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Going Global? Transnationality, Women/Gender Studies and Lessons from the Caribbean

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Abstract

The word 'global' has entered our everyday lexicon, presented as new, inescapable and often, as inherently positive. This poses considerable challenges in re-narrativizing globalization's trajectories to render visible historical encounters that are productive of difference and hierarchy. This essay offers tentative reflections on notions of the global that underlie the imperial divide between area studies and women/gender studies in a North American context.¹ The essay highlights practices of exclusion via Eurocentric

¹ This essay – and the attempt to specify a relational approach in which feminism is simultaneously a site of critical practice and an object of critique – is the product of a four-year engagement with curricular transformation in women and gender studies at the University of Toronto. In particular I would like to acknowledge Michelle Murphy and Linzi Manicom, with whom these conversations about transnationality and feminism first started and with whom a related essay, "Transnationalising Women's Studies", is in progress; June Larkin, undergraduate co-ordinator; and M. Jacqui Alexander, from whom I learn so much every day. The analysis that is presented here draws on and has benefited greatly from a multi-university study group that included Sedef Arat-Koc (Trent), Ena Dua (York), Kamala Kempadoo (York), Kiran Mirchandani (OISE/Toronto), Shahrzad Mojab (OISE/Toronto), Michelle Murphy (Toronto), Linzi Manicom (organizer, Toronto), Cynthia Wright (Toronto); discussions with colleagues at other women's studies programs; as well as a review of a wide cross-section of undergraduate syllabi.

renderings of global sisterhood based on a putatively universal notion of ‘woman’, and efforts to ‘go global’ that reduce areas, and people from those areas, to gendered types.

In response to Mino Moallem’s question – “[U]nder what circumstances are we able to claim that we belong to other significant locations that enable new theoretical and political connections?” (2001: 1267) – I see the Caribbean as a space that produces knowledge with important lessons for a remapping of women/gender studies in a Canadian context. In addition to exemplifying a long scholarly tradition of engaging with its insertion into global processes, the Caribbean also has historical and contemporary links to Canada, which belies the artificiality of the separation between the ‘women’ of women/gender studies and the ‘women’ of Caribbean (or more broadly, area) studies.

Introduction

By drawing on the Caribbean at certain points, I want to highlight its epistemological significance. I am not making the argument that scholarship on, about (as in area studies programs) or from this region offers ready answers to the dilemmas identified in this essay.² For example, the existence of the Centre for Gender and Development at the University of the West Indies (UWI) speaks to the institutionalization of feminism/women’s activism as a partial response to the relative marginalization of gender and sexuality questions from the general curricula in the region. At the same time, we should perhaps think carefully about whether and how ‘development’ disciplines the kinds of feminist inquiries that can be made under its name. We should also consider what kind of Caribbean gets served up and reproduced by the various area studies programs offered in Europe and North America. These examples point to the need to think more explicitly about the different questions or priorities generated in specific locations, while recognizing that they are, in important ways, related.

I open, therefore, by readily admitting that the impulse to share these provisional thoughts comes from my own ambivalence—as someone whose point of departure is the Caribbean—towards women’s studies in a Canadian/North American context, a project in which I am also invested. The term *ambivalence* is used here not in its usually negative sense (denoting the co-existence of opposing feelings or sentiments) but to describe a state of hesitancy, to signify the unsettled nature of conversations and to suggest a productive tension that can be animated by exploring where the two intellectual endeavours intersect.

More precisely, the hesitancy emerges from an observation that one can complete a women/gender studies degree in Canada without ever really encountering the Caribbean. This is not, however, a plea for inclusion; rather the broader question that its relative invisibility puts on the table is the extent to which women/gender studies curricula consistently and systematically engage the complex relations of inequality across place

² That is to say, it is also the case that the so-called ‘Third World woman’ can easily disappear between the cracks of the ethnocentrism of women/gender studies and the androcentrism of area studies.

that both constitute and are constituted by the international system we inhabit (Malkki 1994).³

