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Introduction to Feminist Concepts and Issues

By Anne Donadey

Contents

Original publication details: 1.1 Sandra Cisneros, "My Name" from *The House on Mango Street*, pp. 10–11. New York: Vintage, 1991. © 1984 by Sandra Cisneros. Reproduced with permission of Susan Bergholz Literary Services and Bloomsbury Publishing plc. 1.2 Jacinta Bunnell and Nat Kusinitz, "The new pronoun they invented suited everyone just fine" from *Sometimes the Spoon Runs Away with Another Spoon Coloring Book*, words by Jacinta Bunnell, pictures by Nat Kusinitz. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010. Reproduced with permission of PM Press. 1.3 Marilyn Frye, "Oppression" from *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, pp. 1–7. Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983. Reproduced with permission of Marilyn Frye. 1.4 Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" from *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, pp. 114–23. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984. Reproduced with permission of Abner Stein Agency. 1.5 Alice Walker, "Womanist" from *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, pp. xi–xii. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983. 1.6 Michael S. Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity" from *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman; pp. 124–26; 131–41. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994. Reproduced with permission of Sage Publications, Inc. *(continued on page 2)*

Women in Culture: An Intersectional Anthology for Gender and Women's Studies, Second Edition.
Edited by Bonnie Kime Scott, Susan E. Cayleff, Anne Donadey, and Irene Lara.

Feminism has many different definitions and facets. A popular definition of feminism is "the radical notion that women are people." The *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines it as "1: the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes; 2: organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests." Feminism thus includes both scholarship and activism. African American public intellectual bell hooks takes issue with a narrow definition of feminism that focuses only on seeking equality with men. She importantly asks, to *which* men do *which* women seek to be equal, given that not all men are equal? She highlights the extent to which this narrow definition of feminism only focuses on gender issues and therefore applies best to the situation of white, middle-class women. She goes on to redefine feminism more broadly and radically: "Feminism as a movement to end sexist oppression directs our attention to systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression" ("Feminism" 31). The most complete definition of feminism is probably that of Black lesbian writer-activist Barbara Smith: "Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free *all* women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old women – as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women. Anything less than this vision of total freedom is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement" (25).

Intersectional Feminism

Smith's and hooks's definitions are intersectional, a term that means that they do not only focus on one issue such as gender but broaden the analysis to encompass other vectors of identity and of human domination such as race and racism, social class and classism, sexual orientation, colonialism and imperialism, disability, national origin, religion, and age. This wide-ranging approach, which has created a paradigm shift in Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies, and other fields, has come to be known as intersectionality (Crenshaw) but is also variously termed "Black feminist thought" (Collins), "multiracial feminism" (Zinn and Dill), "multicultural feminism" (Shohat), "US Third-World feminism"

Original publication details: 1.7 Kate Bornstein, "Abandon Your Tedious Search: The Rulebook Has Been Found!" from *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*, pp. 45–52. New York: Routledge, 1994. Reproduced with permission of Taylor & Francis Group LLC. 1.8 Rosemary Marangoly George, "Feminists Theorize Colonial/Postcolonial" from *Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney, pp. 211–16; 220–23, 227–31. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Reproduced with permission of Cambridge University Press.

(Sandoval), "multiple consciousness" (King), and multi-axial approach (Brah 189). Intersectionality can be traced back to African American activist-intellectuals Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper in the nineteenth century. While others had also made connections between some issues such as gender and class, gender and sexual orientation, race and class, or race and colonialism, the focus on race, class, gender, and sexual orientation as profoundly interwoven and interlocking vectors is an original contribution to scholarship by 1970s and 1980s US feminists of color.[1] They theorized the interrelatedness of race, gender, and imperialism (e.g., Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez in 1972; Mitsuye Yamada in 1981); race, gender, and class (e.g., Angela Davis in 1981); race, gender, class, and sexual orientation (e.g., the Combahee River Collective in 1977; Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in 1981; Audre Lorde; and Adrienne Rich); colonialism, race, class, and gender (e.g., Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1985). Starting around the 1990s, scholars from various countries addressing the intersections among gender, race, and nationalism (e.g., Ella Shohat; Deniz Kandiyoti; Floya Anthias; and Nira Yuval-Davis) and among disability and other vectors such as gender (e.g., Susan Wendell) and gender, race, and class (e.g., Rosemarie Garland Thomson and Jenny Morris) have made important additions to this scholarship. By the year 2000, gender identity had been added as a key factor that LGBTQQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex) activists urged must be considered in discussions of oppression and identity. This is explored in this chapter and in Chapter 5. A central lesson feminists have learned through debates between single-focus and intersectional approaches is that our standpoint (our worldview, the ways in which we make sense of our life experiences and of the world around us) is influenced by our social location (the time and place in which we live and the information to which we have access, as well as the social categories or groups to which we are perceived as belonging).

The readings in this introductory section illustrate some of the main issues discussed above. Chicana creative writer Sandra Cisneros's chapter, "My Name," from her acclaimed novel *The House on Mango Street*, first published in 1984, opens the anthology. The character of young Esperanza shares her standpoint with readers with respect to the difficulties of having multiple identities in a world that fragments you because it expects you to be only one thing. Bilingual and bicultural, Esperanza struggles to find her place. Her first name, Spanish for hope, is also related to the verb *esperar*, to wait. This double meaning reflects her sense of double belonging – being between Anglo and Latino cultures – and her hope for a better future for women. Her sense of connection to the strong woman in her lineage after whom she was named makes her reflect on the dual meaning of her name – both hope and waiting, a metaphor for the need to be able to fit in your lineage and cultures without letting them completely determine your identity or your place in society. Her attentiveness to various levels of linguistic meaning reflects her awareness of the different value associated with Anglo and Latino cultures in the United States – her "silver"-sounding name in Spanish sounds like "tin," a much less valued metal, in English.

In her book *The Politics of Reality* (1983), from which a portion of the chapter on "Oppression" is excerpted here, white lesbian feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye provides a critical definition of oppression as "a system of interrelated barriers and forces which

reduce, immobilize and mold people who belong to a certain group, and effect their subordination to another group" (33). Oppression is a system that unfairly targets certain people based on their perceived group membership (for example their perceived race, gender, social class, or sexual orientation), rather than judging them on their individual characteristics (7–8). It includes specific unpaid or poorly paid functions that members of the oppressed group are expected to provide to members of the dominant group. Frye gives the example of women being expected to provide service work of a personal, sexual, and emotional nature for men (9). She highlights the fact that oppression is made to appear natural so oppressed people internalize it through socialization (33–34). Internalized oppression leads people who are the target of one form of oppression to believe the negative messages against their groups and sometimes to end up acting against their own self-interests. Conversely, internalized domination leads members of a dominant group to believe that they are naturally entitled to a superior status and to the advantages derived from that status. It thus serves to hide the existence of dominant group privilege (see Adams, Bell, and Griffin).

Afro-Caribbean lesbian writer Audre Lorde's essay "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" (1984) develops central concepts for wide-ranging feminist social justice projects: the dangers of a world view that arranges perceived group differences into hierarchical binary oppositions such as male/female, white/black, mind/body, self/other, or culture/nature[2]; the ways in which various forms of oppression are structured similarly to create a norm that is seen as superior (the "mythical norm"); the need to recognize each other's oppression and resistance ("the edge of each other's battles"); the need to learn from histories of oppression and resistance so we do not have to reinvent the wheel generation after generation; and the need for intersectional activist approaches so that an inclusive feminist agenda does not solely focus on gender issues but includes a commitment to fighting for racial and economic justice and against heterosexism (the primacy of heterosexuality) and ageism (privileging adults versus older people and children). In beautifully evocative language, Lorde invites us to imagine "patterns for relating across our human differences as equals," a project that is as central to a socially just future today as it was in the early 1980s when she first articulated it. For instance, pretending to be color-blind and to not "see" differences (especially racial ones) only leads us to conceptualize equality in terms of sameness and to feel guilty over noticing differences, thus resulting in avoidance of the topic and immobilization rather than social justice activism. The ideology of color-blindness implies that difference is bad and that it is therefore impolite to notice or dialogue about differences. More problematically, it encourages the denial of racism (Frankenberg) and of the existence of power differences between groups, makes racism a taboo topic, and signals that people of color are expected to act white and assimilate (Sue). Instead, Lorde invites us to explore differences and create new ways of working together as *equals through differences*.

Because feminists active in the movement have tended to be the ones with more access to financial resources, time, and education, the leadership of the movement has historically tended to be primarily white, middle/upper-class, and heterosexual. Debates over whether feminism should focus on gender issues narrowly defined or should adopt a broader, intersectional focus have to do in great part with who sets the agenda and

what issues are primary in their lives. As a result, issues of importance to women of color, working-class women, women with disabilities, indigenous women, and lesbians or queer people have historically not been fully included in feminist agendas. While many feminists of color focused on redefining feminism more broadly, as explained above, some selected a different term altogether to reflect their intersectional approaches in reaction against mainstream feminism's inability to fully include race issues in the 1970s and early 1980s. In her book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), African American novelist Alice Walker famously coined the adjective "womanist" and created a definition of the term that mimics the standard format of a dictionary definition. Her definition is purposefully grounded in African American vernacular language, history, and culture and progressively broadens to include lesbian existence, female solidarity, and men, culminating in a holistic and spiritual view of feminism based on love. It is to be noted that while many critics refer to Walker's concept as womanism, Walker herself only coined the adjective womanist – presumably seeking to create an intersectional approach that many could identify with rather than trying to impose a new doctrine or movement.

Feminists of color have disagreed with some white radical feminists and lesbian separatist feminists who called for women to separate from men as a solution to sexist oppression and male domination. While feminists such as hooks, Lorde, Walker, Martinez, and others have taken men from their own cultural backgrounds to task for engaging in sexist oppression, they also insist that these men are their allies in the fight against racism and white supremacy. As early as 1972, Martinez insisted that Latinas "have the right to expect that our most enlightened men will join in the fight against sexism; it should not be our battle alone" (33). Lorde also powerfully reminds white feminists that female cross-racial solidarity is not a given but something that must be achieved through recognition of the different issues with which various women struggle: "Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying."

In "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity" (1994), white sociologist Michael S. Kimmel picks up on Lorde's concept of the mythical norm. The gender-based mythical norm is often referred to as "hegemonic masculinity" (a term coined by R. W. Connell and various collaborators), which Kimmel defines as the masculinity of those who have power in society. As Lorde described hierarchical binary oppositions, Kimmel shows that hegemonic masculinity defines itself in opposition to anything feminine and teaches men that the only emotion appropriate for them to display is aggression (Frye similarly refers to anger, *Politics* 14), which leads to violence (see Chapter 8). Since men are not supposed to be feminine, they are encouraged to look down upon women, distance themselves from men who are perceived as being gay, and attack the masculinity of men who have less power in the culture, such as men of color. Kimmel shows how homophobia, sexism, and racism can be wielded by men to defend their own sense of masculinity. Lorde's insight that the "mythical norm" is set up in such a way that very few people can feel that they are a part of it and Frye's distinction between oppression and suffering can help explain what

Kimmel describes as a major "paradox in men's lives, a paradox in which men [as a group] have virtually all the power and yet do not feel [individually] powerful," thus leading yet again to frustration and anger.

