



## Journal of International Women's Studies

Volume 5

Issue 3 *Feminist Challenges: Crossing Boundaries*

Article 8

May-2004

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### Recommended Citation

Brah, Avtar and Phoenix, Ann (2004). Ain't I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5(3), 75-86.

Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol5/iss3/8>

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## Ain't I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality

By Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

In the context of the second Gulf war and US and the British occupation of Iraq, many 'old' debates about the category 'woman' have assumed a new critical urgency. This paper revisits debates on intersectionality in order to show that they can shed new light on how we might approach some current issues. It first discusses the 19<sup>th</sup> century contestations among feminists involved in anti-slavery struggles and campaigns for women's suffrage. The second part of the paper uses autobiography and empirical studies to demonstrate that social class (and its intersections with gender and 'race' or sexuality) are simultaneously subjective, structural and about social positioning and everyday practices. It argues that studying these intersections allows a more complex and dynamic understanding than a focus on social class alone. The conclusion to the paper considers the potential contributions to intersectional analysis of theoretical and political approaches such as those associated with post-structuralism, postcolonial feminist analysis, and diaspora studies.

*Key words:* diaspora space; intersectionality; racialisation

### Introduction

At the time of the 1991 war against Iraq, feminist critiques of the then familiar discourse of 'global sisterhood' were a commonplace. As American and British bombs fell over Iraq once again in March 2003, many of the 'old' questions that we have debated about the category 'woman' assume critical urgency once again, albeit they now bear the weight of global circumstances of the early twenty first century.

This paper aims briefly to discuss some 'old' issues that continue to be central to making feminist agenda currently relevant. In order to do so, it revisits debates on 'intersectionality' that helped to take forward feminisms in previous decades. The first part of the paper discusses some long-standing internal conversations among different strands of feminisms which have already furnished important insights into contemporary problems. By revisiting these historical developments, we do not wish to suggest that the past unproblematically provides an answer to the present. On the contrary, we would wish to learn from and build upon these insights through critique so that they can shed new light on current predicaments. Hence, when we start with the 19<sup>th</sup> century debates, it is not because there is a direct correspondence between slavery and 21<sup>st</sup> century forms of governmentality, but rather to indicate that some issues that emerged then can help illuminate and elucidate our current entanglements with similar problematics.

The second part of the paper comments on intersections as they have been analysed in some autobiographical and empirical research based texts. We argue that the need for understanding complexities posed by intersections of different axis of differentiation is as pressing today as it has always been. In the final section we briefly examine the contribution of recent theoretical developments to the analysis of 'intersectionality' which could potentially nurture fruitful new feminist agendas.

### **Ain't I a Woman? Sojourner's 'Truth'**

One critical thematic of feminism that is perennially relevant is the important question of what it means to be a woman under different historical circumstances. Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, this concern was the subject of major debate as the concept of 'global sisterhood' was critiqued for its failure to fully take on board the power relations that divided us (Haraway, 1991, Davis 1981, *Feminist Review*, 1984, Talpade- Mohanty 1988). A century earlier, contestations among feminists involved in anti-slavery struggles and campaigns for women's suffrage also foregrounded similar conflicts. Their memory still resonates with us because the interrelationships between racism, gender, sexuality, and social class were at the heart of these contestations. Indeed, we begin this paper with the 19<sup>th</sup> century political locution '*Ain't I a Woman?*' precisely because - by fundamentally challenging all ahistoric or essentialist notions of 'woman' - it neatly captures all the main elements of the debate on 'intersectionality'. We regard the concept of 'intersectionality' as signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation - economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential - intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands.

It is worth bearing in mind that the phrase, 'Ain't I a Woman?' was first introduced into North American and British feminist lexicon by an enslaved woman Sojourner Truth (the name she took, instead of her original name Isabella, when she became a travelling preacher). It predates by a century some of our more recent feminist texts on the subject such as Denise Riley's (2003/1988) 'Am I that name?' or Judith Butler's 'Gender Trouble' (Butler, 1990). It is as well to remember in this regard, that the first women's antislavery society was formed in 1832 by black women in Salem, Massachusetts in the USA. Yet, black women were conspicuous by their absence at the Seneca Falls Anti-Slavery Convention of 1848 where the mainly middle class white delegates debated the motion for women's suffrage. Several questions arise when we reflect on black women's absence at the Convention. What, for instance, are the implications of an event which occludes the black female subject from the political imaginary of a feminism designed to campaign for the abolition of slavery? What consequences did such disavowals have for the constitution of gendered forms of 'whiteness' as the normative subject of western imagination? How did events like these mark black and white women's relational sense of themselves? Importantly, what happens when the subaltern subject - black woman in this case - repudiate such silencing gestures?