This is not to say that these encounters do not occur. Here the pressure to open up the curriculum is not only in relation to a more general tendency to internationalise that can be found in other departments and programs,⁴ but also comes out of specifically located struggles in feminist organizing and women's studies programs. In relation to these latter political struggles for voice, visibility and inclusion, however, going global has done little to destabilize dominant subject positions in women and gender studies, since it is all too often accomplished via a politics of inclusion. At the introductory undergraduate level, for instance, one might be introduced to the global (usually in the form of women in a particular Third World site, such as workers in a 'global' factory) for a week or two, or there is an occasional interruption in the 'local' or national space, as in discussions of paid domestic work and immigrant women caregivers in Canada (this is actually one of the few, if not only, places where one is likely to find the Caribbean in a women/gender studies introductory course). Consistent with the multicultural language of Canadian national narratives (Bannerji, 1995), one might find a week on specific groups of women (such as Japanese-Canadians, African-Canadians), an identity-based approach that renders these communities fleetingly visible to students and frequently results in a pedagogy of compartmentalization, problematically communicating the message that different groups have different experiences. But there is little sense of how to theorise experience or to make connections.⁵ Indeed, one might ask, in a year-long course with a few weeks on hyphenated Canadians, who is the normative female subject of all the remaining 'unmarked' weeks? At more senior levels, intellectual encounters with the global tend most frequently to take place via special topics courses, courses on international development or area studies electives with a gender component or emphasis (for a similar discussion in relation to teaching 'Canadian' history in the women's studies classroom, see Wright, 2000. Also see Grewal & Kaplan, 2002; Mohanty, 2003).

³ The observations that follow are based on discussions with colleagues in women studies programs or those who do anti-racist and feminist work in other departments; conversations with students; as well as an overview of women/gender studies websites and a number of undergraduate syllabi. The discussion is meant to illustrate some general tendencies, and it should also be noted that the size and structure of programs across Canada vary widely, from those with departmental status and undergraduate as well as graduate programs, to those that continue to rely heavily on cross-listed courses and don't have faculty lines. This discussion also recognizes the exciting direction some institutional sites are taking, which also inspired these reflections – see for example the women's studies program at the University of Victoria. Note that I am using the Caribbean here to highlight gaps in how these encounters with otherness are pedagogically managed, not to make some sort of 'special interest' argument for its inclusion (although, given the vast number of people from the Caribbean and their descendants in Ontario and Montréal, one could justifiably ask where and how does the region appear in women/gender studies curricula in these sites).

⁴ Although beyond the scope of this paper, there is need for research into precisely what is meant when universities announce their intention to 'internationalise'. For critical discussions that address this call under conditions of global capitalism, and that focus on the kinds of global consumer/citizen/learner that are imagined in such apparently cosmopolitan gestures, see Mitchell (2003), Mohanty (2003).

⁵ This is another place where one might 'meet' the Caribbean in the curriculum. In fact, the Caribbean has largely been synonymous with blacks in Canada; for example until recently the Canadian Census had no box to tick as Chinese or Indian *and* Caribbean.

There are a number of consequences to this additive pedagogical approach, as feminist scholars such as Ella Shohat (2002), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), Inderpal Grewal & Caren Kaplan (1994, 2002) have pointed out in relation to their observations of women's studies in the U.S.:

- (1) It generates a plurality of knowledges, within a curricular structure that is profoundly hierarchical;
- (2) It reintroduces and reinforces ideas of 'here' and 'there' as place-bound, non-intersecting and discrete – where the 'there' that appears most infrequently and is integrated most problematically into the program appears under the general title of 'Third World', 'south' or 'international'. This makes the global an 'elsewhere, not here'⁶ that belongs in area studies, reinstating not only the compartmentalization of knowledge and spaces but also the certainty of 'Canada', despite the fact that as Audre Lorde reminds us, "By the year 2000, the 20 largest cities in the world will have one thing in common/ none of them will be in Europe, none in the United States"...and, one might add, none in Canada;
- (3) It situates geographies of gender along a tradition-modernity continuum in which women 'there' are less developed, less civilized, less able to contest patriarchal constraint than women 'here';
- (4) It raises questions of what counts as knowledge and what counts as case study, where certain 'areas' become fodder for theorizing, contributing data or information, then understood via the optics of a seemingly decentred, displaced and universal theorizing.

Critically, the national is left un-interrogated in these efforts, a point I return to later in this essay. Ella Shohat (2002) has an excellent discussion of nationalism in women's studies programs in the U.S. academy, and there is need for research on the specific form it takes in the Canadian context, how it shapes the narration of feminism in Canada (see Srivastava, 2005; Valverde, 1992), especially since there can be a temptation to claim an innocent space in the shadow of US empire. An anecdotal example of what I am trying to elaborate here comes from a panel on the future of women's studies in Canada a few years ago, where one speaker decried the use of so many American textbooks in introductory courses, a problem which she suggested could only be resolved with 'more Canadian content'. It is worth considering whether and how a call to fulfil such a mandate and our anxieties vis-à-vis the United States end up sustaining the fiction of a benevolent Canadian national identity, in which, as historian Michelle Murphy states, [Canadian] nationalism becomes the remedy/antidote to [American] imperialism.⁷

Sherene Razack (2004) reminds us, it is an innocence, bolstered by ideas of Canada as international peace-keeper, multicultural haven, that takes a lot of effort to construct and maintain, even as it is continually belied by domestic and foreign policies (in the context of the region, witness the central role played by the Canadian state in the Haitian crisis). It raises the troubling question of how women and gender studies, by unreflexively relying on a nation frame within which to accomplish its curricular objectives, might

⁶This is a play on Dionne Brand's novel, entitled *In Another Place, Not Here*.

