how the field of history deals with intersectionality -- I think what's really important is to be aware of the way that transnational organizing was exclusionary, often involuntarily exclusionary. So the ways that decisions were made about organizing, the obvious one is always, and this is still true, if you have to travel to go to conferences to be a part of a network or an organization, you have to have resources. What was true for the organizations I studied, you either had to be wealthy or you had to be such a prominent worker if you didn't have the resources yourself, in your national organization that somebody else would pay for you to go. So the question of finances is an obvious one, but then of course there are a million other ways that organizations are exclusionary.

I think its important to be aware of that and of the way that global power relations and now, in the contemporary context, the phenomenon of globalization has an impact on feminism and women's movements. And so I think those are the most important things to think about.

In terms of the relationship between scholarship and contemporary transnational women's movements, it seems really clear to me that the flow in terms of history is from contemporary movements to the scholarship. That people wouldn't even be really interested in the topic if we didn't have contemporary transnational feminism. That it's what makes us think about the topic, it's what makes us think about the pitfalls and the problems and I think that's really important. Whether there's a return flow is kind of an interesting question. I brought this from the International Alliance of Women, which started as the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, and they had their 100th anniversary in 2004 and the Dutch secretary sent me this anniversary edition that they put together on the whole history of the organization because she read my book, which I thought that is so exciting, that somebody who's still involved in this organization. So I don't know whether there's a flow back but I hope that there is.

I guess the thing that I think history has the potential to contribute is that by studying the past of transnational organizing, it's very clear about the pitfalls. It's very clear about the ways that women from the Euro-American world practice what I call feminist Orientalism, and I mean that not just in terms of the Middle East or Orientalism in a narrow sense, but really in a very broad sense in terms of the way that they thought about the world. The way that they constructed organizations that involuntarily excluded a lot of women, the notion of feminist imperialism in terms of both thinking and practice. So those are the pitfalls. The question that remains for me is whether we have answers to those, whether looking at the pitfalls, looking at the problems, and looking at the possibilities gives us answers for how to organize better. [applause]

## **Ellen DuBois**

Well, I just want to say, I think many of my premises were wrong but somehow the effect was fabulous. I think these premises about disciplinary distinctions -- I think everybody brought a different perspective but the perspectives are related to each other and it's clear that the discussion that we have is through our capacity to draw on different traditions and bring them together in an interdisciplinary practice. We have about a half an hour left, certainly before Nayareh has to leave, so I want to suggest a slightly altered way to go ahead. I want to give the

participants a chance to respond, if they'd like, to each other, and then go to the audience. So, does anybody have something -- ok they have nothing to say? [laughter] Ok.

**Blackwell** I might have something to say in a minute.

**DuBois** So I think we'll open it up ---- so who's ready to plunge in? I can see that nothing that anybody said stimulated any thoughts.

**Q** The question that I was thinking about, and I want to thank you all for participating -- it's such a beautiful day, there's all sorts of things you could do outside -- but I was glad to hear the word inductive, that is you start from the movement and then go to the theory because that's sort of my theoretical orientation and therefore what happens is you then demystify some of the things for women on the ground, which is what I would like to do. At any rate, one of the things I couldn't quite figure out, and perhaps you can help me with this, I remember hearing that the work I was doing, which had to do with violence against women, was not important for women in the South, that this was a bourgeois American thing. And then I wasn't sure -- what did I know? I thought, maybe they're right? So I went to an enquentro in Buenos Aires -- I don't know how long ago, but some time ago, and all they were talking about, on all the bulletin boards and stuff, was battering. So the question is -- this seems almost like a universal, that wherever you go, women are concerned with certain forms of violence, particularly battering -- how would that work out into what I've been hearing here?

**DuBois** That was Pauline Bart, and from now on I'm going to ask you to say your name. Kathy?

**Q** I'm Kathy Sheldon and my own work is on African women's history, so I wanted to actually not have a question but add a couple of comments about African stuff, which was, except for a couple of comments from Leila was really absent from this discussion, and think that's a shame really. One thing I appreciate is that Maylei commented about the growing intersection between Latin American studies and Chicano studies and I think that African studies has had a very different trajectory, that pan-Africanism has been a major factor in both African studies and African American studies and the cross fertilization has been really important, including for women. I think that's one example that can be seen having a much longer history, perhaps, of this kind of going back and forth between North America and other parts of the world. I'm never sure what to say -- third world, developing world -- you know how these terms are not right anymore but we haven't really found a good one to replace them.

