

Global Feminisms, Transnational Political Economies, Third World Cultural Production

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Abstract

Third wave feminism is located historically in relation to de-industrialization in the 1980s and the 1990s' boom in information technologies and transnational finance, which exponentially increased disparities of wealth and power worldwide. Given the global context of third wave feminism's emergence, this article argues for a consideration of the many forms and expression of feminism the world over, and of the ways they converge with and diverge from western feminisms, both politically and culturally. After briefly discussing the economically oppressive and culturally homogenizing tendencies of globalization, the article looks at the democratizing potential of today's global media networks. I end with analyses of recent work by Lília Momplé and Nadine Gordimer which demonstrate how these texts grapple with questions of neocolonial domination and unprecedented flows of capital, labor, commodities, and culture as they affect women and are addressed by feminists in Africa.

Key Words: third wave feminism, globalization, third world politics

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Third Wave Feminism and the Wider World

If anything can be said with certainty about third wave feminism, it is that it is mainly a first world phenomenon generated by women who, like their second wave counterparts, have limited interest in women's struggles elsewhere on the planet. The most comprehensive studies/expressions of third wave feminism that have appeared in the US, such as Leslie Heywood's and Jennifer Drake's *Third Wave Agenda*, the special issue of *Hypatia* on edited by Jacqueline Zita, and the anti-intellectual *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* by Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, explore many new ways of "doing feminism" but exhibit little concern with the politics of gender and sexuality outside the west. Likewise, a perusal of third wave feminist websites yields only one site – the *Third Wave Foundation* – centered on "the fight for social justice," and even that one unself-consciously focuses exclusively on events in New York City and on women's efforts in that town to combat inequalities stemming from "age, gender, race, sexual orientation, economic status" and so on. An article on this site earnestly reports the proceedings of a Barnard College conference (New York again) sponsored by the Veteran Feminists of America – Susan Brownmiller, Catherine Stimpson, Betty Friedan, Barbara Seaman, and others – as well as the critical response of the young women in attendance, with nary an allusion to any part of the world in which the names and aims of US feminists of the past and present would have little meaning. Other sites, produced in Germany, Quebec, France, Australia, the US and other wealthy nations/regions, proclaim that feminism is alive and well despite reports of its death, and provide information and articles on everything from activist projects, sports, and entertainment to domestic

violence and diabetes. But these sites address feminist concerns in North America and Europe exclusively.

Not surprisingly, a number of third wave feminist websites promote women's empowerment in and through computer technologies. Sites such as *DigitalEve*, *GirlIncorporated* and *Webgrrls International* celebrate women's involvement in the field of information technology and encourage all women to make use of it in any way that may be helpful to them and to feminist causes. Symptomatically, however, most of these sites either unabashedly promote capitalist self-advancement in the name of feminism, or else mistakenly assume that their sincere appeal to feminist action, self-help, and solidarity really addresses a worldwide audience. For example, *Girl Incorporated*, which designs websites and online marketing strategies passes itself off as feminist simply by virtue of being a women's business that markets to women in business. *DigitalEve*, on the other hand, which is feminist in a more meaningful sense insofar as it aims to information technology in the service of feminism, characterizes itself as a "global" organization, by which it means that it has chapters in the US, Canada, the UK, and Japan. I point this out in order to suggest that in much of the cyberfeminist world, as in much third wave and second wave feminism generally, the first world, perhaps unwittingly, stands in for the world as a whole.

This aspect of western feminism is quite troubling, particularly since it is not limited to liberal organizations such as *DigitalEve* or to the work of liberal academic feminists. For example, Elaine Showalter's reaction to the attacks in New York on 11 September 2001 at the *Third Wave Feminism* conference exhorted young feminists to support and actively engage in western governments' profoundly undemocratic antiterrorist operations, as if such moves would reflect and advance the interests of women everywhere. Unfortunately, even "radical" feminists often turn a blind eye to the situation of women in the third world, or content themselves with paying lip service to the importance of third world feminist struggles without bothering to investigate the ways in which those struggles are linked with their own.ⁱⁱ Whereas certain modes of radical feminist activism of the second wave had their roots in the US Civil Rights movement as well as in third world liberation movements, to which they considered their own struggles to be inextricably tied, the acute consciousness of these links has faded in the minds of many of today's feminists, regardless of the "wave" to which they supposedly belong. And whereas many second wave feminists in Europe and North America worked in concert with third world feminists in the 1960s and 70s,ⁱⁱⁱ the connection between western and third world feminists today, for Westerners, often takes the form of a link on a website, an icon that may be clicked, or not, as if it merely constituted one option among others for women engaged in feminist activity.