⁷Personal conversation with Michelle Murphy.

operate within and not against such ideological moves. Here instead we might want to think about how we reorient a seemingly innocent imperative to teach ‘more about Canada’ that ends up reinscribing alterity on certain bodies, and assigning certain ‘kinds’ of women to particular marginalized geographies (within the academy, this means that students interested in these questions have to find – or hope to find – these women in area studies). How might we shift this desire to learn more about ourselves to an interrogation of who ‘ourselves’ comprises and the exclusions such investments have necessarily entailed, to a more careful and critical analysis of Canada in the world and in terms of its ongoing internal colonialisms vis-à-vis First Nations communities, its own productions of locals and outsiders, of ‘elsewheres within here’?

Transnationality and the women and gender studies curriculum: Caribbean lessons

The remainder of this essay considers some feminist interventions that offer alternatives to a celebratory or pluralizing approach to going global. It draws on recent discussions among a research group that included colleagues from the universities of Trent, York and Toronto, as well as initiatives in women and gender studies at the University of Toronto, to recast the undergraduate and graduate curricula in a transnational frame. The term transnational has proliferated in recent years, having

...been invested with a variety of meanings and political attributes, from accounts of global capital to the politics of alliance and coalition-building, from the creation of subjectivities (to be transnational, transmigrant, diasporic) through to the reconfiguration of imperialist ideologies and practices (Series Description, *Gender, Transnationality and Citizenship*, University of Toronto, 2002).

In the studies, transnational tends to be most frequently deployed in three ways. Firstly, it refers to border-crossing flows of capital, technology/information and people (Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) mediascapes, financescapes, ideoscapes and ethnoscapes), the latter perhaps most clearly staked out as an area of study in relation to the back-and-forth movement of people across national borders that prompted the transformation of migration studies, coming primarily out of sociology, anthropology and to a lesser extent, geography.

Secondly, the transnational also encompasses border-spanning/crossing activism; what Michael Peter Smith and Luis Guarnizo (1998) referred to as ‘transnationalism from below’ in reference and in vigorous response to the seemingly borderless predations of capital, and what feminists identify variously as global, international, transnational feminism/feminist activism (although some of what is called global feminism, especially the United Nations (UN) Conferences, might be more aptly termed ‘globalization from above’ (see Spivak, 1996). A frequent assumption is that this political strategy of organizing across borders is the principal or only way of responding effectively to a world in which capital flows know no boundaries and where international civil society via supranational organizations like the UN and a proliferation of NGO networks produce new possibilities for realizing justice on a global scale.

The third use of the term, within which this essay's attempt to trouble the boundaries of women/gender studies is located, is to think of transnationality as a mode of critically apprehending the world, and which is related to, but distinguishable from the other two processes described above. Feminists bring overlapping intellectual trajectories to bear on this project. For instance, in a recently published set of reflections on women and gender studies in the present conjuncture (Wiegman, 2002), Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan identify Marxism, post-modernism and post-colonialism, while for Laura Donaldson, Anne Donadey and Jael Silliman, it is anti-racism and post-colonialism that are initially most productive. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty point out that any genealogy of transnational feminism must not only remember, but centre the struggles of aboriginal women and women of colour in and across both North and South to name colonialism and racism (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Alexander, 2006; Mohanty, 2005). This emphasis finds its counterpart in Canada (see Brand 1991; Bristow et al 1994; Carty 1993; Dua & Robertson, 1999). Their approach underlines the need to consider and historicise the context in which ideas emerge, circulate and reverberate, and offers a way of destabilizing the academy/community or theory/practice divide. In this third account, transnationality names the effort to find a conceptual apparatus that can ask critical feminist questions of globalization, understood in this reading as the historical and contemporary materialization of unequal and partial linkages in the worlds we inhabit. In the remainder of this essay, and drawing in part on the Caribbean to elaborate my argument, I sketch what I suggest are two important dimensions: history/relationality; and reflexivity.⁸

Historicizing and relationality (or, thinking backwards and outwards)