We know from the biographies of black women such as Sojourner Truth that many of them spoke loud and clear. They would not be caged by the violence of slavery even as they were violently marked by it. Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, very well demonstrates the historical power of a political subject who challenges imperatives of subordination and thereby creates new visions. This power (which, according to Foucault, simultaneously disciplines and creates new subjects) and its consequences are much bigger than the gains or losses of an individual life who articulates a particular political subject position. Sojourner Truth was born into enslavement (to a wealthy Dutch slave-owner living in New York). She campaigned for both the abolition of slavery and for equal rights for women. Since she was illiterate throughout her life, no formal record of the speech exists and, indeed, two different versions of it are in existence (Gates and McKay, 1997). The first was published in *The Anti-Slavery Bugle*, Salem, Ohio, in

June 21, 1851. However, it is the more dramatic account, recounted in 1863 by the abolitionist and president of the Convention, Frances Gage, which is in common circulation. What is clear is that the words of Sojourner Truth had an enormous impact at the Convention and that the challenge they express foreshadowed campaigns by black feminists more than a century later:

"Well, children, where there is so much racket, there must be something out of kilter, I think between the Negroes of the South and the women of the North - all talking about rights--the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this talking about? That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody helps me any best place. And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm. I have plowed (sic), I have planted and I have gathered into barns. And no man could head me. And ain't I a woman? I could work as much, and eat as much as any man--when I could get it--and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne children and seen most of them sold into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain't I a woman? ..."

This cutting edge speech (in all senses of the term) deconstructs every single major truth-claim about gender in a patriarchal slave social formation. More generally, the discourse offers a devastating critique of socio-political, economic and cultural processes of 'othering' whilst drawing attention to the simultaneous importance of subjectivity--of subjective pain and violence that the inflictors do not often wish to hear about or acknowledge. Simultaneously, the discourse foregrounds the importance of spirituality to this form of political activism when existential grief touches ground with its unconscious and finds affirmation through a belief in the figure of a Jesus who listens. Political identity here is never taken as a given but is performed through rhetoric and narration. Sojourner Truth's identity claims are thus relational, constructed in relation to white women and all men and clearly demonstrate that what we call 'identities' are not objects but processes constituted in and through power relations.

It is in this sense of critique, practice and inspiration that this discourse holds crucial lessons for us today. Part lament, but defiant, articulating razor sharp politics but with the sensibility of a poet, the discourse performs the analytic moves of a 'decolonised mind', to use Wa Thiongo's (1986) critical insight. It refuses all final closures. We are all in dire need of decolonised open minds today. Furthermore, Sojourner Truth powerfully challenges essentialist thinking that a particular category of woman is essentially this or essentially that (e.g. that women are necessarily weaker than men or that enslaved black women were not real women). This point holds critical importance today when the allure of new Orientalisms and their concomitant desire to 'unveil' Muslim women has proved to be attractive even to some feminists in a 'post September 11' world.

There are millions of women today who remain marginalized, treated as a 'problem', or construed as the focal point of a moral panic – women suffering poverty, disease, lack of water, proper sanitation; women who themselves or their households are scattered across the globe as economic migrants, undocumented workers, as refugees and asylum seekers; women whose bodies and sexualities are commodified, fetishised, criminalized, racialised, disciplined and regulated through a myriad of representational regimes and social practices. So many of us, indeed,

perhaps, all of us one way or another, continue to be 'hailed' as subjects within Sojourner Truth's diasporic imagination with its massive potential for un-doing the hegemonic moves of social orders confronting us today. She enacts dispersal and dissemination both in terms of being members of a historical diaspora but equally, in the sense of disarticulating, rupturing and de-centring the precariously sutured complacency and self-importance of certain feminisms.