I wanted to mention that there's a very good book out -- this a different topic slightly, but still in Africa. Margaret Snyder and Mary Tadesse have written a book about the women's movements within the UN in Africa. So it's looking at what Leila was saying is missing, this study of women in the UN. It's a very good book but it really just focuses on African UN women's stuff.<sup>16</sup>

**DuBois** This is reminding me -- we're going to compile a bibliography and put it on the web.

**Sheldon:** And then I just had to personally respond to Leila's comment that as historians we don't look at methodology, because I just got a book this week that I have a contribution in. It's a book of methodology and African history. It's a huge book -- it's got about twenty essays -- but my essay is specifically on writing about women in African history and it looks specifically at the

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<sup>16</sup> Margaret C. Snyder and Mary Tadesse, African Women and Development : a History (Johannesburg: Zed Books), 1995.

kinds of methodologies that we've had to use. Africa is a little bit different problem because there's such a limited set of documents. I mean going to the archives is not what we do when we're doing African women's history because there's very little there, but I have an essay in that book that talks about the kinds of methodologies that we can use to try and learn about African women, their history and social movements and all kinds of things.<sup>17</sup> So, sorry I don't have a question but I just wanted to add that because I thought it was important.

**DuBois** Others?

**Q** I just have a quick question. A few of you raised this issue, or this question around global media and global media access and I was just wondering if some of you all could speak to -- Dr. Blackwell spoke a little more directly to it -- around questions of access, questions of technology and I'm just wondering how that might inform building a transnational movement or in what ways your research has addressed that or not addressed it.

**DuBois** Ok, I think we'll stop on these three and then get another three. So, who would like to respond to any of these?

**Blackwell** Concerning the question about violence against women, there's been research by two political scientists, Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, and their book is called *Activists Beyond Borders*.<sup>18</sup> They map out how the international women's movement has used what they call frame alignment around human rights discourse, to align all these struggles for violence against women. So, all kinds of battering, rape, militarization -- I mean, every kind of violence you can think of around the framing of international human rights. And so they have a pretty rich chapter on its pitfalls and its successes and how it's been aligned really well to create an international movement, or at least an international framework in which people can talk about the multiple forms of violence that women face in a shared conversation. Part of what I was saying in my talk is trying to pay attention to the way movement activists are revitalizing and co-opting and reworking discourses like human rights and navigating the complex structures of the UN and making them their own. Because they could be this abstract set of rights, but it's how people are actually utilizing them and creating them as a norm -- and sometimes it backfires. Sometimes in local communities it's like, "Well that's a foreign idea," so sometimes it doesn't work. But in a certain way it has at least created a global framework in which to have a conversation about violence against women.

**Tohidi** I totally agree with Maylei about this and about the importance of human rights framework. In many countries we don't have that luxury of even looking at the shortcomings of the human rights framework. That's the only thing that internationally we have there to use, to build coalitions around. And violence is an issue that, at least as far as women in the Middle East are concerned, is a subject that is the most unifying issue, around which most coalitions that I know of have been built. In Iran, for example, it is a less politicized issue. Something that is not as politically dangerous to address. They don't necessarily address state violence, although they talk about it, but Iran's violence, domestic violence, all sorts of violence -- and they use also the UN definition of violence, which is still useful -- and they make coalitions. The first open rather massive demonstration that happened last year in Tehran during International Women's Day was about violence against women, although that demonstration itself was violated. It was attacked by some vigilantes. But they have realized and there has been debates

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<sup>17</sup> John Edward Philips, ed., *What is African history?* Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> *Activists beyond Borders : Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

that that is the most important and less politicized -- that we can agree on and can build coalition, not only at the local level, but also at national and international, transnational levels.

**Rupp** I just wanted to say that the issue of violence was one that the international women's organizations dealt with in the early 20th century, and they actually saw it as one of the kind of bonds of womanhood, as they would have put it. That they saw this as something that women experienced in different contexts. At the same time, I think a lot of the kinds of reactions that you're describing -- you can see the ardency of that as well because it was an issue very fraught with nationalism and racism so that it depended, especially the question of rape in wartime, could be used in very nationalist ways, was used in very racist ways. That was a real issue for the organization.

**Peterson** Let me start by saying something about the Africa thing and then something about the violence thing. I think it's a very interesting point and I don't know how to generalize for this, but if you look particularly at the post-UN, post-45 period, we use global as if it's a monolithic thing. But different parts of the world come into discourse about women's issues at different times under different rubrics. So in the 1960s, when the name of the game is international development, which is something that's completely flooded with Cold War stuff going on and which is particularly embedded in the United Nations context, Africa was where it was at. The Commission on the Status of Women concentrated on Africa. Now it seems to me in the age of globalization, and particularly post-Cold War, it seems to me that first Asia came into view with this sort of development of particularly Southeast Asian economies. And then, of course, the Middle East has come into view in the in the 21st century. So I do think that different parts of the world draw attention at different times in different historical contexts and in different international political discourses. So we have to sort of read through those in order to be able to make all of these things talk to each other. It is . Let me just leave it at that.