One frustration about the proliferation of globalization discourses, what Fred Cooper (2001) refers to as global babble, is the tendency to forget. Or, as Sidney Mintz (1998, 20) notes, there is "some risk in waxing too enthusiastic over a new lexicon of transnationalism without a serious historical perspective". As they point out, by some of the very definitions or assumptions undergirding the use of the term today, earlier moments of international trade were greater or 'more global' than the present. Historicizing globalization makes it less possible for celebratory narratives to elide the central question of the enduring legacies of colonialism in the neo-imperial present; as Mintz notes, "[t]he new theories of transnationalism and globalization are not respectful enough...especially of the history of exploration, conquest and the global division of labour" (Mintz, 1998, 131). At a time when border porosity in relation to capital is taken for granted (even by some anti-globalization activists who argue for border-crossing solidarities as a fundamental oppositional strategy), historicizing also challenges the inevitability embedded in such assumptions by allowing us to see capital flows not as a given, but rather as the outcome of travelling, *situated* and contingent practices and negotiations which link parts of the world, some more completely than others (Cooper, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 1996).

⁸ The first of these draws from Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1992) seminal discussion of anthropological engagements with the Caribbean, where he identifies three themes that mark this encounter: historicity; articulation; and heterogeneity.

Foregrounding the acknowledgement that “the fluid millions who whisk here and there and back again...originated *somewhere*” (Mintz, 1998, 131), and that movement was regulated at various points to respond to the differently gendered needs and demands of an emerging global capitalist economy, resonates with the effort to bring area studies and women and gender studies into a meaningful conversation with each other. About Middle Eastern Studies, Mino Moallem comments that she supports work that “throws global feminism into crisis by emphasizing the historical specificity of the region, in general and each locality in particular” (2001, 1267). This should not be mistaken for a call to pit the local against the global as fixed binaries where the local becomes romanticized as the site of critical practice or as an arena of authenticity: “Retrieving or recuperating the local cannot immediately transform the contradictory politics of feminist theory, nor is recourse to the local an instant panacea” (Kaplan, 1994, 149). Again, a sense of historical process is key to avoiding the trap of reifying the local and culturalising differences. Uma Narayan points out that this has been a dominant response coming out of the challenges to the universalist claims of Western feminism that named gender as the most important form of subordination that *all* women faced, and where the particular was made into a general, normative and unmarked rule. In the search for ‘better’ representations or understandings, what one finds is “...culturally essentialist generalizations being generated as a result of self-conscious feminist attempts to avoid gender essentialism, something that happens not infrequently in classrooms and conferences, as well as in academic texts” (2000, 83). She goes on to note that such efforts “fracture the universalist category ‘woman’ only slightly” (2000, 81), a move that slides easily into a relativist and pluralist stance writ large on a global stage and calls up easy stereotypes, like the indefatigable African-Caribbean matriarch or the Latina overwhelmed by machismo. As Shohat notes, “we must worry about a globalist feminism that disseminates its programs internationally as the universal gospel, just as we have to be concerned about a localist feminism that surrenders all dialogue in the name of an overpowering relativism” (Shohat 2006, 7). Multiculturalising representational regimes do little to destabilize the centrality of Western feminist claims, projected as independent of gendered practices and ideas in other spatial configurations. Rather than reifying the local and leaving difference untheorised, we need to historicize categories of self-other and explore the global-local processes through which differences are produced, stabilized and taken for granted *in relation to each other*.

Accounting, therefore, for the production and circulation of gendered representations, practices and relations requires an emphasis not on comparison between separate entities, but on relationality (Shohat, 2002), or what Mohanty (2003) calls a deep comparative method. This does not suggest connecting up the previously disconnected, as if such embodied spaces existed outside or *a priori* those connections. Instead, it is a mode of analysis that questions both the discreteness and the equivalence of place, focusing our attention instead on tracking how power is spatialized, on the gendered flows and relations that constitute the uniqueness of each place and that also differentiate and hierarchize across and within them, the ‘power-geometries’ that feminist geographer Doreen Massey (1994) refers to.