In an essay that is widely available online, white anti-racist feminist activist Peggy McIntosh makes a similar point with respect to white people and race, claiming that "whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege." Internalized domination serves to hide the existence of dominant group privilege. McIntosh points out that it is easier for people in general to see the ways in which we are oppressed than it is to recognize ways in which we are privileged. Privilege is the flip side of oppression, and she challenges white readers to become more aware of the ways in which whiteness functions as a mythical norm granting whites "unearned privileges." A dominant upbringing systematically trains white people to become blind to white privilege or to see it as a natural entitlement, and McIntosh provides many daily examples of how white privilege functions for individuals in society. By focusing on men and white people, Kimmel and McIntosh demonstrate that analyses of oppression can yield important insights into the role that privilege and internalized domination play in the maintenance of structures of oppression, as well as open up avenues for self-awareness and social change through alliance politics.

Redefinitions of Gender

As scholars have widened the purview of feminism from a single-minded focus on gender to intersectional approaches, they have also refined and redefined what we mean by gender and women in significant ways. Whereas the generic definitions of sex and gender are that sex refers to the biological sexual characteristics with which one is born and gender to social constructions of sex, feminists such as anthropologist of sexuality Gayle Rubin have complicated our understandings of the relationship between the two terms. For Rubin, the "sex/gender system" is "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity" (159). This definition acknowledges that sex and gender cannot be easily pulled apart along the lines of nature versus culture but that they constantly interface with one another. This redefinition is important because women's oppression is often justified with reference to female biology (the ideas that women bear children and are supposedly more emotional and naturally inclined to raise children and to work out of love – that is, for free). White postmodernist feminist and queer studies scholar Judith Butler reverses the biological justifications for women's secondary status by claiming that since we can only conceive of sexual difference through our cultural understandings of it as male and female, "perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender" and sex turns out "to have been gender all along" (7, 8). In "Abandon Your Tedious Search: The Rulebook Has Been Found!" (1994), white transgender intellectual, activist, and performance artist Kate Bornstein participates in this debate by deconstructing the "rules of gender," our society's expectation of rigid distinctions between males and females. Through the use of analysis, personal examples, and humor, she demonstrates that these supposedly natural

rules are in fact constructions that contribute to marginalizing gender-nonconforming people. The binary opposition between male and female obscures the existence of people who do not fit into either category: intersex people (who are born with some male and female physical sexual characteristics) and transgender people (people whose gender identity – that is, their personal and psychological sense of being male or female or on a continuum – is at odds with their sex assigned at birth, or people whose gender identity does not fit easily into the male/female, heterosexual/homosexual binary). Sometimes the terms trans*, transgender, and queer are used interchangeably. For transgender persons, being referred to as one's gender of choice – signified by correct and preferred name and pronouns – is a major issue in the struggle for respectful recognition. Feminists have long fought for gender-inclusive language (e.g., firefighter instead of fireman, mail carrier for mailman, or staffing the desk instead of manning the desk). Transgender activists have coined gender-neutral pronouns such as "ze" and "hir" (Bornstein, *My Gender Workbook* 36); others use they/them/theirs to refer to one person. Children's coloring book authors Jacinta Bunnell and Nat Kusinitz's thoughtful cartoon "The New Pronoun They Invented Suited Everyone Just Fine" (2010) illustrates this issue and encourages us to be creative in modifying language to reflect more inclusive ways of perceiving identities for future generations. Chapter 5, on sexualities and genders, develops these issues at greater length.

Postcolonial and Transnational Feminisms

As feminists from various locations have developed intersectional definitions of oppression and feminism, they have also focused on strategies of resistance to oppression and on the importance of women's agency (the awareness that women are not just oppressed and victimized but that they also find ways, both large and small, of setting their own course and making their own decisions even in contexts in which they have very limited options). Even in situations of oppression that are marked by what Frye calls the double bind – the absence of viable choices – it is important to recognize that people still manage to exert some amount of agency and should not only be seen as disempowered victims. For instance, Cisneros ends her chapter with her protagonist selecting a new, mysterious name full of promise for herself. Walker highlights a history of African American women's organized resistance to slavery, referencing Harriet Tubman's participation in the Underground Railroad.

Feminists focusing on the lives of women in colonized parts of the world have similarly insisted on the importance of acknowledging the agency and resistance of women to three specific forms of oppression. The first form of oppression is created by colonialism and imperialism, which rely on a discourse of Third World women as victims of their own cultures and religions to justify military intervention, conquest, and the exploitation of natural resources and human labor in the colonies. The second one comes from masculinist (male-dominated) nationalist resistance to colonialism that equates liberation from colonial domination with regaining manhood (which entails keeping women in secondary positions – see hooks, "Reflections"). The third difficulty originates

with Western feminists who, when they only focus on gender issues, ignore the detrimental impact that their own colonizing governments have had on women from colonized countries and may end up reinforcing colonial oppression under the guise of so-called feminist sisterhood. In "Feminists Theorize Colonial/Postcolonial" (2006), Indian postcolonial feminist scholar Rosemary Marangoly George clarifies the central contribution of postcolonial feminist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to the field. Spivak explained that between the colonialist discourse of "white men saving brown women from brown men" and the male "nativist" (nationalist) argument that local women who conform to oppressive cultural or religious practices are doing so entirely of their own free will, there is almost no space for local women to express their concerns in ways that will actually be heard on their own merits as opposed to being coopted, reframed, and manipulated by either side. The problems are compounded when Western feminists exhibit colonialist attitudes and start acting as "white women saving brown women from brown men." In that difficult context, postcolonial/Third World/transnational feminists are often attacked and dismissed in their own countries as being Westernized and inauthentic representatives of their cultures by a masculinist leadership that does not want to question male privilege (see also Narayan). In the West, their critiques of Western colonial practices and discourses often go unheard, and their complex feminist positions are simplified and used to justify a colonialist critique of their cultures or religions as being backwards and in need of Western salvation. With the renewed Islamophobia in the West after the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in New York City on September 11, 2001, and the state of permanent warfare in which the West has been engaged ever since, creating new waves of refugee populations from the Middle East, these patterns have gained renewed centrality and call for careful analysis on the part of scholars and citizens alike.

Finally, Spivak distinguishes between two meanings of the term "representation": it can refer to political representation (gaining the right to vote, having politicians who speak for their various constituent groups) and visual or textual representation (the ways that various groups are portrayed in society through stereotypes, as well as counter-narratives and resistance to stereotypes). Women's Studies is an interdisciplinary field (it includes scholars trained in various fields, from English and Comparative Literary Studies to the Social Sciences and History, and increasingly includes researchers in the Natural Sciences). It focuses on analyzing, critiquing, and bettering women's status in society and promoting activism for social justice. In general, humanities scholars will tend to focus on issues of cultural/visual/textual representations and social science scholars on political representation and access. Both aspects of representation are important for all social justice projects and will be addressed in various chapters in the volume.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways do Cisneros's and Walker's essays demonstrate an intersectional approach? What vectors of identity are most salient for each? How are these vectors presented as interrelated?

2. Why does Frye argue against too broad a definition of oppression? What problems does she envision if oppressors can also be viewed as oppressed?
3. Explain Frye's theory of the double bind oppressed people experience. Can you think of some examples? Explain her analogy of oppression as a bird cage. What makes this analogy rhetorically effective?
4. In what ways are the poetic style used by Cisneros and Lorde and the humorous style used by Cisneros and Bornstein particularly effective to convey their message? Why and how does style give their message a more powerful punch?
5. Can you think of concrete examples of Kimmel's notion of "hegemonic masculinity" and of his idea (also evident in Bornstein's piece) that "our peers are a kind of gender police"? How can we counter these practices?
6. George explains that nineteenth-century "European texts repeatedly justified and explained colonial domination by reinforcing a series of hierarchized oppositions such as civilized/savage, modern/traditional, mature/childlike, and, most significantly, rational/irrational." Can you think of some examples that show that these patterns of colonial thinking continue today? For example, which cultures are still described in popular media as uncivilized, which religions as traditional, and which gender as irrational?
7. How do *you* define feminism? Has your definition been somewhat modified after doing the readings in this chapter? Why, or why not?

Notes

1. The terms "women of color" and "people of color" began to be used widely in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s to indicate coalitional and intersectional identities among groups facing oppressions based on race and other factors. These terms were created by people belonging to these groups and should not be confused with the earlier terms "colored women" and "colored people," which were derogatory terms used during the Jim Crow segregation era in the United States to refer to African American people. The two sets of terms are not interchangeable.
2. White feminist anthropologist Sherry Ortner argued that women are devalued in most cultures because they are seen as being closer to nature and the body and men are identified with culture and the mind, which are seen as superior values.

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1.1
My Name
Sandra Cisneros

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.

It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse – which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female – but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong.

My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it.

And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the

best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window.

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister's name – Magdalena – which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza.

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.

1.2
The New Pronoun They Invented Suited Everyone Just Fine

Jacinta Bunnell and Nat Kusinitz

The new pronoun they invented suited everyone just fine.

1.3
Oppression
Marilyn Frye

It is a fundamental claim of feminism that women are oppressed. The word "oppression" is a strong word. It repels and attracts. It is dangerous and dangerously fashionable and endangered. It is much misused, and sometimes not innocently.

The statement that women are oppressed is frequently met with the claim that men are oppressed too. We hear that oppressing is oppressive to those who oppress as well as to those they oppress. Some men cite as evidence of their oppression their much-advertised inability to cry. It is tough, we are told, to be masculine. When the stresses and frustrations of being a man are cited as evidence that oppressors are oppressed by their oppressing, the word "oppression" is being stretched to meaninglessness: it is treated as though its scope includes any and all human experience of limitation or suffering, no matter the cause, degree or consequence. Once such usage has been put over on us, then if ever we deny that any person or group is oppressed, we seem to imply that we think they never suffer and have no feelings. We are accused of insensitivity; even of bigotry. For women, such accusation is particularly intimidating, since sensitivity is one of the few virtues that has been assigned to us. If we are found insensitive, we may fear we have no redeeming traits at all and perhaps are not real women. Thus are we silenced before we begin: the name of our situation drained of meaning and our guilt mechanisms tripped.

But this is nonsense. Human beings can be miserable without being oppressed, and it is perfectly consistent to deny that a person or group is oppressed without denying that they have feelings or that they suffer …

The root of the word "oppression" is the element "press." *The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; printing press; press the button*. Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gasses or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing's motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce.

The mundane experience of the oppressed provides another clue. One of the most characteristic and ubiquitous features of the world as experienced by oppressed people is the double bind – situations in which options are reduced to a very few and all of them expose one to penalty, censure or deprivation. For example, it is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful. If we comply, we signal our docility and our acquiescence in our situation. We need not, then, be taken note of. We acquiesce in being made invisible, in our occupying no space. We participate in our own erasure. On the other hand, anything but the sunniest countenance exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous. This

means, at the least, that we may be found "difficult" or unpleasant to work with, which is enough to cost one one's livelihood; at worst, being seen as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous has been known to result in rape, arrest, beating and murder. One can only choose to risk one's preferred form and rate of annihilation.