Paradoxically, this is so despite the fact that today's computer technologies and mass communications networks have facilitated the growth of transnational intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) devoted to feminism, human rights, and ecology, and have augmented the effectiveness of these organizations in putting direct democracy into practice, gaining the attention of the mainstream media, mobilizing and shaping public opinion, and putting pressure on governments to implement and enforce democratic policies that protect women's interests. Even though transnational feminisms have more potential today than ever before, they have been sidelined since the recession of the mid-1980s. At that moment, most western nations

became preoccupied with their internal economic and political problems and with racially-charged questions of immigration, while at the same time exhibiting a powerful antifeminist backlash that prompted mainstream and extreme right wing media pundits to declare the demise of feminism. It is worth noting that third wave feminism emerged at a historical juncture in the late 1980s and early 1990s when leftist movements in western countries were more focused on their domestic economic and political crises than on international politics, and when the then-new Cable News Network broadcast US President George Bush's triumphant announcement of the inauguration of a New World Order – violently imposed without significant negotiation and without apology by the US – in the course of the mass-mediated Gulf War.

Owing to the deindustrialization of the 1980s, this period was characterized by corporate downsizing, underemployment, and high unemployment, especially in Europe, as well as by the growing ethnicization of class differences, and by intense racial strife and xenophobia in the west – not to mention the feminization of poverty across the globe. It was also the time when information technology and transnational finance became the most powerful economic forces in the postindustrial western countries, enabling those nations to dominate the rest of the world more effectively than ever before. Finally, we must not forget the economic boom of the late 1990s, the moment at which the gap between rich and poor within the global North, as well as between the North and the South, reached unprecedented proportions.^{iv} Given the historical context of their emergence, then, neither women's empowerment in and through information technology, nor feminist cultural/imaginative/erotic activity in cyberspace, nor third wave feminism generally can be adequately understood solely in terms of a western politics of gender and sexuality, since the latter cannot be divorced from matters of global political economy. Even less can third wave feminism be understood simply in terms of a generational divide between second and third wavers, that is, in terms of an oedipal battle between older and younger first world women, mainly white and middle class. Its significance and potential can be grasped only by adopting a global interpretive frame, that is, by relinquishing the old frameworks of the west and developing new ones that take seriously the struggles of women the world over, a process that gained wide recognition among intellectuals in the 1980s thanks to the research of scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and her essay "Under Western Eyes."

Third wavers are right to claim that new modalities of feminism must be invented for the new millenium. But in the increasingly globalized world that we have inhabited at least since the 1990s, it is essential that feminism be conceived and enacted in global terms. Globalization, both as a social process and as a key concept in social science and humanities research, emerges as a central concern in the 1990s when the world-binding technologies of satellite communications and the Internet begin to alter the cultural-political landscape, as did (and do) decentralizing, potentially democratizing technologies such as video and VCRs, fax machines, alternative radio, and cable television. Globalization also involves unprecedented transnational flows of capital and labor that fundamentally shape economic, political, social, and cultural relations. Given the global arena in which third wave feminism emerges, it is disappointing that new feminist debates arising in first world contexts mainly address issues that pertain only to women *in* those contexts. At their best, they attend to issues of race and class as they shape the politics of gender and sexuality in the global North – hence the myriad community

groups, websites, zines, and scholarly publications devoted to economic inequality and the gender struggles of minority women in North America and Europe (Wilkerson; Sidler). They also explore the new sexualities, pleasures, and forms of embodiment that are coming into being through human interaction via the new media, as Gillis argues in her work on cybersex. At their worst, third wavers proffer glib commentaries (or “rants”) on the concerns and desires of young women in the West, as if no other women existed (or mattered). In an interview, Jennifer Baumgardner opines, for instance: “feminism is something individual to each feminist.” “Name an issue,” says Baumgardner; “if that’s what you’re interested in, then it’s the most important, whether it’s eating disorders, sexual harrasment, child care, etc.” This is consumerism, not politics.