The Caribbean is an excellent site to illustrate these connections, because it throws into relief the amnesia that is required or the particular kinds of histories that must be narrated in order to sustain globalization as innocent or recent. As Sidney Mintz (1998, 123) asks, “Does it not seem, to those who believe globalization is a new phenomenon, that moving a million people a year trans-oceanically for an entire century is pretty big and pretty global? If so, why have they not noticed?” It is only possible to maintain globalization’s myth of contemporaneity if we erase the colonial and imperial histories that created such ‘areas’ as Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, South Asia, or if we forget that, as Mintz, C.L.R. James and so many others have asserted, “Caribbean peoples are the first *modernized* peoples in world history” (Mintz, 1993, 10). As a region forged in the crucible of a colonial encounter that would initially lead to the expulsion and extermination of the area’s original inhabitants, where the “sugar making machine” (Benítez-Rojo, 1997) helped in no small way to industrialise Europe, and whose contemporary population are predominantly the descendants of those massively and brutally transplanted from Africa, India and China, it is impossible to think of the Caribbean *without* considering the colonial linkages that give it its historically specific imprint.⁹ Canada is very much a part of this transnational circuit, which historically encompasses 19th century missionary and banking links, trading routes for ships from Halifax bringing cod and timber and returning with sugar and rum, Maroons in Nova Scotia, bauxite ventures, and a Caribbean population in Canada since the 17th century (Bristow et al, 1994; Chodos, 1977). Today, those connections include banking interests, mining companies, the involvement of the Canadian state via ‘development’ work in the region and the central role played most recently in the removal of Jean-Bertrand Aristide from office in Haiti (and the deployment of Canadian police officers during the interim administration of Gerard Latortue).

Nor is it just the Caribbean that is shaped by these historical connections. Radhika Mongia (2003) provides an excellent interrogation of the apparent coherence of Canadian boundaries and national identity in her account of the history of the passport, that technology of differentiation which holds nationality between its covers and is a key index of inequalities in the international family of nations (Malkki, 1994). The Caribbean comes into play here in intriguing ways that beg further exploration. Canada’s robust support for passports was intended to effectively restrict Indian immigration in the early 20th century, an effort that can only be fully understood when placed in the context of Indian indentureship (in this continent, to the Caribbean), since the regulatory measures that did exist were for the movement of indentured labourers and did not at the time imagine ‘free’ migrations of Indians, especially to white settler colonies. It was consistent with earlier practices of racialization that denied citizenship rights to Aboriginal peoples as well as Chinese and Japanese resident in Canada. The furore over Indian immigration came to a head in 1914, when hundreds of Indian passengers on the steamship *Komagata Maru*, denied entry into Canada, launched a court challenge citing their right as British subjects to claim residency throughout the empire. Here differentiation (between ‘indentured’ and ‘free’ labour, between Canada as a white settler society and other British

⁹ One could think also in the opposite direction, from Eric William’s historical masterpiece *Capitalism and Slavery*, to more recent feminist studies such as Catherine Hall’s (2002) work on the Caribbean connections to the fashioning of the British imperial masculine subject.

colonies, between the citizenship rights of ‘white’ and ‘non-white’ peoples) would become key to the insistence of the Canadian federal government on its sovereign right to determine the boundaries of belonging (Dua 2003).

In her detailed examination of the migration of Indians to Canada in the early 20th century, Dua (2000, 2003) discusses the ways in which the state restricted access to citizenship for people of colour, with debates on the ‘Hindu woman’s question’ in the Canadian parliament explicitly linking the barring of Indian women to the prevention of family reunification and settlement. Significantly, these debates occurred around the same time that indentureship was coming to an end in the Caribbean. There, gendered representations were shifting against the backdrop of an immense shortage of women, and via an elaborate colonial project to remake and domesticate Indian women within the family as part of a strategy of ensuring a resident male labour force and halting the possible return to India of ex-indentured labourers (Mohapatra, 1995). We need to think across these apparently distinct locations and sites of scholarly endeavour (Canada, the Caribbean, India), in order to understand precisely the gendered circuits, what Inderpal Grewal (2005) refers to as transnational connectivities, through which discourses of the family and of women’s sexuality were emerging in roughly the same historical moment of the British empire. These discourses sought to position Indian women alternately as a threat to the Canadian national project and as integral to the future of sugar in parts of the Caribbean (albeit through a shift from public to private patriarchy via their relocation to the household and marginalization from the estate workforce). Holding and addressing this simultaneity in the same analytical frame enables us to see that compartmentalization is perhaps less an account of lives lived than the product of the imposition of our own intellectual maps.

A more multifaceted approach, then, would restore to the picture the ongoing gendered transnational processes that underpin contemporary Canadian state practices, the Canadian economy and the Canadian national imaginary. Discourses and practices of gender, class, race and sexuality are crucial to the ways in which national belonging – a family of citizens – is invoked, such that Caribbean peoples continue to be represented as recent migrants, as contingent members of the Canadian multicultural mosaic, notwithstanding their presence in Canada since the 17th century. An example of this contradictory positioning can be seen in the programs that have historically brought Caribbean women to Canada as domestic workers since the early 20th century (Calliste, 1989). These women represent a largely invisible labour force that sustains contemporary urban industrialized centres like Toronto: they are not simply or even victims of globalization, but an integral part of the process through which the global is constituted. They are not beneficiaries of Canadian benevolence and largesse as per the hegemonic representations of Canada as safe haven, generous to immigrants and refugees (Razack, 2000). Rather, they are women historically displaced and for whom migration is a transnational survival strategy (and today it is the economic and social dislocations effected by structural adjustment programs which have led to Caribbean peoples being among the region’s greatest ‘export’). It is the invisible labour of women recruited from the Caribbean as domestic workers and nannies that has made it possible for their Canadian employers and female counterparts to enter the paid workforce. Yet their