Another example: it is common in the United States that women, especially younger women, are in a bind where neither sexual activity nor sexual inactivity is all right. If she is heterosexually active, a woman is open to censure and punishment for being loose, unprincipled or a whore. The "punishment" comes in the form of criticism, snide and embarrassing remarks, being treated as an easy lay by men, scorn from her more restrained female friends. She may have to lie and hide her behavior from her parents. She must juggle the risks of unwanted pregnancy and dangerous contraceptives. On the other hand, if she refrains from heterosexual activity, she is fairly constantly harassed by men who try to persuade her into it and pressure her to "relax" and "let her hair down"; she is threatened with labels like "frigid," "uptight," "man-hater," "bitch" and "cocktease." The same parents who would be disapproving of her sexual activity may be worried by her inactivity because it suggests she is not or will not be popular, or is not sexually normal. She may be charged with lesbianism. If a woman is raped, then if she has been heterosexually active she is subject to the presumption that she liked it (since her activity is presumed to show that she likes sex), and if she has not been heterosexually active, she is subject to the presumption that she liked it (since she is supposedly "repressed and frustrated"). Both heterosexual activity and heterosexual non-activity are likely to be taken as proof that you wanted to be raped, and hence, of course, weren't *really* raped at all. You can't win. You are caught in a bind, caught between systematically related pressures.

Women are caught like this, too, by networks of forces and barriers that expose one to penalty, loss or contempt whether one works outside the home or not, is on welfare or not, bears children or not, raises children or not, marries or not, stays married or not, is heterosexual, lesbian, both or neither. Economic necessity; confinement to racial and/or sexual job ghettos; sexual harassment; sex discrimination; pressures of competing expectations and judgments about *women, wives* and *mothers* (in the society at large, in racial and ethnic subcultures and in one's own mind); dependence (full or partial) on husbands, parents or the state; commitment to political ideas; loyalties to racial or ethnic or other "minority" groups; the demands of self-respect and responsibilities to others. Each of these factors exists in complex tension with every other, penalizing or prohibiting all of the apparently available options. And nipping at one's heels, always, is the endless pack of little things. If one dresses one way, one is subject to the assumption that one is advertising one's sexual availability; if one dresses another way, one appears to "not care about oneself" or to be "unfeminine." If one uses "strong language," one invites categorization as a whore or slut; if one does not, one invites categorization as a "lady" – one too delicately constituted to cope with robust speech or the realities to which it presumably refers.

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to

catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. It is the experience of being caged in: all avenues, in every direction, are blocked or booby trapped.

Cages. Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere. Furthermore, even if, one day at a time, you myopically inspected each wire, you still could not see why a bird would have trouble going past the wires to get anywhere. There is no physical property of any one wire, *nothing* that the closest scrutiny could discover, that will reveal how a bird could be inhibited or harmed by it except in the most accidental way. It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment. It will require no great subtlety of mental powers. It is perfectly *obvious* that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon.

It is now possible to grasp one of the reasons why oppression can be hard to see and recognize: one can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some good will without seeing the structure as a whole, and hence without seeing or being able to understand that one is looking at a cage and that there are people there who are caged, whose motion and mobility are restricted, whose lives are shaped and reduced.

The arresting of vision at a microscopic level yields such common confusion as that about the male door-opening ritual. This ritual, which is remarkably widespread across classes and races, puzzles many people, some of whom do and some of whom do not find it offensive. Look at the scene of the two people approaching a door. The male steps slightly ahead and opens the door. The male holds the door open while the female glides through. Then the male goes through. The door closes after them. "Now how," one innocently asks, "can those crazy womenslibbers say that is oppressive? The guy *removed* a barrier to the lady's smooth and unruffled progress." But each repetition of this ritual has a place in a pattern, in fact in several patterns. One has to shift the level of one's perception in order to see the whole picture.

The door-opening pretends to be a helpful service, but the helpfulness is false. This can be seen by noting that it will be done whether or not it makes any practical sense. Infirm men and men burdened with packages will open doors for able-bodied women who are free of physical burdens. Men will impose themselves awkwardly and jostle everyone in order to get to the door first. The act is not determined by convenience or grace. Furthermore, these very numerous acts of unneeded or even noisome "help" occur in counterpoint to a pattern of men not being helpful in many practical ways in which women might welcome help. What *women* experience is a world in which gallant princes charming commonly make a fuss about being helpful and providing small services when help and services are of little or no use, but

in which there are rarely ingenious and adroit princes at hand when substantial assistance is really wanted either in mundane affairs or in situations of threat, assault or terror. There is no help with the (his) laundry; no help typing a report at 4 a.m.; no help in mediating disputes among relatives or children. There is nothing but advice that women should stay indoors after dark, be chaperoned by a man, or when it comes down to it, "lie back and enjoy it."

The gallant gestures have no practical meaning. Their meaning is symbolic. The door-opening and similar services provided are services which really are needed by people who are for one reason or another incapacitated – unwell, burdened with parcels, etc. So the message is that women are incapable. The detachment of the acts from the concrete realities of what women need and do not need is a vehicle for the message that women's actual needs and interests are unimportant or irrelevant. Finally, these gestures imitate the behavior of servants toward masters and thus mock women, who are in most respects the servants and caretakers of men. The message of the false helpfulness of male gallantry is female dependence, the invisibility or insignificance of women, and contempt for women.

One cannot see the meanings of these rituals if one's focus is riveted upon the individual event in all its particularity, including the particularity of the individual man's present conscious intentions and motives and the individual woman's conscious perception of the event in the moment. It seems sometimes that people take a deliberately myopic view and fill their eyes with things seen microscopically in order not to see macroscopically. At any rate, whether it is deliberate or not, people can and do fail to see the oppression of women because they fail to see macroscopically and hence fail to see the various elements of the situation as systematically related in larger schemes.

As the cageness of the birdcage is a macroscopic phenomenon, the oppressiveness of the situations in which women live our various and different lives is a macroscopic phenomenon. Neither can be *seen* from a microscopic perspective. But when you look macroscopically you can see it – a network of forces and barriers which are systematically related and which conspire to the immobilization, reduction and molding of women and the lives we live.

1.4
Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference

Audre Lorde

Much of Western European history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior. In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who,

through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior. Within this society, that group is made up of Black and Third World people, working-class people, older people, and women.

As a forty-nine-year-old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an inter-racial couple, I usually find myself a part of some group defined as other, deviant, inferior, or just plain wrong. Traditionally, in american society, it is the members of oppressed, objectified groups who are expected to stretch out and bridge the gap between the actualities of our lives and the consciousness of our oppressor. For in order to survive, those of us for whom oppression is as american as apple pie have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection. Whenever the need for some pretense of communication arises, those who profit from our oppression call upon us to share our knowledge with them. In other words, it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes. I am responsible for educating teachers who dismiss my children's culture in school. Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions. There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future.

Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion.

Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation.

Racism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance. Sexism, the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance. Ageism. Heterosexism. Elitism. Classism.

It is a lifetime pursuit for each one of us to extract these distortions from our living at the same time as we recognize, reclaim, and define those differences upon which they are imposed. For we have all been raised in a society where those distortions were endemic within our living. Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all. This results in a voluntary isolation, or false and treacherous connections. Either way, we do not develop tools

for using human difference as a springboard for creative change within our lives. We speak not of human difference, but of human deviance.

Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our hearts knows "that is not me." In america, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing. By and large, within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not, in fact, exist.

Unacknowledged class differences rob women of each other's energy and creative insight. Recently, a women's magazine collective made the decision for one issue to print only prose, saying poetry was a less "rigorous" or "serious" art form. Yet even the form our creativity takes is often a class issue. Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper. Over the last few years, writing a novel on tight finances, I came to appreciate the enormous differences in the material demands between poetry and prose. As we reclaim our literature, poetry has been the major voice of poor, working-class, and Colored women. A room of one's own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a typewriter, and plenty of time. The actual requirements to produce the visual arts also help determine, along class lines, whose art is whose. In this day of inflated prices for material, who are our sculptors, our painters, our photographers? Where we speak of a broadly based women's culture, we need to be aware of the effect of class and economic differences on the supplies available for producing art.

As we move toward creating a society within which we can each flourish, ageism is another distortion of relationship which interferes with our vision. By ignoring the past, we are encouraged to repeat its mistakes. The "generation gap" is an important social tool for any repressive society. If the younger members of a community view the older members as contemptible or suspect or excess, they will never be able to join hands and examine the living memories of the community, nor ask the all-important question, "Why?" This gives rise to a historical amnesia that keeps us working to invent the wheel every time we have to go to the store for bread.

We find ourselves having to repeat and relearn the same old lessons over and over that our mothers did because we do not pass on what we have learned, or because we are unable to listen. For instance, how many times has this all been said before? For another, who would have believed that once again our daughters are allowing their bodies to be hampered and purgatoried by girdles and high heels and hobble skirts?

Ignoring the differences of race between women and the implications of those differences presents the most serious threat to the mobilization of women's joint power.

As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define *woman* in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become "other," the outsider whose experience and tradition is too "alien" to comprehend. An example of this is the signal absence of the experience of women of Color as a resource for women's studies courses. The literature of women of Color is seldom included in women's literature courses and almost never in other literature courses, nor in women's studies as a whole. All too often, the excuse given is that the literatures of women of Color can only be taught by Colored women, or that they are too difficult to understand, or that classes cannot "get into" them because they come out of experiences that are "too different." I have heard this argument presented by white women of otherwise quite clear intelligence, women who seem to have no trouble at all teaching and reviewing work that comes out of the vastly different experiences of Shakespeare, Molière, Dostoyevsky, and Aristophanes. Surely there must be some other explanation.

This is a very complex question, but I believe one of the reasons white women have such difficulty reading Black women's work is because of their reluctance to see Black women as women and different from themselves. To examine Black women's literature effectively requires that we be seen as whole people in our actual complexities – as individuals, as women, as human – rather than as one of those problematic but familiar stereotypes provided in this society in place of genuine images of Black women. And I believe this holds true for the literature of other women of Color who are not Black.

The literatures of all women of Color recreate the textures of our lives, and many white women are heavily invested in ignoring the real differences. For as long as any difference between us means one of us must be inferior, then the recognition of any difference must be fraught with guilt. To allow women of Color to step out of stereotypes is too guilt provoking, for it threatens the complacency of those women who view oppression only in terms of sex.

Refusing to recognize difference makes it impossible to see the different problems and pitfalls facing us as women.

Thus, in a patriarchal power system where whiteskin privilege is a major prop, the entrapments used to neutralize Black women and white women are not the same. For example, it is easy for Black women to be used by the power structure against Black men, not because they are men, but because they are Black. Therefore, for Black women, it is necessary at all times to separate the needs of the oppressor from our own legitimate conflicts within our communities. This same problem does not exist for white women. Black women and men have shared racist oppression and still share it, although in different ways. Out of that shared oppression we have developed joint defenses and joint vulnerabilities to each other that are not duplicated in the white community, with the exception of the relationship between Jewish women and Jewish men.

On the other hand, white women face the pitfall of being seduced into joining the oppressor under the pretense of sharing power. This possibility does not exist in the same way for women of Color. The tokenism that is sometimes extended to us is

not an invitation to join power; our racial "otherness" is a visible reality that makes that quite clear. For white women there is a wider range of pretended choices and rewards for identifying with patriarchal power and its tools.

Today, with the defeat of the ERA, the tightening economy, and increased conservatism, it is easier once again for white women to believe the dangerous fantasy that if you are good enough, pretty enough, sweet enough, quiet enough, teach the children to behave, hate the right people, and marry the right men, then you will be allowed to coexist with patriarchy in relative peace, at least until a man needs your job or the neighborhood rapist happens along. And true, unless one lives and loves in the trenches it is difficult to remember that the war against dehumanization is ceaseless.