**Tohidi** On the one hand, you know the global media has been helping the cause of women and feminists, and expansion of feminist discourse and feminist consciousness. But on the other hand, because it has been controlled, almost monopolized by western powers, it is always a source of suspicion and not very reliable source. Sometimes it induces or produces backlash rather than helping. There are attempts to create alternative media. There is increasing effort in this regard -- I'm not talking about medium like al-Jazeera that have been created in the Middle East, for example -- but I'm talking about women who are trying to create alternative media. There's a growing number of bloggers, Internet journalism in different languages. Interestingly, in a country like Iran which has a very repressive government and also an Islamist one, proportionally speaking Iranians are using weblog and the Internet extensively -- I think they are either the third or fourth one in the world -- there has been a huge emergence of interest in weblogging, as if the Internet has become the space for communication, for free exchanges of ideas and also for self expression. If you read some of these weblogs, you see how free they are and how intimate and how they are redefining, for example, sexuality. They talk about everything, and how personal they are. There are all sorts of weblogs and Internet journals which are just opposite to what the Islamic ideology was trying to construct about womanhood and manhood and the sexual relationship and sexuality. So that's why media is very important but unfortunately, because of too much -- how you can say that -- "mediation" of struggles, those struggles that get international, global media attention gain precedence and privilege over the ones we don't hear about. So we keep hearing about terrorism, about all the negative aspect of what's going on in Third-world countries, but we rarely hear about the important, local struggles that are taking place, which will hopefully and are more likely to result in profound changes from below and bottom-up democratization . We don't hear much about them because they don't get the global media attention. So that is the dilemma. Those very

sensational stories get the global media attention, but not the one that you need to be patient about. They are not very sexy or sensational.

**Rupp** I think just to add to that that maybe it's important in trying to walk through the question, the implication that distinguish between media -- in which case I think many of us assume we're talking television and the kind of public media that are very much controlled and dominated not just by the West but by elite interests as in reflect in corporate capitalist, patriarchal and western imperialists. It's not all of the rest really. Right now it's pretty much the United States imperialist project that is determining a militaristic, anti-terrorism rhetoric that you hear. So there's the media and their control domination by particular interests that are the intersection of a variety of hierarchies, and then there are the technology -- as in the Net, which is a much different situation in regard to the political economy of it. So in so far as the Internet still reproduces the differential access that is reflected in, you have to have a computer or you have to have electricity, or if you don't, then it reproduces those particular class in geopolitical dynamics and gender ones as well. But there is some difference between who controls what's being mediated, publicized, and who has access to communication more generally, which clearly affects movements.

**Blackwell** Well, I just wanted to comment on the media question really quick. I think actually that media and culture is really, really critical to transnational flows and transnational feminism because it's providing alternative ways of hooking in. You'll see, as much as the U.S. is a cultural imperialist dominant world megaforce in bad ways, it's interesting that you'll see Palestinian hip-hop, hip-hop from South Africa, feminist hip-hop from all over the globe. So that people actually -- and this is a more cultural studies approach -- take those cultural flows and rework them and then put them back out. It's important to think about how people do that and rework film genres and cultural flows and there is an alternative media, an alternative cultural movement. And then some of the stuff around gay and lesbian organizing is real important exchanges between the Chicana lesbian feminists and Mexican lesbian feminists on digital artist, Internet work -- you know, it's happening. And then the unevenness is an important thing - - not just about technology but about the means and modes of representation. So I always tell my students, because they have this idea that the Zapatistas were this post-modern revolution in indigenous folks who are in the highlands typing away on the Internet [laughter] -- or the intergalactic network as it was called -- but that's a solidarity effort, that that whole Zapatista thing was around solidarity work. But even having said that there are uneven flows of access to the Net and technology, I work with indigenous women organizers who organize in the highland and come into small towns where there's one phone there. And they'll get online to send you an email. So even as hard as it is to have access, people do realize that email and Internet are essential tools for organizing.