In writing this, I risk inviting charges of elitism from third wavers who applaud the accessibility of work such as Baumgardner’s as well as its affirmation of pleasure, and who see established feminist academics and their theories as oppressive and exclusionary. Nevertheless, I want to argue that theory plays a crucial role in feminist politics; that it plays as crucial a role in the analysis of popular cultural forms as it does in the analysis of elite ones; and that it is unhelpful to oppose theory to activism, as if the one were ethereal and the other real. Only social and cultural theory can enable us to distinguish, for example, between meaningful modes of participatory democracy made possible by mass communication (whether on radio shows, on television, or in Internet discussion forums/chat rooms) and what Sreberny-Mohammadi calls “pseudo-participatory circuses” (11). Similarly, only theory can allow us to grasp the political implications of the contradictions in mass-mediated representations and practices of gender and sexuality, which may be emancipatory in certain respects but not in others. Pleasure is an issue, but it is not the only issue, and it certainly is not a simple one. Theory can cast light on the subjective processes, bodily experiences, and social bonds that generate pleasures and assign value to them. Finally, only theory can enable us to understand how the relation between elite and popular culture has been radically reconfigured in recent decades by global media networks. As Waterman points out, the publishing industry that disseminates elite literature “can hardly be isolated from the more general electronic information, media, and advertising conglomerates into which publishing is increasingly integrated” (52). Theories of the political economy of global media are especially important for third wave feminism, since it is so heavily invested in mass-mediated forms of political affiliation, feminist solidarity, and pleasurable, politically engaged subjectivity. The crucial role of theory *in* and *as* politics, as well as the importance of thinking through the mutually constitutive relations between Western feminisms and feminisms in other parts of the world, are key issues for twenty-first century feminists.

The Transnational/Cosmopolitan Public Sphere and Global Forms of Citizenship

For more than a decade, scholars in the humanities and social sciences have been investigating the globalization process with the purpose of determining the extent to which it fosters the development of a transnational public sphere and global forms of citizenship.^v A transnational public sphere is important because it is rooted in civil society, that is, a social space that is controlled neither by the market nor by national governments, and that promotes “a sense of involvement with the affairs of other, unknown, nonkin citizens” (Sreberny-Mohammadi 19). As flows of capital and labor alter national and ethnic landscapes worldwide, and as global media networks facilitate

new forms of rapid communication, it becomes conceivable that a transnational public sphere could be expanded to include those parts of the world that have so far been excluded, resulting in new freedoms for many people. Of course, fundamental questions remain regarding the possibility that the mere existence of electronic linkages could guarantee meaningful political participation for ordinary citizens, and that new public “spaces” would work to the benefit of women, ethnic and religious minorities, and others who have traditionally been excluded from effective involvement in the public sphere: “[i]n situations in which there is (as yet?) no civil society, can transnational news media, exile publishing, and the internet really help in the creation of such a space?” (Sreberny-Mohammadi 10). Moreover, we must ask, what are the political structures and shared symbolic forms that could sustain it? Despite these basic questions, the possibility of a transnational public sphere that empowers the disenfranchised is an enticing prospect.

The counterpart of a transnational public sphere is global citizenship, which involves both deepening democracy and expanding it on a global scale, so that “issues such as peace, development, the environment, and human rights assume a global character” (Sreberny-Mohammadi 11). Indispensable elements in global citizenship include intergovernmental politics (as in the UN), international solidarity movements, independent media, and grassroots democracy. I would add that cultural expression is crucial as well since it alone encourages sensuous and affective investment in social arrangements, both real and imagined. As such, it has greater power to generate progressive change and sustain egalitarian relationships than do rational calculations of shared interest. I want to consider feminist activity in various parts of Africa – including grassroots movements, scholarship, and cultural expression – in relation to globalization, the transnational public sphere, and the possibility of global citizenship. My aim is to provide concrete examples of the ways in which feminists in the global South conceive and enact their struggles in a global frame – necessarily so owing to the immense asymmetries in the distribution of power and wealth worldwide, which keep the South in a state of dependency on the North. At the same time, I want to signal a need to counter the ghettoization of African and other third world feminisms, which are still so often consigned to separate sessions at conferences, separate chapters in anthologies, separate and unequal political agendas and activist efforts. Finally, I will enrich the concept and practice of third wave feminism through a consideration of its relation to other feminisms of our day.

African Feminism in the Wider World

Given the scattering of African writers and intellectuals across the globe, as well as new modes of political and cultural expression that bear witness to the sweeping economic and social changes of the past twenty years, it is important to consider the political activism and cultural production of African feminists in a global frame. To adopt a global frame surely means taking into account, as all third world feminists are obliged to do, the neo-liberal economic forces driving globalization, a process characterized by cross-border flows of finance capital and commodities, as well as by unprecedented migrations of cultures, ideas, and people, the majority of them poor laborers or refugees. It means taking seriously the repressive effects of that process, which stem from the operations of exploitative multinational corporations and transnational institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as

well as the power plays of the world's wealthiest nation states, the United States being at the top of the pyramid of those that do their best to call the political shots on the international stage at the same time that as exercising daunting control over flows of information and culture through vast media networks spanning the entire planet. Finally, adopting a global frame suggests examining the ways in which feminist projects the world over are inevitably being shaped by the growing disparities of wealth, power, and well being not only between the North and the South, but between the rich and the poor in both those arenas.