But Black women and our children know the fabric of our lives is stitched with violence and with hatred, that there is no rest. We do not deal with it only on the picket lines, or in dark midnight alleys, or in the places where we dare to verbalize our resistance. For us, increasingly, violence weaves through the daily tissues of our living – in the supermarket, in the classroom, in the elevator, in the clinic and the schoolyard, from the plumber, the baker, the saleswoman, the bus driver, the bank teller, the waitress who does not serve us.

Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying.

The threat of difference has been no less blinding to people of Color. Those of us who are Black must see that the reality of our lives and our struggle does not make us immune to the errors of ignoring and misnaming difference. Within Black communities where racism is a living reality, differences among us often seem dangerous and suspect. The need for unity is often misnamed as a need for homogeneity, and a Black feminist vision mistaken for betrayal of our common interests as a people. Because of the continuous battle against racial erasure that Black women and Black men share, some Black women still refuse to recognize that we are also oppressed as women, and that sexual hostility against Black women is practiced not only by the white racist society, but implemented within our Black communities as well. It is a disease striking the heart of Black nationhood, and silence will not make it disappear. Exacerbated by racism and the pressures of powerlessness, violence against Black women and children often becomes a standard within our communities, one by which manliness can be measured. But these woman-hating acts are rarely discussed as crimes against Black women.

As a group, women of Color are the lowest paid wage earners in america. We are the primary targets of abortion and sterilization abuse, here and abroad. In certain parts of Africa, small girls are still being sewed shut between their legs to keep them docile and for men's pleasure. This is known as female circumcision, and it is not a cultural affair as the late Jomo Kenyatta insisted, it is a crime against Black women.

Black women's literature is full of the pain of frequent assault, not only by a racist patriarchy, but also by Black men. Yet the necessity for and history of shared battle have made us, Black women, particularly vulnerable to the false accusation

that anti-sexist is anti-Black. Meanwhile, womanhating as a recourse of the powerless is sapping strength from Black communities, and our very lives. Rape is on the increase, reported and unreported, and rape is not aggressive sexuality, it is sexualized aggression. As Kalamu ya Salaam, a Black male writer points out, "As long as male domination exists, rape will exist. Only women revolting and men made conscious of their responsibility to fight sexism can collectively stop rape."[1]

Differences between ourselves as Black women are also being misnamed and used to separate us from one another. As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living.

A fear of lesbians, or of being accused of being a lesbian, has led many Black women into testifying against themselves. It has led some of us into destructive alliances, and others into despair and isolation. In the white women's communities, heterosexism is sometimes a result of identifying with the white patriarchy, a rejection of that interdependence between women-identified women which allows the self to be, rather than to be used in the service of men. Sometimes it reflects a die-hard belief in the protective coloration of heterosexual relationships, sometimes a self-hate which all women have to fight against, taught us from birth.

Although elements of these attitudes exist for all women, there are particular resonances of heterosexism and homophobia among Black women. Despite the fact that woman-bonding has a long and honorable history in the African and African-american communities, and despite the knowledge and accomplishments of many strong and creative women-identified Black women in the political, social and cultural fields, heterosexual Black women often tend to ignore or discount the existence and work of Black lesbians. Part of this attitude has come from an understandable terror of Black male attack within the close confines of Black society, where the punishment for any female self-assertion is still to be accused of being a lesbian and therefore unworthy of the attention or support of the scarce Black male. But part of this need to misname and ignore Black lesbians comes from a very real fear that openly women-identified Black women who are no longer dependent upon men for their self-definition may well reorder our whole concept of social relationships.

Black women who once insisted that lesbianism was a white woman's problem now insist that Black lesbians are a threat to Black nationhood, are consorting with the enemy, are basically un-Black. These accusations, coming from the very women to whom we look for deep and real understanding, have served to keep many Black lesbians in hiding, caught between the racism of white women and the homophobia

of their sisters. Often, their work has been ignored, trivialized, or misnamed, as with the work of Angelina Grimke, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Lorraine Hansberry. Yet women-bonded women have always been some part of the power of Black communities, from our unmarried aunts to the amazons of Dahomey.

And it is certainly not Black lesbians who are assaulting women and raping children and grandmothers on the streets of our communities.

Across this country, as in Boston during the spring of 1979 following the unsolved murders of twelve Black women, Black lesbians are spearheading movements against violence against Black women.

What are the particular details within each of our lives that can be scrutinized and altered to help bring about change? How do we redefine difference for all women? It is not our differences which separate women, but our reluctance to recognize those differences and to deal effectively with the distortions which have resulted from the ignoring and misnaming of those differences.

As a tool of social control, women have been encouraged to recognize only one area of human difference as legitimate, those differences which exist between women and men. And we have learned to deal across those differences with the urgency of all oppressed subordinates. All of us have had to learn to live or work or coexist with men, from our fathers on. We have recognized and negotiated these differences, even when this recognition only continued the old dominant/subordinate mode of human relationship, where the oppressed must recognize the master's difference in order to survive.

But our future survival is predicated upon our ability to relate within equality. As women, we must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change. Now we must recognize differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each other's difference to enrich our visions and our joint struggles.

The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference. The old definitions have not served us, nor the earth that supports us. The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion.

For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.

As Paulo Freire shows so well in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,[2] the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships.

Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as

different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For Black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival.

We have chosen each other
and the edge of each other's battles
the war is the same
if we lose
someday women's blood will congeal
upon a dead planet
if we win
there is no telling
we seek beyond history
for a new and more possible meeting.[3]

Notes

1. From Kalamu ya Salaam, "Rape: A Radical Analysis, an African-American Perspective," *Black Books Bulletin*, 6(4) (1980).
2. Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970).
3. From "Outlines," unpublished poem.

1.5
Womanist
Alice Walker

Womanist

1. From *womanish*. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.

. . .

2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counter-balance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and

yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans.: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."

. . .

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.

. . .

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.

1.6
Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity

Michael S. Kimmel

All masculinities are not created equal; or rather, we are all *created* equal, but any hypothetical equality evaporates quickly because our definitions of masculinity are not equally valued in our society. One definition of manhood continues to remain the standard against which other forms of manhood are measured and evaluated. Within the dominant culture, the masculinity that defines white, middle class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men is the masculinity that sets the standards for other men, against which other men are measured and, more often than not, found wanting. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) wrote that in America, there is only "one complete, unblushing male":

> a young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports. Every American male tends to look out upon the world from this perspective. … Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself … as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior. (p. 128)

This is the definition that we will call "hegemonic" masculinity, the image of masculinity of those men who hold power, which has become the standard in psychological evaluations, sociological research, and self-help and advice literature for teaching young men to become "real men" (Connell, 1987). The hegemonic definition of manhood is a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control. The very definitions of manhood we have developed in our culture maintain the power that some men have over other men and that men have over women.

Our culture's definition of masculinity is thus several stories at once. It is about the individual man's quest to accumulate those cultural symbols that denote manhood, signs that he has in fact achieved it. It is about those standards being used against women to prevent their inclusion in public life and their consignment to a devalued private sphere. It is about the differential access that different types of men have to those cultural resources that confer manhood and about how each of these groups then develop their own modifications to preserve and claim their manhood. It is about the power of these definitions themselves to serve to maintain the real-life power that men have over women and that some men have over other men.

This definition of manhood has been summarized cleverly by psychologist Robert Brannon (1976) into four succinct phrases:

1. "No Sissy Stuff!" One may never do anything that even remotely suggests femininity. Masculinity is the relentless repudiation of the feminine.
2. "Be a Big Wheel." Masculinity is measured by power, success, wealth, and status. As the current saying goes, "He who has the most toys when he dies wins."
3. "Be a Sturdy Oak." Masculinity depends on remaining calm and reliable in a crisis, holding emotions in check. In fact, proving you're a man depends on never showing your emotions at all. Boys don't cry.
4. "Give 'em Hell." Exude an aura of manly daring and aggression. Go for it. Take risks.

These rules contain the elements of the definition against which virtually all American men are measured. Failure to embody these rules, to affirm the power of the rules and one's achievement of them is a source of men's confusion and pain. Such a model is, of course, unrealizable for any man. But we keep trying, valiantly and vainly, to measure up. American masculinity is a relentless test.[1] The chief test is contained in the first rule. Whatever the variations by race, class, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, being a man means "not being like women." This notion of antifemininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical conceptions of manhood, so that masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than who one is.

This, then, is the great secret of American manhood: *We are afraid of other men*. Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood. Homophobia is more than the irrational fear of gay men, more than the fear that we might be perceived as gay. "The word 'faggot' has nothing to do with homosexual experience or even with fears of homosexuals," writes David Leverenz (1986). "It comes out of the depths of manhood: a label of ultimate contempt for anyone who seems sissy, untough, uncool" (p. 455). Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed, because the recognition of fear in ourselves is proof to ourselves that we are not as manly as we pretend, that we are, like the young man in a poem by Yeats, "one that ruffles in a manly pose for all his timid heart." Our fear is the fear of humiliation. We are ashamed to be afraid.

Shame leads to silence – the silences that keep other people believing that we actually approve of the things that are done to women, to minorities, to gays and lesbians in our culture. The frightened silence as we scurry past a woman being hassled by men on the street. That furtive silence when men make sexist or racist jokes in a bar. That clammy-handed silence when guys in the office make gay-bashing jokes. Our fears are the sources of our silences, and men's silence is what keeps the system running. This might help to explain why women often complain that their male friends or partners are often so understanding when they are alone and yet laugh at sexist jokes or even make those jokes themselves when they are out with a group.

The fear of being seen as a sissy dominates the cultural definitions of manhood. It starts so early. "Boys among boys are ashamed to be unmanly," wrote one educator in 1871 (cited in Rotundo, 1993, p. 264). I have a standing bet with a friend that I can walk onto any playground in America where 6-year-old boys are happily playing and by asking one question, I can provoke a fight. That question is simple: "Who's a sissy around here?" Once posed, the challenge is made. One of two things is likely to happen. One boy will accuse another of being a sissy, to which that boy will respond that he is not a sissy, that the first boy is. They may have to fight it out to see who's lying. Or a whole group of boys will surround one boy and all shout "He is! He is!" That boy will either burst into tears and run home crying, disgraced, or he will have to take on several boys at once, to prove that he's not a sissy. (And what will his father or older brothers tell him if he chooses to run home crying?) It will be some time before he regains any sense of self-respect.

Violence is often the single most evident marker of manhood. Rather it is the willingness to fight, the desire to fight. The origin of our expression that one has a chip on one's shoulder lies in the practice of an adolescent boy in the country or small town at the turn of the century, who would literally walk around with a chip of wood balanced on his shoulder – a signal of his readiness to fight with anyone who would take the initiative of knocking the chip off (see Gorer, 1964, p. 38; Mead, 1965).

As adolescents, we learn that our peers are a kind of gender police, constantly threatening to unmask us as feminine, as sissies. One of the favorite tricks when I was an adolescent was to ask a boy to look at his fingernails. If he held his palm toward his face and curled his fingers back to see them, he passed the test. He'd looked at his nails "like a man." But if he held the back of his hand away from his face, and looked at his fingernails with arm outstretched, he was immediately ridiculed as a sissy.

