Introduction

In May this year I went to Melbourne for a conference called “Feminist Futures”. This was organized by a group of (mostly) younger women to provide a new forum for discussions of feminism, and help revive movement activism. Held in the old, chilly town hall of an inner-city area, it attracted a good audience and held lively sessions.

Feminism has not been a strong presence in Australian politics recently, though we have our first woman head of government, Julia Gillard, and the unions have just won an important Equal Pay case for public sector workers. There is much uncertainty about future directions for feminism, and this kind of forum is needed. A similar conference was held last year in Sydney.

The organizers of Feminist Futures took a great deal of care with the issue of diversity, providing opportunities for a wide range of groups and tendencies to speak. The conference was consciously inclusive, including Aboriginal women, women from unions and socialist groups, anti-violence activists, lesbian groups, migrant women, transsexual women and men, environmental and animal rights campaigners, men’s anti-violence work, anti-prostitution groups, sex workers’ rights campaigners, students, women’s health activists, and more.

All this was positive, and the event was, I think, a significant success. But it did face a problem, indeed a classic feminist problem. When Julieta Kirkwood in Ser política en Chile (1986) traced the history of women’s politics (in another country of the far south), she was concerned above all with the way a subordinate group transformed itself, through political organization, into a subject, a collective actor in its own right. As a political subject, feminism spoke for women directly and did not accept a secondary role to any other political force.

But as Nelly Richard observed a little later in Masculino/Feminino (1993), Kirkwood’s narrative is likely to miss the importance of creative cultural practice, disruptions of gender identity, and dispersed forms of radicalism. To Richard, feminist concepts...
and strategies are necessarily impure. They do not tend towards unification in a collective subject.

In our Feminist Futures conference in Australia, we faced this issue in a specific way. The conference organizers proposed rules for participants that emphasised mutual respect, and not trying to impose one point of view on others. Pre-conference conflict erupted over who would be speaking, and whether marginalized groups would find it a safe space. One tendency withdrew and set up its own rival event, denouncing the conference as not ‘real feminism’.

In the conference, another group took advantage of the open-microphone format in a plenary session to stage an orchestrated public humiliation of an opponent.

We can see the dilemma of the Feminist Futures conference conceptually, in Kirkwood/Richard terms, as this: how do we construct a new feminist subject or collective actor, in a context of diversity and unequal power, where much of the radical energy is centrifugal, both dispersed and anti-normative?

Personally, I felt that a question of responsibility as well as strategy was taking shape in the North Melbourne Town Hall. Who here is taking responsibility for each other’s wellbeing, across the divides of identity and doctrine? Who is taking responsibility for the future of the complex assemblage, the diverse feminist presence, that the conference represented? And if we are willing to take such responsibility, how do we do it?

The purpose of this paper is to raise the same kind of question about feminist thought on a world scale. Here we have great diversity, great inequality, and significant uncertainty about how to proceed. And yet it matters immensely to have an active and connected feminist movement, in the face of the massive gender inequalities, violent patriarchies, widespread sexual abuse and cultural denigration of women that are our reality on a world scale.

What is the responsibility of the intellectual workers associated with feminism, and how do we proceed? To make progress with that issue, we have to consider what is involved in constructing knowledge about gender relations on a world scale, and that is the problem addressed in this paper.

**Gender in the global political economy of knowledge**

In the last two decades, Anglophone feminist research has been increasingly concerned with globalization. The number of papers recorded in the ISI Web of Knowledge database whose titles or abstracts combined the term ‘globalization’ with a ‘gender’ term rose ten-fold between the early 1990s and early 2000s. I am sure the same is true of research published in other languages.

Global surveys of knowledge are now a genre of gender studies, for instance Global Gender Research: Transnational Perspectives (Bose and Kim 2009) and Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2005). Influential feminist thinkers in the social sciences are now trying to formulate their analyses at a world level, for instance Esther Ngan-ling Chow’s (2003) argument for the gendered character of globalization, and Cynthia Cockburn’s (2010) worldwide synthesis on gender relations and war.

However, the intellectual framing of this work remains entirely Northern. It remains in the European conceptual world of Marx, Foucault, de Beauvoir and Butler even when talking about
maquiladora factories in Mexico, sexuality in India or human rights in Africa. A few feminist thinkers in the majority world are well known in the metropole, such as Nawal el Saadawi (1997) in Egypt. They are respected as activist voices from the global South. But they are almost never treated as significant theorists.