Yet while it acknowledges the harm inflicted by globalization, the interpretive frame I propose considers its potentially liberatory dimensions as well. Certain emancipatory aspects of globalization as discussed by David Rodowick provide a useful point of entry into this part of my discussion. Rodowick defines the media state as "a virtual information territory" which, in conjunction with the "deterritorialized transnational communities" spawned by hegemonic forces produces a "cosmopolitan public sphere" (13), another term for the transnational public sphere discussed earlier. This new public sphere is said to be capable of fostering innovative forms of political activism despite its genesis by the very communication technologies and migratory flows that make possible state-of-the-art modes of domination. A transnational space fraught with contradiction, it is noticeably eroding the traditional functions of the state, sometimes in progressive ways. Echoing many earlier theorists of globalization, Rodowick argues that one dimension of this space concerns the transnational concept of human rights, which is increasingly being defended on the ground by interstate and nongovernmental organizations in situations where states fail to protect the rights of their citizens. He demonstrates too that, like human rights, citizenship is now a concept that is meaningful and effective beyond the frontiers of individual nation states. Owing in part to the communication networks linking individuals and communities in different parts of the world, growing numbers of citizens are in a position to put direct democracy into practice with respect to "issues that are increasingly global and local at the same time" (Rodowick 14).

For Rodowick, the other dimension of the cosmopolitan public sphere is "defined by the global reach of electronic communication and entertainment networks" (14). While global media forms may themselves elude state regulation and restrict both the content and the dissemination of information in ways that undermine democracy the world over, they are not monolithic; rather "they are heterogeneous and contradictory with respect to their source (print, film, television, video, radio, and the varieties of computer-mediated communication) and to modes of reception" (Rodowick 14). Media conglomerates create networks (e.g. by means of satellite communications, cellular phones, and the Internet), the velocity and global range of which offer myriad possibilities for political intervention on the part of activists operating independently of repressive states. They provide technological resources that can be taken up by alternative media and channeled into new circuits. Once they have been "recontextualised in *immigré* and activist communities" (Rodowick 14), they can help to generate new modes of identification and forms of collective action that are consonant with democratic politics.

Until 11 September 2001, political intervention on the part of activists operating independently of repressive states was considered, on the left, mainly in relation to

“progressive” political activity in the new public sphere. This activity ranged from protests against environmentally hazardous and dehumanizing forces of globalization, coupled with demands for decent wages and working conditions for laborers everywhere, to the performances of media artist/activists such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a Mexican American whose “pirate radio interventions” and “experimental home videos on police brutality” (Gómez-Peña 38) aim to reconfigure repressive notions of national and cultural borders and identities.^{vi} Today, however, critics and activists across the political spectrum are painfully aware of the frightening possibilities now open to religious and political conservatives, notably the young men allegedly responsible for the spectacularly successful attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. These men, and many others with whom they were apparently associated, including a number of Africans from the predominantly Arab countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt, not only recruited new members in slums and prisons, on construction sites and soccer fields in many countries, but evaded control by nation states and used global electronic communication networks to build and mobilize a transnational community of Islamic militants as well as to plan, fund, and carry out acts of mass destruction. Their successes should prompt serious new reflection in various fields – postcolonial studies, media studies, and the politics of gender and sexuality within those fields – on the many ways in which the new cosmopolitan public sphere can be activated, including some that are totally undemocratic and fundamentally hostile to women. I want to emphasize that the significance of the 11 September 2001 attacks lies not in the fact that they targeted purportedly “innocent” US citizens on US territory, but in the fact that they were of such an enormous scale, were so spectacular in their effects, and above all, were planned, funded, and carried out by a transnational militant group operating independently of nation states and taking full advantage of the possibilities offered by global communication networks.

Women’s Rights and Human Rights

How is the transnational concept of human rights being defended by African nongovernmental organizations in the cosmopolitan public sphere? How do these efforts affect African women?^{vii} In Algeria, which has been in a violent civil war for the past decade, feminists of the older generation – notably the venerable Khalida Messaoudi – continue to defend women’s rights, legitimizing and strengthening local grass roots movements through reference to the UN *Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women*. But of course there are many young women who have joined the ranks as well, notably Nadjat Bouda, who began working as an activist at age sixteen in a group called the *Rally for Youth Action*, in a country where young people constitute the majority of the population and have virtually no prospects for gainful employment of any kind. Now, at age twenty-three, Bouda works with *SOS Disparus*, an NGO that advocates for Algerians who have disappeared during the civil war. The efforts of *SOS Disparus* are supported by the US-based *National Endowment for Democracy*, a private, nonprofit group working to foster democratic institutions in more than ninety countries. Bouda’s accomplishments are in no way diminished by the fact that she was honored in July 2002 by First Lady Laura Bush and members of the US Congress as one of four women to have made outstanding contributions in the Muslim world. On the contrary, the US government’s move to embrace Bouda testifies to the significance of her democratic activism on the

world stage: it works for oppressed citizens in the name of human rights, independently of control by any state; as such, it implicitly contests the presumption of the US to embody democracy and to define it for the rest of the world, even as the US and other wealthy countries impose economic policies that undermine democratic forces in countless venues across the globe.