### **Late Modern Decentrings**

Since Sojourner Truth many feminists have consistently argued for the importance of examining 'intersectionality'. A key feature of feminist analysis of 'intersectionality' is that they are concerned with 'decentring' of the 'normative subject' of feminism. Such decentring activities scaled new heights when fuelled by political energies generated by the social movements of the second half of the last century--anti-colonial movements for independence, Civil Rights and the Black Power movements, the Peace movement, student protests and the Workers' movements, the Women's Movement or the Gay and Lesbian Movement. Whichever set of hegemonic moves became the focus of contestation in a specific debate--whether it was the plight of subordinated sexualities, class injustices, or other subaltern realities--the concept of a self-referencing, unified subject of modernity now became the subject of overt and explicit political critique. Political projects such as that of the Combahee River Collective, the black lesbian feminist organisation from Boston, pointed, as early as 1977, to the futility of privileging a single dimension of experience as if it constituted the whole of life. Instead, they spoke of being "actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression" and advocated "the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking (ibid: 272).

The concept of 'simultaneously interlocking oppressions' that were local at the same time as they were global was one of the earliest and most productive formulations of the subsequent theorisation of a "decentred subject" (see, e.g. hooks, 1981). As Norma Alacorn, in her analysis of the book 'The Bridge Called My Back' -- a North American collection of political writings by women of colour -- later suggested, the theoretical subject of 'Bridge' is a figure of multiplicity, representing consciousness as a "site of multiple voicings" seen "not as necessarily originating with the subject but as discourses that traverse consciousness and which the subject must struggle with constantly". This figure is the bearer of modes of subjectivity that are deeply marked by "psychic and material violence" and it demands a thorough "reconfiguration of feminist theory" (Alacorn in Anzaldúa 1990: 359-365).

In Britain, we were making similar claims when women of African, Caribbean, and South Asian background came to be figured as 'black' through political coalitions, challenging the essentialist connotations of racism (Grewal et al., 1988, Brah 1996, Mirza 1997). This particular project of Black British feminism was forged through the work of local women's organisations around issues such as wages and conditions of work, immigration law, fascist violence, reproductive rights, and domestic violence. By 1978, local groups had combined to form a national body called the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD). This network held annual conferences, published a newsletter, and served as an active conduit for information, intellectual conversations and political mobilisation. The ensuing dialogue entailed sustained analysis of racism, class, and gender with much debate as to the best means of confronting their outcomes whilst remaining alive to cultural specificities:

Our group organises on the basis of Afro-Asian unity, and although that principle is maintained, we don't deal with it by avoiding the problems this might present, but by having on-going discussions.....Obviously, we have to take into account our cultural differences, and that has affected the way we are able to organise (OWAAD cited in Mirza 1997:43)

This careful attention to working within, through and across cultural differences is a highly significant heritage of this feminism and it is one that can be used as a resource for working with the question of cultural difference in the present moment when, for example, differences between Muslim and non-Muslim women are constructed as posing insurmountable cultural differences. Internal conflicts within OWAAD, as amongst white women's groups, especially around homophobia, proved salutary so that, even as British 'black feminism' assumed a distinctive political identity separate from 'white feminism', engaging the latter in critical theoretical and political debate, it was not immune to the contradictions of its own internal heterogeneity. These internal conflicts within and between different feminisms prefigured later theories of 'difference'

### **Gender, Race, Class and Sexuality**

During the 1980s, there was much controversy about the best way to theorise the relationship between the above dimensions. The main differences in feminist approaches tended to be understood broadly in terms of socialist, liberal and radical feminisms, with the question of racism forming a point of conflict across all three. We do not wish to rehearse that debate here. Instead, this section discusses the importance of an intersectional approach by first addressing the contributions made by feminist work on gender and class, followed by an exploration of the gains made when the focus shifted to encompass other dimensions. We are aware that social class remains a contested category with its meaning varying with different theoretical and political perspectives. Our focus is somewhat different. We are primarily concerned with the ways in which class and its intersections are narrated in some autobiographical and empirical studies.