In this way, what Aníbal Quijano (2000) calls the ‘coloniality of power’ operates in the realm of feminist knowledge. If we look back into the history of gender research, it is clear that data acquired by European colonial conquest and post-colonial dependency has been very important to metropolitan theorists. Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s famous essay ‘Under Western eyes’ (1991) revealed the colonial gaze that constructed a false image of the ‘third world woman’.

But even this, I think, understated the importance of knowledge from the periphery.

The colonized world provided (and continues to provide) raw material for metropolitan feminist debates about the origin of the family, matriarchy, the gender division of labour, the Oedipus complex, third genders, male violence and war, marriage and kinship, gender symbolism - and now, of course, globalization. I don’t want to labour the point, but it is worth stating that such pivotal feminist texts as Juliet Mitchell’s Psychoanalysis and Feminism (1974) would be inconceivable without the colonial knowledge on which Engels, Freud, Lévi-Strauss and other mighty figures of the metropole built their theories.

Feminist theory, then, must be understood as participating in a global political economy of knowledge. The sharpest analysis of the production and circulation of knowledge on a world scale has been made by the west African philosopher Paulin Hountondji (1997). The global division of labour in the sciences locates the moment of theory in the metropole, while the periphery exports data, and imports applied science. A circulation of knowledge workers accompanies the international flows of data, concepts and techniques.

One of the most interesting parts of Hountondji’s analysis is his account of the resulting attitude of knowledge workers in the global periphery, which he calls ‘extroversion’ – being oriented to external sources of intellectual authority. This is realized in practices such as: citing only metropolitan theorists, going to the metropole for training, publishing in metropolitan journals, joining ‘invisible colleges’ centred in the metropole, and acting as native informants for metropolitan scientists interested in the periphery.

Hountondji’s description of African reality is instantly recognizable to an Australian. Even in my rich country, intellectual dependence is ingrained. In Australian universities we cite Bourdieu or Deleuze as our theorists, import Grounded Theory or MANOVA for our empirical work, teach from textbooks written in the USA, and send our best students to get PhDs in Boston or Oxbridge.

Broadly speaking, this is the situation found in Gender Studies, in the universities, professional associations and state agencies of the global periphery.

Metropolitan texts about gender are translated and read here, and treated as authorities constituting the discipline. Feminist researchers from the periphery travel to the metropole for qualifications and recognition. Whole frameworks, terrains of debate, problematics, are imported.

Again, I don’t want to labour the point, so I will give just a few examples. Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana in ‘Problems for a contemporary theory of gender’ (1996) define the problems of Indian feminist politics by applying postmodernist feminism from the metropole. Superna Bhaskaran’s lively Made in India (2004), treating sexual diversity,
applies queer theory from the USA. I don’t except myself! Gender and Power (Connell 1987), though using many Australian examples, could have been written in London; its main intellectual sources are German, French, British and North American.

But of course there is always some friction between the intellectual perspectives created in the imperial centres, and the realities of society and culture in the colonized and post-colonial world. This has mostly been experienced as a certain discomfort rather than a major theoretical problem. Nelly Richard, for instance, importing French post-modernist thought to feminism in Chile, notes that these ideas have to be ‘re-worked’ in the periphery.

Much the same approach was taken, about the same time, by the Mexican sociologist Teresita de Barbieri, in her essay ‘Sobre la categoría género’ (1992), though using more structuralist sources.

In my view, the global relationships within theory represent an issue that is crucial for the future of gender studies. The debates about ‘decolonial’ thought and indigenous knowledge, though they have rarely been gender-informed, are nevertheless important for us. We need to think through questions about the decolonization of method (Smith 1999) as they appear in gender studies. In this paper I will outline a spectrum of responses to the global political economy of knowledge that are possible for feminist thinkers in the post-colonial world who are trying to move beyond extroversion and cultural dependence.

Indigenous knowledge and mosaic epistemology

Some of the decolonial literature has emphasised the fact that indigenous knowledge systems existed before colonial conquest, and persisted under colonialism. This issue has been particularly important in sub-saharan Africa. Debates about a pre-colonial ‘African philosophy’, and the relation between indigenous knowledge and the knowledge systems based in the global North, have been long, complex, and sometimes bitter (Odora Hoppers 2002).