Another example of an NGO defending human rights as a transnational concept is *Women in Nigeria* (WIN). The WIN collective is a grassroots African feminist organization, one that sees women's liberation as inextricably linked to the liberation of poor urban workers and peasants in Nigeria, and that aims to "merge the concern for gender equality into popular democratic struggles" (Imam 292). WIN works actively, through direct democracy in its own activities and through "conscientization," to overcome hierarchies and conflicts not only of gender and class but also of language, region, ethnicity, and religion in its promotion of all Nigerian women's interests. WIN necessarily focuses much of its effort on dealing with the socioeconomic fallout of IMF and World Bank's structural adjustment policies (SAPs) imposed in Nigeria as well as in much of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa since the late 1970s. These policies, which are intended to stabilize economies in order to make them attractive to lenders and foreign investors, require governments of poor nations to ensure that their people produce mainly for export, which often has the effect of requiring that most consumer goods be imported and purchased at inflated prices. Moreover, in the name of an "open economy," price controls and protective tariffs are abolished, with the result that local businesses are forced to fight a losing battle against multinational giants. Finally, in order to direct all possible elements in a nation's economy toward servicing the debt, the SAPs also impose radical reductions in public spending, which may cover everything from roads and transportation that do not directly serve foreign investors, to civil service jobs and pensions, as well as education, health, and other social services.

Imam shows that since the SAPs have been in place in Nigeria, the macroeconomic effects have been devastating. The rate of growth of the GDP has fallen precipitously (7.9 % in 1990 to 4.3% in 1991); the value of the local currency has fallen dramatically against the US dollar, and the external debt has increased exponentially. At the social level, the effects of SAPs have been almost uniformly negative, with a general decrease in the standard of living and in purchasing power. Contributing factors are growing unemployment, wage freezes, and delays of several months in payment of wages and/or benefits, if payments are made at all. As employment shrinks in the public sector, there is increasing pressure on the informal economy, which translates into greater competition and lower returns on labor there. Other factors include staggering levels of inflation and the effects of the cuts in social services, which disproportionately affect women and children. There have been marked decreases in the number of girls attending school at all levels, marked increases in infant mortality, and alarming increases in the numbers of people infected with HIV and AIDS. This massive healthcare issue alone will, before long, take a huge toll not only in terms of large-scale human suffering but in terms of economic productivity and political stability as well. For feminist groups like WIN, a key concern in all of this is the dramatic increase in rape and domestic violence that has resulted from the combination of rising economic hardship, declining opportunities for meaningful political action, a burgeoning of misogynist fundamentalisms of all kinds, and the fact that in many African cultures, woman-beating is seen as the right of

husbands and male relatives. One sensational instance of official anti-woman violence in Nigeria that made the international news involved Safiya, a divorced Muslim woman in her thirties who was accused and convicted of “adultery” that ended in an out of wedlock pregnancy. The Islamic government of the state in which she resides in Nigeria condemned her to death by stoning, and subsequently, under pressure from democratic forces in Nigeria, foreign governments, NGOs, and international feminist and human rights campaigns conducted via email, telephone, fax, and letter writing, ordered a stay of execution until Safiya had given birth to the baby she was carrying which, of course, was not the desired outcome.

The situation in Nigeria – terrible effects of the SAPs, the repressive government, the official and unofficial violence against women – is replicated, in various forms, all over sub-Saharan Africa. And while democratic and feminist NGOs are doing invaluable work in the defense of human rights in both national and international arenas, I am a bit skeptical, not so much about the liberatory potential of the cosmopolitan public sphere and grassroots democratic politics in Africa, as about their liberatory effectiveness. As Ayesha Imam points out, already in the mid-1990s, the SAPs had taken such a toll that it was almost impossible for WIN to raise funds for its operations by selling books and T-shirts, as it had done in the past, as a means of resisting state control and state appropriation. It could no longer even rely on donated meeting space, because the economic crisis was so acute. In order to support its “projects, campaigns, research, meetings, and publishing activities” (Imam 305), it was increasingly relying on grants from external sources. And while its policy in the mid-1990s was to accept outside funding only for projects that WIN had designed independently, it is hard to imagine that the organization has been able to remain as autonomous as it once was.