As young men we are constantly riding those gender boundaries, checking the fences we have constructed on the perimeter, making sure that nothing even remotely feminine might show through. The possibilities of being unmasked are everywhere. Even the most seemingly insignificant thing can pose a threat or activate that haunting terror. On the day the students in my course "Sociology of Men and Masculinities" were scheduled to discuss homophobia and male-male friendships, one student provided a touching illustration. Noting that it was a beautiful day, the first day of spring after a brutal northeast winter, he decided to wear shorts to class. "I had this really nice pair of new Madras shorts," he commented. "But then

I thought to myself, these shorts have lavender and pink in them. Today's class topic is homophobia. Maybe today is not the best day to wear these shorts."

Our efforts to maintain a manly front cover everything we do. What we wear. How we talk. How we walk. What we eat. Every mannerism, every movement contains a coded gender language. Think, for example, of how you would answer the question: How do you "know" if a man is homosexual? When I ask this question in classes or workshops, respondents invariably provide a pretty standard list of stereotypically effeminate behaviors. He walks a certain way, talks a certain way, acts a certain way. He's very emotional; he shows his feelings. One woman commented that she "knows" a man is gay if he really cares about her; another said she knows he's gay if he shows no interest in her, if he leaves her alone.

Now alter the question and imagine what heterosexual men do to make sure no one could possibly get the "wrong idea" about them. Responses typically refer to the original stereotypes, this time as a set of negative rules about behavior. Never dress that way. Never talk or walk that way. Never show your feelings or get emotional. Always be prepared to demonstrate sexual interest in women that you meet, so it is impossible for any woman to get the wrong idea about you. In this sense, homophobia, the fear of being perceived as gay, as not a real man, keeps men exaggerating all the traditional rules of masculinity, including sexual predation with women. Homophobia and sexism go hand in hand.

The stakes of perceived sissydom are enormous – sometimes matters of life and death. We take enormous risks to prove our manhood, exposing ourselves disproportionately to health risks, workplace hazards, and stress-related illnesses. Men commit suicide three times as often as women. Psychiatrist Willard Gaylin (1992) explains that it is "invariably because of perceived social humiliation," most often tied to failure in business:

> Men become depressed because of loss of status and power in the world of men. It is not the loss of money, or the material advantages that money could buy, which produces the despair that leads to self-destruction. It is the "shame," the "humiliation," the sense of personal "failure." … A man despairs when he has ceased being a man among men. (p. 32)

In one survey, women and men were asked what they were most afraid of. Women responded that they were most afraid of being raped and murdered. Men responded that they were most afraid of being laughed at (Noble, 1992, pp. 105–106).

Homophobia as a Cause of Sexism, Heterosexism, and Racism

Homophobia is intimately interwoven with both sexism and racism. The fear – sometimes conscious, sometimes not – that others might perceive us as homosexual propels men to enact all manner of exaggerated masculine behaviors and attitudes to make sure that no one could possibly get the wrong idea about us. One of the

centerpieces of that exaggerated masculinity is putting women down, both by excluding them from the public sphere and by the quotidian put-downs in speech and behaviors that organize the daily life of the American man. Women and gay men become the "other" against which heterosexual men project their identities, against whom they stack the decks so as to compete in a situation in which they will always win, so that by suppressing them, men can stake a claim for their own manhood. Women threaten emasculation by representing the home, workplace, and familial responsibility, the negation of fun. Gay men have historically played the role of the consummate sissy in the American popular mind because homosexuality is seen as an inversion of normal gender development. There have been other "others." Through American history, various groups have represented the sissy, the non-men against whom American men played out their definitions of manhood, often with vicious results. In fact, these changing groups provide an interesting lesson in American historical development.

At the turn of the 19th century, it was Europeans and children who provided the contrast for American men. The "true American was vigorous, manly, and direct, not effete and corrupt like the supposed Europeans," writes Rupert Wilkinson (1986). "He was plain rather than ornamented, rugged rather than luxury seeking, a liberty loving common man or natural gentleman rather than an aristocratic oppressor or servile minion" (p. 96). The "real man" of the early 19th century was neither noble nor serf. By the middle of the century, black slaves had replaced the effete nobleman. Slaves were seen as dependent, helpless men, incapable of defending their women and children, and therefore less than manly. Native Americans were cast as foolish and naive children, so they could be infantilized as the "Red Children of the Great White Father" and therefore excluded from full manhood.

By the end of the century, new European immigrants were also added to the list of the unreal men, especially the Irish and Italians, who were seen as too passionate and emotionally volatile to remain controlled sturdy oaks, and Jews, who were seen as too bookishly effete and too physically puny to truly measure up. In the mid-20th century, it was also Asians – first the Japanese during the Second World War, and more recently, the Vietnamese during the Vietnam War – who have served as unmanly templates against which American men have hurled their gendered rage. Asian men were seen as small, soft, and effeminate – hardly men at all.

Such a list of "hyphenated" Americans – Italian-, Jewish-, Irish-, African-, Native-, Asian-, gay – composes the majority of American men. So manhood is only possible for a distinct minority, and the definition has been constructed to prevent the others from achieving it. Interestingly, this emasculation of one's enemies has a flip side – and one that is equally gendered. These very groups that have historically been cast as less than manly were also, often simultaneously, cast as hypermasculine, as sexually aggressive, violent rapacious beasts, against whom "civilized" men must take a decisive stand and thereby rescue civilization. Thus black men were depicted as rampaging sexual beasts, women as carnivorously carnal, gay men as sexually insatiable, southern European men as sexually predatory and voracious, and Asian men as vicious and cruel torturers who were immorally disinterested in life itself,

willing to sacrifice their entire people for their whims. But whether one saw these groups as effeminate sissies or as brutal uncivilized savages, the terms with which they were perceived were gendered. These groups become the "others," the screens against which traditional conceptions of manhood were developed.

Being seen as unmanly is a fear that propels American men to deny manhood to others, as a way of proving the unprovable – that one is fully manly. Masculinity becomes a defense against the perceived threat of humiliation in the eyes of other men, enacted through a "sequence of postures" – things we might say, or do, or even think, that, if we thought carefully about them, would make us ashamed of ourselves (Savran, 1992, p. 16). After all, how many of us have made homophobic or sexist remarks, or told racist jokes, or made lewd comments to women on the street? How many of us have translated those ideas and those words into actions, by physically attacking gay men, or forcing or cajoling a woman to have sex even though she didn't really want to because it was important to score?

Power and Powerlessness in the Lives of Men

I have argued that homophobia, men's fear of other men, is the animating condition of the dominant definition of masculinity in America, that the reigning definition of masculinity is a defensive effort to prevent being emasculated. In our efforts to suppress or overcome those fears, the dominant culture exacts a tremendous price from those deemed less than fully manly: women, gay men, nonnative-born men, men of color. This perspective may help clarify a paradox in men's lives, a paradox in which men have virtually all the power and yet do not feel powerful (see Kaufman, 1993).

Manhood is equated with power – over women, over other men. Everywhere we look, we see the institutional expression of that power – in state and national legislatures, on the boards of directors of every major U.S. corporation or law firm, and in every school and hospital administration. Women have long understood this, and feminist women have spent the past three decades challenging both the public and the private expressions of men's power and acknowledging their fear of men. Feminism as a set of theories both explains women's fear of men and empowers women to confront it both publicly and privately. Feminist women have theorized that masculinity is about the drive for domination, the drive for power, for conquest.

This feminist definition of masculinity as the drive for power is theorized from women's point of view. It is how women experience masculinity. But it assumes a symmetry between the public and the private that does not conform to men's experiences. Feminists observe that women, as a group, do not hold power in our society. They also observe that individually, they, as women, do not feel powerful. They feel afraid, vulnerable. Their observation of the social reality and their individual experiences are therefore symmetrical. Feminism also observes that men, as a group, *are* in power. Thus, with the same symmetry, feminism has tended to assume that individually men must feel powerful.

This is why the feminist critique of masculinity often falls on deaf ears with men. When confronted with the analysis that men have all the power, many men react incredulously. "What do you mean, men have all the power?" they ask. "What are you talking about? My wife bosses me around. My kids boss me around. My boss bosses me around. I have no power at all! I'm completely powerless!"

Men's feelings are not the feelings of the powerful, but of those who see themselves as powerless. These are the feelings that come inevitably from the discontinuity between the social and the psychological, between the aggregate analysis that reveals how men are in power as a group and the psychological fact that they do not feel powerful as individuals. They are the feelings of men who were raised to believe themselves entitled to feel that power, but do not feel it. No wonder many men are frustrated and angry.

This may explain the recent popularity of those workshops and retreats designed to help men to claim their "inner" power, their "deep manhood," or their "warrior within." Authors such as Bly (1990), Moore and Gillette (1991, 1992, 1993a, 1993b), Farrell (1986, 1993), and Keen (1991) honor and respect men's feelings of powerlessness and acknowledge those feelings to be both true and real. "They gave white men the semblance of power," notes John Lee, one of the leaders of these retreats (quoted in *Newsweek*, p. 41). "We'll let you run the country, but in the meantime, stop feeling, stop talking, and continue swallowing your pain and your hurt." (We are not told who "they" are.)

Often the purveyors of the mythopoetic men's movement, that broad umbrella that encompasses all the groups helping men to retrieve this mythic deep manhood, use the image of the chauffeur to describe modern man's position. The chauffeur appears to have the power – he's wearing the uniform, he's in the driver's seat, and he knows where he's going. So, to the observer, the chauffeur looks as though he is in command. But to the chauffeur himself, they note, he is merely taking orders. He is not at all in charge.[2]

Despite the reality that everyone knows chauffeurs do not have the power, this image remains appealing to the men who hear it at these weekend workshops. But there is a missing piece to the image, a piece concealed by the framing of the image in terms of the individual man's experience. That missing piece is that the person who is giving the orders is also a man. Now we have a relationship *between* men – between men giving orders and other men taking those orders. The man who identifies with the chauffeur is entitled to be the man giving the orders, but he is not. ("They," it turns out, are other men.)

The dimension of power is now reinserted into men's experience not only as the product of individual experience but also as the product of relations with other men. In this sense, men's experience of powerlessness is *real* – the men actually feel it and certainly act on it – but it is not *true,* that is, it does not accurately describe their condition. In contrast to women's lives, men's lives are structured around relationships of power and men's differential access to power, as well as the differential access to that power of men as a group. Our imperfect analysis of our own situation leads us to believe that we men need *more* power, rather than

leading us to support feminists' efforts to rearrange power relationships along more equitable lines.

Philosopher Hannah Arendt (1970) fully understood this contradictory experience of social and individual power:

> Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is "in power" we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with … disappears, "his power" also vanishes. (p. 44)

Why, then, do American men feel so powerless? Part of the answer is because we've constructed the rules of manhood so that only the tiniest fraction of men come to believe that they are the biggest of wheels, the sturdiest of oaks, the most virulent repudiators of femininity, the most daring and aggressive. We've managed to disempower the overwhelming majority of American men by other means – such as discriminating on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, age, or sexual preference.

Masculinist retreats to retrieve deep, wounded, masculinity are but one of the ways in which American men currently struggle with their fears and their shame. Unfortunately, at the very moment that they work to break down the isolation that governs men's lives, as they enable men to express those fears and that shame, they ignore the social power that men continue to exert over women and the privileges from which they (as the middle-aged, middle-class white men who largely make up these retreats) continue to benefit – regardless of their experiences as wounded victims of oppressive male socialization.[3]

Others still rehearse the politics of exclusion, as if by clearing away the playing field of secure gender identity of any that we deem less than manly – women, gay men, nonnative-born men, men of color – middle-class, straight, white men can reground their sense of themselves without those haunting fears and that deep shame that they are unmanly and will be exposed by other men. This is the manhood of racism, of sexism, of homophobia. It is the manhood that is so chronically insecure that it trembles at the idea of lifting the ban on gays in the military, that is so threatened by women in the workplace that women become the targets of sexual harassment, that is so deeply frightened of equality that it must ensure that the playing field of male competition remains stacked against all newcomers to the game.