**DuBois** More questions]

**Q** Hi, I'm Sondra Hale, anthropology and women's studies. First I think, great panel, so I thank the five of you. Well, I don't know how to ask this question, but I'm really troubled about the critique of international feminism, post-colonial studies and so on, being partially responsible or attempting to or resulting in the erasure of women of color feminist theories and activism. But I'd like to be able to account for more than we have. I mean, Maylei goes some direction and being able to describe it for us and analyze it and so on, but I'm trying to look at some of the causes, especially considering that many of the global south theorists -- they're women of color also. So what are we seeing? Are we seeing a class issue? Are we seeing an international class issue? Say, if we look at the class of the subaltern theorists, or we look at the class of the post-colonial discourse theorists, certainly we're dealing with upper-class academics, but is this the entire

explanation or is there something peculiar going on in this country with regard to the way in which abstract theories, in fact, lose people on an everyday basis and lose the politics of everyday life?

**Q** Kelly Lytle Hernandez, department of history. Spike, I was really taken by your idea of feminization as denigration and a move away from embodied identity as a gender. I was wondering if you can tell us if that was bubbling up from what's happening on the ground or something that you're collecting out of the scholarship.

**Q** Good afternoon. Rosios Ama... Rodriguez from Guatemala. So I apologize for my limitation, not only with the language but to transmit my ideas properly. My congratulations to all of you for the activity and for the panel. Secondly, because of the background I come from, so-called third world or developing country, I am very concerned about how you are approaching the oppression and discrimination that women face due to gender, ethnic and economic structure. Thank you.

**Q** Hello, my name is Richard Rish.... I'm a psychology major, third year. I have a question you might have addressed recently in the past few questions, but I'll just ask it again and see if you can add something to that. I was wondering about what are the best countries in the world you could look at for feminism succeeding, and what are the worst countries in the world, like Iran, Asia or Africa. What could be done, like changing them into democracies or the Internet or hip hop, or what positive social events in the country ...[inaudible] What kind of positive things could do to help where women are getting mutilated or whatever in countries, and things like that? And also focus some of the positive things that are happening with women in the world. Thank you.

**Peterson** Kelly is it? Thank you very much for your point. Basically it seems to me, in trying to be one among a number of people trying to draw some productive linkages and connections between the issues of intersectionality, how to see in more complex ways and especially how to bridge the gap that keeps returning of theory and practice, or discursive cultural phenomena and manifestations or the social science/humanities thing, all of those divides. That feminization is denigration affords one possible way to do that because it just opens up so many possible ways of thinking about economic devalorization, the devalorization of women's bodies and not just women's bodies, but gay men's bodies and migrant bodies and all of those who are denigrated, devalued, trivialized, rendered exploitable, devalued and rendered 'dispensable' by their association with feminine characteristics. So it's at one level simplistic, and it's just a particular leverage point that I've tried to pursue as I've said, particularly because it's easy enough to do when you're dealing with economic issues. It plays out so obviously in regards to who we do not pay or take seriously as workers and what kind of work do we value. It also feminizes work. So it works for me and I just offer it as a larger rubric and how well it works for others, we'll have to see. I'll be happy to talk to you later about it.

**Blackwell** I want to speak to Sondra's question. And it's not so much a critique of post-colonial theorists as a critique of how we are using post-colonial theory and transnational feminism without putting it into conversation with the ways transnationalism operates in the West. So this is more an internal conversation about our disciplines and our fields because that's how the questions were framed, more than the theorists themselves. Because my problem isn't really around the theorists -- the dichotomies between theory and practice are important to raise and bring up, but mostly it's having some awareness and thoughtfulness about how we might be reinscribing things that we worked really hard as a field to overcome. And so thinking about how that works -- and it speaks to your question as well about how are we account for the

oppression of women on economic, class and gender levels. Am I answering your question? I'm trying to. But just keeping those things in very much tension -- and conversation is a productive tension -- I wrote this article with Nadine Naber about the UN World Conference Against Racism and it was about the concept of intersectionality in global work, in transnational work.<sup>19</sup> It's an important thing because even concepts that women of color created in the U.S. don't necessarily translate internationally. So we are also situated actors, but how do we keep different kinds of conversation on board? Because sometimes I notice in women's curriculum we are like the 'exotic others.' We are more interested in that, in the far away others, not the domestic others here that we actually have to deal with who are mowing our lawns and cooking our dinners, or you know, that kind of stuff. So how do we merge those -- I think is a political project. How do we merge those forms of solidarity, those forms of intellectual production, those theoretical and intellectual and material conversations together?

**DuBois** I'm going to use this -- because Nayereh has to jump up and I don't want her to leave without us thanking her along with everyone else, and I'm going to say, obviously we have so much more to talk about. More to come, and I want to thank everyone, audience and participants. So thank you.

[applause]

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<sup>19</sup> Intersectionality in an Era of Globalization: The Implications of the UN World Conference Against Racism for Transnational Feminist Practices." Primary author written with Nadine Naber. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, Volume 2, Number 2 (2002): 237-248