If WIN cannot afford typing and printing services or meeting spaces, to what extent can its members really benefit immediately and substantially from satellite communications and the Internet? To what extent can they meaningfully participate in the new cosmopolitan public sphere, as some members of the Berber diaspora are doing in their innovative use of “CouscousNet”? More modestly, we might ask, could they benefit from new forms of piracy that enable Africans to circulate videos outside official channels, with row after row of subtitles in Wolof, Arabic, and other African languages, added on an as-needed basis? WIN has reportedly had some success in using popular theater for consciousness-raising, but could it also make use of mass-circulated popular cultural forms such as romance novels, as writers and publishers are doing in Nigeria and Ivory Coast? Could it adjust the romance formulas to appeal to particular ethnic or national audiences, drawing on local traditions that provide a point of entry for raising questions about the gender politics of intimate relationships, work, and cosmopolitan modes of identification? Could it do so in a critical way that does more than to market print commodities profitably? These are real questions, not just for Africans or Africanists, but for everyone, if indeed we live in a globalized world. The larger issue is that reflections on the emancipatory possibilities of new media and the new cosmopolitan public sphere need to incorporate a serious consideration of the parts of the world that are not wealthy, that is, most of the world. This issue is especially acute for third wave feminism, since the latter is defined, to a considerable extent, by the historical moment of its emergence, a moment of unprecedented interrelation between the local and the global, between the West and “the rest.”

African Feminist Literature and the Cosmopolitan Public Sphere

In Africa, for a variety of reasons having to do with disparities of wealth and uneven development, older forms of cultural production such as literature still enjoy considerable prestige and power to shape people's thinking. However "elite" it may be, a good deal of the literature published by well known African writers in the past decade takes up many of the same issues that concern activist groups such as the *Women in Nigeria* collective; that is, it engages with and promotes feminist and other grassroots democratic struggles while also enjoining readers to imagine and embrace new forms of political subjectivity.^{viii} In literature, we consistently note a concern with today's global economies as they adversely affect Africa.

A text that brings to the fore Africa's place in the global economy is Mozabiquean Lília Momplé's short story "Stress." It deals with violence – that of the international division of labor and the unequal distribution of wealth and power, the violence of civil war and of class hierarchies within Mozambique, as well as domestic violence, and the complex ways in which these different forms of violence are gendered. Far from idealizing women or portraying them simply as victims, Momplé offers a nuanced and insightful view of the central female character, a woman who comes from poverty and now lives in utter isolation as a mistress kept by a wealthy major-general. This character, who is referred to only as "the major-general's lover," has no identity or existence outside the narrow sphere in which she has enclosed herself. Her emptiness and lack of vital connection to others shapes her vision, making her see only vileness around her. Significantly, the woman is shown to cast her gaze from the vantage point of an apartment building surrounded by "uncharacteristic constructions of a wearisome beauty, designed in colonial times by Portuguese entrepreneurs with lots of money and dubious taste" (102). Some Portuguese still live in the neighborhood, as do "foreign aid workers of all kinds" (102), as well as families of blacks from the suburbs, who "came immediately after the nationalization of apartment blocks, their heads filled with dreams and hopes as if the fact of coming to occupy these homes would automatically entitle them to lead the same lives of ease as the settlers who had abandoned them" (103). From her balcony, the woman sees smug rich people gliding by in cars and poor people – visitors to the nearby Central Hospital – "shining with sweat from the long walk from the suburbs," wearing "down-at-heel mud-spattered shoes" or "dragging their feet in plastic sandals" (104). In other words, the people and the buildings attest to the history of colonialism in Mozambique and to its legacy in the present day; that is, the stark opposition between rich and poor both within Mozambique and between that country and the wealthy nations that provide foreign "aid." The comment offered by the narrator, namely that "[t]he major-general's lover looks at all this in disgust" (104), discloses not only the revolting nature of the present circumstances in Mozambique, but above all the main character's misapprehension of the situation: the object of her revulsion is not the political economy of global inequality, which is a central issue in Momplé's story, but rather the impoverished Mozabiqueans who are its victims.

Momplé's story shows that the woman's dim view of her compatriots is no matter of indifference, and is certainly not a purely private, subjective matter; on the contrary, it is clearly tied to the legacy of colonialism in Mozambique, to the omnipresence of "aid" and poverty, and to unfounded dreams of entitlement on the part of people of her own