Exclusion and escape have been the dominant methods American men have used to keep their fears of humiliation at bay. The fear of emasculation by other men, of being humiliated, of being seen as a sissy, is the leitmotif in my reading of the history of American manhood. Masculinity has become a relentless test by which we prove to other men, to women, and ultimately to ourselves, that we have successfully mastered the part. The restlessness that men feel today is nothing new in American history; we have been anxious and restless for almost two centuries. Neither exclusion nor escape has ever brought us the relief we've sought, and there is no reason to

think that either will solve our problems now. Peace of mind, relief from gender struggle, will come only from a politics of inclusion, not exclusion, from standing up for equality and justice, and not by running away.

Notes

1. Although I am here discussing only American masculinity, I am aware that others have located this chronic instability and efforts to prove manhood in the particular cultural and economic arrangements of Western society. Calvin, after all, inveighed against the disgrace "for men to become effeminate," and countless other theorists have described the mechanics of manly proof. (See, for example, Seidler, 1994.)
2. The image is from Warren Farrell, who spoke at a workshop I attended at the First International Men's Conference, Austin, Texas, October 1991.
3. For a critique of these mythopoetic retreats, see Kimmel and Kaufman, 1994.

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1.7
Abandon Your Tedious Search: The Rulebook Has Been Found!

Kate Bornstein

The rules of gender are termed the "natural attitude" of our culture (the real, objective facts) per Harold Garfinkel's 1967 *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. I like to read these rules every now and then to see how each rule has continued to play a part in my life – it's frighteningly accurate. I keep in touch with these rules – it helps me figure out new ways of breaking them. Here are Mr. Garfinkel's rules, and a few ideas about each:

1. There are two, and only two, genders (female and male).

The first question we usually ask new parents is: Is it a boy or a girl? There's a great answer to that one going around: "We don't know; it hasn't told us yet." Personally, I think no question containing *either/or* deserves a serious answer, and that includes the question of gender.

I'm a member of a commercial electronic bulletin board service called **America Online**. My screen name is **OutlawGal**. I inevitably get two queries: "What makes you an outlaw?" to which I always reply that I break the laws of nature. The second question is almost always, "M or F?" to which I answer, "Yes." Anyone who has a sense of humor about that is someone I want to keep talking with.

2. One's gender is invariant. (If you are female/male, you always were female/male and you always will be female/male.)

The latest transsexual notable has been Renee Richards who has succeeded in hitting the benefits of sex discrimination back into the male half of the court. The public recognition and success that it took Billie Jean King and women's tennis years to get, Renee Richards has achieved in one set. The new bumper stickers might well read: "It takes castrated balls to play women's tennis."

– Janice G. Raymond,
The Transsexual Empire, 1979

Despite her vicious attack on transsexuals, Raymond's book is a worthwhile read, chiefly for its intelligent highlighting of the male-dominated medical profession, and that profession's control of transsexual surgery. Raymond and her followers believe in some essential thing called "woman," and some other essential thing called "man," and she sees transgendered people as encroaching in her space. Raymond obeys the rules: in her world view, there can be no mutable gender.

> There have been both cultural feminists and hard-line fundamentalists who have agreed that I was not only born male, but that no matter what happened to me, and no matter my choices, I will remain male 'til the day I die. I no longer dispute people like that: that's how they're going to experience me no matter what I say or do. As long as they neither threaten me nor keep me from entering any public space, I feel more sorry for them than anything else.

3. Genitals are the essential sign of gender. (A female is a person with a vagina; a male is a person with a penis.)

> I never hated my penis; I hated that it made me a man – in my own eyes, and in the eyes of others. For my comfort, I needed a vagina – I was convinced that the only way I could live out what I thought to be my true gender was to have genital surgery

to construct a vagina from my penis. Fortunately, I don't regret having done this.

It's real interesting all the papers you have to sign before actually getting male-to-female gender reassignment surgery. I had to acknowledge the possibility of every surgical mishap: from never having any sensation in my genitals, to never having another orgasm in my life, to the threat of my newly-constructed labia falling off. As it turned out, I have some slight loss of feeling on the surface of the skin around my vagina, but I can achieve orgasms, and the last time I looked my labia were still in place. Like I said, I'm lucky; some folks aren't.

4. Any exceptions to two genders are not to be taken seriously. (They must be jokes, pathology, etc.)

I remember one time walking into a Woolworth's in Philadelphia. I'd been living as a woman for about a month. I came through the revolving doors, and stood face to face with a security guard – a young man, maybe nineteen or twenty years old. He did a double take when he saw me and he began to laugh – very loud. He just laughed and laughed. I continued round through the revolving doors and left the store. I agreed with him that I was a joke; that I was the sick one.

I went back in there almost a year later. He came on to me.

5. There are no transfers from one gender to another except ceremonial ones (masquerades).

The Mummers' Parade is held annually on New Year's Day in Philadelphia. Hundreds of men – mostly blue-collar family men – dress up in sequins, feathers, and gowns, and parade up and down the main streets of the City of Brotherly Love.

In most shamanic cultures, there exists a ceremonial rite whereby spiritual leaders, like the Siberian "soft man," need to live part of their lives as another gender before attaining the rank of spiritual leader.

The transformation [from man to "soft man"] takes place gradually when the boy is between ages eight and fifteen, the critical years when shamanistic inspiration usually manifests itself. The Chukshi feel that this transformation is due to powerful spirits.

– Walter L. Williams,
The Spirit and the Flesh, 1986

6. Everyone must be classified as a member of one gender or another. (There are no cases where gender is not attributed.)

Do you know anyone to whom you've not assigned the gender male or the gender female? Isn't that a hoot? That alone makes it important for each of us to question gender's grip on our society.

7. The male/female dichotomy is a "natural" one. (Males and females exist independently of scientists' [or anyone else's] criteria for being male or female.)

There is black on one side of a spectrum, and

white
on the other

with a middle ground of grey, or
some would say there's a rainbow between the two.

There is
left, and

right

and a middle ground of center

There is birth on one side,

and death on the other side

and a middle ground of life.

Yet we insist that there are two,
only two genders: male and female.

And we insist that this
is the way of nature.

Blue

yellow

green.

Nature?

Nature?

Nature.

8. Membership in one gender or another is "natural." (Being female or male is not dependent on anyone's deciding what you are.)

In the mid-80s, when I first got involved with women's politics, and gay and lesbian politics, I saw these buttons that read:

or

I thought they were particularly relevant to my situation as a transsexual. But I found out otherwise. If I attempt to decide my own gender, I am apparently transgressing against nature – never mind what the buttons said.

> When I entered the women's community in the mid-80s, I was told that I still had male energy. (I never knew what "male energy" was, but I later figured out that it was the last of my male privilege showing.) They said that I'd been socialized as a male, and could never truly be a female; that what I was, in fact, was a castrated male. And that hurt me for a long time – over a year, in fact.

I kept hearing people define me in terms *they* were comfortable with. It's easy to play victim, and to say that these people were being malicious, but assuming the worst about others is simply not truth, and it's not a loving or empowering way to look at other people. So, I began to look at their investment in defining me. What I found was that each person who was anxious to define me had a stake in maintaining his or her own membership in a given gender. I began to respect the needs of those who had a stake in their genders.

> So I began to say things like, "Yep, I'm a castrated man all right, if that's what you see." And my joy at the look on their faces was the beginning of my sense of humor about all of this – I was no longer humiliated by their definitions of me.
> I still have my
>
> 
>
>
> button – it's more nostalgic than anything else.

Somewhere, Beyond the Rules

So there are rules to gender, but rules can be broken. On to the next secret of gender – gender can have ambiguity. There are many ways to transgress a prescribed gender code, depending upon the world view of the person who's doing the transgressing: they range from preferring to be somewhat less than rigidly-gendered, to

preferring an entirely non-definable image. Achievement of these goals ranges from doing nothing, to maintaining several wardrobes, to full surgical transformation.

> It doesn't really matter what a person decides to do, or how radically a person plays with gender. What matters, I think, is how aware a person is of the options. How sad for a person to be missing out on some expression of identity, just for not knowing there are options.

And then I found out that gender can have fluidity, which is quite different from ambiguity. If ambiguity is a refusal to fall within a prescribed gender code, then fluidity is the refusal to remain one gender or another. Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender.

> A fluid identity, incidentally, is one way to solve problems with boundaries. As a person's identity keeps shifting, so do individual borders and boundaries. It's hard to cross a boundary that keeps moving!

It was the discovery of my own ambiguity and fluidity of gender that led me to my gender change. It was figuring out these two concepts that allowed me to observe these factors – inhibited or in full bloom – in the culture, and in individuals.

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1.8
Feminists Theorize Colonial/Postcolonial

Rosemary Marangoly George

Postcolonial feminist theory's project can be described as one of interrupting the discourses of postcolonial theory and of liberal Western feminism, while simultaneously refusing the singular "Third World Woman" as the object of study. From the early 1980s onward, postcolonial feminism in the West has been centrally concerned

with the terms in which knowledge about non-Western women was produced, circulated, and utilized. In postcolonial literary analyses, issues of location, of representation, of "voicing" female subjecthood, and of the expansion of the literary canon emerged as important foci. As a critical approach, the postcolonial literary feminism that would radically alter the study of literature in the Western academy can be traced to a few key critical essays written in the early 1980s. In this essay I discuss a range of the most significant contributions to postcolonial literary feminism and situate them in relation to the work of numerous scholars in the fields of colonial and postcolonial studies and feminist literary scholarship. I will present Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a feminist and cultural theorist, born and educated in India and based in the United States as an exemplary critical figure; a discussion of the trajectory of her work will allow us to consider some of the major ideas in the field. Postcolonial feminist literary critics negotiate with a wide range of related discourses in order to revise the terms in which the location of the critic and of the literary subject are understood. Indeed, postcolonial feminist criticism contests the very location of literature itself.

Much of the theoretical energy of early postcolonial feminist scholarship focused on challenging Western feminist literary theory's investment in first world women's texts, in uninterrogated national literary traditions, and in a benevolent, ultimately patronizing, reception of third world women, in and out of literary texts. At the same time, postcolonial feminists scrutinized the gendered blind spots of the mostly masculinist postcolonial critique of relations of power in colonial contexts and newly independent states. Thus postcolonial feminist scholarship has as its characteristic markings: the fashioning of cautionary signposts, the disclosure of absences, an insistence on what cannot be represented in elite texts, an emphasis on the more than "purely literary," and the persistent embedding of gendered difference in a larger understanding of race, nationality, class, and caste. Despite the disciplining tone of many of the occasions for such scholarship, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a postcolonial feminist approach harnesses the wisdom of many different critical strands; a coalitional scholarship, it is indebted even as it contributes to scholarship in a range of fields that extend feminist discourse beyond any simple notion of the literary or of gender.