It is not surprising, then, that the strongest statement of an indigenous-knowledge perspective on gender comes from an African intellectual. Oyèrónké Oyéwùmí’s The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses (1997) examines the history of the Yoruba people in Nigeria. Oyéwùmí’s conclusion is a radical one: pre-colonial Yoruba society did not classify people on the basis of gender; so gender was not a structure of indigenous knowledge and ‘women’ in the sense of feminist theory was not a social category. Gender division was a colonial importation and modern feminism itself, in relation to Africa, is a colonial project.

But other African scholars do see gender patterns in pre-colonial Yoruba culture. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (2003), in a detailed reply to Oyéwùmí, points to misogynist Yoruba proverbs, and other cultural evidence that points to gendered patterns of power. Oyéwùmí, she argues, misinterpreted the situation by looking only at the formal properties of language, missing how language is inscribed in social practices, and how experience is embodied. In this view of the evidence, colonialism changed gender patterns by building on distinctions that already existed in Yoruba culture. Bakare-Yusuf also takes a different stand on the relation of indigenous to metropolitan knowledge. It is a mistake, she argues, to try to reconstruct a hermetically sealed indigenous cultural system, and reject everything other as an intrusion. African cultures have always been plural, and open to otherness and change.

Here Bakare-Yusuf touches on the epistemological consequences of the
Bakare-Yusuf accepts that there were distinctive features of the Yoruba gender order, but not that Yoruba culture was a closed system. Feminist scholars in other parts of the world have also laid emphasis on local distinctiveness, without requiring separate conceptual tools to talk about it.

A notable example is the analysis of Indian gender relations in Uma Chakravarti’s Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens (2003). Chakravarti pictures the Indian caste system as a deep-seated structure of privilege and exclusion that combines gender hierarchy, property ownership, religious ideology and social identity in a distinctive way. Caste is a hierarchical system of endogamous groups, making exclusive marriage its key institution. Control over women’s sexuality is therefore crucial to the maintenance of male lineages. An ideology of ‘purity’, focussed on women but also affecting men, provides the cultural rationale. Upper caste women become complicit in this system, as their conformity to patriarchal prescriptions is what guarantees their access to privilege.

Chakravarti, a historian, spends a good deal of time showing how this gender order came into existence, over a long historical period, and through definite steps. The caste system was associated with the consolidation of an agricultural economy (forest peoples were marginal to it) and a state structure, rationalized by Brahmanical intellectuals. A flexible social order allowed some caste mobility, and created a patchwork of different castes in different parts of the country. Colonialism did little directly to change it, as the British imperial regime drew upper castes into the colonial state and gave them Western-style education. In this respect the situation is very different from that suggested by Laurie (2005). Nevertheless the caste system was always contested. In its early stages it was challenged by no less a figure than the Buddha. In the late colonial period it was challenged by Phule, Ambedkar, and others speaking for the ‘untouchables’. But it remains powerful in post-colonial India, enforced by violence as well as ideology – violence directed at lower-caste men as well as women who break the rules.
The importance of recognizing local distinctiveness can be seen in discussions of ‘third genders’ or groups involved in gender transition, who have become prominent in recent gender theory in the global North. There is a Northern literature that tends to blur all such groups, including hijra in India, kathoey in Thailand and travesti in South America, into one ‘transgender’ category (e.g. Feinberg 1996). Close-focus studies of these groups, seen in the context of local gender orders, contest this.

Equally important, Nandy shows how the colonial encounter re-shaped models of masculinity among the colonizers. As the regime settled into a permanent governing structure during the nineteenth century, a distinctive culture emerged that exaggerated gender and age hierarchies. This produced a simplified, dominance-oriented, and often violent masculinity as the hegemonic pattern, despising weakness, suspicious of emotion, concerned to draw and police rigid social boundaries.

More recently, the making of masculinities and negotiation of gender relations in colonial and post-colonial transitions has been the subject of intense research in southern Africa (Morrell 2001; Epstein et al. 2004). At the risk of over-simplifying a complex terrain of knowledge, I would say that this research goes far to establishing two important conclusions.

The first is the sheer diversity of masculinities that are under construction at the same time in the one national territory. Post-colonial gender reality cannot be captured by generalized models of ‘traditional’ vs ‘modern’ manhood. The second is how intimately the making of masculinities is bound up with the vast and continuing transformations of the society as a whole. Gender is not off to the side in a cupboard of its own. It is enmeshed with the changing structure of the gender literature. It is, nevertheless, a classic study of the social construction of masculinity. Nandy traces how the pressure of British conquest and the colonial regime re-shaped Indian culture, including its gender order. It called out specific elements of Indian tradition, over-valuing the kshatriya or warrior category, to justify essentially new patterns of masculinity in a modernizing process.
of power and shifts in the economy, the movement of populations and the creation of cities, the struggle against Apartheid and the lurch to neoliberalism, the institutional effects of mines, prisons, armies and education systems.