background. It also has deadly effects in public life. Since the woman's narrow, contemptuous outlook prevents her from conceiving of a life whose meaning is not determined exclusively by material well being and by the attentions of an idealized male figure, she can imagine no real alternative to her (now dreary) relationship with the major-general. She manages only to fantasize about another heterosexual relationship structured by the same passive desire to be desired, one destined to become as unsatisfying as the affair with the major-general. We watch the woman watching the man through her apartment window, and note her frustration in the face of his obliviousness. We are privy to the woman's vengeful eagerness to bear false testimony in order to convict her neighbor of murdering his wife. The neighbor, a teacher, did in fact kill his wife, but the *voyeuse* did not witness the murder; only the readers do. The tension between the woman's blindness to her neighbor's social and subjective reality and our knowledge of it lends a strong emotional charge to the text's presentation of the murder as an act that resulted from a convergence of forces summed up by the term "stress." In this text, "stress" is at once banal and lethal: it refers to everything from global inequalities and national crisis to domestic tension stemming from poverty, exhaustion, anxiety, and hopelessness. It refers as well to the gender inequality that structures all of these domains. Without demonizing the man, but also without excusing him, the story discloses the intricate web of connections between different forms of violence at various levels of Mozambiquan society, and the ways in which they can converge to produce deadly domestic violence that is gendered in a painfully predictable way.

Yet Momplé's story focuses not on the man's murder of his wife, but on the dynamics in the larger social framework within which the drama has unfolded. It compels us to scrutinize the main character's self-absorption, her inability to grant others an independent existence and subjective reality, and her blindness to her own identification with the forces of oppression in her society: she bears false witness against her neighbor, accusing him of murder and assuring his conviction, not because he has killed his wife, but because he has unwittingly denied the *voyeuse* the recognition she seeks from him. Paradoxically though, even had he recognized her, she would have been unable to appreciate and benefit from that recognition, because she is incapable of recognizing *him* (or anyone else) as one who is worthy of confirming her status as a subject. Implicitly, Momplé's text leads us to ask whether this apparently aberrant female figure displays tendencies that are common to many people and to nearly all societies, tendencies that partially explain the failure of democracy not only in poor countries like Mozambique, but in wealthy ones as well. These same pathological tendencies inhere all too often in the stance that one country adopts toward another in international relations. "Stress" suggests that it is incumbent upon scholars to pursue a longstanding line of feminist inquiry; that is, to renew our efforts to analyze the interrelation between subjective transformation and broader social change, within and without Africa.

Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup* also deals with issues of global connection. Gordimer, a white South African Jew, has written at length about the politics of race, gender, and social class in South Africa. Questions of migration come to the fore in such a way that South Africa, and by extension, Africa as a whole, is brought into the wider world, and can no longer be conceived solely in terms of conflicts and exchanges between blacks and whites. In *The Pickup*, Africa's intricate ties to Asia, the Middle

East, North America, and other parts of the world become all the more visible by virtue of being figured in a novel by a best-selling and prestigious author. The text's most striking feature is that it invites readers to look beyond the widely recognized migratory circuits linking "sending" and "receiving" countries, notably former colonial powers and their ex-colonies, and to reflect on present day migration patterns that are producing new conflicts as well as new modes of coexistence and cultural exchange between peoples who formerly had little direct contact with each other. These include the many groups who migrate to the wealthy cities of South Africa in search of gainful employment – Indians and Malays, Arabs, and Africans from all over the continent. Many of these immigrants are in South Africa illegally and thus, in order to avoid deportation, are repeatedly obliged to disappear, "like the Mozambiquans, the Congolese, the Kenyans, what-not" (Gordimer 86).

Such is the fate of the Arab protagonist, Ibrahim ibn Musa. Ibrahim comes from an unnamed desert country that is not oil rich, a small strip on the world map. He has a degree in economics from a university that no one has heard of, but is "disguised as a grease-monkey" (231) in South Africa, where he is living on an expired visa as a manual laborer. He is picked up by Julie Summers, a white South African woman who has distanced herself from her wealthy family, has moved into a tiny apartment in the city and spends her free time with friends at the L.A. Café. Dubbed the EL-AY Café, it is suggested that the glamour that its name is supposed to invoke is lost on the residents of the urban neighborhood in which it is located. When the government authorities order Ibrahim to leave South Africa, on pain of facing criminal charges as well as certain deportation, Julie's well-connected family members only pretend to help Ibrahim because, in their view, "he's not for [her]" (80). He is finally forced to leave South Africa and Julie surprises and dismays him by insisting on returning with him to his native village, of which he is deeply ashamed because of its filth, poverty, and backwardness. Once they have married and moved into his family's house, Julie feels content despite the lack of running water and the limited privacy: the tactful intimacy in Ibrahim's family contrasts favorably with the alienating relations between her own her ultra-individualistic family members. Julie feels "fully occupied now," learning Arabic and making herself useful teaching English both in the household and in the village, rather than "merely trying out this and that, always conscious that she could move on, any time, to something else, not expecting satisfaction" (195), as she had done as a matter of course in South Africa. Moreover, the illusion of stasis in the desert, "this space undisturbed by growth" (168), provides relief from the relentless pursuit of "opportunities" (258) in the world of the wealthy, even for a person like Julie who, long ago, abjured the bourgeois fantasy of finding happiness by acquiring money, power, and elegant possessions.