In the introduction to a now classic book *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing-Up in the Fifties*, Liz Heron (1985) discusses how the provision of free orange juice gave working class children the sense that they had a right to exist. The implication of this – that social class produces entitlement/lack of entitlement to exist and that social policy decisions affect this - is vividly demonstrated in this example. In the same book, Valerie Walkerdine (who has consistently discussed social class over the last 20 years), describes walking with a middle class friend on a seaside pier and seeing a working class family adding brown sauce to their chips. When her friend asks, 'how could they do that?' Walkerdine is immediately interpellated as working class, drawn into recognising the 'othering' of her working class background in this class inflected discourse on culinary habits. In later work Walkerdine also discusses middle class tendencies to view working classes as 'animals in a zoo' (with Helen Lucey, 1989) and with Helen Lucey and June Melody (2002) she considers the ways in which social class is lived in everyday practices and the emotional investments and issues it produces. Some of the middle class young women, for example, were subjected to expectations that meant that they could never perform sufficiently well to please their parents.

While the intersection of 'race' with social class is not analysed in Walkerdine's example, it is a silent presence in that it is white, working class practices that are subject, in the 1985 example, to the fascinated scopophilic gaze. In a similar way, Beverley Skeggs' (1997) work on young, white, working class women in North-West England showed their struggle for respectability and their often painful awareness of being judged more severely than middle class women. In these examples, social class (and its intersections with gender) are simultaneously subjective, structural, about social positioning and everyday practices. If we consider the intersections of 'race' and gender with social class, however, the picture becomes even more complex and dynamic.

"Race matters" writes the African American philosopher Cornel West (1993). Actually, class, gender and race matter, and they matter because they structure interactions, opportunities, consciousness, ideology and the forms of resistance that characterize American life... They matter in shaping the social location of different groups in contemporary society.' (Andersen, 1996: ix)

Anne McClintock (1995) uses an intersectional analysis to argue that to understand colonialism and postcolonialism, one must first recognize that 'race', gender and class are not distinct and isolated realms of experience. Instead, they come into existence in and through contradictory and conflictual relations to each other. In keeping with Catherine Hall's (1992, 2002) argument, McClintock shows that the Victorians connected 'race', class, and gender in ways that promoted imperialism abroad and class distinction in Britain.

'Imperialism... is not something that happened elsewhere -- a disagreeable fact of history external to Western identity. Rather, imperialism and the invention of race were fundamental aspects of Western, industrial modernity. The invention of race in the urban metropolises... became central not only to the self-definition of the middle class but also to the policing of the "dangerous classes": the working class, the Irish, Jews, prostitutes, feminists, gays and lesbians, criminals, the militant crowd and so on. At the same time, the cult of domesticity was not simply a trivial and fleeting irrelevance, belonging properly in the private, "natural" realm of the family. Rather, I argue that the cult of domesticity was a crucial, if concealed, dimension of male as well as female identities -- shifting and unstable as these were.' (McClintock, 1995: 5)

At the level of everyday practices and subjectivity, Gail Lewis (1985) demonstrates how 'race' and gender intersected with the working class positioning of her parents so that their shifting power relations were only understandable as locally situated, albeit with global underpinnings. Her mother (a white woman) was responsible for dealing with public officials because of her parents' experiences of racism in relation to her father (a black man). In these instances, mother's 'whiteness' (Frankenberg, 1993), becomes a signifier of superiority over her black husband. On the other hand, since both parents -- marked by patriarchal conventions of the time surrounding heteronormativity -- believed that men ought to deal with the outside world, this had implications for their relationship at home, where her father prevailed. Lewis (2000) develops her analysis of the intersections of 'race', gender and class in studying the diverse everyday practices of black women social workers in relation to black and white clients and colleagues and white line managers. She demonstrates that the

intersection of 'race', gender and class is subjectively lived, that it is part of social structure and involves differential (and sometimes discriminatory) treatment (see also Dill, 1993).

Other autobiographical pieces of work also demonstrate these intersections. For example, bell hooks (1994) writes of how she quickly learned that working class black people around Yale University greeted her on the street, while middle class ones ignored her. Using her own experience as a white, Jewish, middle class woman, Paula Rothenberg (2000) examines the intersections of 'race', gender and social class. She argues that people generally do not see the ways in which they are privileged, and so well-intentioned, middle class, white liberals often strive to maintain privilege for their children, while denying that they are doing so. Yet, the dynamics of power and privilege shape the key experiences of their lives. From a different class position, Nancie Caraway (1991) argues that a simplistically racialised notion of privilege is highly unsatisfactory for analysing the experiences of working class white women living in poverty.