The colonial encounter, continuing as the encounter of contemporary communities with globalized power, is itself a massive source of social dynamics - including intellectual innovation. This is the territory explored in my book Southern Theory (Connell 2007), and a growing body of work across the human sciences. The ‘psychology of liberation’ proposed by Ignacio Martin-Baró in the 1980s is a recent example (Montero 2007).

As a form of social knowledge, southern theory has a connection with indigenous knowledge, but is centrally concerned with the transformation of society and knowledge in the colonized world. Consider, for instance, the discussion of gender and land by Marcia Langton, a leading Aboriginal intellectual in Australia, in her paper ‘Grandmother’s law, company business and succession in changing Aboriginal land tenure systems’ (1997). In mainstream anthropology, Australian Aboriginal culture has been portrayed as patrilineal and patriarchal; but this account mainly comes from male anthropologists convinced of women’s inferiority. Women have increasingly demonstrated that women’s rights were embedded in precolonial land tenure systems, though often in a different way, or covering different sites, from men’s land rights.

In the conditions of violent colonial conquest, and the extreme pressure on most Aboriginal cultures in the post-colonial world, this land-and-gender order was badly disrupted. But Aboriginal people struggled tenaciously to survive. Langton argues that it was women’s traditions and ties to place – ‘Grandmothers’ law’ – that were the more resilient, and proved crucial in holding Aboriginal society together.

Older women thus became the key to social survival. In contemporary Aboriginal life, ‘Aunty’ is a term of great respect.

Langton’s emphasis on land rights is worth thinking about. The land is an issue almost absent from Northern gender theory (with the exception of eco-feminism), and mostly absent from Northern social theory in general. Yet it is a prime issue in any understanding of colonialism and post-colonial power. I think we need to make it a significant theme in gender studies.

There is, perhaps, a risk of setting the gender politics of colonialism too far in the past. I will therefore mention the important research, now abundant, on the interplay between gender relations and neoliberal globalization in sites such as the export processing zones of south and south-east Asia, the south China economic miracle, and the maquiladora industries of northern Mexico. The gender effects are much more than economic. This becomes clear when we reflect on the toxic conjunction of NAFTA, labour migration, narcotráfico, corruption, poverty, and masculine cultures of violence that has produced femicide in Ciudad Juárez (Ravelo Blancas 2010).

Studying up

Most of the post-colonial literature is concerned with the colonized, and understandably so. Just as ‘Women’s Studies’ was concerned to insert the unheard voices of women into a masculine academic culture, so there has been a need to recover the voices, experiences and struggles of the colonized. Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism (2000) is an eloquent argument for doing this in gender politics. It places a heavy responsibility on feminists of the colonizing culture to listen and learn.
Members of colonized societies have always had to ‘study up’, to learn about the holders of power. It might be a matter of life and death for them to predict the colonizers’ behaviour correctly. This perspective, studying global power holders from the point of view of those over whom they hold power, has not been very common in internationally-circulating scholarship.

Yet there are some remarkable examples – not least, Edward Said’s Orientalism, a striking dissection of the toxic fantasies about the Arab world constructed by intellectuals of the global metropole. Recall that in the founding text of dependency theory, Raúl Prebisch’s The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems, there was a long analysis of the centre of economic power, the United States economy and the US dollar.

‘Studying up’ is a valuable approach for gender studies also. It is present to some degree in studies of masculinity. A feminist framing has been adopted by journals such as Men and Masculinities in the United States, and research enterprises such as the programmes of research on masculinities and men undertaken at FLACSO, now at CEDEM, in Santiago de Chile, in the GEXcel programme based at the University of Linköping in Sweden, and at the Centre for Research on Men and Masculinities at the University of Wollongong in Australia. James Messerschmidt’s recent book on masculinity in the Bush presidencies in the United States, Hegemonic Masculinities and Camouflaged Politics (2010), shows the potential of ‘studying up’ even within the metropole. Radhika Chopra’s Reframing Masculinities (2007) documents potentials for change, indeed for anti-sexist activism, in the practices of men in the periphery, specifically in India. Yet there is also a strong tendency, in Anglophone scholarship at least, for ‘men’s studies’ to be uncritical, simply descriptive, or even celebratory.