contributions are largely unrecognized, their labour rights unprotected, their access to permanent residence and citizenship contingent, as was made clear in the case of the seven Jamaican mothers ordered deported in 1979 because they didn't declare in their applications that they had children in the Caribbean (Chancy, 1997).¹⁰

The racialisation and gendering of citizenship also has implications for Caribbean men. The counterpart to the Domestic Worker Scheme (now a Live-in Caregiver Programme) is the recruitment of women and predominantly men from Latin America and the Caribbean as temporary farm workers across Southern Ontario, where there is a similar presumption that while their labour is required, their families, and the costs of social reproduction, must remain outside the borders of Canada. Here we see the ways in which gender calls for different bodies to perform feminised (domestic, private) and masculinised (public) work, in a context in which both kinds of jobs have little status and are associated with immigrants, non-Canadians, people of colour. Caribbean men are also positioned in urban Canada as potentially dangerous, as a threat to the stability of the nation. Racial profiling is fueled by stereotypical depictions of Caribbean men as gangsters (mostly Jamaicans by default), part of a wider global circulation of representations of violent black masculinity. It is perhaps unsurprising that the effect of federal legislation allowing the Canadian government to deport permanent residents was disproportionately felt in the Caribbean community. According to one report, in the first year of the law's application, Jamaicans, Trinidadians and Guyanese ranked among the top three groups deported from Ontario (*Toronto Star* 1998). What these examples point to – if our conceptual maps are not to end up doing the work of the state – is the need to address the ways in which these histories and geographies are unevenly and inextricably entangled, as well as to track how this intertwining is denied by gendered, racialised and sexualized practices and representations that are called up to sustain and narrate Canada's self-image and outward projection as a white settler society (Atlantis, 2000; Razack, 2000).

There is another point of entry into this category of 'Canadian', in exploring the "racial geography of the Canadian nation-state" (Walcott, 1997), one that reorients our focus away from dominant stereotypes and exclusionary state practices and towards the cumulative effects of a range of everyday activities on this seemingly bounded sense of national identity. If we start with the lives and survival strategies of Caribbean women and men, their uneven circulation and mobility map a transnational social field that stitches Canada and the Caribbean together and makes it impossible to insist on the separability of the two if an adequate accounting of this complexity is to be rendered. This manifests itself in a number of ways, from the households in the Caribbean that are kept afloat by remittances sent by relatives in Toronto (Burman, 2002), to efforts by Haitian women in Montréal to contribute to the democratic struggle in Haiti (Charles,

¹⁰ That the women eventually challenged the ruling and won, after a vigorous campaign fittingly titled 'good enough to work, good enough to stay', did not prevent the future policing of immigrant domestics: witness the deportation order against Mavis Baker more than a decade later, where the fact that she had children in Canada (and also in Jamaica) was used to suggest that she had sought 'immigration by progeny'. For an excellent discussion of what this case revealed about the production of the Canadian border, see Browne, 2002.

1995), active involvement of Caribbean women in community, feminist and anti-racist activism in Toronto (Bobb-Smith, 2003), and the emergence of Toronto itself as a significant performative site of Caribbean identity through the annual Caribana parade and associated festivities (Trotz, 2006). The field of cultural production offers another rich and varied tapestry of diasporic affiliations in which the Caribbean is a central interlocutor (Walcott, 1999, 2001). The contributions of Lillian Allen, Dionne Brand, Ramabai Espinet, Lorna Goodison, Nalo Hopkinson, Tessa McWatt, Shani Mootoo, M. NourBese Philip, Djanet Sears, Olive Senior, Makeda Silvera and D'Bi Young, among others, foreground the multiple ways in which women's bodies are not only witness to histories of suffering that are transatlantic and diasporic, but also emerge as key sites of resistant practices and memories that cannot be contained or incarcerated by territorial borders (also see McKittrick, 2006; Sudbury, 2004). In these renditions the Caribbean is not an elsewhere. It also exists in Canada, in the lives of people who constitute part of the steady migratory stream, in the continuing connections that are forged through remittances, the internet and the telephone, travel back and forth, as a material and imaginative/symbolic diasporic resource that is reiterated daily. There is much work to be done here to explore the ways in which these movements are gendered, and their contribution to challenging and redrawing maps of belonging within and across both the Caribbean and Canada.