Over the last twenty years, the manner in which class is discussed in political, popular and academic discourse has radically changed to the point that, as Sayer (2002) notes, some sociologists have found it embarrassing to talk to research participants about class. This tendency is also evident in government circles as when the discourse on child poverty comes to substitute analysis of wider inequalities of class. While the current government does not wish to use the language of class inequality, it has pledged itself to eradicate child poverty within twenty years. However, it is important to ask whether a commitment to eradicating poverty in children can ever be fully achieved without the eradication of poverty among their parents. For example, a study by Middleton et al. (1997) found that one per cent of children do not have a bed and mattress to themselves, five per cent live in damp housing and do not have access to fresh fruit each day or new shoes that fit. More than ten per cent of children over the age of 10 share a bedroom with a sibling of the opposite sex. Yet, counter-intuitively, over half the children who were defined as 'not poor' had parents who were defined as 'poor'. Their parents reported that they sometimes went without clothes, shoes and entertainment in order to make sure that their children are provided for. One in twenty mothers reported that they sometimes go without food in order to provide for their children. Lone mothers were particularly likely to report this. In Britain and the USA, recent studies by Ehrenreich (2002) and Toynbee (2003) provide another timely reminder of how grinding, poorly-paid, working class jobs continue to differentiate women's experiences.

From their analyses of data from 118 British Local Education Authorities, Gillborn and Mirza (2000) found that social class makes the biggest difference to educational attainment, followed by 'race' and then by gender – although they recognised that class outcomes are always intertwined with gender and 'race'. The processes by which social class continues to operate (for the middle as well as the working classes) require more attention if processes of social inclusion and exclusion are to be taken seriously. As Diane Reay (1998) points out in relation to education, this is not because different social classes view the importance of education differently – middle class position is commonly seen by both sections as central to social mobility and success. However, middle class mothers can draw upon more success-related cultural capital than their working class peers – e.g. they are better positioned to provide their



children with ‘compensatory education’ (help with school work, for example) and having the status (and confidence) to confront teachers when they feel their children are not being pushed hard enough or taught well enough.

Similarly, The Social Class and Widening Participation in HE Project, based at the then University of North London (Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Archer et al., 2001), found that class has an enormous impact on participation in higher education. However, ‘working class’ people do not constitute a unitary, homogeneous category, and participation in higher education varies between different working class groups. Participation is lowest amongst those from unskilled occupational backgrounds and for inner-city working class groups. These class factors articulate with ‘race’ and ethnicity to produce complex patterns of participation in higher education (CVCP, 1998; Modood, 1993).

Recognition of the importance of intersectionality has impelled new ways of thinking about complexity and multiplicity in power relations as well as emotional investments (e.g. Arrighi, 2001; Kenny, 2000; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). In particular, recognition that ‘race’, social class and sexuality differentiated women’s experiences has disrupted notions of a homogeneous category ‘woman’ with its attendant assumptions of universality that served to maintain the status quo in relation to ‘race’, social class and sexuality, while challenging gendered assumptions. As such, intersectionality fits with the disruption of modernist thinking produced by postcolonial and poststructuralist theoretical ideas.

### **Postcoloniality, Poststructuralism, Diaspora and Difference**

Feminist theories of the 1970s and 1980 were informed by conceptual repertoires drawn largely from ‘modernist’ theoretical and philosophical traditions of European Enlightenment such as liberalism and Marxism. The ‘postmodernist’ critique of these perspectives, including their claims to universal applicability, had precursors, within anticolonial, antiracist, and feminist critical practice. Postmodern theoretical approaches found sporadic expression in Anglophone feminist works from the late 1970s. But, during the 1990s they became a significant influence, in particular their poststructuralist variant. The work of scholars who found poststructuralist insights productive traversed theoretical ground that ranged from discourse theory, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, queer theory, and postcolonial criticism. Contrary to analysis where process may be reified and understood as personified in some essential way in the bodies of individuals, different feminisms could now be viewed as representing historically contingent relationships, contesting fields of discourses, and sites of multiple subject positions. The concept of ‘agency’ was substantially reconfigured, especially through poststructuralist appropriations of psychoanalysis. New theories of subjectivity attempted to take account of psychic and emotional life without recourse to the idea of an inner/outer divide. Whilst all this intellectual flux led to a reassessment of the notion of experiential ‘authenticity’, highlighting the limitations of ‘identity politics’, the debate also demonstrated that experience itself could not become a redundant category. Indeed, it remains crucial in analysis as a ‘signifying practice’ at the heart of the way we make sense of the world symbolically and narratively.