A lot of research projects do little more than document the existence of a particular masculine identity, or the patterns of gender practice among a particular group of men. And there has arisen a recuperative masculinity politics, particularly in the United States and Australia, that has actively pushed back feminist gains in divorce courts, mass media, some areas of social policy, and school systems (Weaver-Hightower 2008).

In the contemporary context, the most important subjects for ‘studying up’ in gender terms would seem to be those privileged by the gender relations in the most powerful institutions of the neoliberal global economy and political order. Of the 500 largest transnational corporations in 2007, 2% had women as chief executives; which is to say, 98% had men. This is a strongly masculinized institutional arena; but what kind of masculinity? We have some beginnings of knowledge about this, in studies of gender relations among the managerial cadres of transnational corporations and local business involved in the international economy (Olavarría 2009), and more generalized studies such as Donaldson and Poynting’s (2007) Ruling Class Men. There is a great deal to be done to fill out the empirical picture, to link these studies to gender theory, and to link the theorization of gender to contemporary understandings of neoliberalism and the modern security state.

Though it is men who dominate the top levels of power in corporations, military forces and governments, a ‘ruling class’ must also include women, and a lot of children too, and the institutions that support them. There is an older literature on ruling class women, not particularly feminist in approach, that needs re-
thinking. Contemporary cultural studies has useful material on privileged women as consumers (for instance studies of ‘luxe’ marketing), but there is more involved than consumption.

Gendered resistance in transnational space

To the extent that imperialism and post-colonial global processes have linked local gender orders, and the institutions of the world economy, media and state structure have their own gender regimes, we can speak sociologically of a ‘world gender order’. This is the institutional form taken by the processes that Radcliffe, Laurie and Andolina (2004) call the ‘transnationalization of gender’ and Howe and Rigi (2009) call ‘transnationalizing desire’.

I see the world gender order as loosely linked and full of incoherence and sometimes contradiction, but nevertheless as a continuing historical reality. It is already an arena for new forms of gender politics, in which the power of the masculine elites just mentioned is faced with various forms of gendered resistance.

Feminism has been international for a long time – transnational links go back before the Great War of 1914, which itself triggered new organizing, such as the foundation of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Kartini, the feminist pioneer in the colony that became Indonesia, famously made links with progressive women in the colonizing power, the Netherlands, in 1899 (Kartini 2005, Robinson 2009).

The United Nations became a vehicle for international feminism in the 1970s, with the first world conference on women, in Mexico City, and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. Development aid programmes then became the scene of feminist action and debate. Controversy has raged over how much reform in gender relations can be expected by action through institutions, such as the diplomatic bureaucracy of the United Nations, that continue to be dominated by men (Gierycz 1999). It will be interesting to see how much difference Michelle Bachelet can make!

Other forms of organizing have developed outside these institutions. A notable study is Valentine Moghadam’s Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks (2005). Framing her work as a study of ‘globalization as a gendered process’, Moghadam goes over the familiar story of international feminism, and moves on to fascinating case studies of new forms. She describes three kinds of network: one doing policy work concerned with structural adjustment programmes and trade; another involving groups for women in Muslim-majority countries, doing solidarity and advocacy work; and a third linking women’s groups, mostly left-wing, around the Mediterranean Sea.

In contrast with the much-discussed NGO-ization of feminism, these groups reject bureaucratization and continue to operate as informal groups. There are of course costs in doing this; Moghadam notes a lack of alliance with the labour movement as a weakness. But the fact of new forms of globalization-from-below, addressing gender politics, is well established.

Other examples can be found. For instance the violence in Ciudad Juárez has not only triggered protest and organizing among women in the city. International organizing has also followed. For instance, in 2009, a group of Mexican artists announced a campaign under the title ‘Una oración por Juárez’ and called (via the Internet) for international support. Solidarity actions followed, as far away as Australia (Sydney Action for Juárez 2011).

Transnational networks of this kind are not only bases for action; they are also bases for knowledge. A notable contribution to feminist theory was made in a paper by Brooke Ackerley, ‘Women’s human rights activists as cross-cultural theorists’ (2001). This reports two on-line discussions, involving hundreds of participants, sponsored by UNIFEM. Ackerley sees here a methodology of theory, engaging with real-life experiences of the exploited and violated. All statements about women’s human rights are imperfect
and subject to correction; the transnational dialogue is part of the method of developing them, allowing participants to learn from experience in other contexts. The result can be ‘universality without universals’, that does not privilege a Northern point of view, but also escapes the paralysis of relativism.