Ibrahim, on the other hand, is determined to leave the village in the desert for some land of opportunity. He does not turn a deaf ear to the urging of his rebellious friends to "plot and agitate, risk, for change here – this desert" (179). But he is outraged by the global forces that conspire to keep him in that place against his will: "the future of this place the world tried to confine him to was not his place in that world" (179). So he continually files applications for visas to wealthy countries and, anticipating the inevitable chain of refusals, keeps "contingency plans for the next country, concurrently with every application that failed. They have enough trying to keep out others from the

East, they don't need people like me" (149). Having been rejected by Australia, Sweden, and Canada, Ibrahim muses cynically, "Canada had enough Arabs, Pakistanis and Indians – the kind other than the red ones who were the original Permanent Residents" (175). When he finally obtains visas for his wife and himself to go to America, Julie decides to stay with his family instead of following him, in part because of the sense of purpose she has found in his village, in part because "only she and [Ibrahim's] mother could experience the apprehension of, the rejection of what every emigration, this emigration, was ready to subject her son to" (231), that is, "living in a dirty hovel...cleaning American shit – she has seen the slums of those cities, the empty lots of that ravaged new world, detritus of degradation" (230).

Through its treatment of Ibrahim's and Julie's situations, *The Pickup* productively explores the constraints and possibilities of global migrations today – the freedom *and* subjection inherent in both extreme contingency and relative fixity of identity and place. It explores as well the tensions between "opportunity" and debilitating marginality, anxiety and assurance, romanticism and love, and the ways in which they may be negotiated by people in different social positions, people who do not share cultural histories. Equally important, Gordimer's novel identifies white South Africa as a bastion of wealth and race privilege and links it not only to the pan-African world, but also to Asia, the Middle East, and their respective diasporas. It does so in such a way as to suggest new paths for feminist activism and scholarship, paths that displace the center-periphery relation in favor of other linkages between points on the world map. In addition, Gordimer's text fruitfully explores the ways in which transnational flows of capital, goods, cultures, and people affect intimate relationships such as the one between Ibrahim and Julie. Both characters discover that they are capable of giving and receiving love and reciprocal recognition that they never thought was "for them" from each other.

Like Momplé's "Stress," Gordimer's *The Pickup* underscores the political reality that without substantial changes in subjectivity, affect, and ethics, there can be no deep-seated desire for and commitment to democracy. Literature and other forms of cultural expression have a key role to play in the political arena, for only they can sensuously convey the experience of fragmented, overdetermined identities and the multiple, conflicting modes of identification and affiliation that characterize human existence. They have unique power to evoke other worlds and to instill the desire to bring new worlds into being. As such, like the global media networks in which they are embedded, literature, music, film, video, and other kinds of cultural expression constitute an important part of the new cosmopolitan public sphere that affects us all, albeit in very different ways, depending on our geopolitical location – a public sphere that does indeed offer exciting possibilities for fostering democracy and gender equality worldwide.

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ⁱⁱ There are exceptions, e.g. the University of Maryland-Baltimore Campus' Women's Studies Program's *Gender-Related Electronic Forum*, which directs users not only to the usual lists on health, education and motherhood but also to an "International List" of discussion forums that includes entries such as AFR-FEM (on Africa, women and economic development), Gender-Law (on legal issues that affect women in developing countries), and SHAMS (on the rights of women in Muslim societies).

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, Simone de Beauvoir and the Paris-based Tunisian attorney Gisèle Halimi supporting Djamila Boupacha, an Algerian freedom fighter who was subjected to sexual torture by French

forces in the Algerian War or Angela Davis supporting black women's liberation movements in many parts of the world.

^{iv} This may partially explain second wavers' impatience with the "it's-all-about-me" consumerism that indisputably characterizes certain manifestations of third wave feminism.

^v Braman and Sreberny-Mohammadi provide an excellent introduction to these issues from a social science perspective, as do Wang *et alia* and Dower & Williams' collections.

^{vi} An exception that comes to mind in the US is the network formed by Timothy McVeigh and other right wing vigilantes in the bombing of the Federal Office Building in Oklahoma City, although their network was fairly low tech by today's standards, relying on such technology as fax machines.

^{vii} For more on citizenship for women, see Jones; for more on African feminist work, see Amadiume, Udoh James & Etim or Mickell.

^{viii} This is in sharp contrast to African television shows, whose popularity is often proportional to their focus on the lives of very rich Africans living in Lagos, Abidjan, or Dakar.

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