I use the term "postcolonial" in this essay to refer to a critical framework in which literary and other texts can be read against the grain of the hegemonic discourse in a colonial or neocolonial context: this framework insists on recognizing, resisting, and overturning the strictures and structures of colonial relations of power. It takes its inspiration from and constantly refers to the intellectual work that contributed to the end of Europe's colonial occupation of the globe, from the mid-twentieth century to the present. But the postcolonial critical framework is more than a condensed theory of decolonization. Rather, it is a methodology especially invested in examining culture as an important site of conflicts, collaborations, and struggles between those in power and those subjected to power. While colonial control over far-flung empires was largely accomplished through use of force, the "superiority" of the colonizer was crucially reinforced through cultural "persuasion." British colonizers spread the secular scripture of English literature through the colonial education

system as a means of establishing the "innate" superiority of British culture (and therefore of British rule) in the minds of the native elites. As Cheikh Hamidou Kane, the Senegalese writer, noted in his 1963 novel, *Ambiguous Adventure*: "The cannon compels the body, the school bewitches the soul."[1]

Anticolonial national struggles and postcolonial literary discourse developed an implicit conviction that cultural sites have the potential to change social and political reality. Indeed, the urgency to end colonial rule was often first publicly expressed in cultural texts. In the present, the term "postcolonial" is differently invoked by different practitioners. For the most part, however, this critical stance counters the usual relations of power between First and Third World locations in the linked arenas of economics, politics, and cultural production.

Like other scholars and cultural practitioners arguing from the margins in the 1980s and 1990s, postcolonial theorists in the West and elsewhere were engaged in the task of widening the range of literary texts and practices understood as worthy of scholarly attention, that is, as canonical. In order to achieve this goal, the role of literary texts in society had to be retheorized: thus, for instance, Ngugi Wa Thiongo argued for two literary categories: the literature of oppression and the literature of struggle; he thus challenged the conventional practice of distinguishing among literary texts solely on the bases of form (*Writers in Politics*, 1981). Other scholars, for example, those working on testimonials or on transcribed oral texts, argued for a reevaluation of the *type* of texts considered worthy of analysis. Concurrently, postcolonial literary criticism finally put to rest the humanist notion that the best literary texts transcended politics by carrying within them the pearls of what would be *universally* acknowledged as wisdom. By disclosing, as Edward Said did in *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1992), that literary texts were shaped by and in turn shaped the ruling ideologies of their day, they demonstrated the logic of tracing both colonial and anticolonial ideologies through literature.[2] Postcolonial feminists intervened to insist that men and women experience aspects of colonialism and postcolonialism differently. Yet they also vigorously maintained that gender was not *invariably* a fundamental marker of difference. Postcolonial feminists have noted, for example, that European women in the colonial period wrote frequently about their "Eastern Sisters," but that there were very few instances in which alliances between women *as women* overcame the difference of race under a colonial system. As a result, gender must be understood as operating in tandem with the pressures of race, class, sexuality, and location.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, postcolonial theorists were very invested in reexamining colonial and "native" discourses from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, produced and circulated in Europe and in the colonies, especially those that constructed "modernity" in opposition to "traditional" or "native" customs. European texts repeatedly justified and explained colonial domination by reinforcing a series of hierarchized oppositions such as civilized/savage, modern/traditional, mature/childlike, and, most significantly, rational/irrational. Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000) is an example of a postcolonial critical text that attempts to undo the central position that Europe has held as "the Universal" in non-European locations thanks to the legacy of these colonialist oppositions. While Europe in

the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is clearly no longer the embodiment of the universal human, a certain Europe still occupies a central position in the scholarly imagination. Postcolonial criticism aims to "provincialize Europe" and to counter the hegemonic weight of an Enlightenment universalist world view by insisting on the humanity of colonized peoples and on the value of non-European thought and culture. Postcolonial feminists bring to this revisionary reading of center and periphery a keen sense of the gendered dynamics of knowledge production in colonial discourse and in the postcolonial critique of the same.

Arguably, one of the inaugural moments of postcolonial feminist literary criticism in the West was the publication of Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" in the Fall 1985 issue of *Critical Inquiry*. In this short essay, Spivak forced a rethinking of the ways in which literary texts, especially those written by women, had been deployed in feminist arguments. Spivak brilliantly focuses on Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, one of the "cult texts" of Western academic feminism; she argues that in the novel, as in twentieth-century feminist criticism, Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason Rochester become who they are – heroine and less than human, respectively – because of the politics of imperialism. Prior to Spivak's essay, the authoritative feminist critical analysis of *Jane Eyre* was the lynchpin chapter in Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's hugely successful *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). Despite titling their book after the experiences of *Jane Eyre*'s Creole Bertha, who is declared insane and locked in the attic of her husband Mr. Rochester's English country house, Gilbert and Gubar were quite oblivious to Bertha's significance, except insofar as she served as Jane's "dark double": Bertha would do for Jane what Jane could not herself do. Gilbert's and Gubar's reading of the novel brought to a crescendo the feminist celebration of Jane as the solitary heroine who begins life "without connections, beauty or fortune" and ends having acquired all three *and* the power to narrate her version of the story of her life. In these readings Jane's triumph is her transformation, seemingly through the power of her first-person narrative, from a timid, impoverished governess into a desirable woman the hero cannot live without. When the first-person narrator begins the last chapter of the novel with "Dear Reader, I married him," the immolation of Bertha and her leap to her death (the plot event that allows Jane finally to accept Mr. Rochester's marriage proposal) is quite easily forgotten in the celebratory conclusion to the romance plot.

"Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" made the feminist argument exemplified by Gilbert's and Gubar's work completely untenable, by demonstrating how "the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction," the fully individual feminine subject that is the apotheosis of liberal feminism, comes into being through violence done to the Other. Spivak argues that this becoming of the subject/the individual is brought about not just by marriage and childbearing, but by "soul making" – a task that requires the violence done to the soulless, less than human Other. With much assistance from the Caribbean novelist Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1965), Spivak demonstrates that "so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism."[3] Using Rhys's narrative, which tells Bertha's version of the story of her marriage to Mr. Rochester, Spivak deftly demonstrates that "the

active ideology of imperialism … provides the discursive field" for the Brontë novel. Following Spivak, we might ask: Where do Mr. Rochester's wealth and Jane's fortune come from? Why is Bertha initially considered an attractive match? And how is it that her legal rights as Mr. Rochester's wife are so easily disregarded by the narrative and the reader? The resulting discussion of the novel's imbrication in the global relations of domination established under British imperialism significantly alters our understanding of the gendered politics of fiction. If the study of eighteenth-century English novels and conduct books demonstrates, as Nancy Armstrong argues, that "the modern individual was first and foremost a female," in the wake of Spivak's essay postcolonial feminists argued that the nineteenth- and twentieth-century English woman of liberal feminism was first and foremost authorized by the economic, political, social, and cultural axioms of British imperialism.[4]

The 1990s saw the publication of many essays, special editions of journals, and books that reexamined the much-trammeled terrain of eighteenth- to twentieth-century British literary, legal, and other texts with a view to explicating the investment in Empire that had gone unnoticed in earlier scholarship. Of these projects, Lata Mani's analysis of the British colonial discussion of the custom of *sati* (spelt "suttee" in the colonial period) in nineteenth-century India illustrates colonial discourse's construction of "native custom and practice" as barbaric, thus rationalizing the imposition of a "civilizing" European colonial rule. But Mani also interrogates the patriarchal "native" representation of this custom in which newly widowed wives immolated themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres. As she shows, *sati* was not a practice followed all over the Indian subcontinent, nor was it the necessary fate of all widows in a particular caste or class. Rather, it was practiced sporadically in scattered incidents that were, however, scrupulously recorded by British observers. Mani's study discloses the use to which the burning widow (referred to as the *sati*) was put in simultaneously furthering the colonial project and protecting indigenous patriarchal power. Mani argues that the *satis* "become sites on which various versions of scripture/tradition/law are elaborated and contested" (p. 115).[5] She demonstrates that the elaborate narratives compiled by eyewitnesses contain no record of the widows' motivations, utterances, reasoning, or subjectivity, or even of their pain. In Mani's words: "… even reading against the grain of a discourse ostensibly about women, one learns so little about them … neither subject, nor object, but ground – such is the status of women in the discourse on *sati*" (p. 118). Despite the colonizers' stated concern for the wellbeing of native women, the real purpose of this debate around the practice of *sati* was to reinforce the "necessity" of the regulatory presence of British colonial rule.

In her 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak succinctly notes that the same nineteenth-century descriptions of *sati* (even after the abolition of this rite by William Bentinck in 1829) allow us to understand the way in which colonial rule presented itself: as "white men saving brown women from brown men." Against this colonialist reading of the anti-*sati* campaign, Spivak places the Indian nativist argument, which she condenses into the phrase, "the women actually wanted to die." She argues that "the two sentences go a long way to legitimize each other. One never encounters the testimony of the women's voice-consciousness. Such a testimony

would not be ideology-transcendent or 'fully' subjective, of course, but it would have constituted the ingredients for producing a countersentence."[6] Spivak points to what will become a major preoccupation of postcolonial feminist writing: namely, if and how disenfranchised women can represent, speak, and act *for themselves*, despite oppressive conditions. Postcolonial feminism unflinchingly acknowledges that there are many obstacles in the path of securing such "voice-consciousness." Yet, despite the odds, postcolonial feminist discourse strives to create the space for this "countersentence" to be spoken by the "gendered subaltern."

Postcolonial feminist criticism developed in this period in relation to other critical feminist projects as well. From the early 1960s onward, there was a powerful and multifaceted movement by US-based "women of color" (as they began to call themselves) for equal rights in all spheres of life. This struggle emerged from and alongside the feminist and civil rights movements of the 1960s–1970s, with women of color insisting on the double oppression they faced on account of their race and gender. As part of their resistance to racial and gendered prejudices, women of color in the United States also developed powerful critiques of mainstream white feminism for its race-related blind spots, and against the masculinist bias of nationalist struggles for racial uplift within their own communities. Like postcolonial theorists, these women were inspired by nationalist struggles in the third world. Thus women of color in the United States argued that they were also "third world women," despite the irony of their geographic location.

Two texts from the early 1980s consolidated theorizing from this position: the poetic and incisive *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, with a foreword by Toni Cade Bambara (1981), and Chandra Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984). These early texts, emblematic of this critical tradition, connected the US-based women of color critique (conventionally linked with US feminist and civil rights movements) with the then-burgeoning postcolonial feminist critique (whose arena was usually defined in the United States as "foreign," given its preoccupation with the contours of the erstwhile colonial spaces of Britain and her former colonies and the general amnesia about US imperialism).

Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" was first published in 1984 in the academic journal *Boundary 2*, then republished in Teresa de Lauretis's influential anthology *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* in 1986, then reprinted in *Feminist Review* in 1988 and again in 1991 in the immensely important *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, edited by Mohanty, Russo, and Torres.[7] Very widely read, this essay engaged both women of color and postcolonial feminist concerns and soon became constitutive of both fields. In the essay Mohanty formulates a theoretically nuanced critique of the "discursive colonialism" toward "third world women" practiced by elite women, both in the geographic West and outside it. She maps the contours of privilege in feminist writing and the effects of such West-oriented feminism on the non-West. She pinpoints the effect of feminist analysis that constructs a singular and generic "third world woman" as the object of study. Third world women always function in such work as "a homogenous, powerless group … often located as the implicit victim of particular socioeconomic systems" (*Third World Women*, p. 57).