Local applicability with transnational reference is also the key to the methodology of El índice de compromiso cumplido – ICC: una estrategia para el control ciudadano de la equidad de género (Valdés 2001). Building on the work of a Chilean group, itself set up to promote participation in regional and world forums, this develops a distinctive method for monitoring gender equity.

Rather than the fixed cross-national scales used by the UN Development Programme, the ICC assesses gender inequality in terms of local political commitments and obligations undertaken by the state.

Three types of indicators are used, concerning political will, process, and results respectively; across fields (e.g. health and reproductive rights) that reflect women’s movement priorities. This approach gives political leverage that an abstract transnational methodology would not.

An age of mutual learning

The practical relationships discussed in the last section show that the epistemological and theoretical questions about understanding gender on a world scale are not just abstract concerns. They relate to present-day processes in the real world. Interests, strategies, and immediate futures are at stake.

When, in the mid 1980s, the All-China Federation of Women (an official body) decided that the time had come to establish Women’s Studies in China, they looked to the United States for a model, considering that scientific study in the field had advanced furthest there. But they also argued that ‘Chinese studies on women should start out from Chinese realities and have distinctive Chinese characteristics’ (Shen 1987).

The result was an important opening, but one that subordinated the field both to the categorical gender model of US liberal feminism, and to the economic development programme of the patriarchal Chinese regime. Chinese gender studies has gradually been working its way out of this corner in the quarter-century since. In doing so, continuing use has been made of ideas from the metropole, but a greater range of ideas. For instance, a recent textbook series, A Theoretical Reader in Female Identity and A Theoretical Reader in Male Identity, translates texts that include psychoanalysis, queer theory, eco-feminism and the sociology of masculinity (Zhan et al. 2011).

The contradictory story here is, I think, typical of the development of knowledge about gender on a world scale. The global political economy of knowledge is not an illusion, nor a product of bad attitudes. The metropole really does have greater resources, including a larger, better-resourced and more influential university system, than any region of the periphery. Because of the structure of the global circulation of knowledge, the metropole is also the main means of communication among regions of the periphery. In Australia I learn about gender issues in the Mahgreb or central Asia or east Africa mainly through publications in the United States or western Europe. And I am confident that not many people at this conference habitually read journals from Australia, even on-line!

We would be unwise, however, to imagine the metropole as the home of unsullied knowledge. The counterpart of extroversion in the periphery is myopia in the metropole – the usual state of the human sciences - or the neo-colonial appropriation of knowledge without taking responsibility for the circumstances in which it is gained.

Metropolitan universities too are underpinned by class privilege, still embed patriarchal culture, and are currently being re-structured by neoliberal managers and governments so new forms of privilege and exclusion will continue into the future. The public realm in the metropole is rich in pseudo-knowledges, ranging from climate change denial, to ‘brain sex’ theories of gender,
to the persistent misuse of statistics by opponents of gay marriage or gay adoption (Stacey 2011).

The effort to create genuinely global perspectives on gender and gender politics, then, is not only of advantage to the periphery. It is important for the metropole too. But without doubt, this is difficult for the metropole. It requires major shifts in perspective across the human sciences. At a practical level it means new curricula, new pedagogical practices, new texts and resources, new academic staff, new publication practices; a massive investment in translation, new ways of cooperating with intellectuals in the periphery, and more. Above all, it requires an institutionalized willingness to learn from the periphery. This willingness has been admirably shown by many individual women and men in the global North, but is not easy to build into the functioning of knowledge institutions.

Help is needed, and has to come from feminist intellectuals in the global periphery. Part of the task of knowledge production in the periphery is to help educate the North. I hope that does not sound arrogant. I see it as a matter of taking responsibility, in a specific way, for the future of feminism and gender studies on a world scale. So I see conferences such as ‘Gender, Feminism and Diversity’ as having more than regional importance. They can generate perspectives and resources of value internationally, not because they move into placeless abstraction, but precisely by being aware of land and location in global social relations. Our intellectual work should be designed with that educational purpose in mind. The difficulty, of course, is to do so while keeping alive and robust the connection with local realities and local political struggles. A strong sense of perspective, including a sense of humour, will help us.

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