Reflexivity and social change

In the final section of this essay, I want to briefly draw out an argument that has been implicit in the previous pages, namely that women/gender studies needs to consider the space it occupies, the ground it is standing on. In other words, and in some ways most importantly, feminist practice, rather than simply or primarily being that which illuminates, or complicates, or makes visible, becomes an object of analytic scrutiny itself.¹¹

This lesson can be a difficult one to impart to a first-year class where the understanding of feminism writ large is theory not just in and of itself, but for social change, and which slides easily into expectations of happy endings, a narrative of women's (which women?) struggles worldwide against the odds (which odds?).¹² It is certainly difficult to resist the temptation to offer celebratory invocations of women's organizing globally across borders, and indeed many would define transnational feminism in just these terms. Instead, what is suggested here is that we historicise these spatial practices, open up the question of how gender is constituted across uneven circuits of power, in order to "pressure the question of gender relations without bypassing the contradictions arising from the unequal power configurations inherent in colonialism and neocolonialism, as well as in globalization and transnational capitalism" (Shohat, 2006: xvi).

¹¹ To be sure, this is partly difficult to do because such programs, unevenly institutionalized, still appear to operate at the margin of the academy, and engaging this – apparently larger – issue often remains the priority. The point I am making is that it need not come at the expense of truly opening the program up to a genuinely inclusive practice.

¹² To be sure, this is not always the case. In fact, for students who may have tended to feel that certain issues were marginal or unspeakable, practising self-critique in the classroom can open up new spaces for engagement and belonging.

In this regard, Anne McClintock's (1995) notion of anachronistic space is extremely useful for enabling us to see how the tradition-modernity binary is spatialized and gets played out on the bodies of women. We can, for instance, consider how the first wave of Western feminism imagines its project of political belonging via positing women of other, 'non-Western' spaces as less modern (Burton, 1994; Valverde, 1992). We witnessed the recycling of these orientalist tropes in the US-led war against Afghanistan, now actively supported by Canadian troops, which was partly justified on the grounds of helping to liberate Muslim women from Muslim men and Islamic fundamentalism (for a discussion of Canadian media representations of these stereotypes see Jiwani 2005). In Canada, this rationale found active support among many self-described feminists (Arat-Koc, 2002; Razack, 2005). Moreover, orientalism took the form of sanctioning the kinds of feminist responses that were forthcoming, as in the case of Sunera Thobani, women's studies professor and former president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, whose loyalty (as an immigrant) to Canada was questioned after she called for feminists to critique the gendered and racialised effects of US foreign policy (Arat-Koc, 2005). In tracking itineraries of feminism here, we should foreground the 'Canadian' in order to undo it; that is to say, we can fruitfully explore in what ways, and with what effects, nationalism is sedimented in feminist projects inside and outside of the academy, creating not only notions of who rightfully belongs but also what place the normative Canadian citizen is imagined to occupy in the world, and in relation to whom¹³

Reflexivity is also warranted in view of what many would describe as the success of well-networked feminist struggles to mainstream gender. The evidence of these efforts surrounds us, from national governments collecting data and creating women's bureaus and gender focal points in ministries, to the declaration of a United Nations Decade for Women in 1975, to the various international legislative instruments and protocols issued by institutions such as the UN and the Canadian International Development Agency (which is present across the Commonwealth Caribbean). If these have all helped to give gender its current institutional recognition on the world stage, has this legitimacy perhaps come to regulate the terms of participation?

One good example of this tension can be seen in what has come to be known as the NGO-ization of feminism. Much has been written about the benefits and dangers of NGO-izing: the perils of bureaucratization; questions of co-optation and autonomy; compromise and neglect of grassroots movements. Yet it could be argued that a good deal of the literature contains a residual core of innocence: the idea that notwithstanding the huge gains that were made to get gender accepted and institutionalized, something was sacrificed or corrupted in the process. This doesn't really answer the question of how we make sense of the almost ritualistic invocation of gender by the same institutions – local, national, regional and international – that are the architects of structural adjustment

¹³ Sarita Srivastava (2005), in her study of feminist organizations in Canada, provides an excellent discussion of just how difficult such conversations around anti-racism can be, and suggests that some of the resistance has "roots in feminist community, imperial history, and national imaginings" (p. 30). For a discussion of these issues in relation to feminist scholarship, see Ruth Roach Pierson (2006); and in relation to the university classroom, see Dua & Lawrence (2000).

policies with hugely detrimental effects on the majority of the world (Manicom, 2001). If in the previous example we see how gender becomes a rationale for imperialist wars, here we must ask what is it about the way in which gender has been deployed by a constellation of actors that *includes* feminists, that enables it to co-exist so easily, to fall in line so effortlessly, with neo-liberal projects?