Mohanty's concern is that even as elite feminism intervenes in traditional disciplinary analysis, an "ethnocentric universalism is produced in western feminist analysis" and "a homogenous notion of the oppression of women is assumed, which, in turn, produces the image of an 'average third world woman'" – one who is studied most often in terms of her fertility (p. 56). Mohanty thus both names and challenges the objectification of women in the third world as perennial victims within scholarship on topics as seemingly disparate as economic development, male violence, familial systems, genital mutilation, and "the Islamic code." Marking the gap between the heterogeneous conditions in which women live their lives in the third world and the monolithic "third world woman" of elite feminist discourse, "Under Western Eyes" is a foundational text for all contemporary feminist endeavors, even those that are not readily identified as postcolonial. The cautions that Mohanty offers are now part of the "common sense" of the field. Yet, even as recently as 2001–2, the discussion of Afghan women in the mainstream US media provided many examples of the imperialist first world reading of third world women that Mohanty vociferously and painstakingly critiqued in an essay written more than twenty years ago!

Mohanty's essay, along with some of the writing produced in parallel discussions such as Denise Riley's "*Am I That Name?*" *Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* (1988), Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), and other work on this topic, began to disassemble one of feminist literary criticism's most revered and "natural" categories – that of "the woman" and, subsequently, of "the woman writer." A long-presumed, *automatic* unity based in gender was repeatedly challenged by these feminists, who were quick to point to the ways in which women were *multiply* constituted subjects. As Mohanty states: "by women as a category of analysis, I am referring to the crucial assumption that all of us of the same gender, across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogeneous group identified *prior to the process of analysis*" (p. 56, my emphasis). Yet "women" as a category of analysis has long been considered central to feminist theory and practice. What does it mean for feminist discourse and practice to give up the category of women as foundational? Postcolonial feminism had only to turn to anticolonial discourse to see the very special place it granted to women and to understand that this special status was to be firmly resisted.

Postcolonial feminists were especially astute in noting *and refusing* the exalted yet largely symbolic status allotted to women in many nationalist struggles. Indeed, gender symbolism in colonial and postindependence periods remains essentially unchanged: women were paradoxically both central (as symbolic figures) and marginal (in terms of actual changes in their material circumstances) to nationalist projects, just as they had been to colonial projects. Partha Chatterjee's influential essay on "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" in the Indian context best surveys the terrain in which such discussions of women as subjects and objects of discourse played out.[8] Chatterjee argues that nationalism resolved the women's question through the separation of the domain of culture into two spheres: the material and the spiritual. Colonialism, it was believed, had left the spiritual or private realm of culture untouched; this realm was embodied by the Indian woman. The spiritual sphere was thus a space in which the nation imagined itself as already free; cultural arenas were seen as not always in the same subordinate

relation to the colonizers as economic or political arenas. What resulted from this nationalist reasoning was a firm association of women with the spiritual, cultural, and private realms. Indian nationalists deftly invoked prevalent patriarchal gender inequalities to resist colonial interference in the intimate reaches of "native" lives. As a consequence, reforming women's lives became a contentious arena of struggle between colonists and nationalists. Mrinalini Sinha's discussion of the age of consent (for marriage) debates in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British India provides a good illustration of the gendered dynamics of social reform.[9]

During independence struggles and immediately after, most nations were figured as female, and women were the ground on which national identity was erected. In Loomba's succinct reformulation of Benedict Anderson's argument: "If the nation is an imagined community, that imagining is profoundly gendered" (*Colonialism-Postcolonialism*, p. 215). Postcolonial feminist scholars have argued that while women may make minimal gains when mobilized as symbols of the new nation, they are easily returned to the domestic or to a depoliticized private sphere when independence is achieved. As Deniz Kandiyoti notes: "the vagaries of nationalist discourse are reflected in changing portrayals of women as victims of social backwardness, icons of modernity, as boundary markers or privileged bearers of cultural authenticity."[10] In these symbolic sites, Kandiyoti argues, women's claims to "enfranchised citizenry" ("Identity and its Discontents," p. 378) are ultimately limited because they are "held hostage" to the needs of the nation and tenaciously subjected to patriarchal control in the familial sphere. That is, they are caught in the role of mother/daughter/wife in both familial *and* national discourse. This disposition does not go unchallenged, however. As Lila Abu-Lughod makes clear in her discussion of the Middle East, "women themselves actively participate in these debates and social struggles, with feminism, defined in sometimes quite different ways, having become by now an inescapable term of reference."[11] Thus women in these locations are simultaneously participants in and hostages to nationalist projects – both empowered and undercut by the weight of their symbolic place.

As in the colonial era, in the postindependence period women are also the primary objects of reform and manipulation, especially under state-sanctioned modernization projects. Reforming/modernizing the lives of women in the Middle East, as Abu-Lughod demonstrates, is regulatory and emancipatory: modernity in the Middle East, she argues, introduces an era of the consolidation of the domestic as the proper arena for women within a new, heterosexual nuclear family model, with the man as head of household and the concomitant devaluation of women's homosocial networks. "The forms of feminism in the Middle East tied to modernity," she writes, "ushered in new forms of gendered subjection (in the double sense of subject positions for women and forms of domination) as well as new experiences and possibilities" (*Remaking Women*, p. 13).

Elite women's writing in these locations reflects the pride, ambivalence, and tension of embodying the locally defined ideal of womanhood. Popular literature by women in the newly independent nations expresses a desire to evolve into a female subject who is "free" from the many representations of proper womanhood

that are abundantly produced in various nationalist texts, yet the contours of this desired self are defined by these representations. Thus in a range of texts, including *Changes: A Love Story* by the Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo, *Nervous Conditions* by the Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Women of Sand and Myrrh* by the Lebanese writer Hanan al-Shaykh, and *That Long Silence* by the Indian writer Shashi Deshpande, frustration at the appropriation of the body, labor and intellect of the female subject by state, communal, or familial projects forms a central theme of the realist plot.[12] For the women in these fictional texts, belonging to, indeed, being the showpiece of a newly independent nation holds no guarantees.

Increasingly, postcolonial scholars within the Western academy have begun to theorize a "new" Diaspora Studies that considers the effects of mass migrations beyond the groups (Jews, Greeks, Armenian) to which the term "diaspora" was exclusively applied before the 1960s. As Western academia slowly opened up to scholarly articulations of diasporic experiences of travel and resettlement, of cultural production "on the road," as it were, of cross-continental links that endure over generations and of the differentiated, diasporic sense of belonging and citizenship in all locations, new issues relating to gender and sexuality in a cross-continental framework are elaborated upon by feminists. Diaspora Studies serves as an interesting site for feminist and other scholars, straddling as it does several geographic locations that are held in one framework. Thus an immigrant's view of the West is both linked to and distinguished from one or more parts of the non-Western world.

Forty years after women of color in the United States associated themselves with "women in the third world," the changes in immigration law, the movement of capital and jobs, globalization, and other economic and political forces all call for reformulations of the relations between people who live in and move among different corners of the planet. For example, under the rubric of Diaspora Studies, one can study the long history of the transportation of "indentured labor" from China and South Asia to meet the demands of a plantation economy after the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century. We might ponder how gendered, labor, sexual, and familial relations were reorganized in these circumstances. Moving to the current phase of globalization, we may ask who are the subalterns and elites in the new global economies. What was the impact of the changes in immigration law in 1965 on racial and class dynamics in the United States? Consider the full implications of the slogan "We Are Here Because You Were There" that is frequently used by black and Asian British subjects protesting about various aspects of race relations in the United Kingdom. How are citizenship, gender, sexuality, and familial dynamics reformulated in a diasporic context? How does the conventional understanding of nationality signify in the age of what Aihwa Ong has called "flexible citizenship" in her study of transnational Asians? Newly emerging feminist scholarship on these issues goes well beyond the "literary" and beyond a pristine understanding of gender as an isolated factor.

Also, other well-established areas of study – such as Asian Studies and Asian American or Latin American Studies – come into conversation with postcolonial studies under the aegis of diaspora. Asian American Studies over the past decade

has moved well beyond a purely national understanding of its scope to study the effects of US imperialism in Asia, new immigration, and transnational labor arrangements that stretch from Asia to the United Kingdom and out into other geographies. Thus a novel such as Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1991), set in the Philippines in the Marcos era, can be classified both as postcolonial fiction (given its clear elaboration of the impact of US imperialism on the Philippines) and as a classic Asian American novel framed by the protagonist Rio's immigration to the United States. As the novel makes clear, the United States shapes Rio's everyday life well before she steps onto US shores. Increasingly, the foods, music, television channels, languages, and peoples of the Philippines are now visible and established in thriving Filipino American communities in the United States. There are many such local contact zones where third world meets first world and irreversibly mix the categories of "West" and "non-West." The so-called "mainstream" cultures of the West are now irreversibly colored by the contributions from their immigrant populations and thus by past and present imperial policies.

Returning our attention to postcolonial literary feminist criticism: literary critical feminist territorial boundaries are not as clear-cut in the twenty-first century as they were imagined to be even a decade ago. We are at the threshold of a new location, one that *approaches* what we might call "global literary studies" – a situation that calls for a radical rethinking of the claims we have become accustomed to making when we produce feminist and/or literary scholarship. We can no longer make claims about how literary texts function as cultural artifacts and as political tools without having to think hard about how such texts might play out in other locations. This is not to suggest glibly that today information and influence circulate easily among scholars working in different parts of the world, but rather to argue that we cannot proceed with our scholarly projects oblivious to how our work speaks to scholarship or readership in different locations. Writing to this enlarged audience alerts one to the kinds of theoretical and practical negotiations that will soon be required *as a matter of course* in the era of global literary studies. Many cultural practices (literary and nonliterary) are produced every day across the globe, and many theorists and intellectuals (whose names do not appear here) continue to reflect on and articulate the significance of such work. The challenge for postcolonial feminist scholarship within the Western academy is to look beyond this location and engage with literary texts and literary criticism produced elsewhere, but always with a clear understanding of the pitfalls of apprehending the world with the aid of the old imperial analytical tools supplied by our common history of colonialism.

Notes

I would like to thank Ellen Rooney for her generosity with insights and countless conversations about this essay.

1. Quoted by Ngugi Wa Thiongo in *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 45.

2. See also Moira Ferguson's *Colonialism and Gender Relations from Mary Wollstonecraft to Jamaica Kincaid: East Caribbean Connections* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), Firdous Azim's *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* (London: Routledge, 1993), among a host of other scholarly books on this topic.
3. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, eds., *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 183.
4. See Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 66. See also the chapter "The Authoritative Englishwoman: Setting up Home and Self in the Colonies," in my *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 35–64.
5. See Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: the Debate on Sati in Colonial India," in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women Press, 1989), pp. 88–126.
6. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 93.
7. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
8. See Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," Sangari and Vaid, eds., in *Recasting Women*, pp. 233–53.
9. See Mrinalini Sinha, "Potent Protests: the Age of Consent Controversy, 1891" in Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity* (1995; reprinted New Delhi: Kali for Women Press, 1997), pp. 138–80.
10. Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation," in Williams and Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse*, pp. 376–91. See also N. Yuval-Davis and F. Anthias, eds., *Women-Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1989); and Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed, 1988).
11. Lila Abu-Lughod, "Introduction: Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions," in Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 3–31.
12. See Ama Ata Aidoo, *Changes: A Love Story* (London: The Women's Press, 1991); Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (London: The Women's Press, 1988); Hanan al-Shaykh, *Women of Sand and Myrrh* (London: Quartet Press, 1989); and Shashi Deshpande, *That Long Silence* (London: Virago, 1988).

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