Overall, critical but productive conversations with poststructuralism have resulted in new theories for refashioning the analysis of ‘difference’ (Butler, 1990; Grewal and

Kaplan 1994; Weedon 1996; Spivak, 1999). One distinctive strand of this work is concerned with the potential of combining strengths of modern theory with postmodern insights. This approach has taken several forms. Some developments, especially in the field of literary criticism have led to 'postcolonial' studies with their particular emphasis upon the insight that both the 'metropolis' and the 'colony' were deeply altered by the colonial process and that these articulating histories have a mutually constitutive role in the present. Postcolonial feminist studies foreground processes underlying colonial and postcolonial discourses of gender. Frequently, such work uses poststructuralist frameworks, especially Foucauldian discourse analysis or Derridean deconstruction. Some scholars have attempted to combine poststructuralist approaches with neo-Marxist or psychoanalytic theories. Others have transformed 'border theory' (Anzaldúa 1987; Young, 1994, Lewis 1996; Alexander and Mohanty-Talpade 1997; Gedalof, 1999; Mani, 1999; Lewis, 2000). A related development is associated with valorisation of the term diaspora. The concept of diaspora is increasingly used in analysing the mobility of peoples, commodities, capital and cultures in the context of globalisation and transnationalism. The concept is designed to analyse configurations of power – both productive and coercive – in 'local' and 'global' encounters in specific spaces and historical moments. In her work (Brah 1996, 2002) addresses the concept of 'diaspora' alongside that of Gloria Anzaldúa's theorisation of 'border' and the widely debated feminist concept of 'politics of home'. The intersection of these three terms is understood through the concept of 'diaspora space' which covers the entanglements of genealogies of dispersal with those of 'staying put'. The term 'homing desire' is used to think through the question of home and belonging; and, both power and time are viewed as multidimensional processes. Importantly, the concept of 'diaspora space' embraces the intersection of 'difference' in its variable forms, placing emphasis upon emotional and psychic dynamics as much as socio-economic, political and cultural differences. Difference is thus conceptualised as social relation; experience; subjectivity; and, identity. Home and belonging is also a theme of emerging literature on 'mixed-race' identities which interrogates the concept of 'race' as an essentialist discourse with racist effects (Tizard and Phoenix 2002/1993, Zack 1993; Ifekwunige 1999; Dalmage, 2000). Accordingly, the idea that you are mixed-race if you have black and white parents is problematised. Instead the analytical focus is upon varying and variable subjectivities, identities, and the specific meanings attached to 'differences'.

### **Raising new and pressing questions**

In 2003, the second war against Iraq has brought into relief many continuing feminist concerns such as the growing militarization of the world, the critical role of the military industrial complex as a technology of imperial governance, the feminisation of global labour markets and migration flows, the reconstitution of differentially racialised forms of sexuality as a constitutive part of developing regimes of 'globalisation', and the deepening inequalities of power and wealth across different regions of the world. A historically-rooted and forward looking consideration of intersectionality raises many pressing questions. For example: What are the implications for feminisms of the latest forms of postmodern imperialisms that stalk the globe? What kinds of subjects, subjectivities, and political identities are produced by this juncture when the fantasy of the veiled Muslim woman "in need of rescue", the rhetoric of the 'terrorist', and the ubiquitous discourse of democracy becomes an alibi for constructing new global hegemonies? How do we challenge simplistic binaries which posit secularism and fundamentalism as mutually exclusive polar

opposites? What is the impact of these new modes of governmentality on the lives of differentially exploited, racialised, ethnicised, sexualised, and religionised humans living in different parts of the world? What do these lived experiences say to us – living as we do in this space called the west -- about our own positionalities, responsibilities, politics, and ethics? We have tried to indicate that feminist dialogues and dialogic imaginations provide powerful tools for challenging the power games currently played out on the world stage.

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