We can turn to the Caribbean where some of the debates among feminists and women activists have squarely put these thorny questions on the agenda. Thus, in a seminal essay on a Jamaican women's organization, Sistren, Honor Ford-Smith (1997) addresses external structural constraints, including the disinvestment of the state from the provision of education, health and other social services, the disproportionate burden that structural adjustment policies placed on poor women in particular, the 'discovery' of women by international funding agencies and the limit placed by sponsors on the kinds of transformative work needed to be done. At the same time, Ford-Smith confronts the difficult legacy of colonialism as it plays itself out in Sistren, through a discussion of the internal dynamics of race and class among the women involved. It is an analysis that foregrounds the uneven international terrain which the feminist movement in the Caribbean must navigate (thus naming the impossibility of global sisterhood), without sacrificing attention to the nuances within the region that reproduce hierarchized differences among women.

More recently, and in a discussion of the consequences of what one might term the supranational gender agenda on women's organizing in the region, activist Guyanese Andaiye pointedly reflects on the changing ways in which she is interpellated as a respectable women's activist/expert on women in a socio-economic climate patently hostile to comprehensively addressing gender and poverty:

As the market has shown itself more hostile to the interests of poor nations and poor people, beginning with the poorest women...I have become less and less a political activist and more gatekeeper for the development industry, helping to demobilize poor women. Agencies which would never pay me to organize with women pay me as a "gender expert" to mainstream gender into institutions which are not designed to serve the interests of poor women or men and cannot be made to serve their interests...I end up helping to provide services to a few women instead of challenging the economic model that justifies governments not providing and maintaining services to all women (Andaiye, 2002: 16-17).

Andaiye's comments raise the question of the reconfiguration of the women's movement in the contemporary Caribbean, prompting us to examine the uncomfortable ways in which feminist activism meets or converges with neo-liberal strategies to produce the category of poor women in need of rescue.¹⁴ The broader lesson that can be drawn from these sites, and that can usefully inform our pedagogical practices, is the call to beware

¹⁴ In an interesting discussion of feminist ethnography in Latin America and the Caribbean, Carla Freeman and Donna Murdock (2001) note the enduring influence of Marxist intellectual traditions on the direction of scholarship, in particular the prominence of political economy and development. One avenue for future research is to explore in greater detail how 'women and development' approaches changed in the region, as well as how knowledge production travels across the borders of academia, nongovernmental organizations and the state, and with what effects.

the tendency to think that a feminist analysis necessarily provides the way out – where everything ‘global’ but feminism itself is subjected to the feminist critique (and here of course we need to think about our own investment in certain sorts of narratives as always already oppositional). As Grewal and Kaplan (2001) note, “Feminism’s own self-rendition as an agent of liberating women must itself come into critical view”. At stake, as always, is the question, what are the terms of inclusion? Who is hidden from this picture and what does inclusion – different from transformation – entail?

Conclusion

This essay has offered some reflections on what transnationality might mean in the context of reframing women and gender studies in Canada, noting its uneasy relationship with area studies and drawing on the Caribbean as a site that is both in Canada (historically as well as currently) and where there is a tradition of engaging some of the issues these comments sought to address here. At a time when globalization is spoken of as something new that connects us all, but the reality is that such connections have magnified inequality and displacement to staggering proportions, critical literacy is required to apprehend what exactly is this ‘global’ that we speak of. Feminist knowledge production is an important interdisciplinary space that can offer much in the way of understanding the gendered dynamics of this new dispensation of power, but it does not stand outside of these processes and it is crucial to recognize these messy entanglements and their histories *from the start*. Pedagogically, we want to keep our eyes on both dimensions simultaneously. The goal of opening up women and gender studies to these close and strange encounters is not to be ‘at home in the world’ or to achieve a simplistic sisterly solidarity in the face of globalization. It is more modest (and hopefully more accountable), to unsettle these impulses and to explore the kinds of conceptual tools that will enable us to specify and make obvious the connections across which our lives have been, are and will be made. As has hopefully been made clear, identifying linkages should not result in a commensurability of place, a move that in relation to women studies/feminist projects can all too easily slide into a multicultural feminism or proclamations of ‘sisterhood is global’. A critical, accountable and in the final analysis, inclusive feminist practice must struggle to render visible the historical and contemporary materialization of unequal and partial connections in the worlds *it also* inhabits.

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